

Widening the Sweetgrass Road:
Re/Balancing Ways of Knowing for Sustainable Living
with a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle

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Abstract

A Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, as I have learned about it over the last twenty-eight years in ceremonies, guides this learning journey of an Indigenous way of knowing as it applies to the theory and practice of sustainability, a strategic ideal established to negotiate the complexities of human-nature relationships and balance social, environmental, and economic priorities.

The definition and pursuit of sustainability today have been approached primarily from within the dominant Western, neoliberal worldview. In this dissertation, I uphold Indigenous ways of knowing as equal to Western knowledges. If life as we know it is undergoing significant changes due to climate change and stress upon the natural limits to Earth's life-supporting systems, how can Indigenous ways of knowing and being contribute toward humanity's adaptation to these changes? The Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, as I have come to understand it, provides the methodological basis for my dissertation. This distinctly Indigenous framework privileges an Indigenous approach to assessing the above question and comprehending a way forward. As a non-Indigenous woman, I share how I have been able to situate myself within an Indigenous framework to examine dominant approaches to sustainability (distinct from the customary practice of using a Western methodology). The following questions are explored to provide context and propose a way forward: What is the dominant Western approach to the current pursuit of sustainability? What are fundamental Indigenous and Western viewpoints underlying their respective worldviews? How does a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle provide insights and instruction for living in respectful balance with Creation? The main thesis of this dissertation is that Indigenous ways of knowing integrate holistic perspectives and time-proven wisdom essential for sustainable, relational living, which have endured in learnings of "the Sweetgrass Road," the miyopimatisiwin (also translated as "the way of the good life" or "the way of an exemplary life"). Metaphorically speaking, "widening the Sweetgrass Road" is one intent of my dissertation, sharing learnings of the Medicine Circle so more people can "walk this road" and appreciate the depth and meanings contained therein. By combining insights and balancing both Indigenous and Western knowledges, I propose a way forward around four themes: raised consciousness, shared responsibility, universal equity, and braided movement.

Key words: Indigenous knowledge, Medicine Circle, Sustainability, Sustainable Development

In Gratitude

Creation, I thank you for the gift of spirit and life and I understand that I am one with the power that created me.

Grandmother Buffalo, I thank you for the gifts of acceptance, respect, calmness and fairness. It is through your kind vision that I exist. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Grandfather Sun, I thank you for the gifts of time, patience, love and relationship. It is through your patient balance that I exist. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Grandmother Thunderbird, I thank you for the gifts of feelings and reason, kindness and gentleness. It is through your intuitive power that I exist. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Grandfather Wind, I thank you for the gifts of movement, behaviour, courage and righteousness. It is through your consistent flow that I exist. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Creation, I am grateful for the gift of life and spirit that these Grandfathers and Grandmothers bring to me with the connectedness and oneness that I strive for.

All My Relations

As is customary in Indigenous protocols, openings begin with a thanksgiving prayer.

With permission, I share this Cree-Nishnaabe prayer of gratitude for the wondrous gifts in Creation (Thrasher, 1987). I wish to acknowledge all those who have come before who have safeguarded and carried their cultural knowledge and ensured its survival to the present day through the oral tradition and ceremonies. I am so grateful to my relative, Mooshum (grandfather) Michael Thrasher, for being my teacher and mentor, for guiding me along this doctoral journey, for sharing his quick humour and warm laughter, and for dedicating his life to passing on the knowledge with which he has been entrusted to the next generation with love, kindness, and deep care.

I am so very grateful to my parents, Elaine and Leonard Simon, for the wonderful life and infinite love they have given me, for instilling in me the values and traditions I carry forth, and for their unconditional support along whatever path I have chosen to walk.

I am so very grateful to my husband, Dr. Mark S. Dockstator, for being the love of my life forever, for walking beside me always, for inviting me to my first ceremonies in 1986 and ensuring we get there year after year, for being the father of our children, for supporting me in everything I do and convincing me I have it within me to complete a doctorate, and for all the insightful suggestions and counsel along the way.

I am grateful to my wonderful sons, Jacob and Michael, and my siblings, relatives, and friends who have encouraged me throughout this journey. The people in my ceremonial community are my relatives, too, and to them I am so thankful for their love and support throughout all our years together.

I often think of those in my life who have passed on – my grandparents, my mother-in-law and father-in-law, and relatives and friends – and I am thankful for their love I still feel in my heart.

As is customary in Indigenous protocols, I wish to acknowledge the traditional territory in which I live and where I have conducted my doctoral work, expressing my deepest gratitude to the Mississauga people of the Anishnaabe Nation on whose lands Toronto's York University is situated. I am especially grateful to my supervisory committee: Dr. Leesa K. Fawcett, Dr. David T. McNab, and Dr. Timothy B. Leduc. I also wish to thank Dr. Joseph W. Sheridan. They have all been so instrumentally supportive and have provided such helpful guidance and insightful perspectives throughout my five years at the Faculty of Environmental Studies (FES). Thanks to Dr. Paul Delaney for a lesson in astronomy, and to the FES staff for all the administrative support they have provided. Lastly, and with deep gratitude, special thanks to Dr. Celia Haig-Brown (York University) and Dr. Deborah McGregor (University of Toronto) for serving as the external examiners for my defense. Chi miigwech. Nya:weh. Thank you.

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Pre/Amble: Preparing for the Journey

Beginning with a Story

I remember my first spring ceremonies with Elder Peter O'Chiese in 1986. I was brand new to ceremonies; I was like an infant, seeing the world for the first time, filled with wonder and open to learning. I felt honoured to have been asked to be a part of this annual event and I felt humbled by the deep knowledge Peter O'Chiese held and of his tangible relationship with Creation, and over the course of those first ceremonies, by how little I knew. Upon arrival, I only knew that I was there to help and support fasters who were to spend four days by themselves without food and water.

Four days without food or water! What was all that about? I had no clue why anyone would go without sustenance for so long and wanted to spend so much time all by themselves, alone. One day of fasting during Yom Kippur was easy for me but I did not know if I could fast for four days. What about bears? What about the cold? What would they do all that time? Wondering about the fast was only one of the many questions that filled my head. I did not fully know all that would be happening during the entire ten days, which included setting up the camp, holding ceremonies, and cleaning up. Mark¹ had only told me that I would be helping alongside the other women, none of whom I had previously met. Feeling some trepidation of the unknown, I steeled myself and committed myself to being the best helper I could be. After all, that was how I was raised. My mother had taught me to ask, "How can I help?" or "What can I do for you?" upon coming home from school each day. Before I sat down to do my homework, I might be told to dust, help prepare something for dinner, hang laundry on the line, unpack groceries or water the plants . . . If I did not ask, she would certainly remind me in no uncertain terms of my lapse in behaviour! This lesson has become part of who I am today, being willing and prepared to help anywhere I go. Naturally, the first day in ceremonies I asked, "How can I help?"

The above story is told for a reason – to prepare the reader for an experience with this dissertation different from conventional doctoral experiences. Just as I attended my first ceremonies with an open mind, I am asking the reader to approach this dissertation with an open mind, suspending one's expectations for a dissertation which flows linearly through a logically presented flow of reason. While this dissertation certainly has a point to make, the journey to that point is just as significant as the point itself. In addition, while objectivity is the norm in standard dissertations, this dissertation is subjective in nature. The reasons for these (and other)

¹ In 1986, Mark Dockstator and I had known each other for three years. We married in 1988.

distinctive differences will be clarified in the opening chapters and throughout the work. I extend my gratitude to you, the reader, for your anticipated engagement.

Thesis Statement

This dissertation explores the theory and practice of sustainability, a strategic ideal continually evolving to address socio-ecological issues and human-nature relationships and rooted in the environmental movement. The first difference the reader must note is that this exploration is conducted from within an Indigenous paradigm, rather than through a Western approach commonly prevalent in academia. More specifically, the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle,² as I have learned about it over the last twenty-eight years in ceremonies, guides this learning journey.

The definition and pursuit of sustainability today have been approached primarily from within the **dominant Western, neoliberal worldview**.³ In this dissertation, I uphold **Indigenous ways of knowing** as equal to Western knowledges. If life as we know it is undergoing significant changes due to climate change and stress upon the natural limits to Earth's life-supporting systems, how can Indigenous ways of knowing and being contribute toward humanity's adaptation to these changes? The **Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle**, as I have come to understand it,⁴ provides the methodological basis for the process followed throughout my doctorate. Also, learnings of the Medicine Circle inform the content of this dissertation. This distinctly Indigenous framework privileges an Indigenous approach to assessing the above question and comprehending a way forward. The following questions will

² A Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle informs this dissertation's format and content and guides the process I have followed. The particular Medicine Circle that is foundational to my doctoral work is introduced more thoroughly in Chapter One.

³ Words and phrases appearing in bold the first time they appear in the text from this point forward are defined in a special section in this Pre/Amble.

⁴ I must acknowledge that I am still learning.

be explored to provide context and propose a way forward: What is the dominant Western approach to the current pursuit of **sustainability**? What are fundamental Indigenous and Western viewpoints underlying their respective worldviews? How does a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle provide insights and instruction for living in respectful balance with Creation? The main thesis of this dissertation is that Indigenous ways of knowing integrate holistic perspectives and time-proven wisdom essential for sustainable, relational living.

Background and Context

Sustainability – where humanity strives to live in a harmonious balance with our planet – has become a grand ideal in industrialized nations motivating corporations, governments, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and households to reduce their overall ecological footprints and make socially responsible decisions, all the while ensuring financial profitability.⁵ The sustainability movement has grown out of an evolving recognition of the interconnectedness of our world. As much as I am enamoured with this ideal, however, I regret admitting that the sustainability of modern life as we know it, from solely a Western growth-oriented perspective, is simply not possible. The Club of Rome (Meadows, Randers, & Meadows, 1972), in the book *Limits to Growth*, has shown quantitatively this improbability, given unfettered rates of population growth and resource consumption. In an effort to respond to this ‘growing’ concern, the concept of sustainable development began to take root with the 1987 Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*. This United Nations World Commission on Environment and Development (WCED) publication defines sustainable development as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”

⁵ William Rees defines the ecological footprint of a specified population as “the total area of productive land and water required on a continuous basis to produce all the resources consumed, and to assimilate all the wastes produced, by that population, wherever on Earth that land is located.” Retrieved February 12, 2014 from: <http://www.iisd.ca/consume/brfoot.html>.

(1987; p. 43). Setting aside for the moment any difficulties this definition has presented over the ensuing twenty-seven years, results from sustainable development (and more recently sustainability) initiatives are mixed, at best.

Are we more sustainable than we were in 1987? Certainly encouraging success stories abound. In the private sector, for example, Nike Corporation with their North Star initiative has made progress toward closing their materials loop by using only sustainable materials, minimizing wastewater, and working with suppliers to do likewise, among other goals. Numerous other corporations, too many to list here, are engaged in similar corporate socially responsible (CSR) and sustainability endeavours.⁶ In the public sector, according to a Corporate Knights' 2013 assessment,⁷ the city of Ottawa ranks as the third “most sustainable North American city,” behind San Francisco and Washington, DC. Vancouver and Toronto rank fourth and fifth. Each of these cities and many others, alongside NGOs, have developed comprehensive sustainability initiatives, which not only address governance and infrastructure issues, but also engage residents and business communities to adopt more environmentally and socially responsible practices. Monitoring programs such as Community Foundations of Canada Vital Signs assess progress annually.⁸ Around the world, a leading global network assisting over a thousand cities and eighty-six countries, the International Council for Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI), works to “achieve tangible improvements in global sustainability” with local levels of government.⁹ This “think globally, act locally” mandate includes *Local Agenda 21* and

⁶ Please see <http://www.naturalstep.ca/case-studies>.

⁷ Retrieved January 25, 2014 from: <http://www.corporateknights.com/article/north-americas-2013-most-sustainable-cities-ranking-announced>.

⁸ Please see <http://www.vitalsignscanada.ca/en/home>.

⁹ Retrieved January 25, 2014 from: <http://www.iclei.org>.

Cities for Climate Protection (CCP), among other programs, to assist municipalities in achieving *Agenda 21* commitments approved during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.¹⁰

Even with these as well as many other noteworthy programs, looking at the big picture to assess overall progress reveals increasing climate variability and rising sea levels due to climate change, biodiversity losses, world-wide economic crises, and growing disparities in human well-being both between and within countries (Millennium Ecosystem Assessment, 2005). Granted, the myriad of local and corporate sustainability initiatives are significant and may be ameliorating some of the worsening trends (AtKisson, 2006). Nevertheless, are these efforts only delaying the inevitability of societal and environmental collapse?

According to some surveys of the general public many people feel, in general, we are headed in the wrong direction (Meadows, 2006). Various experts have pointed to the mathematical fact that the world population has already exceeded the Earth's carrying capacity (Bartlett, 2006, 2012; Wackernagel and Rees, 1996; Barrett and Odum, 2000; World Wildlife Fund, 2012). Without controlling population growth, achieving global sustainability is, based upon common logic, improbable. Societal and environmental collapse may be on the horizon due to numerous factors, including but not limited to: the undeviating J-curve of population growth; momentum of the current growth-oriented mindset of a consumption-based society; disparities in resource distribution; short-sightedness due to the ever-recurrent election cycle (in democratic nations); and subsequent lack of political will to accept the need for, and engage in, immediate and long-term, transformative change on local to global scales. Even with the best of intentions, technological innovations seem to fall short of the mark given the above realities.

¹⁰ Please see <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/Agenda21.pdf>.

I am generally a positive person and do not wish to portray a depressing picture of our present inclination and future direction. While a “doom and gloom” message, in my mind, is unproductive, along the range of prevailing sentiments, I am unconvinced adherence to a “technology-will-solve-all” narrative is effective in capably addressing our persistent environmental, social, and economic challenges. This is the launching point for my dissertation. Western society has explored and developed the field of sustainability from within and across numerous disciplines, including environmental economics, science and engineering, resilience and socio-ecological systems analyses, and so many more. Alternative Western perspectives, such as ecofeminism and deep ecology, among others, have provided counterpoint assessments to the dominant discourse. Strong and weak versions of sustainability, and iterations across the spectrum, have been articulated. Important tools have been developed, such as the ecological footprint, life cycle analysis, and Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) standards, among others. New planning strategies have been initiated, such as Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSPs), the Transition Town movement, and CSR initiatives. Several organizations have established themselves to assist in the sustainability movement, such as The Natural Step (TNS), ICLEI, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), and so many more in each and every sector of our society, from the sciences to construction to agriculture to energy and transportation, among others. All of these achievements and developments are noteworthy and critical for global and local efforts in progressing toward sustainability.

Still, due to the entrenched nature of the status quo, which is grounded in a paradigm perpetuating economic growth and consumerism, this overall progress has been less than impressive given the declining health of planetary ecosystems and the scope and scale of various

socio-ecological challenges around the world. To examine the roots of this predicament and explore another way forward, I approach the concept of sustainability from a different vantage point, from an Indigenous worldview. Contrary to common experience in the academy and popular culture, which are dominated by Western worldviews, **Indigenous knowledge** systems are able to provide important insights, which in my view must no longer be discounted. With respect to sustainability, Indigenous perspectives are able to inform the dominant discourse, as these ways of knowing and being are predicated upon deep knowledge of place and time, relationship with and in nature, and living in balance with all Creation. Indigenous peoples distinguish this balanced living from Western concepts of sustainability in significant ways. For too long, these viewpoints and insights have been dismissed out-of-hand and regarded as inferior to dominant Western scientific thought (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Ellen, 2004; Maffie, 2009).

Non-Western worldviews have been suppressed in modern discourse through colonialism and imperialism. Over the last 500-plus years, many Indigenous peoples around the world have been overwhelmed by dominant, Western (Eurocentric) society and have been subject to dispossession of their lands, loss of their languages, prohibitions of their cultural practices, and significant losses in life, liberty, health, and livelihood. Western Eurocentric societies, intent on their own superiority, have moved to assimilate Indigenous peoples and subjugate their knowledge systems to Western traditions of scientific rationality, positivism, and objectivism.

In response, Canada's Indigenous peoples have struggled with mixed results to overcome the impacts wrought by the Indian Act, residential schools, and broken treaty promises. While success stories exist, significant challenges endure. Drug and alcohol abuse remains a problem. Stories in the media of band corruption and financial mismanagement perpetuate feelings of

mistrust on all sides. Band offices and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) struggle to meet changing deadlines and complicated reporting requirements with staff whose education may be limited to grade eight or high school at best. Efforts to improve the outlook through education are beset by pedagogical and resource challenges. While not the topic of this dissertation, this picture of the current challenges facing Canada's Indigenous peoples on and off reserve summarizes their recent histories and present predicaments.

Although Indigenous peoples' struggles are ongoing, and much effort has gone into assimilation initiatives, Western society has been unsuccessful in fully dismantling Indigenous cultures and knowledge systems. In fact, Western society has begun to recognize the value of Indigenous knowledge systems in science and ecology. Research has burgeoned in accessing Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) for information on wildlife and fish habitats, migration routes, climate change impacts on ecosystems, and pharmaceuticals, among other subjects and fields. This recognition, however, has come at a price with unwanted impacts associated with the outright appropriation of knowledge, implications for intellectual property rights and commodification of TEK, and a history of abuses experienced by Indigenous peoples in the name of research (Haig-Brown, 2010; Smith, 1999).

With this backdrop, as a **non-Indigenous** person embarking on a dissertation project involving Indigenous knowledge, I must acknowledge that I am walking on tenuous ground. However, I also acknowledge my unique position with respect to both my research approach and my dissertation topic. I am of eastern European descent, a Jewish woman married to a Haudenosaunee man with two Haudenosaunee-Jewish sons. Since before we were married, my husband and I have been attending and helping in ceremonies with different Elders. Mostly, we have helped in spring fasting ceremonies with one particular line of Elders, first with Peter

O'Chiese, a Cree-Nishnaabe who passed on in 2006, and then with his wascapeos, his helper, Michael Thrasher (hereinafter referred to as “**Mooshum**” a name of respect meaning “grandfather”), a Métis-Cree who learned from Peter O'Chiese for decades as well as many other Elders too numerous to recount in this introduction.

I have been attending ceremonies for twenty-eight years, since 1986, during which time I have been fortunate to come to appreciate the depths of Indigenous ways of knowing and being according to Cree-Nishnaabe ways, their relevance to everyday living and to living in relationship and balance with Creation. This education has been a different learning experience from my Western education, but no less valid. Indeed, I regard Indigenous knowledge (IK) as an equal partner in contributing to the whole of global knowledge and am thankful to those who have cared for this knowledge over the millennia, who have passed it onto each subsequent generation, so that IK still exists today and may be passed onto future generations.

In a simplified narrative, the first half of my life I learned according to the Western knowledge system, leading me to a master's degree and now my doctoral studies. The second half of my life, I have been learning an Indigenous way of knowing through ceremonies, and I have come to realize that Indigenous ways provide an incredibly rich, holistic approach to knowing and being in the world (i.e., in scientific knowledge and knowledge for human development), importantly distinct from and as valid as the rationalist, positivist approaches dominant in the Western paradigm.

One of the underlying tenets of my doctoral research, therefore, that sets my work apart from conventional academic deliberations, presumes the importance of Indigenous knowledge systems as a unique and equal partner within the whole of global knowledge.¹¹ Another unique

¹¹ Many Indigenous knowledges exist around the world. The Elders with whom I have been fortunate to learn base their learnings on the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, which they have learned from Elders before them. Hence,

aspect is that I am embedding my work wholly within an Indigenous paradigm, which I have learned through oral tradition and actual practice in ceremonies. While recently introduced into the academy (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008), working with an Indigenous framework is still a relatively new approach accepted in doctoral programs (Absolon, 2008, Dockstator, 1993; FitzMaurice, 2005; Fook, 2011; Hankard, 2012; Longboat, 2008; Metallic, 2011; Warren, 2008). Whereas other researchers have applied an Indigenous lens to their work (i.e., adapting a Western methodology such as critical, emancipatory, or feminist methodologies to incorporate Indigenous principles and practices), I am working primarily within an Indigenous conceptual framework.¹²

This conceptual framework is based upon my learnings from ceremonies rooted in a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle. This Medicine Circle grounds my research, informing both my methodological process and the content of my work. This is unique in doctoral work, as I have found few authors who have written about Indigenous knowledge from the standpoint of learning through ceremonies. Shawn Wilson (2008), in *Research is Ceremony*, articulates how research in an Indigenous paradigm must honour Indigenous “codes of conduct and . . . systems of knowledge and worldviews” (p. 8). He explores relationality and relational accountability, which are both central to Indigenous research, from choosing the research topic to selecting the methods of information gathering, analysis, and presentation. In essence, I have endeavoured to apply the maxim “research is ceremony” throughout my doctoral journey. Similarly, ceremony grounds my research as I have learned primarily through attending ceremonies all these years. I have worked according to Indigenous “codes of conduct” or protocols. I have striven to care for

my doctoral work is based on this Indigenous way of knowing and being while acknowledging the wide range of Indigenous knowledges throughout the world.

¹² This Indigenous framework is explained more fully in Chapter One and my position within this framework is explained in Chapter Three.

my relationships and be accountable to them. I have learned how to do so through ceremonies and I have applied these learnings throughout my doctorate. Acknowledging the care I have had to exercise (both working with an oral tradition and being non-Indigenous), I will explore the various challenges I have encountered at numerous points throughout this dissertation.

To this last point, a final purpose of my doctoral work is to explore complexities I have encountered as a non-Indigenous person working within an Indigenous paradigm. While many non-Indigenous scholars have conducted Indigenous-based research, few are able to ground their work within ceremonies and situate themselves within an Indigenous conceptual framework. The challenges I have faced are worth noting, given the possibility that other non-Indigenous researchers may choose to situate themselves within an Indigenous conceptual framework as well. Again, tenuous territory as, ethically speaking, I am not condoning research with or of Indigenous knowledge pursued by a path of expediency. As will be discussed in this dissertation, benefits from appreciating the whole of Indigenous knowledge remain hidden if researchers are unable and unwilling to spend the time necessary (i.e., often years) not only developing respectful relationships with Elders, Traditional Knowledge Holders, and communities, but also learning the physical and metaphysical nature of one's reciprocal relationship inherent in Indigenous cultures and the lands we share.

A Story about Learning

As noted above, spending “the time necessary” to learn is central to grasping deeper meanings in *any* subject. With respect to Indigenous ways of knowing, distinctions exist between how one learns using an Indigenous approach and how one learns according to mainstream Western ways. As this dissertation is presented from an Indigenous perspective, I

feel it worthwhile to share this distinction before proceeding so the reader grasps a core difference in the learning approaches, which will be revisited throughout this dissertation.

Indigenous learning is said to occur in four consecutive stages: 1) awareness (curiosity to learn about something), 2) understanding (learning *how* something occurs), 3) knowledge (learning cause and effect relationships – *why* something occurs), and 4) wisdom. Mainstream Western learning places a priority on exploring cause and effect relationships (*why*) before understanding the process (*how*). In essence, stages two and three are reversed in a conventional Western approach to learning (Douglas, Thrasher & Kemp, 1995).

This dissertation emphasizes the relevancy of practicing an Indigenous approach to learning, which requires spending the time necessary to fully understand *how* something occurs (e.g., how fire is made) to truly know *why* something occurs (e.g., the cause and effect relationship of why fire burns). By gaining experience making and keeping fire, one is better able to control and use it wisely, avoid getting burnt, and prevent the fire from getting out of control. The following story further illustrates the Indigenous approach to learning through my experience in ceremonies about learning to prepare a feast:

To illustrate “awareness,” I will share my first experience learning to make bannock. Bannock is a bread made with flour, baking powder, salt, water (or milk), and, seeing as we do not have baking ovens in camp, we fry it in oil or bake it in a fry pan over a fire or on a Coleman stove. While wheat flour is not a traditional ingredient, bannock has become a popular feast food. Bannock is also known as “Indian bread,” “scone,” or “fry bread.”

At my first ceremonies in 1986, the head woman, Shirley Williams, an Anishnaabe woman from Wikwemikong First Nation gave us a bannock lesson. It was my first ceremonies, but the other women (also non-Indigenous) had been attending ceremonies for a number of years already. Still, they did not know how to make bannock. So Shirley set out teaching us. She started putting flour in a big mixing bowl. One of the women asked, “How much do you put in?” Shirley, responded “That much,” pointing to the bowl and having us take a look. The woman asked again, “No. I mean how many measuring cups do you put in?” Shirley laughed. In all her years making bannock, she had actually never taken a measuring cup and “measured” the exact quantity of flour she adds to the bowl. She always had taken a mug of a particular size and used that, loosely piling flour to the top or just to overflowing, never being precise in

her measurements, just knowing proportions of flour to baking powder based on how many mugs of flour she was using, which was based on how many mouths she was feeding. With the baking powder, salt and water, the woman asked again, "How much is that?" wanting to write down the recipe exactly. Each time Shirley laughed and said, "That much!" or "Until it looks – or feels – like this."

This was my first experience at 'becoming aware' of the difference in learning from an Indigenous perspective compared to Western ways. Over the years, I received helpful lessons from my mother-in-law and my Kokum ("grandmother" in Cree) Chris Kensit whose favourite tip is to "treat the dough tenderly, just like you would a baby's buns!" By practicing making bannock over and over again, learning by doing and feeling the consistency of the dough, and not fretting about exact measurements, I was able to finally learn how to make bannock that did not turn out like hockey pucks!

*To "understand" that preparing a feast was more than simply making sure all the food was cooked by a certain time, I will talk about the Three Sisters. While I share the full story of the Three Sisters in Chapter Six, I will summarize the learning by saying that the Three Sisters is a dish made of corn, beans, and squash. These three vegetables have a special relationship, especially when they are grown together. They help each other to grow strong and healthy. When Shirley told us the story of the Three Sisters, she emphasized the collaboration between the plants. I later understood this teaching of the Three Sisters in relation to all the women collaborating together to prepare a good feast for ceremonies. As years passed, I began to understand this learning on deeper levels in relation to **how** everyone in the camp works and collaborates together, ensuring everything is taken care of and fulfilled according to protocols.*

*By first focusing on understanding **how**, I then came to "know" **why** things are done a certain way more completely as the years passed. Mooshum would share teachings in the tepee and I would apply them to my daily responsibilities around camp. When preparing the feast, especially the fasters' 'coming out' feast, I "knew" how our energy in camp may affect the fasters. We were encouraged to put our best minds toward the task at hand, in this case, preparing the feast. We thought our best thoughts – how happy we were that the fasters were returning. If someone was in a bad mood, or was troubled by something, more than once I have felt that person's energy have a negative effect on my mood and the camp's atmosphere. I am sure the reader must be able to relate to this on some level. The fasters are at a heightened state of sensitivity when they come out from their fasts. Making sure we are of a good mind, and that our thoughts are positive throughout the day while preparing the feast, helps the fasters upon their return.*

*Today, while I cannot say that I have "wisdom" about everything as I know I still have much to learn, I am no longer the newcomer asking questions and being directed to the Elders with tobacco in hand. I have gained an "understanding" and a degree of "knowledge." One year, I went to Mooshum for guidance regarding a question the women had asked. All he said was, "You tell them." As there was no senior woman above me that year and I was first wascapeos (head woman), I suddenly realized I had the most "wisdom" among all the women present. I lifted my jaw up from the ground and began accepting the new responsibilities of my changing role (with more than a bit of concern!). Now people were looking to **me** for guidance – from teaching them how to make bannock or sharing the story of the Three Sisters to explaining ceremonial protocols.*

This story illustrates for the reader the four stages of learning from an Indigenous perspective and the time it takes to gain knowledge and wisdom. Only so much can be learned through reading. Learning by doing takes time – either by attending ceremonies or spending time with Elders or in a community, all of which have proven tried and true avenues for deeper comprehension. Mooshum underscores this point by asking, “Why do we think that if we can look it up on the internet that we can do it?” In other words, shortcuts lead to shallower rather than deeper learning. I am being straightforward in stressing that, after reading this dissertation, the reader may have a new “awareness” about the subject matter, but cannot claim to have “learned” it or to have a deeper “understanding” or presume he/she has acquired advanced “knowledge” or “wisdom” of Indigenous ways of knowing. For these higher levels of learning, a great deal of time is needed; perhaps not twenty-eight years, depending on the route taken, but certainly more than the time necessary to read these pages.

Organization of Dissertation

Following from this story about Indigenous learning, and prior to engaging with the topic of sustainability, I first introduce important contextual information for the reader to “become aware” and gain an appreciation of the Indigenous paradigm in which this doctoral work is situated. Rather than a finite “work,” this dissertation unfolds as a “process.” That is, the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, which serves as the foundation for this doctoral journey, is not a static object, but a dynamic model which I have learned through attending ceremonies and which is intended for many things, from everyday living to the highest learning. What this means will be explained in the next chapter (Chapter One), which is an introduction to a Medicine Circle, and will unfold for the reader as the entire dissertation is read. The Elders with whom I have

learned will be introduced in Chapter Two, including my first teacher Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and my current ceremonial conductor and teacher, Mooshum Michael Thrasher, who has learned from Mooshum Peter and many other Elders throughout his lifetime. So that the reader understands how I have come to my understanding of the Medicine Circle, Chapter Three explores how I have learned through ceremonies and my positionality. The final chapter in the First Journey (Chapter Four) frames the second half of the dissertation, which is the application of the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle to examine both Western and Indigenous concepts of sustainability.

The first challenge I am facing is how to explain the organization of this dissertation when the reader may have no firsthand knowledge of a Medicine Circle. While the next chapter provides an in-depth introduction to a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, for the moment, the geometric characteristics of a circle will suffice for this brief overview. The circle presented here contains 360 degrees, split into four equal quadrants of 90 degrees each. The radii for these quadrants correspond to the four cardinal directions: east, south, west, and north. In addition to these four directions, hash-marks indicate the diagonal radii at the 45 degree mark within each quadrant. While the reasons for these diagonal radii will be explained in Chapter One, for the purposes of this introduction, initial attention is focused primarily on the four cardinal directions.

This dissertation is organized according to these directions and journeys clockwise around the circle two times, beginning in the east where the sun rises. The first circle (comprised of Chapters One through Four) is the introductory course, providing background information and the framework for when the reader journeys around a second time. For illustration, please refer to Figure P.1 for the First Journey around the Medicine Circle.

Figure P.1: First Journey around a Medicine Circle – Contextual Background

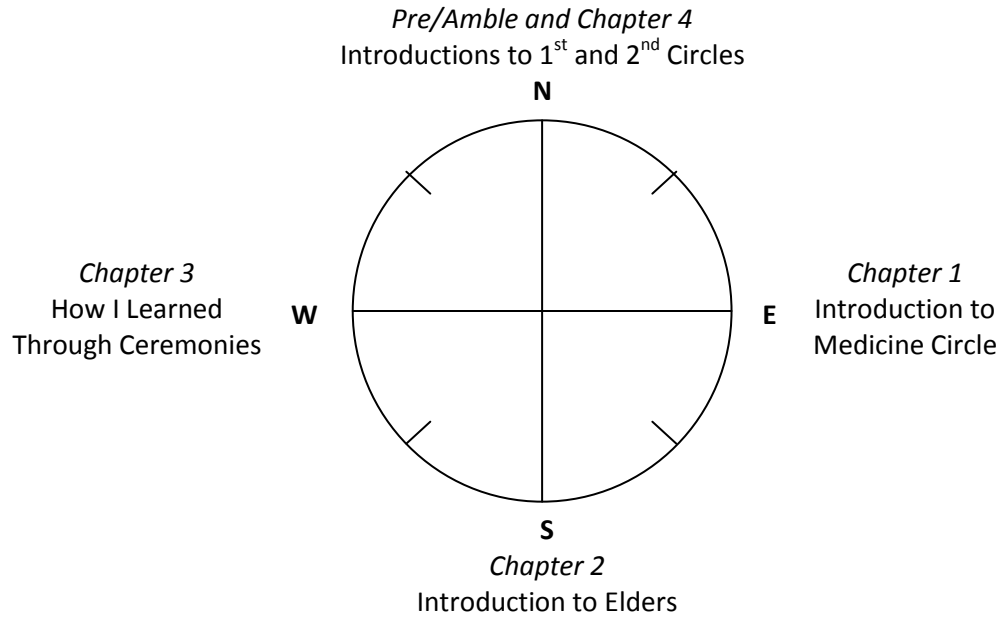


Figure P.2: Second Journey around a Medicine Circle – Application to Sustainability

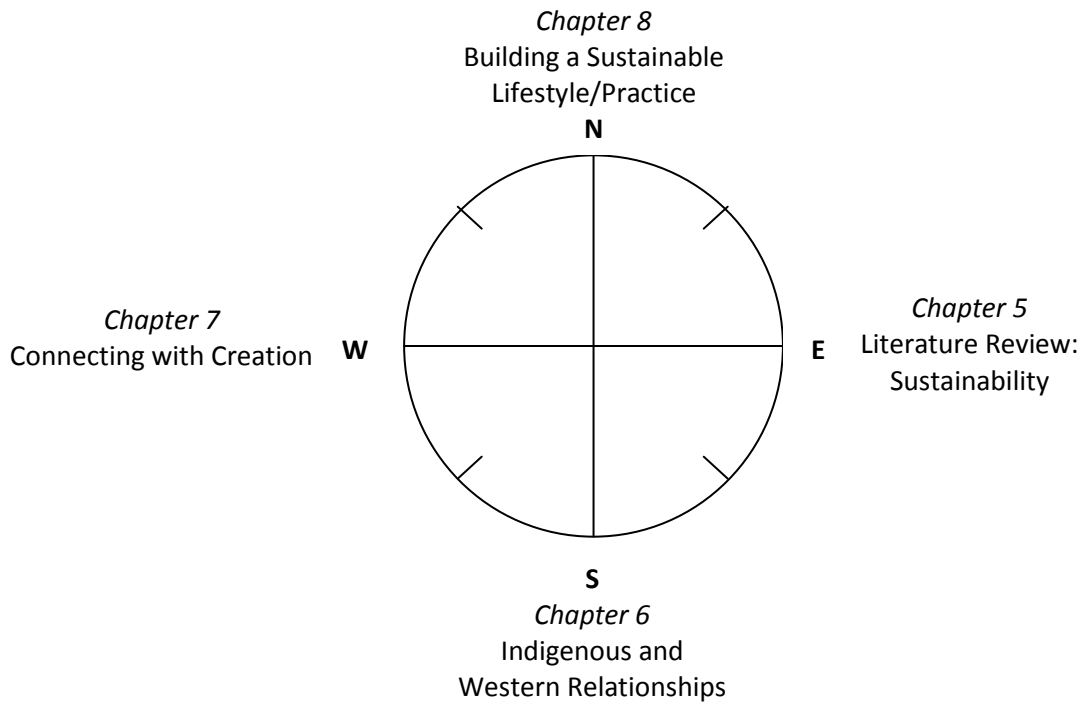


Figure P.2 illustrates the second journey around the Medicine Circle, presenting a new dilemma: How do I present an introduction to the second when we have yet to even begin the first? The challenge is balancing the academic expectations of a conventional dissertation with an Indigenous way of knowing and seeing. The former is more linear according to standard guidelines while the latter is circular and iterative¹³ with ensuing discussions blending with earlier ones and chronological order yielding to fluidic time and space. To jump ahead to a detailed introduction to the second may only serve to confuse the reader before the journey has even begun. As Mooshum Michael Thrasher has often said, and I believe Mooshum Peter O'Chiese has used this analogy as well, "You can eat a whole elephant if you take small enough bites. Try to swallow it whole and it will choke you." Heeding this advice and emphasizing the unfolding nature of this dissertation, I have postponed a more thorough introduction to the second half of this dissertation until Chapter Four. In general terms, the Second Journey (as illustrated in Figure P.2) explores Western and Indigenous approaches to sustainability according to the four directions of the Medicine Circle, their gifts and meanings, and their application in ascertaining a way forward that balances both ways of knowing.

Important Considerations and Definitions

For the time being, therefore, I will briefly present some initial definitions and establish the bounds of the forthcoming discussions. I will also articulate some important considerations, which will be revisited throughout this journey. To assist the reader in this section, words and phrases in **bold type** indicate that an explanation or definition is provided in this section.

Worth emphasizing first is the challenge inherent in working with an **oral tradition** when the medium for sharing is the written word. In a co-authored document written for the First

¹³ I recognize that other peoples around the world have circular rather than linear worldviews. My dissertation focuses primarily on Western and North American Indigenous worldviews.

Nations School of Toronto, **Mooshum** comments on the limitations in translating an **oral tradition** “to a second symbol system that relies on print material to convey meaning” (Douglas, Thrasher and Rickett, 1995; p. 2):

As is the case with all attempts at interpretation, some concepts cannot be accurately represented and others are mere approximations of meaning. At the base of this dilemma is the philosophical concept represented by the medicine wheel and the dissonance created when an attempt is made to translate it into a linear format that conceptualizes meaning as a continuum (p. 2).

The main point here is that the **Medicine Circle** is more than a mere geometric shape.

As an example of **Indigenous knowledge**, the Medicine Circle represents a vast store of knowledge. Multiply this knowledge by the many different peoples who have Medicine Circles, the knowledge becomes exponential in terms of their meanings and purposes. Add the fact that this knowledge has developed over millennia through **oral tradition** and the reader may begin to wonder how one is able to truly appreciate the fullness of the **learnings** written on these pages. Questions certainly arise regarding the appropriateness of writing down **oral tradition**. These questions are explored in Chapter Two.

Suffice it to say, I acknowledge the challenges I face in this regard writing this dissertation. A limitation I readily acknowledge is that I do not know any First Nations language. **Mooshum** knows some words but is not fluent in Cree. Choice of words has been done with care and with respect for the knowledge. Diligence and time has been taken to articulate clear, meaningful explanations. When I was first considering pursuing a doctorate in 2008, I presented tobacco to **Mooshum**, and thankfully, he agreed to walk with me on this journey. At that time, we both acknowledged the importance of keeping our eyes open with an

unwavering commitment to work through the “dissonance” and, in his words, “make sure whatever gets written stays true to the oral form in its intent of spirit and intelligence.”¹⁴

The following descriptions and definitions are presented in no particular order of importance.

Medicine Circle – See Chapter One for a thorough introduction to the Medicine Circle. Suffice it to say, for the moment, the term ‘Medicine Circle,’ as opposed to ‘Medicine Wheel,’ will be the preferred terminology used throughout this essay. The Medicine Circle is a dynamic model grounded in and reflective of the fixed **laws of nature**. In essence, it is a model of the universe. Whereas the Medicine Circle does not change, it is a facilitator for change, enabling human beings to adapt to the ever-fluid circumstances around them.

Natural Law – Laws of Nature – These phrases are used interchangeably throughout the dissertation and are not to be confused with the legal definition of “natural law.” What I refer to here are the laws found in nature that have been fixed since the moment of creation and will never change. These are observable and have been the focus of Indigenous peoples’ close study for millennia, resulting in the formulation of the Medicine Circle. In essence, “laws of nature” and “Medicine Circle” are synonymous and describe how we are dependent upon all Creation (i.e., without food, the sun’s warmth or fire, water, and air, we would die; so we better take care of them). As illustrated by the Medicine Circle, one of the laws of nature is the constancy of change. Knowing this, and learning from all of Creation, including the cosmos, Indigenous peoples have been able to adapt and sustain themselves over all time.

¹⁴ This was most recently discussed with Michael Thrasher, personal communication, September 12, 2013. In our first conversations about my doctorate, beginning in 2008, we have shared this common goal.

Oral tradition – Oral tradition is explored more fully in Chapter Two. In brief, oral tradition may be understood as both the knowledge (i.e., the traditions, histories, cultures, skills, etc.) being shared and the method of sharing that knowledge, which may be through stories, ceremonies, dreams, practical experiences, as well as listening and reflecting. Hulan and Eigenbrod (2008) define oral traditions as “distinct ways of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation” (p. 7).

Creation – Is interchangeably used in this dissertation with the words “nature,” “earth,” and “the land” to serve as an all-embracing term to refer to all of nature, inclusive of human beings, the water and air, sun, moon and stars, animals, plants, trees, those that crawl and slither, fly and swim, as well as the soil and rocks from the smallest pebbles to the highest mountains, the seen and the unseen (e.g., the spirit world). This understanding may be extended to include the universe or cosmos. All Creation has spirit. The word “creation” with a small ‘c’ refers to the formation or genesis of something.

This Indigenous view of Creation is distinct from dominant Western, religious views of Creation, which may be alternatively viewed as God or Creator. Pre-contact, Kihci-Manitow (in Cree)¹⁵ was, and is, the Great Mystery, which was not an anthropomorphic figure, as spirit energy or life force is inherent throughout all Creation and unknowable mysteries permeate life on earth. During colonization, European missionaries appropriated the word to represent the Christian God (Allen, 1986; Deloria, 1973; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). I discuss the Great Mystery further in Chapter Seven.

Indigenous, First Nations, Aboriginal, Indian, Native – Which one is the politically correct term of the day? Drew Hayden Taylor lightheartedly suggests the term NAFNIP which he says is the all-inclusive acronym he prefers for “Native, Aboriginal, First Nations, Indigenous

¹⁵ In Ojibwe: Kitche Manitou or Gichi Manidoo (various spellings)

People.”¹⁶ On a more serious note, Indigenous persons often prefer to be named according to their people. My husband and sons are Haudenosaunee (or Iroquois in English). Other peoples are Anishnaabe (Ojibwe or Chippewa in English). Inuit, Innu, Nehiyaw (Cree in English),¹⁷ Métis, Haida, Algonquian, Mi’kmaq (or Mikmaw in English) are other names among many too numerous to list here. In academic publications and periodicals, the more generalized terms listed in bold font at the beginning of this paragraph are often used. An excellent explanation of the historical, legal and political definitions and usages of each of the above terms may be found in the book, *First Nations in the Twenty-First Century* by Frideres (2011).

For the purposes of this dissertation, I have chosen primarily to use the term “Indigenous” to refer to all peoples who are original to this land, whose ancestry or part thereof originates on Turtle Island (North America). Other Indigenous peoples are original to other lands and continents as well, so at times I also refer to Indigenous peoples of the world. Anyone whose ancestry originates elsewhere (i.e., whose ancestors migrated to colonize or settle in another part of the world) is not Indigenous (alternatively, “non-Indigenous”), even if they were born in North America. In a specific context, I may use another term such as “Aboriginal” rather than “First Nations” because the former is inclusive of those who are non-status according to the Indian Act and 1982 Constitution, and the latter has become associated with those who have status with the federal government of Canada. If the words “Indian” or “Native” are used in this dissertation, they are usually part of a quotation from another author.

Dominant Western – Rather than use terms such as “Euro-Canadian” or “Euro-American” or “Settler,” I refer to the dominant, neoliberal worldview as “Western.” This dominant view is rooted in principles espoused by various philosophers and scientists of the

¹⁶ Taylor, D. H. (November 2013). *You know things are bad when . . . Acronym now!* Windspeaker 31(8), p. 6.

¹⁷ Original, cultural names for Cree peoples vary according to location. The names of many North American Indigenous peoples have been Anglicized and Franquized (Newhouse & Belanger, 2010).

European Renaissance (e.g., Newton, Bacon, Descartes, among others). Lorraine Code (2006) summarizes "the dominant model of knowledge and epistemology in Anglo-American philosophy" (p. 8) as:

scientism, reductionism, and the instrumental-utilitarian moral and political theories that sustain an ethos of dominance and mastery, where a dislocated knower-as-spectator seeks to predict, manipulate, and control the behavior of the material world and of other "less enlightened" people (p. 8).

Many Indigenous authors point to the assumptions underlying this Western "ethos of dominance and mastery" as the unfortunate rationale for colonization and the subjugation of Indigenous peoples (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Deloria, 1973; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Graveline, 1998; Smith, 1999). Battiste and Henderson (2000) trace the superiority colonizers assumed over Indigenous peoples to European constructs of civilization and progress, spurning different understandings of these concepts held by other cultures.¹⁸ These European constructs, in turn, have reinforced core assumptions of universalism and diffusionism (Battiste and Henderson, 2000) or homogenization (Cajete, 1994). That is, only one "truth" exists as revealed through scientific rationality and based upon Christian dictates, and all peoples of the world are to be united under this one "truth." These assumptions have grounded the Eurocentric worldview from the time of colonization when, as Cajete (1994) describes:

The first Europeans saw America as wilderness, an obstacle to overcome through settlement and the use of resources, living and non-living. They looked upon the land primarily as a material object, a commodity they could gain from economically. For the most part they viewed the Indians they encountered as one of those resources, which they would either use or abuse according to their agenda for material gain (p. 75).

¹⁸ For example, Pre-contact civilizations in North America were grounded in "learned means of survival in an environment, . . . [involving] such things as "language, education, technology, and social organization . . ." (Mohawk in Barreiro, 2010; p. xv). In essence, progress was successfully surviving through time and passing on the knowledge of how to survive from one generation to the next. As Cajete (1994) writes: ". . . the real test of living was to establish a harmonious relationship with that perfect state that was Nature – to understand it, to see it as the source of one's life and livelihood, and the source of one's essential well-being" (p. 75).

This perspective has evolved into its present-day form, with scientific and technological advances both facilitating and reinforcing this “dominance and mastery” doctrine. As well, the field of economics has yielded a host of “intricate artificial models of ‘the economy’ and of ‘the market’” entirely separated from nature and independent from the human relationship with nature (Winner, 1986; p. 124). As a result, neoliberal capitalism has emerged as the prevailing political orientation in the postmodern, Western world, blending liberal, market-oriented, and economic growth priorities (Code, 2006; Winner, 1986). Winner (1986) explains the resulting “penchant to define every situation according to an orthodox format of costs, benefits, supply, demand, and prices” (p. 124) where even the “value of clean air, clean water, dwindling resources, wilderness, and the like” is commodified and monetized (p. 124).

This Eurocentric worldview is the dominant Western view to which I refer throughout this dissertation. Alternative Western worldviews, such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and Gaia, among others, are discussed at various points to underscore the existence of other perspectives that diverge from mainstream thought and offer different approaches to perceiving and living in the world.

Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous ways of knowing (and being) - Many different Indigenous knowledges exist around the world. Indigenous knowledge (IK) is not homogeneous across peoples. Just as many different shades of red exist, differences exist between cultures, distinguishing one nation from another. In fact, the term "Indigenous knowledge" is a relatively new term, having been introduced in the academy in the late 1980's, early 1990's. When Mooshum was growing up, the term "culture" was commonly used to refer to the knowledge being shared.

My dissertation, therefore, recognizes that abundant differences exist between Indigenous peoples and their cultures, their knowledges. I understand that diversity among Indigenous peoples contributes to their inherent strength and perseverance. I also understand that the underlying philosophies among Indigenous knowledges hold significant commonalities. These fundamental principles and shared philosophies are the foundation upon which I ground my doctoral work.

I have learned about Indigenous knowledge – or more specifically, Indigenous ways of knowing and being – through helping and participating in ceremonies since 1986. These Cree-Nishnaabe ceremonies are based in the old **Midewiwin** Lodge Society. As such, my dissertation is based upon my understanding of what I have learned and how I have learned these ways. Other people may have attended the same ceremonies and walked away with different understandings. I can only share what I have learned and how I understand what I have learned. What others have learned is just as valid as what I have learned, for each individual's experience is according to their needs. How I understand IK is presented in Chapter Two and unfolds throughout this dissertation.

To be clear, IK and Indigenous cultures, philosophies, and spiritualities are distinct from the dominant Western concepts of “religion.” As Mohawk explains in Barreiro (2010), Indigenous peoples “do not call theirs a religion, but a Way of Life” (p. 10). Their “way of being . . . is the active participation in the daily celebration of [all life and] Life-supportive processes” (p. 10). Further, “The rituals of Life-Celebration are not the actual celebration, but a reflection of reality” (p. 10). That is, “[Indigenous peoples] do not strive to respect the Natural World only in their minds and hearts (although they do this), but, rather they try to make their lives a

celebration” (p. 10). Deloria (1973) highlights a major difference between a Western religion and Indigenous spirituality:

Christians would be well advised to surrender many of their doctrines and come to grips with the lands now occupied. . . The problem of relating to a place’s spirit or alternatively bringing a spiritual reality to a particular place is yet to be understood in the sphere of religious thought. That a fundamental element of religion is an intimate relationship with the land on which the religion is practiced should be a major premise of future theological concern (pp. 295-296).

As a final insight into the distinction between religion and Indigenous ways of knowing and being, Deloria & Wildcat (2001; p. 54) quote Osage theologian George Tinker in the *Encyclopedia of North American Indians* (1996):

Most adherents of traditional American Indian ways characteristically deny that their people ever engaged in any religion at all. Rather, these spokespeople insist, their whole culture and social structure was and still is infused with a spirituality that cannot be separated from the rest of the community’s life at any point. . . Whereas outsiders may identify a single ritual as the ‘religion’ of a particular people, the people themselves will likely see that ceremony as merely an extension of their day-to-day existence . . . (pp. 537-538).

Pre-contact – This term refers to the time prior to the first Europeans arriving in any land they were colonizing and before they met and overwhelmed the Indigenous peoples of that land.

Midewiwin – Like other Indigenous knowledges, old Midewiwin teachings have been handed down across generations through oral tradition and have guided the many Nishnaabe peoples in their way of life across the land and through the ages. The term “Midewiwin” is translated into English to mean “Grand Medicine Society.”¹⁹ Many other Indigenous knowledges exist, including Haudenosaunee, Haida, and Navajo, among others in North America and around the world too numerous to be named here. While commonalities exist underlying all Indigenous knowledges and this dissertation may draw upon authors from other Indigenous nations, my understanding of Indigenous knowledge is specific to the Anishnaabeg and to old

¹⁹ Retrieved September 17, 2013 from: <http://www.gct3.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/midewiwin.pdf>

Midewiwin teachings as shared by Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and Mooshum Michael Thrasher, as they learned from those who came before them.

Learnings/Teachings - A clear distinction is made between “teachings” and “learnings” by Mooshum. “Teachings” implies someone speaking and sharing information and people receiving the information passively through listening or reading. “Learnings” implies that the listener is actively engaged in the learning experience, not just by listening but, more importantly, by doing. In essence, the onus is on the listener to learn. The Elder or Traditional Knowledge Holder may *teach* many things through the oral tradition; what the listener *learns* is up to the individual.

Mooshum – means “grandfather” in Cree. In addition to one’s relative, Mooshum is often used as a title of respect for one’s Elder. Similarly, “Kokum” means “grandmother” and is also a title of respect. Oftentimes, exercising caution and humility, Elders are reluctant to be referred to directly as “Elders.” This will be discussed further in Chapter Two. Michael Thrasher, throughout this dissertation, is named “Mooshum.”

Sustainability – The Brundtland Report definition, which has already been shared, serves as the launching point for discussing the concept of sustainable development and its more recent incarnation, sustainability. Sustainability’s focus reflects the balance being sought among environmental, social, and economic goals to facilitate humanity’s survival indefinitely. The concept will be more fully explored beginning in Chapter Five; however, some references will be made during the First Journey around the Medicine Circle to highlight various considerations.

Summary

The sustainability movement has grown out of an evolving recognition of the interconnectedness of our world. Indigenous knowledges have known of this holistic

relationship within all Creation for millennia. What if we consider Indigenous ways of knowing of equal value to Western knowledges? After all, as both Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and Mooshum Michael Thrasher have observed, the sun shines equally for everyone.²⁰ All peoples have essential gifts to share with the world; this includes the gift of knowledge. If life as we know it is undergoing significant changes due to climate change and stress upon the natural limits to Earth's life-supporting systems, how can Indigenous ways of knowing and being contribute toward humanity's adaptation to these changes? I am exploring these and other questions from an Indigenous perspective. The Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, as I have learned through ceremonies, provides the methodological basis for the process followed throughout my doctorate. Also, learnings of the Medicine Circle inform the content of this dissertation. This distinctly Indigenous framework privileges an Indigenous approach to assessing the above questions and comprehending a way forward. The following questions provide context for this exploration: What is the dominant Western approach to the current pursuit of sustainability? What are fundamental Indigenous and Western viewpoints underlying their respective worldviews? How does a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle provide insights and instruction for living in respectful balance with Creation? The main thesis of this dissertation is that Indigenous ways of knowing integrate holistic perspectives and time-proven wisdom essential for sustainable, relational living.

This dissertation consists of two journeys around a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle. The First Journey provides the reader with background information to navigate within an Indigenous framework. For contextual awareness, introductions are provided to the Medicine Circle, to those with whom I have learned, oral tradition, and my positionality. The Second

²⁰ This learning teaches that all peoples are equal and includes the notion that all peoples are to be treated equitably, that is fairly and justly. In terms of world knowledges, this learning teaches that all knowledges are equal and are to be balanced respectfully as they are complementary, not oppositional or hierarchical.

Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle applies Medicine Circle learnings to an exploration of the concept of sustainability. This Second Journey is previewed in Chapter Four at the completion of the first circle. These two journeys culminate with the presentation of a way forward, one which balances Indigenous and Western knowledges in a holistic approach toward sustainable living.

FIRST JOURNEY 'ROUND THE MEDICINE CIRCLE

Chapter 1 – EAST: Introduction to a Medicine Circle

I am attending my first ceremonies with Mark in 1986. Mooshum Peter O'Chiese is hanging coloured prints on the willows framing the lodge (prints are metre long fabrics in solid colours according to the four directions – red, yellow, blue, white²¹). As he hangs each print, starting in the east, Mooshum Peter talks about the direction, beginning with Creation, and discusses the gift of that direction. Before this experience, my first impression of a Medicine 'wheel' was that it was a Native American symbol, a circle with four colours in it (as I was growing up and living in the United States at the time, I was thinking in American terms as opposed to 'Native Canadian.' This was the vernacular of the day). I had seen drawings of it, and had considered it simply a Native American symbol similar to a Jewish star being a Jewish symbol.²²

Back in the ceremony in 1986, Mooshum Peter is showing how each direction has a colour, a gift, and something to be learned about that gift. I feel amazement and wonder at what Mooshum Peter is saying and what I am hearing for the first time. I am also feeling overwhelmed by the information being shared. How will I remember all of this? It seems so important and the flood of information is staggering. I am thirsty to know more and all at once – I want to learn, get it right, and not forget anything. What I am hearing feels so important, so right, so natural – how what we see and experience in Creation²³ translates into lessons of how we see and experience the world in which we live, lessons applying to how we behave and how we relate to the world around us and to the people we know. That night and every night thereafter, I laid awake in my tent trying to remember, repeating in my head what I had heard that day. What colour is in the east again? What does it mean? What about the south? What does the south signify? Around the four directions I wander. I do not want to forget anything. The learning is exhilarating; my mind is awakening to a whole new world – but not just my mind, my spirit, too.

*The experience amplifies and deepens to a more profound level what I had felt when I suddenly knew, at my core, that I wanted to focus my studies on ecological issues at University of Michigan's School of Natural Resources (SNR). After a year of wandering aimlessly through my coursework, I had enrolled in an introductory SNR course on ecological issues and after the first lecture, I knew. I knew that I wanted to learn about our natural environment and SNR was where I wanted to be. It felt right; I had found a place where I could enjoy learning, connecting my love of nature with my education. Likewise, at those first ceremonies, I knew at the core of my being that what I was hearing for the first time was so meaningful, the depths of which I could not begin to comprehend through attending just one ceremony. Learning about the environment in school is one thing; quite another is understanding that **more** is possible to learn*

²¹ Other colours represent other directions. The four colours for the cardinal directions will suffice for the purposes of this dissertation.

²² Historically, a Jewish star means nothing more than it is a symbol of the Jewish people. Although over time, different meanings have been applied to the symbol by Kabbalists and other Jewish groups.

²³ I have opted for a capital "C" for Creation when I am referring to all of nature, differentiating "Creation" from "creation" with a lower case "c," which I use when referencing an act of producing something.

– not just **about** the environment, but about our connection (both physical and metaphysical) **with** our environment. I had to learn more – because of how what I was learning made me feel more connected than ever before to the natural world I had been studying about in school. This new awareness kindled within me a respect for this Indigenous way of knowing, respect that would deepen over the years to come.

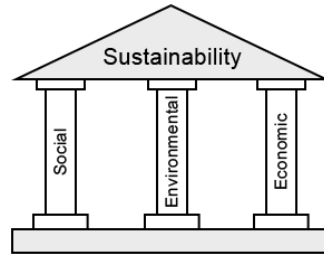
Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with an introduction to what a Medicine Circle is and how it may be used, and specifically how it has been applied for this dissertation. In sharing the preceding story I hope the reader appreciates that the Medicine Circle is more than a mere symbol of First Nations people across North America.

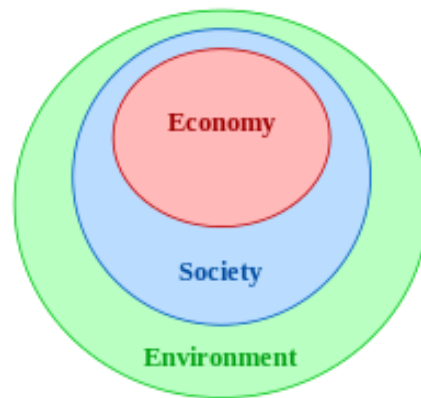
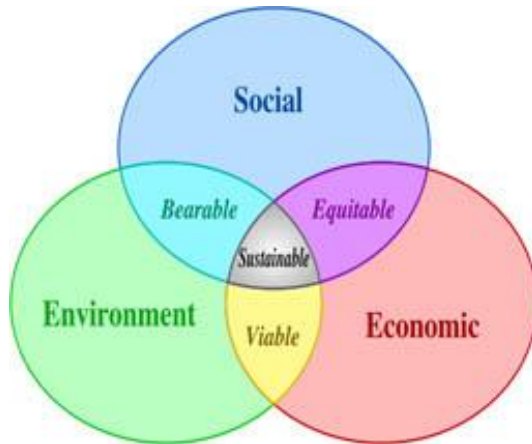
The circular shape has been central to many Indigenous peoples around the world throughout time. As well, the circle influences Western thinking, including with respect to sustainability. When I first began attending ceremonies, the Brundtland Report was just being written. After its publication, popular illustrations of sustainability featured three pillars and three-legged stools (see Figure 1.1), illustrating the idea that the strength of each – the economy, environment and society – contributes toward overall sustainability. Over the years, Venn diagrams and nested eggs have become accepted illustrations. This transition shows how the economy, environment, and society initially tended to be treated as separate, distinct disciplines. The more recent, circular representations show how sustainability thinking has evolved to more explicitly embrace interdisciplinarity, holism, and relationality. These concepts will be discussed more fully as this dissertation unfolds.

Figure 1.1: How Sustainability has been Illustrated over the Years²⁴

Earlier representations of sustainability:



More recent representations of sustainability:



A first question in one's mind when thinking about a Medicine Circle may be, "Why is she referring to a Medicine *Circle*? Isn't it a Medicine *Wheel*?" While the latter is more commonly used in popular culture today, Indigenous peoples of this land possess no original word in their languages for "wheel." Words such as "hoop" or "circle" exist, but not "wheel." In fact, this centrepiece of their cultures is multi-dimensional. However, as this dissertation is written in two-dimensions, for simplicity's sake, the term "circle" is chosen for two reasons: 1) to differentiate the bona fide Medicine Circle from the Medicine Wheel found in popular culture; and 2) to honour the original languages of this land as much as possible.

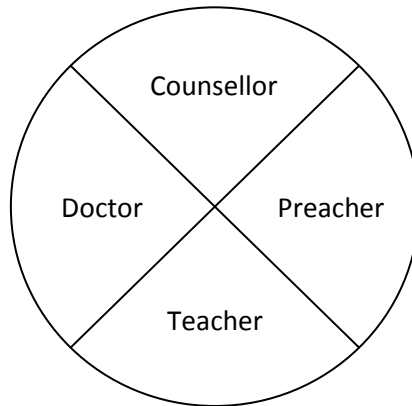
²⁴ Retrieved January 27, 2014 from Google Images: www.google.ca.

A second question the reader may ask is, “Why is this cultural object referred to as a *Medicine Circle*?” What does medicine have to do with this circle? My first awakenings to the *Medicine Circle* as a means of counsel occurred at my first ceremonies. I have gained further understanding through many years of attending ceremonies as well as during cultural workshops that Mooshum Michael has led over the years. Elders Gatherings and non-profit and governmental organizations have invited him to speak and share his wisdom. He has compiled several *Medicine Circles* into a “Counselling Wheel” which he and his colleagues have used in these cultural workshops as well as in drug and alcohol treatment centres. The *Medicine Circle* and *Counselling Wheel* provide a means of counsel for addicts and inmates of Indigenous origin and for those who provide care and assistance to them.

Further insight into the word “medicine” may be found when examining the Latin root of the word, which is *mederi*, “to cure” (Bohm, 1980). David Bohm, in *Wholeness and the Implicate Order* (1980), notes that this Latin word is also the root for “measure.” Bohm (1980) explains the original and ancient relationship between these two words – to cure and to measure – that their common basis “reflects the view that physical health is to be regarded as the outcome of a state of right inward measure in all parts and processes of the body” (p. 26). I first note that this view may be expanded to include mental and spiritual health as well as physical well-being. I concur with Bohm (1980) that this “inner measure of things” (p. 26) is essential for good health and harmonious life. The *Medicine Circle* provides a means for self-counsel, to look inward and reflect on innermost thoughts and feelings, and take measure of one’s life on many levels. Taken as a whole and for a complete “measure of things,” the *Medicine Circle*, as it relates to humans, is not only counsellor, but also preacher, teacher, and doctor (as illustrated in Figure 1.2 below).

Figure 1.2: The Medicine Circle as Preacher, Teacher, Counsellor, and Doctor²⁵

Further explanation will be revealed throughout this dissertation, illuminating the meanings behind these words. For the time being, “preacher” refers to the Medicine Circle as providing spiritual counsel; “teacher” – as providing counsel in relationships; “doctor”- as providing counsel on innermost thoughts and feelings; and “counsellor” – as providing counsel for physical and behavioural issues. Considered all together, these functions of the Medicine Circle contribute to one’s overall health and well-being.



The Medicine Circle is also a system of measurement, not coincidentally. As Mooshum explains, the Medicine Circle is a measure of the sun’s location in relation to the earth. No one knows exactly when these measurements were first taken many millennia ago; however, standing in one spot, marking where the sun rises and sets each day and observing shadow lines, a circle begins to take shape. Through night-time observations, other points around the circle mark where certain stars first rise above the horizon.²⁶ These circles are found across North America and around the world and have been used, among other things, to determine the summer solstice. Many North American Indigenous peoples mark the longest day of the year with Sundance ceremonies.

An additional introductory point I wish to reiterate regards the existence of many Indigenous peoples around the world. By extension, many Indigenous knowledges endure, and numerous Medicine Circles exist, each for different as well as overlapping purposes. I am only able to speak to the one I have learned about these 28 years, which is the Cree-Nishnaabe



²⁵ Source: Michael Thrasher, personal communication, October 28, 2013.

²⁶ For more information on Medicine Circles, please see <http://solar-center.stanford.edu/AO/bighorn.html>.

Medicine Circle used in the ceremonies I have attended and which are grounded in old Midewiwin learnings. As mentioned earlier, others may have different understandings of this particular Medicine Circle. I am only able to speak to what I know and how I have come to understand what I have learned.

Finally, and related to the above notation, while four colours are shown in Medicine Circles, their locations in different Medicine Circles are seen to vary. Differences exist because different peoples have situated the colours according to their cultures. One ordering of colours is no less valid than another. Each is accurate according to the particular people with which a Medicine Circle originates. Additionally, if one understands the Medicine Circle actually to be a three-dimensional sphere, depending on one's vantage point and how one manipulates the sphere, the colours' locations shift according to the perspective selected.

The Four Directions, Laws of Nature, Time and Place

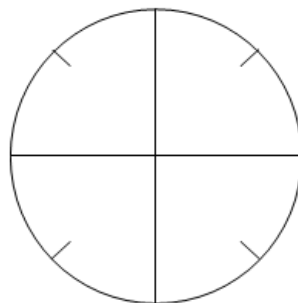
Most people who have seen a Medicine Circle are familiar with seeing it one of two ways, either with the four directions situated along the cardinal points of the compass (east, south, west, and north)  or along diagonally-situated radii . Both combined together actually reveal the complete picture. For simplicity's sake, one is often chosen over the other, depending on its purpose.

For the purposes of my dissertation, however, I feel I must present the holistic illustration of the Medicine Circle with both sets of lines integrated in one diagram (see Figure 1.3). The two sets of lines are interrelated and ought to be considered together for a more comprehensive understanding of the whole. That is, they are two parts of one whole and the whole is greater than simply the sum of its parts. Separating them by reductionist means, contemplating one while dismissing the other, most certainly shortchanges the reader's opportunity for learning.

A word of caution, however, is in order. Learning the Medicine Circle²⁷ by reading alone is a limited experience. Oral traditions are much more than merely listening to a storyteller. Oral traditions assume an active listener, one who not only contemplates and reflects (which are active processes in and of themselves), but also applies what one is hearing in tangible, practical experiences. The learning experience may be in ceremonies (from sun-up to sun-up, not just during the formal protocols of a ceremony), or it may be working and spending time with Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders in organizations and/or communities. The experience may be in one's everyday living, by oneself or in a group. The important message I am trying to convey is that reading about Indigenous knowledge (in this case the Medicine Circle) only provides a glimpse into the fullness of its meaning. Applying what one is learning and gaining experience with the Medicine Circle over time opens a door to deeper understanding.

Accepting the limitations evident through reading about Indigenous knowledge, I will endeavour to be as thorough and as complete as possible. With this challenge in mind, I depict the Medicine Circle with both sets of lines as shown in Figure 1.3. This version represents the holistic nature of the Medicine Circle – that it contains two parts comprising one balanced whole.

Figure 1.3: A Medicine Circle



²⁷ Rather than learning *about* the Medicine Circle. The reader is reminded of the story in the Pre/Amble about the four stages of learning from an Indigenous perspective.

The reason for choosing this illustration abides in nature. After all, Indigenous knowledges and Medicine Circles are understood through observing and learning the laws of nature. That is, what we see around us in Creation informs Indigenous ways of knowing and being in the world. With respect to the Medicine Circle, both the sun and moon ground our learning. The sun measures time and distance according to cosmic position. Sunrise is in the east. At noon, (at least in the northern hemisphere), the sun is in the south; and sunset is in the west. The moon measures time into Earth “life parts,” the seasons, with the sun establishing the length of each season according to equinoxes and solstices.²⁸ The thirteen moons that occur during one cycle of the earth around the sun are named according to the distinguishing characteristics of the season (i.e., *time*) in the *place* where one lives. Over the millennia, knowledge about natural law accrued amongst Indigenous peoples by studying Creation, inclusive of the sun, moon and stars – all to help the people sustain themselves *where* they lived over *time*. Is this not a general description of sustainability?

Either the sun or moon may be studied to learn about the Medicine Circle. I have chosen to share moon teachings as opposed to sun teachings for a few reasons. First, while I am aware of sun teachings, I am comfortable with the moon teachings as the moon is referred to as Grandmother Moon and has a special relationship with women.²⁹ That is, science has shown how the moon influences the movement of the world’s waters, from the ocean tides to women’s monthly cycles (referred to as a woman’s “moon time”). Oral tradition has passed these learnings down through the generations as Indigenous peoples have known of this relationship

²⁸ The moon also measures time with the tides (Michael Thrasher, personal communication, May 17, 2014).

²⁹ Likewise, the sun is referred to as Grandfather Sun and, being male, is connected with men. Having said this, both male and female are composed of elements of each other as the simple fact exists that one cannot exist without the other. Hence, considering the whole – male and female – is essential. Again, another reason why the diagram in Figure 1.3 is chosen as it is a more complete representation of the Medicine Circle with which I am most familiar.

for millennia. Hence, it is on intuitive grounds as a woman that I have chosen to share Grandmother Moon teachings.

Second, while both men and women, and all warm-blooded creatures, have inner fires (i.e., our hearts), in ceremonies the roles of men and women are designated according to fire and water, sun and moon. Together and in balance, both are necessary for ceremonies to function well. Men tend the fire and all the fire's needs during ceremonies (i.e., gathering and chopping wood, making and keeping fire, etc.). Likewise, women take care of water-related responsibilities – preparing and cooking food, providing drinking water, etc.³⁰ Again, as a woman, I choose to honour these women's responsibilities as I have learned about them in ceremonies by sharing my understanding of the Medicine Circle through Grandmother Moon teachings.

Finally, as alluded to above, traditionally and before the advent of the clock and abstract time, both the sun and moon measure *natural* time, with the sun measuring cosmic time and the moon phasing earth's time through the seasons.³¹ Each new moon helps to mark time throughout the year where one lives. While sense of place is important, time is also a central consideration in sustainability discourse, much of which concerns sustaining life in the present and for future generations – that is, through time. As such, I have chosen natural time discerned through Grandmother Moon teachings as an organizing framework.

The Medicine Circle unfolds a process whereby place and time are inextricably linked. In its simplest terms, one of the purposes of a Medicine Circle is to help one learn how to live in a particular place through time (i.e., throughout all seasons over the years). The Medicine Circle is also a process in time through space; that is, it may be applied wherever one may go, providing a means for counsel and self-reflection throughout one's life. With respect to my doctorate, I

³⁰ Chapter 3 further explores women's and men's roles and my coming to understand the reasons for the division of responsibilities in ceremonies.

³¹ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 6, 2013.

have applied the Medicine Circle with this latter focus in mind. Its process has guided me throughout this journey these last five years. As well, as has already been discussed, the Medicine Circle has helped inform the content and organization of this doctoral work.

As background information, both time and place are central themes in the creation and migration stories of the Anishnaabe and other First Nations peoples (Benton-Banai, 1988; Blondin, 1990). These stories speak of the relationship between human beings and all of Creation. They have been handed down orally from one generation to the next to ensure that the peoples' histories are remembered and so their relationship with the land where these histories are grounded remains strong into eternity. Blondin (1990) shares stories that embody the close relationship of the Dene with their land. Stories grounded in their traditional territories have shown the Dene how to survive as a people and live in balance and harmony with their surroundings. Similarly, Benton-Banai (1988) shares Anishnaabe creation stories and relates the movement of the Anishnaabe people across Turtle Island, establishing their historical ties to place.

While all these stories are grounded in place, they emphasize the importance of time, as time is essential to developing the relationships central to one's survival and well-being. These relationships are with oneself, with others – human and non-human, the seen and unseen, and with place, with nature – all of Creation. Taking the time necessary to tend each of these relationships, by following a process manifested in nature, is a central learning of the Medicine Circle and of Indigenous knowledge.

Time from a Western perspective is primarily linear in character. Standing in one moment of time, one looks behind to the past and forward to the future along a one-dimensional pathway, which may be illustrated by a straight line. From an Indigenous perspective, circular

time is more prevalent.³² Using the cycle of the seasons as a foundation for teachings about time, one observes the seasons changing from spring to summer to fall to winter and then to spring again and so on. Time is inextricably linked to place as time is manifested in the world around us through the cyclical progression of the seasons and our tangible appreciation of the ever-changing climatic and spatial conditions we experience. Likewise, place grounds time in the sense that where one is determines the patterns time manifests.

Grandmother Moon Teachings

Grandmother Moon teachings are used to describe these patterns through time – the seasons,³³ helping one to begin to understand the initial layers of the Medicine Circle’s four directions (see Figure 1.4). Grandmother Moon waxes and wanes, marking each month of each season. Each season has its own essence, its root properties that may be discerned through close observation to learn about the laws of nature and gifts of Creation.

To begin, *spring*³⁴ is the time of new growth. The sun warms the earth; plants germinate and emerge from the soil; leaves bud on trees. We can *see* this new growth as life is renewed once again after the cold winter. Once new growth emerges, a relationship with water and the sun becomes evident. Throughout the spring and into the summer, the rains and the sunshine together help plants grow. In the *summer*, the lengthened days and the sun’s warmth and light give the plants *time* to grow, affirming the importance of the *relationship* between life on earth and the sun. By the summer solstice, the first fruits and vegetables have matured. Once the days

³² Indigenous peoples first knew time as cyclical. With the colonization of their lands and the introduction of abstract time, Indigenous peoples have adapted to understand linear time as well. Likewise, while linear time dominates Western societies, Western peoples understand the circularity of the seasons. For further discussion of Indigenous and Western views of time, see Chapter 7.

³³ With attention to place, these teachings are learned through observing the four seasons as experienced in Cree-Nishnaabe and neighbouring territories in northern North America.

³⁴ The highlighted words in this section relate to the words or “gifts” that are connected with their respective season, as reflected in the outer circle of Figure 1.4.

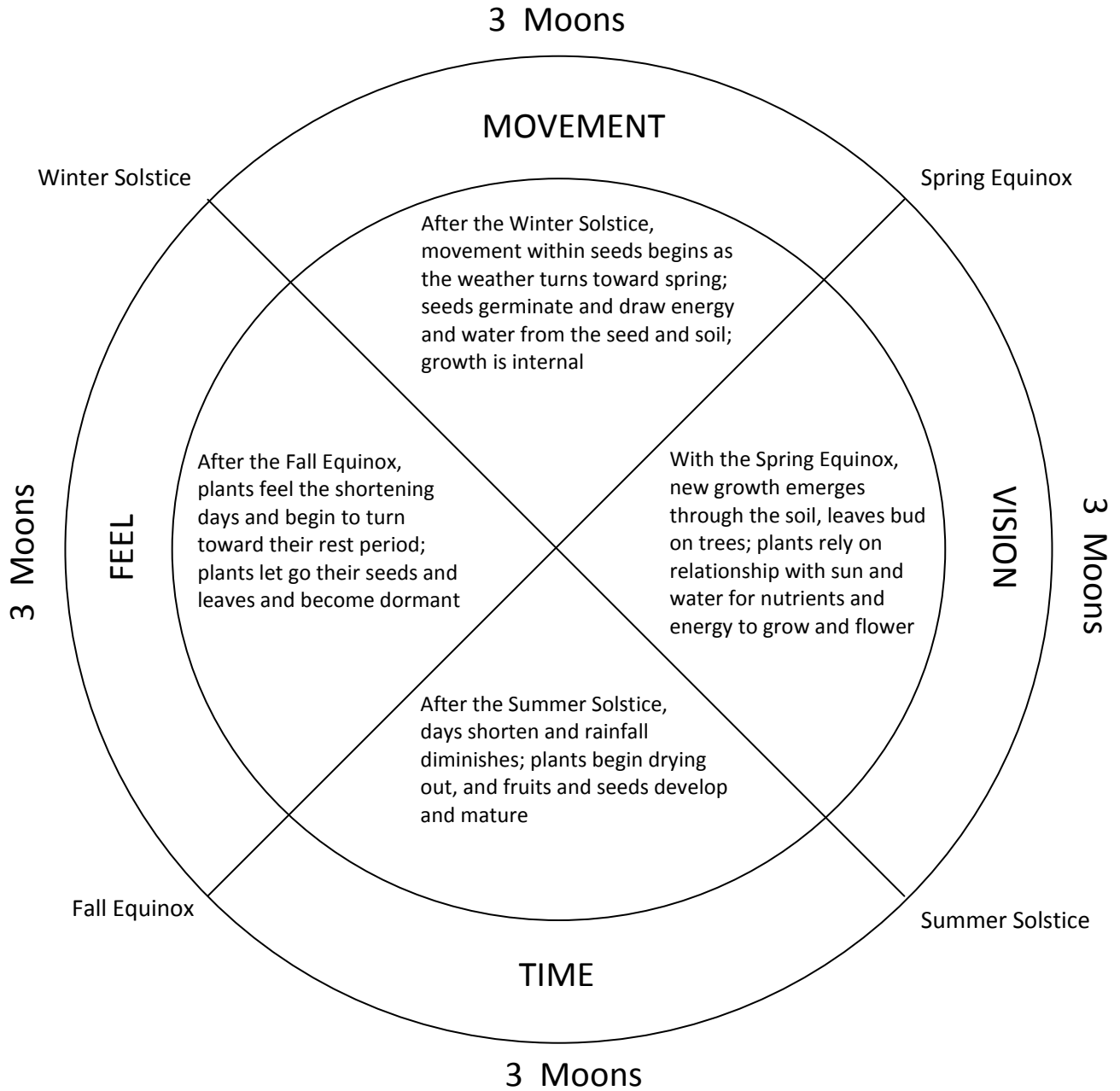
begin shortening, a physiological timer is triggered within plants, causing them to begin preparing for the dryness and coldness of fall and winter. As *fall* arrives, plants *let go* their fruits and seeds, trees lose their leaves. Plants and trees enter a *winter* rest period but their seeds, while appearing dormant are already preparing for the spring. Perhaps they will be carried by the wind or snagged on an animal's fur or eaten so that they will *move* and be dispersed. Once the winter solstice passes, the days begin to lengthen and the earth begins to warm, causing the seeds to germinate, drawing their energy and nutrition from within and from the surrounding soil and melting ice and snow so that once again new growth emerges from the soil in the springtime.³⁵ Hence, *vision, time, feeling, and movement* are the first four gifts of Creation as shown in Figure 1.4.

Now that the reader has been introduced to the Medicine Circle, in preparation for reading the rest of the dissertation, I share how the Medicine Circle grounds my methodology. The basic premise here is that in acknowledging the completeness of the four seasons taken as a whole, one also acknowledges that the cycle of the seasons as experienced in nature is a self-organizing system, affirming its validity and establishing its legitimacy and authority as a methodology guiding both the process I have followed during my doctoral studies and the content of my doctoral work, culminating in this dissertation.

³⁵ To learn about the original gifts of Creation through Grandmother Moon teachings, one may choose to frame the cycle of the seasons in terms of an animal's life cycle as well as a plant's life cycle. For space considerations, I have chosen to focus on a plant's life cycle.

Figure 1.4: Grandmother Moon Teachings

Grandmother Moon Teachings explain how Cree-Nishnaabe peoples in North America measure the passage of time by the changing moons, which in turn allow them to comprehend life cycles within Creation and laws of nature. From the Winter Solstice to the Summer Solstice, water is more plentiful; this is Creation’s growing season. With the lengthening days, the sun’s warmth, and abundant water in the soils, the gravitational pull of the moon helps plants absorb more nutrients and water for growth. After the Summer Solstice with rainfall’s ebb, seeds mature; plants release their seeds for self-planting and prepare for their rest period. The interrelationships and connectedness of the moon, sun, water and plant (and animal and human) life demonstrate the wholly-integrated nature of all Creation and the responsibilities within these relationships to sustain life.



Methodology Guiding Process - Methodology Informing Content

To demonstrate how these teachings ground my research methodology, I have created the following diagram, which is based upon an illustrative approach to the Medicine Circle as originally developed by Dr. Mark S. Dockstator (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2005).³⁶ The Medicine Circle is actually many circles layered upon each other, all of which begin with Creation; that is, they originate in nature. Figure 1.5 shows these layers³⁷ and articulates how one layer builds upon the next to arrive at an Indigenous research methodology for my doctoral studies.

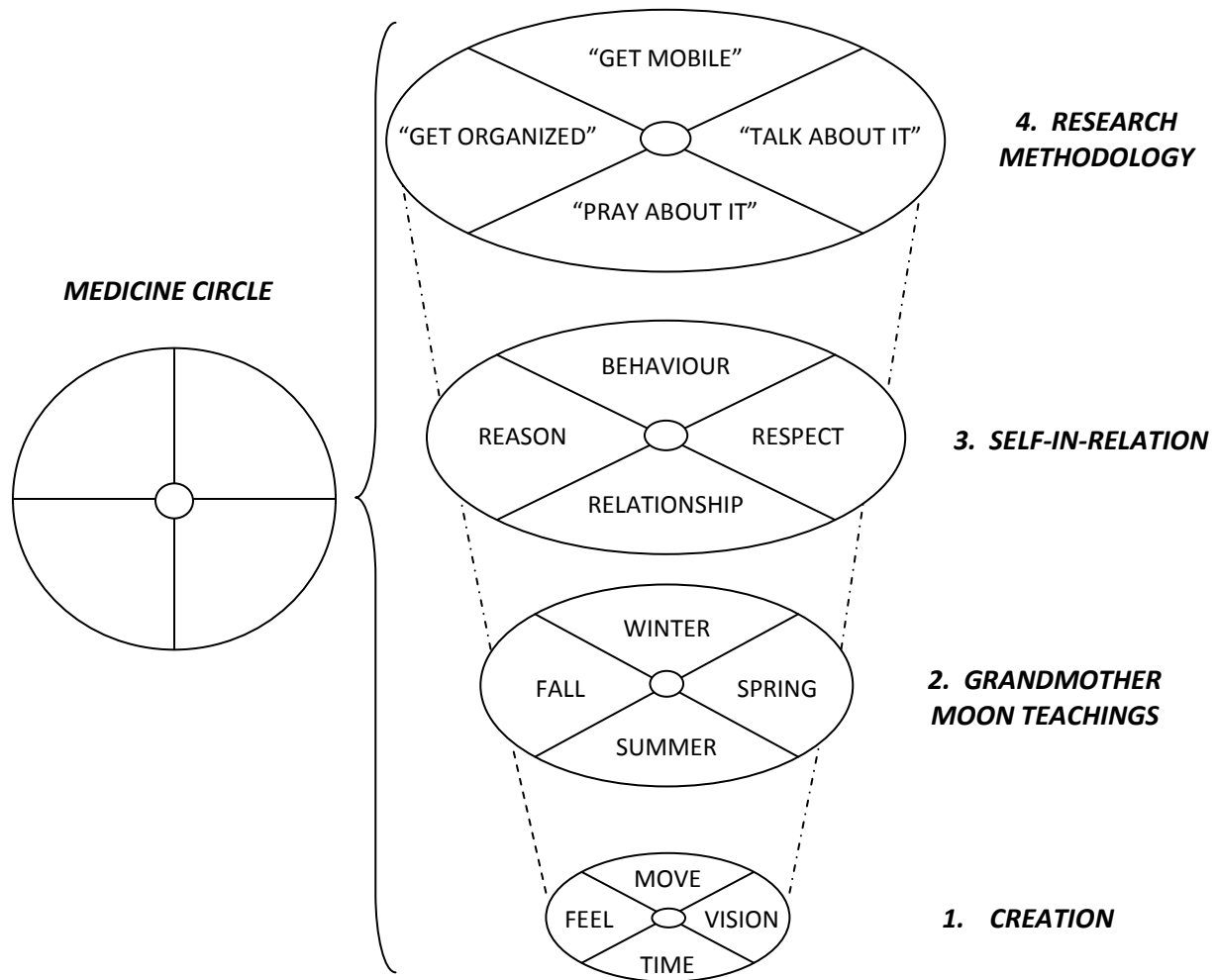
Starting with Creation (at the bottom of the diagram), all Creation, taken as a whole, possesses the gifts of movement, vision, time, and feeling – from the smallest ants to the rocks and trees to the winged-ones and four-leggeds; even the winds, the sun, and the rains. In fact, when considering the initial moment of the creation of the universe, these are the first four gifts in the form of energy: the explosion (movement), the accompanying light (vision), the outward movement of matter (i.e., initial passage of time), and the outward force, creating a pressure wave of sensation and the development of gravitational forces (feeling). When human beings are born, these, too, are our initial gifts. We move; we begin to see; with time we experience different feelings (e.g., our first feelings of being cold or hungry). In the next layer, Grandmother Moon teaches us about these gifts through observation of the life cycles of plants and animals in a particular place over time as marked by the cycle of the seasons – the movement of the earth around the sun as measured by the changing phases of the moon (as described in Figure 1.4). In the third layer labeled “Self-in-Relation,” these gifts are translated into a set of

³⁶ See pages 7-8 and endnote 6 in the report: National Aboriginal Health Organization (2005). *First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey (RHS) 2002/03: The Peoples' Report*. Ottawa: First Nations Centre.

³⁷ Figure 1.5 shows four layers of the Medicine Circle. The Medicine Circle is actually comprised of numerous layers, too many to explore in this dissertation.

instructions of how to be, how to exist, in the world. That is, we exist in relationship for we are all related, and we must act accordingly. With the gift of *vision*, comes *respect* for what one is able to see. With the gift of *time*, *relationships* grow. With the gift of *feeling*, *reasoning* and analysis are possible. Finally, the gift of *movement* provides the foundation for different *behaviours* according to our thoughts, feelings and reasoned analysis.

**Figure 1.5: Grounding Research Methodology in Creation:
Four of the Many Layers of a Medicine Circle³⁸**



³⁸ Please note that this representation of the Medicine Circle is but one of several which invariably exist, as many Indigenous peoples have their own Medicine Circles, the order of which may or may not be the same as above as each Medicine Circle is in accordance with the laws of nature observed over time and particular to place. As well, the Medicine Circle is actually a sphere; the ordering of which depends upon perspective and vantage point.

This explanation of each layer in Figure 1.5 is extremely simplified as its purpose here is to provide the reader with a basic understanding of how the Medicine Circle is grounded in Creation. In turn, the Medicine Circle (of which only a few layers are shared) may be understood as a process (i.e., a flow or prescription), which unfolds through careful observation of Creation. The process, applied to one's life, prescribes how one may live and exist in balanced relationship with all of Creation. These are the "original instructions" according to Cree-Nishnaabe learnings as I have come to understand them.

The final layer in Figure 1.5 outlines a process, a methodology that may be applied to one's life and used as an approach to one's work, in this case my doctoral work. When I first began helping in ceremonies, Mooshum Peter O'Chiese would repeat these phrases over and over: "First talk about it. Then pray about it. Then get organized. Then get mobile."³⁹ At first, I failed to draw the connection between his words and the Medicine Circle until after I had helped in ceremonies a few years. When I finally understood, I appreciated its holistic simplicity and its applicability for everyday living. Now, I find its congruency for my doctoral journey.

If one thinks about research being comprised of four major phases – planning, implementation, analysis, and writing – this Medicine Circle and its many layers may be visited numerous times throughout each phase to ensure a respectful, holistic process. In the *planning* phase, "Talk about it" refers to the preliminary steps of developing and honoring relationships,⁴⁰ clarifying the issues, and defining the research topic so one's vision is clear. "Pray about it" requires spending the time necessary to develop strong, focused relationships with those

³⁹ Peter O'Chiese, personal communication, Spring fasting ceremonies, 1986-1987.

⁴⁰ My relationship with Mooshum Michael began in 1987. Little did I know in 1987 that I would be pursuing a doctorate grounded in Indigenous knowledge and ceremonies. Time is an important factor in developing relationships with communities or individuals in any research process. I have appreciated the gift of all these years to develop a kinship with Mooshum so that when I approached him with tobacco at the beginning of my doctoral journey, when I was first completing program applications, our close relationship facilitated his acceptance to walk this journey with me.

involved as well as to ensure that all the issues are fully identified and understood. “Get organized” involves conducting a thorough analysis of the issues and concerns, checking feelings and using reason to ensure that an appropriate, respectful action plan is developed. Finally, “get mobile” is the implementation stage of the project plan.

The circle is traveled many times throughout the research process to review the plan, ensure good relationships, assess progress and revise the plan, if necessary. Once all the information is gathered, the *analysis* of the material will ensue. This, too, requires visiting the various directions of the Medicine Circle to ensure a holistic and thorough approach to the analysis. The framework is an organic, fluid approach and exists to provide a holistic, iterative structure for the research process, one that ensures respectful relationships with “all our relations” and encourages communal responsibility, reciprocity, as well as gratitude for those who take care of the knowledge.

During the *writing* stage, the Medicine Circle provides an organizational structure for the document’s contents. As exhibited in Figures P.1 and P.2, the Medicine Circle is walked twice around. While a specific order is implied by the clockwise journey, the process is actually an iterative one out of respect for the reader, because learning from an Indigenous perspective is new. Just as I have exercised care during the planning, information gathering, and analysis phases to ensure a respectful process, I also do so with sharing what I have learned in writing the dissertation. The reader will note along the journey that the different directions of the Medicine Circle are revisited and reviewed numerous times in a fluid manner, drawing out particular facets of a direction’s gift or a learning, enabling the reader to grasp a distinct meaning or singular focus at appropriate moments along the journey.

At first glance, going around and around in circles may appear repetitive. However, repetition is a key component of learning in an oral tradition. Walking around an object or a problem, examining it from various angles, one invariably discovers and learns different things. Similarly, I revisit a number of learnings during both the First and Second Journeys ‘Round the Medicine Circle. Recurring themes are not intended to be redundant and boring. From an Indigenous perspective, their reappearance asks the reader to contemplate the idea more deeply to see what new learning may come to light.

Learning Methods

In a conventional dissertation, this section is usually entitled “Research Methods.” I am, however unable to describe as “research” the learning I have done through ceremonies. How did I know in 1986 what I would be beginning in 2009? When I first began attending ceremonies in 1986, I was certainly not conducting research. As far as I knew that very first time, I was going camping with my boyfriend and helping out in some sort of ceremonies. Little did I know that I had just embarked on a path of higher learning which continues to this day. Not until our children had grown and I was contemplating how best to begin a new career did I consider the idea of pursuing a doctorate and doing so from an Indigenous perspective.

I refer to “Learning Methods” to encompass not only the conventional literature review associated with a doctorate, but also the variety of Indigenous ways of learning I have experienced, including through ceremonies and the oral tradition. Kovach (2005) observes that, “While traditional approaches such as surveys, in-depth interviews, and focus groups will be integral to method choices, other options that capture alternate ways of knowing will emerge as legitimate” (p. 31). In Indigenous ways of knowing, legitimate forms of learning and inquiry include one’s experiences – experience through doing (e.g., helping in ceremonies, helping

Elders, helping a community), through fasting, through listening, as well as learning through dreams and solitude with self or in nature (Kovach, 2005; St. Pierre, 1997). Haig-Brown (2010) introduces “deep learning,” which, to me, is another way of describing the multitude of ways one may learn through one’s experiences. St. Pierre (1997) observes that when seeking to “produce different knowledge and to produce knowledge differently” (p. 175), unconventional sources of “data” ought to be accepted as valid in the academy. While I am not producing different knowledge per se, as Indigenous knowledge has existed since long before Socrates and Plato walked the earth, I am engaging with a knowledge system different than the one to which the Western academy is largely accustomed. Accepting the presence of distinct knowledge systems, sources of information that may not have been traditionally accepted in the academy are seen as valid in an Indigenous research process.

Hence, my doctoral studies combine a range of learning methods, both conventional and Indigenous. In conventional academic terms, this may be referred to as a “mixed method,” not in the sense of combining quantitative and qualitative strategies but in the sense of drawing upon the learning I have done through both Western and Indigenous means. “Mixed method” may also be applied in the sense that Indigenous research is a multi-dimensional process in that “all our relations” have to be respected, including relationships with place, people, and the spirit world, and this may require different actions and protocols at numerous points during the entire doctoral journey.

As already noted, my doctoral work draws upon two streams of knowledge – Indigenous and Western. From the Indigenous stream, the first source of information is what I will label “Structured Learnings” with Mooshum.⁴¹ As the Elder with whom I have learned all these years, and representing the line of Elders carrying this knowledge (including Mooshum Peter

⁴¹ I am grateful to Dr. Mark S. Dockstator for his assistance in naming the learning method “Structured Learnings.”

O'Chiese), Mooshum Michael is the one point of continuity for the knowledge and is the key figure representing the ceremonial community to which I am responsible. Without him, our ceremonies and our community would not exist. He is the holder of this knowledge and the one responsible for its transmission to the next generation. Throughout this doctoral journey I am fortunate to have been able to spend time with other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders and discuss various facets of my work. However, the primary source upon which I am relying has been the knowledge carried by Mooshum as he has learned from his Elders before him.

“Structured Learnings” are based in ceremonies, follow ceremonial protocols, and are dependent upon the relationship developed between the Learner and the Elder over time. They are composed of two methods of information gathering

The first method involves further explorations with Mooshum of what I have already learned over two and a half decades in ceremonies. Discussions along this vein have been more than an open-ended interview as defined in a conventional research paradigm, in which I would have simply gathered information for analysis. Because of what I have already learned in ceremonies, our discussions have explored deeper layers of learnings so that I may understand at another level their meanings with respect to my dissertation topic, sustainability. “Structured Learnings” begin with posing a question or discussion topic. Sources of information include oral tradition, history, stories from Mooshum’s life, as well as the whole of Indigenous knowledge he has learned from his Elders, shared through ceremonies, and gleaned from everyday life.⁴² They involve a great deal of listening on my part as well as conversation for clarification, delving deeper into thoughts, stories, and reflections. Many of these discussions have been recorded using audio technology during time spent together in person. When travel was not possible, lengthy telephone conferences were held and detailed notes were taken.

⁴² Although he is selective in what he shares. This point is further explored in the next chapter.

The second source of “Structured Learnings” draws upon the learning I have done in ceremonies over the last twenty-eight years, as well as the learning I have done by spending time with Mooshum and other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders in various events, workshops, and other visits. I have internalized these learnings, from whatever venue, through the full range of experiences in ceremonies – through helping and visiting, laughing together around a campfire, preparing meals, gathering or fulfilling other tasks, listening, and fasting and supporting other fasters in prayer, drumming and song. “Structured learnings” here refer to the practice of self-reflexivity, reflecting upon both the experiences I have had individually and those I have shared with the community. This process is embedded in the eastern direction of the Medicine Circle which relates to vision - in this case, inward vision. Looking inward, I have spent time exploring feelings, thoughts, and ideas through meditation, contemplation, reason and internal analysis. In this way, both the southern and western directions of the Medicine Circle have been applied as well as the east, demonstrating the iterative nature of my methodology.

A final “learning method” has been a literature review of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors. Again, referring to the eastern direction of the Medicine Circle, this is an outward look to the literature, which has provided substantive insights and instructive materials throughout my doctoral journey.

In essence, this doctoral journey is the continuation of learning I have done during half my lifetime. Compiling my learnings and expanding upon them has been a nonlinear, organic process of reaching back into my past, reflecting on experiences in ceremonies – including my first to my most recent – and from my youth to motherhood. In addition, sharing relevant stories from Mooshum’s life contributes to the narrative, providing illustrative experiences and insights

to clarify and explore more deeply various facets within this dissertation. The reflexive nature of these “learning methods” has figures prominently throughout the entire research process.

First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle

With Figures 1.4 and 1.5 as illustrations of my methodology, the Medicine Circle has guided the organization of this dissertation. Translating the seasons into themes for this first journey around the Medicine Circle (Chapters One to Four), one must look into the meaning of each season’s essence for human beings and how it relates to the purpose of this first passage. For spring (the eastern direction), with new growth emerging from the soil and *being seen* for the first time since the previous year, *vision* is the theme for this current chapter, Chapter One. The aim is to provide the reader with *insight* into what a Medicine Circle is as it is at the core of the entire dissertation, informing both process and content.

In summer (the southern direction), the longest days of the year provide warmth and sunlight for plants to grow, affirming the centrality of the *relationship* between the sun and earth for all life. As such, *relationship* is the theme for Chapter Two, in which I introduce Mooshum. Specifically, the *time* needed to develop and care for relationships is emphasized. Chapter Two is devoted primarily to introducing the Elders with whom I have learned, to learning with an oral tradition, and the responsibilities associated with carrying and caring for traditional knowledge.

Fall (the western direction) is the time of *letting go*. For human beings to know what to let go, *analysis* and *reason* are necessary. The Latin root for *reason* is “ratio.” According to Bohm (1980), *reason* “is seen as insight into a totality of ratio or proportion . . . [I]t is in general a qualitative sort of universal proportion or relationship” (p. 26). Bohm (1980) goes on to say:

The essential reason or ratio of a thing is then the totality of inner proportions in its structure, and in the process in which it forms, maintains itself, and ultimately dissolves. In this view, to understand such ratio is to understand the ‘innermost being’ of that thing (p. 27).

With this interpretation in mind, in Chapter Three I provide insight for the reader to fathom how I have learned about the Medicine Circle and Indigenous knowledge through ceremonies. I explore my positionality in relationship to Indigenous ways of knowing, providing the reader with context for how I am able to work within an Indigenous paradigm. As *thoughts* and *feelings* are central in examining “the totality of inner proportions,” I share my thoughts and feelings – as well as some embarrassing yet humorous stories – regarding the learning journey I have walked through life.

Movement or *action* is the characteristic of winter (the northern direction; e.g., winds blowing and animals dispersing seeds), framing Chapter Four of this dissertation. Completing this first walk around the Medicine Circle, Chapter Four prepares the reader for the Second Journey ‘Round the circle. A portion of this chapter is dedicated to reflecting upon some of the challenges I have experienced in *doing* this work. Prior to *moving* on to the Second Journey, the ensuing chapters (Chapters Five through Eight) are previewed, framed generally by the question, how may a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle be applied to the concept of sustainability?

Connecting the Medicine Circle with Sustainability

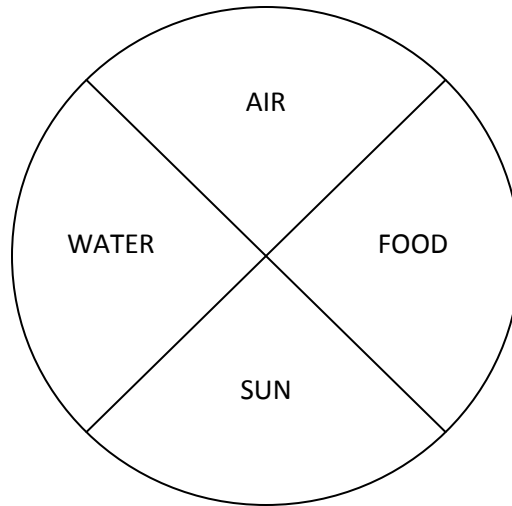
To provide a bit of insight into this last question during this First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle, in each of these first four chapters I explore various principles inherent in the Medicine Circle that also may be associated with principles in sustainability and ecological thought. For example, in this eastern chapter introducing the Medicine Circle, I have already touched upon how the circle illustrates more recent interpretations of sustainability to underscore the importance of holistic, systems thinking and the interconnectedness of all life on earth. To be clear, the dominant Western notion of sustainability is distinctly different from an Indigenous

understanding of the concept in a number of ways. These distinctions will be revealed as this dissertation unfolds. What this chapter provides is an introduction to a Medicine Circle, which in and of itself, taken as a whole, embodies qualities important to the notion of sustainability, no matter the definition. Medicine Circle learnings about holism, relationship, time, and balance are related to principles in sustainability and ecological thought and are revisited throughout this dissertation.

Holism: From an Indigenous perspective, as this chapter has shown, the sun and moon are integrated in a Medicine Circle and cannot be isolated from one another as they are two parts of one whole. In Indigenous knowledge, appreciation and care for mind, body and spirit – *together* – are essential as all three are integral parts of one whole, contributing to an individual's overall health and identity; so, too, with the earth, the place where we live. Indigenous knowledge acknowledges the spirit of place – not just the experience of the physical, but also the certainty of the metaphysical in all Creation. One cannot be considered separate from the other; the earth's health and our very survival are contingent upon our species' appreciation for both physical and metaphysical aspects of Creation.

Understood another way, the Medicine Circle is *one* circle, and all of Creation exists within this one circle. We are all part of one whole – all peoples, all beings, all lands and waters. We all abide and endure in the one circle. Figure 1.6 illustrates how we are all part of this one whole in the sense that each of the four directions of the Medicine Circle – or I should say, another facet of a Medicine Circle – reveals the four gifts upon which our very lives depend. Without them, we do not exist; they *sustain* us. So, in this essence, they are our relatives.

**Figure 1.6: Facet of a Medicine Circle Showing Our Relatives:
Elements for Life**



Modern sustainability has come to emphasize the importance of holistic thinking, acknowledging the interdependence of environmental, economic, and social issues and the necessity to consider all three together in decision-making processes. This holistic approach to sustainability is rooted in the concept of ecosystem thinking, which has informed the design of sustainability methods and planning processes. For example, adaptive ecosystem management integrates ecological, economic, and social principles, recognizing the complex interplay of balancing biological, cultural, economic, and political factors in natural resource planning and management. A holistic approach is sought throughout a planning process to ensure all stakeholders are involved, all issues are thoroughly clarified, measured, and monitored, and decisions are adaptable because changes and uncertainties are expected over the course of time (Miller, 2005). Sustainability planning often seeks to reflect these same principles grounded in ecosystems thinking and adaptive management.

Other principles intertwined with that of holism relate to relationship, time, and balance, and are touched upon below. Because time and relationship are gifts in the southern direction of

the Medicine Circle, they will be further discussed in relation to sustainability in the next chapter, which is a visit in that direction. As well, connecting balance to sustainability and ecological thought is reserved for the visit in the western direction (Chapter Three).

Relationship: Expanding upon this notion of holism and, as depicted in Figure 1.6 above, our reliance upon the gifts of Creation for our very existence is the acknowledgement of the interrelationships found in all aspects of Creation. Very simply, we would perish if we had no plants or animals to eat, no warmth, no water to drink or air to breathe. Deny us just one of these gifts, we cease to exist. Needless to say, our very essence is composed of what is found in nature. We are all related, and Indigenous peoples acknowledge the centrality of this fact. In holistic terms, Indigenous peoples understand inherently that we are part of a whole and solely dependent upon the whole for our well-being. In temporal terms, our continued existence depends on caring for our relatives (i.e., plants, animals, earth, water, air, etc.) to sustain them; in so doing, we may sustain ourselves over time. Whenever Indigenous peoples say “all my relations” or “all my relatives,” they are reaffirming the relatedness of human beings with *all* of Creation and the dependence of all human beings upon *maintaining* these relationships.

Balance: A third quality introduced in this chapter is that of balance. The western direction of the Medicine Circle is that of reason, analyzing and balancing thoughts and feelings to arrive at an understanding of the proportional relationship of those thoughts and feelings. When conducting an analysis on a personal level, one reflects inward and balances what one sees inside with what one sees external to oneself. This reasoning harkens back to the discussion at the beginning of this chapter about the common root for the word “medicine” and “measure.” Reflecting upon a “right inner measure” of oneself facilitates balance and good health.

Similarly, the Medicine Circle teaches about the balance present in Creation. The sun and earth are in relationship with one another. Historically, the sun has been in balance with the earth, effecting just the right temperatures and climates for human life. Too cold and we freeze; too hot and we burn. Balance is found throughout all relationships in Creation, achieving optimal conditions for life. To reiterate, understanding that we are part of one whole, we are dependent upon all of Creation in ongoing relationships, and our actions affect others. Part of our responsibility in these relationships, therefore, is to act in a manner that sustains the balance necessary for our very survival and that of other living beings.

How do we maintain this balance? In one of my first conversations with Mooshum Peter O’Chiese, he said, “Take care of the land and it will take care of you.” In and of itself, this sentence is circular and teaches reciprocity. That is, we are in a reciprocal relationship with “the land.”⁴³ Creation teaches us to live in a conscious, respectful relationship – in a balanced way of living. If we give back, if we care for our relationships, we know to take what we need and no more. Indigenous creation stories reveal the responsibilities of all those created before human beings (including the sun, the waters, the earth, the winds, the moon and stars, the plants, trees and animals): to live in balance with one another, and to take care of human beings, the ones who were created last and who are dependent upon the rest of Creation for life. These are Creation’s Original Instructions. In return, our responsibility as human beings is to take care of Creation by showing gratitude through not only our words (i.e., a verbal expression of thanks), but also our actions – our everyday living, behaving respectfully and carefully (i.e., full of care). These are *human beings’* Original Instructions.

Time: Underpinning this entire chapter is the notion of the importance of time. The Grandmother Moon teachings describe the cycle of the seasons, manifested through time in

⁴³ “The land” is used here to refer to “Creation,” the place where we live, our environment.

place. The southern direction of the Medicine Circle connects time with relationship, establishing the importance of our relationships, and how time is required to care for these relationships so that balance is achieved..

Summary

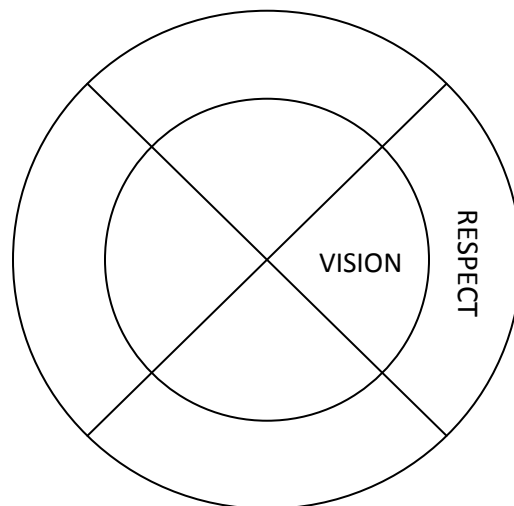
This entire discussion about the interconnectedness of Indigenous principles has been about how the Medicine Circle may be applied to describe what sustainability is in terms of “sustaining our relationships.” More specifically, “sustaining our relationships” describes *how to be* sustainable. The learnings of the Medicine Circle shared in this chapter provide insights into how Indigenous peoples have understood their relationship as part of Creation, as well as their responsibilities to uphold this relationship, contributing to their very survival over millennia. The elemental tenets of holism, relationship, balance, respect, reciprocity, and time are essential learnings in Indigenous ways of knowing, which will be revisited throughout this dissertation.

Chapter One, simultaneously, has been guided by the eastern direction of the Medicine Circle and has provided an introduction to the Medicine Circle. Just as the sun rises in the east, bringing light to a new day, I have endeavoured to shed light on the Medicine Circle for the reader, kindling a respect for it (see Figure 1.7 below). The Medicine Circle is the foundation upon which both process and content of my doctoral work are grounded. As a process, the Medicine Circle has guided how I have explored the concept of sustainability and, as importantly, how I have conducted my work and endeavoured to care for relationships during my doctoral journey. In terms of content, the learnings of the Medicine Circle have helped organize and frame the discussion throughout the entire dissertation.⁴⁴

⁴⁴ As guide for process and content, the Medicine Circle simultaneously provides the methodology, epistemology, ontology, and axiology for both my doctoral work and my dissertation.

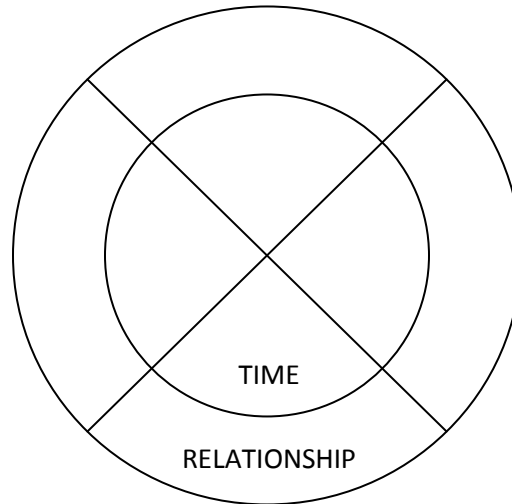
As a model for learning and living, the Medicine Circle is the product of generations of life-long experiential learning all the way back to when human beings first began observing the laws of nature in order to survive. Mooshum explains that generations have studied the universe to understand the laws of nature, and then they fixed these laws into the Medicine Circle in such a way as to provide people with the tools necessary to facilitate and deal with change. He stresses that, “the Medicine Circle is not changeable. One cannot read this document and know what it means and feel he/she is able to change it. But it can help facilitate human beings’ change processes.”⁴⁵ In other words, this chapter has provided the reader solely with an “awareness” of what a Medicine Circle is. “Understanding” and deeper “knowledge” may be obtained over time and through experience.

Figure 1.7: The Eastern Direction of a Medicine Circle



⁴⁵ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 4, 2013

Chapter 2 – SOUTH: Elders, Indigenous Knowledges, and Responsibilities of Care for “All Our Relations”



At my first ceremonies while Mark was fasting, I found some time to think about our relationship. I used to keep a journal and I wrote about how I connected with what I was experiencing and learning at ceremonies. I was considering these feelings in relation to being Jewish. My parents had instilled in my siblings and me a strong connection to our heritage and our people. My love for my mother and father, my grandparents, and all my relatives is grounded in our Jewish way of life. I was wondering if there might be a way in my life to balance both traditions – Jewish and Indigenous – especially if Mark and I were to share our lives together.

At those first ceremonies, we had known each other for three years solely via a long-distance relationship. I had been living in Washington, DC; he in Ottawa, Saskatoon, and then Peterborough. I had recently decided to move to Toronto to begin my Masters degree in the autumn and to see what our relationship might bring.

Over the three years apart, we had many visits and corresponded via letters, phone calls, and yes even cassette tape recordings (I am dating myself here!). I remember many a discussion about our two cultures. Judaism has been and always will be an important part of who I am. Mark was reconnecting with his Indigenous roots through ceremonies. His parents, having been in residential school, knew nothing of their Haudenosaunee heritage. Even though the ceremonies we attend are Cree-Nishnaabe and not Longhouse, as Mark began his learning journey with Mooshum Peter, he wanted to continue learning with his first teacher.

Mark and I knew, as our relationship grew stronger, that both our cultures would be honoured. We found common ground, and throughout our life together we have lived with the richness of both Jewish and Cree-Nishnaabe ways.

Introductions

This story reflects learnings in the southern direction to honour and respect our ancestors and “all our relatives.” This direction of the Medicine Circle also teaches the importance of time in taking care of our relationships – with self, with others, and Creation. If relationships are taken for granted, consequences are likely to follow. With respect to sustainability, this may be understood as taking time to care for the place where one lives, wherever that may be, seeing as we are wholly dependent upon the earth for our lives – for the air we breathe, water we drink, and food we eat. Time is needed to learn how to survive in a particular place through observation and experience. As well, time for expressing gratitude for the sustenance a place provides is an inherent responsibility in this relationship with Creation – not just through a ritual of giving thanks verbally, but through the conscious, intentional care one takes in tending one’s home.

In ceremonies, our everyday living is enveloped by the practice of taking care of “all our relations,” human and non-human, seen and unseen. We treat the land carefully, making sure we leave it as clean as we found it upon arriving. We are one community of people, taking care of each other. If we are in fasting ceremonies, we are supporting the fasters as they work on their relationships with themselves. In our ceremonial protocols, we care for our relationship with all Creation through our prayer, songs, and tobacco offerings. When we exit our lodges, we say “All My Relations,” – in Cree, *Kahkiyaw Niwahkomâkanak* – to acknowledge how we are all connected with one another in Creation and as a way to express our gratitude, as we know how we depend upon this continued relationship for our very lives.

These learnings about “all our relations” are for everyone, as the sun shines equally for all peoples,⁴⁶ and are central to living sustainably and in balance with Creation. Another

⁴⁶ Peter O’Chiese and Michael Thrasher, personal communication. In ceremonies 1986-present. This is a teaching grounded in Cree-Nishnaabe ways of knowing and lands.

elemental learning alluded to above respects the responsibilities central to relationships around notions of care and being “care-full.” Mooshum Michael prefers this unique spelling to emphasize the spirit and intent of deep care that is to be manifested in the fullness and breadth of one’s actions.⁴⁷ Being “care-full” is the opposite of acting carelessly – being without care, “care-less” – precipitating adverse consequences in any relationship. This notion of “care-full” behaviour is a recurring thread running throughout this dissertation, and its meaning and applications will unfold further as it relates to “all our relations” as well as sustainability (later in this chapter and in the Second Journey around the Medicine Circle).

In research, “all our relations” and being “care-full” take on a number of meanings. Devoting sufficient time to develop respectful relationships with those one wishes to work ought to be a key component of any methodology. While this basic tenet is acknowledged in Western research protocols,⁴⁸ taking enough time, not short-changing the time needed for good relations, is central to an Indigenous research process. Shawn Wilson (2008) notes that in speaking with others about Indigenous research, “this relational way of being was at the heart of what it means to be Indigenous” (p. 80). He refers to one of his father’s editorials (Stan Wilson, 2001) in which he introduces the concept of “self-as-relationship” (p. 91), meaning that we are all “constituted by our relationships with all living things” (p. 91). Shawn Wilson (2008) explains:

Identity for Indigenous peoples is grounded in their relationships with the land, with their ancestors who have returned to the land and with future generations who will come into being on the land. Rather than viewing ourselves as being *in* relationship with other people or things, we *are* the relationships that we hold and are part of” (p. 80).

I am my relationships because relationships are central in my mind when I describe who I am. I am Jewish, acknowledging not merely my religion, but my ancestry. I acknowledge my

⁴⁷ Michael Thrasher, personal communication. In ceremonies and workshops, 1987-present.

⁴⁸ See the Tri-Council Policy Statement (2010) on *Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* at: http://www.ethics.gc.ca/pdf/eng/tcps2/TCPS_2_FINAL_Web.pdf. Retrieved April 2012.

people's history as a nation and a culture. I remember fondly my grandparents and other relatives who have passed on. I am a daughter and sister, a wife and mother, friend, volunteer, and colleague. Each of these identifiers is a relationship, reflecting who I am as a woman.

Also defining who I am is how I uphold these relationships. From an Indigenous perspective using the Medicine Circle, as already noted, time is a prerequisite for respecting relationships. In my doctoral research, therefore, spending enough time and caring for those involved in the research journey is a key requirement in the Indigenous approach I am taking.

To acknowledge those relationships, the remainder of this chapter is devoted to the Elders who have cared for their cultural ways with whom I have learned and continue to learn and to the knowledge they hold and share. Many Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders live today and care for Indigenous knowledge passed down to them from several lines of Elders. While I have developed close relationships with a number of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders and have been able to spend time with them in various settings, I am grateful to have been able to spend the most time learning in ceremonies with Mooshum Michael Thrasher, who has learned from a long line of Elders which includes Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and so many others. First, I introduce Mooshum Peter O'Chiese as he is the Elder with whom I began learning. Then, I introduce Mooshum Michael Thrasher, with whom my family and I continue to learn. I explore the roles and responsibilities Mooshum Michael holds as he continues the work of his Elders and those who came before them. My responsibilities working with an oral tradition and the challenges of transferring Indigenous knowledge to the written word are also discussed. Finally, I reflect upon the southern direction of the Medicine Circle as it relates to the concept of sustainability, drawing connections in this First Journey 'Round the Medicine Circle that will be revisited during the Second.

Peter O'Chiese

How old Mooshum Peter was at the time of his passing in 2006, no one is really certain. He may have been as young as 106 or as old as 118. I met him in 1986 at my first ceremonies. To me, at first, he seemed already an old man. Yet at the beginning of camp there he was standing high on a ladder, inserting the wooden pegs to tie the tepee together. So upon second glance, he seemed to me still very young and spry.

Mooshum Peter was a Cree-Nishnaabe Elder who grew up “in the bush” in the northern reaches of Alberta. He did not come down from the mountains until he was in his fifties. Cree is his first language. He also learned other Algonquian languages as well as English.⁴⁹ Mooshum Peter was known to have special gifts from a very young age. He spent his youth learning from his Elders according to old Midewiwin ways, translated to mean Grand Medicine Society.⁵⁰ As an adult, Mooshum Peter became a highly respected Elder, known to hold great knowledge and wisdom of Cree-Nishnaabe and old Midewiwin protocols, governance, ceremonies, and traditions for the spiritual and physical health of the people.

Michael Thrasher

Michael Thrasher, a Métis-Cree, was raised in northern Saskatchewan, dividing his youth and teenage years between Uranium City (which was actually a small town) and a fly-in fishing lodge his father owned and operated further west-northwest. His name in Cree is Kawhywaweeet⁵¹ and he is of the Turtle Clan. In his own words, Mooshum Michael acknowledges those he has learned from, including his parents and grandparents:

⁴⁹ Retrieved September 17, 2013 from: <http://www.reocities.com/Athens/acropolis/5579/teachingrocks.html>.

⁵⁰ Retrieved September 17, 2013 from: <http://www.gct3.net/wp-content/uploads/2008/01/midewiwin.pdf>

⁵¹ One translation of Michael's name is “One you cannot hide from.”

In my own life I have been privileged to be with and learn from several Aboriginal Elders from across Turtle Island - the island we sometimes call Kanata (Clean Place). It was through them that I began a serious journey of explorative learning. To be sure, I also had the privilege of meeting and sitting with several learned people of different races and cultures during my wandering years. However it was through my heritage and those Aboriginal Elders that I was introduced to Indigenous Turtle Island Culture.⁵²

Michael Thrasher met Peter O'Chiese when he was in his twenties. While Michael did not seek out Peter with the express purpose of apprenticing to be an Elder, he became interested in learning more when Peter presented him with a symbol of a Medicine Circle and said to him, "Everything you have and will ever want to know about the past, the present, and the future is written right here. All you have to do is learn how to read it." Peter saw abilities within Michael, and together they began a long journey of deep learning as Michael prepared to accept the responsibilities of pipe carrier and knowledge holder for sweat lodge and fasting ceremonies. He served as Peter's wascapeos (helper and apprentice)⁵³ for several decades, helping him in ceremonies and when traveling to various meetings, speaking engagements, and Elders Gatherings.

While continuing as Peter's wascapeos, Michael worked with many Elders (who have since passed on) such as Eddie Bellerose, Abraham Burnstick, Ben Calfrobe, Robert Smallboy, and the Roan family, to name a few.⁵⁴ Michael pursued a career in cross-cultural training and in

⁵² From an unpublished manuscript written by Mark Dockstator and Michael Thrasher (2011). *Making your everyday living better: Indigenous wisdom, philosophy and practice*.

⁵³ Descriptors for "wascapeos" – "helper" and "apprentice" – are Western interpretations which do not fully convey the importance of a "wascapeos." Mooshum talks about how if there were no wascapeos, there would be no ceremonies, for ceremonies are a place for the wascapeos to learn their roles and responsibilities in ceremonial protocols so that ceremonies may continue for future generations. Wascapeos have roles and responsibilities outside of formal ceremonies as well. During everyday living, wascapeos endeavour to fulfill their responsibilities to their communities so that when it is time for them to assume leadership roles, they have shown their communities they are worthy of the people's trust. Further discussion of the role of wascapeos is a topic for another dissertation. (Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 2014).

⁵⁴ Mooshum Michael is of two minds in sharing these names. He wishes to adhere to a cultural norm where Elders are loathe to take credit and be named for something that is not theirs, which is the knowledge they have been entrusted to carry and pass on. At the same time, Michael does not wish to be credited in this dissertation with

drug and alcohol addiction counseling in the 1970's and 1980's. He worked at the Nechi Institute on Alcohol and Drug Abuse Education and co-founded Four Skies Training and Development Services Ltd. He has consulted, provided training, and has become a nationally recognized teacher of Anishnaabe First Nations philosophy, traditions and culture.⁵⁵

At one point, Peter passed some of the ceremonies over to Michael to run, as each year Peter had to “open a Sundance.”⁵⁶ He has been holding ceremonies every year since 1982, save one due to illness. I first met Michael in 1987, at an Elders Gathering at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario. He came to ceremonies that spring with Peter, and the next year he came to lead them, as Peter could not attend. My family and I have been attending Michael's ceremonies thenceforward to the present season.

Learning an Oral Tradition

Both Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and Mooshum Michael have learned according to the ways of their peoples' oral traditions. They have spent decades learning, devoting their lives to apprentice with their Elders (who learned from their Elders, who in turn learned from their Elders, all the way back to the beginning so many millennia ago). Their lives have been dedicated to learning from those who came before so they could pass on the knowledge to those who are yet to come, keeping the knowledge alive.

With the arrival of the Europeans and the colonization of North America, serious losses have been incurred to this living storehouse of oral wisdom, as millions of people have lost their lives, their lands, and their ways as a result of government policies of assimilation and control

knowledge that is not his either and which may be misinterpreted by readers as such according to Western definitions of ownership. This delicate balance is discussed later in this chapter with further explanations regarding “ownership” and “stealing.”

⁵⁵ Retrieved September 17, 2013 from: <http://www.atlanticconference.org/2009/bioMichael.html>.

⁵⁶ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 2013.

(Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Dickason and McNab, 2009). Ceremonies had been outlawed; and with the loss of their lands and their autonomy, the Indigenous peoples of North America went underground to preserve whatever remained.

A multitude of lives have been lost, and with them a substantial amount of the knowledge the people held. Yet, abundant amounts remain, and since the 1970's, Indigenous peoples of this land have been striving to overcome the impacts of colonization and are said to be in a time of renewal, often referred to as the "Seventh Fire" (Benton-Banai, 1988; p. 91). More and more people are beginning to "retrace their steps to find what was left by the trail" and to seek out and learn from Elders who will speak with them and share their stories and knowledge (Benton-Banai, 1988; pp. 91-93). Mooshum Peter O'Chiese was one of many Elders charged with caring for this knowledge and ensuring its transmittal and retention. Many other Elders had pieces of knowledge they were taking care of as well. While many have since passed on, they have strived to fulfill their obligations to transfer what they know to the next generation.

Mooshum Michael is one of a handful of present day Traditional Teachers who have learned from Mooshum Peter and others. He is the first to say that he is "but a small child"⁵⁷ in what he knows, compared to those who came before him. Still, he has a great deal of knowledge and wisdom. As already mentioned, he learned over the course of decades, spending time with Elders and learning the oral tradition through ceremonies, which up until recently has been the primary means of transmitting knowledge about the Medicine Circle.

Today, one may read in books about the Medicine Circle and other facets of Indigenous knowledge (Allen, 1992; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Deloria, 1973; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Hall, Rosenberg & Dei, 2000; Lame Deer & Erdoes, 1972; Neihardt, 1959; Storm, 1972). Yet, reading provides only a limited window into all that Indigenous knowledge is and all that the

⁵⁷ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 2013.

Medicine Circle holds. For the Medicine Circle contains a wealth of knowledge when experienced and learned according to oral tradition.

What is the oral tradition? In contemplating how to explain the term, I can only describe it as both subject and action. As subject, an oral tradition is the body of knowledge about a people and their culture found in stories, songs, visions, dreams, ceremonies, dances, art, clothing, and other media and means of transmission. As action, an oral tradition is how the knowledge is shared and passed on from one generation to the next – through storytelling, singing, holding ceremonies, dancing, etc. Hulan and Eigenbrod (2008) describe oral traditions as “distinct ways of knowing and the means by which knowledge is reproduced, preserved and conveyed from generation to generation” (p. 7). Both subject and action are included in this description, answering the questions, what is it and how is it learned. Stephen Augustine (2008) illustrates his explanation of oral tradition with a story, illustrating simultaneously oral tradition as both a subject and an action:

. . . [T]he Elders would serve as mnemonic pegs to each other. They will be speaking individually uninterrupted in a circle one after another. When each Elder spoke they were conscious that other Elders would serve as a “peer reviewer” [and so] they did not delve into subject matter that would be questionable. They did joke with each other and they told stories, some true and some a bit exaggerated but in the end the result was a collective memory. This is the part which is exciting because when each Elder arrived they brought with them a piece of the knowledge puzzle. They had to reach back to the teachings of their parents, grandparents and even great-grandparents. These teachings were shared in the circle and these constituted a reconnaissance of collective memory and knowledge. In the end the Elders left with a knowledge that was built by the collectivity” (pp. 2-3).

How oral traditions are shared and learned reveals an important limitation of this dissertation, which is obviously in the form of words on pages for people to read. The experience described above – sitting together, listening to each other, and building the knowledge collectively – produces a circle that when complete results in knowledge that is a

synergistic compilation where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. While the knowledge is central, the collective sharing, in and of itself, is a powerful experience. So reading about an oral tradition is not without its limitations.

How I have learned the oral tradition, and specifically the Medicine Circle, has been primarily through ceremonies. I have also learned outside of ceremonies by spending time with Elders, helping in various venues and circumstances.⁵⁸ Learning via oral tradition is much more than simply sitting and listening to Elders share stories and impart their wisdom. While storytelling and narrative are important facets of oral tradition, learning by doing – the experience – is critical to gaining understanding so that what is learned is able to be practiced not just in ceremonies, but in everyday living.⁵⁹ That is, while one may gain some insight through listening and observing, to fully understand one must apply what is being shared to one's life, gaining experience with the learning so that it may be of beneficial use in different circumstances. Mooshum Peter O'Chiese and Mooshum Michael refer to this as “double-understand”⁶⁰ – practicing what is learned *in* ceremonies, grasping the intent and fathoming deeper meanings so that what is learned may be applied to one's life *outside* ceremonies.

How one attains a measure of “double understanding” is central to learning Indigenous ways of knowing, inclusive of respecting relationships for living sustainably. I remark on this in different ways throughout this dissertation. From an Indigenous perspective, sustainability requires “double understanding,” which in one sense may be likened to the Western strategy of

⁵⁸ I have learned primarily with Michael, but am grateful to have also been able to spend time with other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, both in and outside of ceremonies. How I have learned is discussed more fully in the next chapter.

⁵⁹ This point is repeated a few times in this dissertation for a reason. Stories in the oral tradition are repeated again and again so that the listener may hear new learnings each time, as one story may hold a number of different learnings, and they are repeated to underscore their importance. Similarly, the repetition of the importance of ‘learning by doing,’ as a central practice within the oral tradition, emphasizes this fundamental principle about how one learns most effectively.

⁶⁰ Peter O'Chiese and Michael Thrasher, personal communication, 1986-present day.

adaptive management. To “double understand” one needs to dedicate time not only to intellectualize and contemplate, but also to *do* and to reflect on the implications and consequences from the experiences (positive, neutral, and negative) to learn even more and adapt behaviours accordingly. The Second Journey around the Medicine Circle (especially Chapters Seven, Eight, and the concluding chapter) explore and unfold this concept further.

For me, learning through ceremonies has been an ideal way to learn oral tradition and “double understand,” as I have been able to apply Medicine Circle learnings in my everyday living (and now explore them in the context of living sustainably). In reality, however, Elders are increasingly challenged to find Indigenous youth who are steadfastly interested in dedicating enough time (i.e., years, even decades) to truly learn their ways of knowing, especially through ceremonies. Technological distractions abound in today’s modern world; attention spans are shortening (Louv, 2008; Orr, 1992; Uhl and Stuchul, 2011; Uhl, 2013). With these trends, along with residential school impacts, the Indian Act’s assimilatory policies, and the challenges besetting Indigenous communities to maintain generational links with their traditional ways, “traditional methods, processes, understandings, languages, ceremonies, and knowledge of natural laws are being eroded.”⁶¹ The concern is that too few Indigenous youth are reconnecting with the depths of their ways of knowing and so do not prioritize time for learning them.

Still, recognizing that this is the time of the Seventh Fire, Indigenous peoples are striving to become strong once again and rekindle “old flames” (Benton-Banai, 1988; p. 93). A modern-day term often used to describe this era, this time of the Seventh Fire, is decolonization (Alfred, 2009; Smith, 1999).⁶² In theory, decolonizing endeavours hold the promise of reviving

⁶¹ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, June 3, 2012.

⁶² Decolonization, for the purposes of this dissertation, is defined as a transformative strategy that begins with the self and extends throughout Indigenous communities to restore connections with cultures, languages, and lands,

Indigenous peoples and their cultures. In actuality, while movements such as Idle No More and reserve and urban initiatives strive to improve Indigenous health and socio-economic conditions, strengthen cultures, and reassert responsibilities for the land, Indigenous peoples still wrestle with the effects of colonization. Communities, both urban and reserve, are working hard to overcome ongoing poverty and social injustice, struggling (not without difficulties) to reverse downward trends,⁶³ and several communities have met with success.⁶⁴ Yet, decolonization strategies to effectively overcome impacts from the Indian Act and residential schools remain elusive for numerous reasons, including but not limited to internal administrative and social challenges within communities, ongoing prejudice and pervasive stereotypes, as well as educational, policy, and bureaucratic shortcomings in provincial and federal governments. Numerous authors explore these and other issues in historical and contemporary contexts (Alfred, 1999; 2009; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Dickason & McNab; 2009; Dickason & Newbigging, 2010; Francis, 1992; Hall, Rosenberg & Dei, 2000; Lischke and McNab, 2005; Newhouse, Voyageur, & Beavon, 2005; Ponting, 1986; Simpson, 2008). Still, Indigenous

to achieve self-determination and overcome impacts of colonization, replacing fear and loss with empowerment and strength (gleaned from a variety of sources: Alfred, 2009; Ponting, 1986; Smith, 1999; among others).

⁶³ Statistics from the National Household Survey (2006 and 2011) illustrate some of these trends. For example, regarding health and nutrition, First Nations people living off-reserve aged 45 and over had nearly twice the rate of diabetes compared to the non-Aboriginal population (19% versus 11%). 26% of First Nations people reported higher obesity rates compared to non-Aboriginal peoples (16%). Regarding crime, Aboriginal adults represent only 4% of the Canadian adult population but account for 28% of admissions to prisons in 2011/2012. In the labour market between 2008 and 2009, the unemployment rate for Aboriginal people aged 15 and over increased from 10.4% to 13.9%, while that for non-Aboriginal people rose from 6% to 8.1%. For housing, according to the 2006 census, 29% of Aboriginal people lived in homes needing major repairs, compared to 7% of the non-Aboriginal population. For more statistics, please see <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/index-eng.cfm> <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/130129/dq130129b-eng.htm>; <http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-558/p5-eng.cfm>.

⁶⁴ For example, Oujé-Bougoumou, Osoyoos, Lax Kw'alaams, and Membertou are just a few of the many First Nations communities who have reversed downward trends and whose people are enjoying much-improved lifestyles (more will be shared about these communities in the Second Journey 'Round). As well, even though challenges remain, the number of Aboriginal students graduating with postsecondary degrees has increased over the years, Aboriginal businesses are expanding, and Indigenous fashion, fine arts, music and culture are thriving. However, a discrepancy is apparent between these success stories and media coverage of poverty and suicide in First Nations communities, which tend to perpetuate negative opinions, stereotypes, and misplaced biases. For more, please see Francis, 1992; Henderson, 2013; Ross, 1996; Simpson, 2008.

peoples remain tenacious in their efforts to restore self and community, revive languages, and protect their lands. As Dickason and Newbigging (2010) observe, “Adaptability has always been the key to their survival” (p. 334). Through all the tragedy and heartache they have suffered, Indigenous peoples have persevered, which is a testament in and of itself to their ways of knowing as enduring and resilient cultures.

What is Indigenous Knowledge?

Intrinsic within Indigenous ways of knowing is this attribute of adaptability, which is integrated throughout what Mooshum identifies as three aspects of Indigenous knowledge (IK): land, language, and experience.⁶⁵ He clarifies that when he was young, “Indigenous knowledge” was not a term in use. Rather, land, language and experiences were the “culture” of the people. Various Indigenous authors warn against articulating a concise definition of IK, seeing as Indigenous ways of knowing are ways of life, not objectified abstractions amassed as a body of knowledge (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Ellen et al, 2000; McGregor, 2004b). To define Indigenous knowledges according to a Western construct is antithetical and perpetuates a degree of Western control over Indigenous peoples. What I present, therefore, is a description of IK as I have come to understand it over years of learning with Mooshum and other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, recognizing that Indigenous knowledges are not homogeneous or static and others may have similarly valid, yet different, interpretations of IK (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; McGregor, 2009).⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 9, 2012. Dr. Dan Longboat, Haudenosaunee professor of Indigenous Studies, Trent University, names these three aspects as land, language and traditional practices (personal communication, February 10, 2012).

⁶⁶ Other terms such as traditional knowledge, Indigenous science, “Naturalized Knowledge Systems,” among others, have been used to name what I have chosen to summarize as “Indigenous knowledge,” “Indigenous knowledges,” and “Indigenous ways of knowing” (see for example: Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; F. Henry Lickers, 1997).

As I have learned, Indigenous knowledge is the entirety of living in balanced relationship with the land (i.e., with Creation), depicted here with an image of a feather (see Figure 2.1). On the one side, IK is the set of tangible skills and knowledge of how to actually live on the land, gaining sustenance from and surviving in nature – how to hunt and gather food and medicines, how to read the weather to know when to seek shelter, how to be mindful and careful of the balance of nature, etc. This is the knowledge of place for the care of one’s physical self, providing the essentials of life – food, clothing, and shelter (“skill development” in Figure 2.1). The literature has labeled this Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), which has become relevant in the contemporary arena of environmental resource planning and management (Berkes, 2008; Ellen et al, 2000; Folke, 2004; Huntington, 2000; McGregor, 2004a, 2004b, 2008, 2009).

Figure 2.1: The Feather as an Illustration of the Two Facets of Indigenous Knowledge⁶⁷



Intertwined with this knowledge of place, on the other side of the feather, is knowledge of caring for spirit, knowing one’s place within Creation. This involves reciprocity inherent in relationships, how to care for all our relatives and ourselves. Resonating here are Mooshum Peter O’Chiese’s words which I have already shared: “Take care of the land and it will take care

⁶⁷ Adapted from: Thrasher, Michael. 1987. Blue Book (unpublished material for workshops).

of you.”⁶⁸ This side of the feather includes the foundational values, philosophies, and spirituality inherent within IK and is knowledge for “human development,” informing how to live intentionally with reciprocity – that is, consciously and conscientiously – in balanced relationship with the land. Ceremonial protocols are wholly integrated with everyday routines as everyday living and ceremony are one and the same. Pre-contact, this is how life in North America was lived. This holistic philosophy to life is the Indigenous people’s way of knowing and seeing the world. Both are required to sustain life. Put another way, in relation to Figure 2.1, one cannot fly with half a feather.

What Western society has tended to do, since colonization began, is the practice of decontextualization (Ellen et al, 2000; McGregor, 2004a, 2004b, 2009). Decontextualizing Indigenous knowledge disconnects the physical from its spiritual aspects. Nadasdy (1999) labels this “distillation” (p. 7), the separation of knowledge from people and place. McGregor (2004a) explains that Indigenous knowledge is “required to fit into the existing framework designed to fulfill the needs of Western ideals” (p. 59), thus limiting the scope of a study to TEK. That is, research projects most often, if not always, have ignored the spiritual aspects of IK, showing preference for empirical knowledge of plants and animals and dismissing the existence of a metaphysical⁶⁹ factor in their equations. Wildcat and Deloria (2001) speak of how dominant

⁶⁸ As noted in my first comprehensive, “the land” is an all-embracing term used by Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders to refer to all of nature, all of Creation (Peter O’Chiese, personal communication, 1987; Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 2012; Doug Williams, Elder, personal communication, February 2012; Dr. Dan Longboat, professor of Indigenous Studies, personal communication, February 2012).

⁶⁹ I am using the word “metaphysical” throughout this dissertation to mean “transcending physical matter,” as defined in the Oxford Dictionary (retrieved March 23, 2014 from: <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>). Hence, “metaphysical” and “spiritual” are similar in that they refer to the spirit world and things we cannot see, acknowledging the mystery within Creation. I am not investigating the philosophical branch of metaphysics, which Deloria (2001) defines as “the set of first principles we must possess in order to make sense of the world in which we live” (p. 2). Significant distinctions exist between Western and Indigenous metaphysics. Indigenous metaphysics is a holistic integration of time, place, and being, where being is understood to include the life force or spiritual power pervasive throughout Creation, and subjective experience with place through time contributes to understanding the relationality at the core of existence (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001). Western metaphysics holds

society has tended to treat “Indian science” separately from “Indian religion” (p. 2), failing to understand that: 1) Indigenous spirituality is not a religion but a way of living (i.e., a way of knowing and being in the world in balanced relationship); and 2) spiritual knowledge and skills knowledge are parts of one whole, neither of which ought to be dealt with separately or in isolation.

This last point harkens back to the image of the feather (Figure 2.1) that illustrates the holistic, multidimensional, and relational essence contained within Indigenous knowledges. Indigenous knowledges affirm the presence of spirit throughout all Creation. Modern Western science has dismissed this understanding, which Indigenous peoples have established through their experience with the world and cosmos over millennia. While beneficial contributions by modern Western science have been significant in advancing world knowledge in important ways, I submit that sole adherence to reductionist and positivist thinking, devoid of spirit, has its limitations because of this omission. I return to this point in the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle as I feel it is worth examining more closely in the context of the dominant Western approach to sustainability and how Indigenous ways of knowing may contribute to the discourse.

The Roles and Responsibilities of an Elder

Given modern society’s tendency to decontextualize and fragment Indigenous ways of knowing, the work of an Elder today is certainly challenging. Hatala and Desjardins (2010) and others (see, for example, Colorado, 1988; Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992) distinguish between two

separate spirit from science. More comprehensive explorations into Western and Indigenous metaphysics are found in Deloria, 1973; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; and Dolores Calderon’s dissertation (2008), *Indigenous metaphysics: Challenging Western knowledge organization in social studies curriculum* (retrieved March 23, 2014 from: http://www.academia.edu/3894922/Indigenous_Metaphysics_Challenging_Western_Knowledge_Organization_in_Social_Studies_Curriculum).

types of Elders, “honourable Elders” and “spiritual Elders,” where one has led a good life and has the respect of his/her people and the other also has the ability to run spiritual ceremonies (e.g., sweat lodge, fasting, etc.). To be a spiritual Elder, one spends years apprenticing as a helper. Couture (1991b) in his chapter, *The Role of Native Elders: Emergent Issues*, describes spiritual Elders’ unique qualities, which they have developed over years of apprenticeship, experience, and practice:

Elders . . . know a way to high human development, to a degree greater than generally suspected. Their qualities of mind (intuition, intellect, memory, imagination) and emotion, their profound and refined moral sense manifest in an exquisite sense of humor, in a sense of caring and communication finesse in teaching and counseling, together with a high level of spiritual and psychic attainment, are perceived as clear behavioral indicators, deserving careful attention, if not compelling emulation (pp. 207-208).

Mooshum Michael certainly holds these gifts. As already indicated, however, he humbly notes that he holds only a portion of the knowledge held by the Elders who came before him and is acutely cognizant of the losses caused by colonization and its repercussions. He is honouring those who came before him to the best of his ability as teacher, working to ensure that what he knows is passed onto the next generation.

Mooshum Peter O’Chiese and Mooshum Michael are spiritual Elders; yet, they do not call themselves so. Indeed, it is not an Elder’s place to actively seek this recognition. As Hatala and Desjardins (2010) note, Elders “do not seek status; instead, it flows from the people” (p. 52; see also Steigelbauer, 1996). Elders often shy away from direct references to their names as they know the knowledge they share is not theirs to call their own and because of the deep respect they hold for those who have come before them. They recognize how expansive was the knowledge held by their Elders and Teachers, knowing only a fraction of it has survived the impacts of colonization.

This point raises an apparent dichotomy in this dissertation. While I note Elders' wishes to remain anonymous, I have already named several with whom Mooshum Michael has worked and learned. He and I concur and prefer to honour these Elders' wishes. Yet leaving them nameless may be perceived by some as "stealing." I comment on this concern later in this chapter. Mooshum Michael says, "We cannot have it both ways . . . Leaving them unmentioned here in this document is stealing from them."⁷⁰ He notes that at a "live" cultural or ceremonial event, those speaking address and honour these people, naming them according to proper protocols. To respond to this concern in my dissertation, I am being "care-full" when attributing stories and sharing knowledge Elders have been trusted to carry.

Mooshum Michael's and other Elders' cautiousness in this regard is reflected in their humility about being deemed an Elder by others and in their preference to be referred to by such names as "Old Man," "Mooshum" (Grandfather) or some title other than "Elder." True to form, while he accepts the title others have given him, Mooshum Michael is more than a bit uneasy with the term "Elder" in connection with his name and so prefers "Mooshum."⁷¹

Mooshum stresses that the knowledge he and others have cared for is not theirs; they do not own it in the Western sense of "ownership." They have resisted direct attribution for fear of being misinterpreted as disrespecting those who came before them and all their sacrifices. To explain this point further, a special notation about "ownership" and its Western and Indigenous connotations is necessary. Western ownership carries with it inferences related to property rights and commoditization. In Indigenous terms, ownership of Indigenous knowledge means something altogether different. Harkening back to the discussion in Chapter One about

⁷⁰ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 4, 2013.

⁷¹ The term "Elder" may still appear in this dissertation when I speak in generalities or in a context where the term fits semantically, with the intent being to illustrate some role or responsibility of an Elder, whether I am speaking of Mooshum or Elders in general.

challenges to translate accurately Indigenous concepts into a Western paradigm, the reader is asked to suspend Western ownership rules and focus on Indigenous responsibilities, as opposed to rights, of ownership. That is, Elders have a great sense of responsibility in caring for Indigenous knowledge. They do not own, yet they are responsible for it. The knowledge has accumulated over millennia. Each generation has contributed their own learnings to the body of knowledge, which has been in Elders' trust and care.

To protect the essence of the knowledge, which may be considered "owned by the larger Indigenous community,"⁷² Elders are careful in how they pass it on. To access knowledge, either one has to be accepted as a legitimate member of the community or one has to follow proper protocols and be given permission to use it.⁷³ If knowledge is used indiscriminately, Mooshum says, bona fide Elders who have cared for the knowledge feel a great deal of responsibility when it is subject to abuse. He has seen, too often, exploitation by the New Age and other movements, who have stolen cultural processes, content, and practices of Indigenous peoples around the world. For example, the deaths in the Arizona desert in 2009 in what was called a sweat lodge are a tragic result of the careless exploitation and misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge.⁷⁴

Given this understanding of Indigenous "ownership" in terms of responsibilities, I have been given permission to use Michael's and Peter's names in this dissertation with the caveat that this clear distinction be articulated. As such, I feel a great responsibility to exercise deep care, to be "care-full,"⁷⁵ in presenting the knowledge I am sharing as I do not wish to see it

⁷² Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 1, 2013.

⁷³ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 1, 2013.

⁷⁴ See various news stories at: <http://www.cnn.com/2009/US/10/15/arizona.sweat.lodge/> and http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/nation/2009-10-26-sweat-lodge-self-help-James-Ray_N.htm.

⁷⁵ With respect to the learning shared earlier about being "care-full," in the context of one's responsibility to care for how knowledge is shared and used, the word emphasizes the serious intent to work in a manner which fully or wholly honours, to the best of one's ability, the Elders who have cared for the knowledge over the millennia. This entails care-full consideration of what is to be shared, what is to be written, what words to use to express the

misinterpreted and misused. As Elder, one of Mooshum's roles in this doctoral journey has been to ensure that due care is taken.

A final note about Elders' roles and responsibilities concerns the acceptance of Elders by the academy as caretakers of the knowledge and as qualified teachers. This has been an evolving process. As Couture (1991b) observes:

The "knowing" of Elders is problematic to those who, for a range of reasons, were not schooled in oral tradition. Elders as "knowers" know intimately, directly, and are non-dualistic in their perceptions and understandings. Western trained people are inherently scholastic and dualistic in perception and thinking (p. 211).

Since Europeans arrived on this continent, this dualistic thinking has yielded an either-or mentality where one knowledge system is superior and the other is inferior and inconsequential so must be eradicated. Accepting that this is no longer relevant or permissible thinking, the oral tradition and Indigenous knowledges have an important role to fulfill in present day society. No longer an either-or equation but an opportunity for learning, modern Western society is at a critical juncture in acknowledging the potential within Indigenous knowledges and oral traditions (Haig-Brown, 2008; McGregor, 2009). One role of an Elder is to ensure that proper care is taken as Western society adapts to welcoming Indigenous ways of knowing into the academy and dominant discourse. Implicit in this role are the responsibilities the Elder holds to honour those who came before and the sacrifices they have endured. Today, as Elders strive to pass knowledge onto subsequent generations, "care-full" steps need to be taken to prevent further exploitation and misinterpretation. One such step is for the academy to recognize the wealth of knowledge Elders and other holders keep in trust as equal to any doctorate degree and to adapt Western educational institutions (from elementary to post-secondary) to honour their roles as teachers and guardians. The opportunities for Elders to share Indigenous ways of knowing and for students to

essence or core of the meaning intended – in Mooshum's words, to "make sure whatever gets written stays true to the oral form in its intent of spirit and intelligence" (personal communication, September 12, 2013).

learn experientially as well as in classrooms are important to pursue, a topic for another dissertation, to be sure.

Questions for Indigenous Research

The modern era has presented Elders – and researchers – with a number of challenging propositions in sharing oral tradition and writing down Indigenous knowledge. In terms of Indigenous research and the increasingly expanding body of Indigenous knowledge appearing in the academy, these responsibilities present a distinct set of concerns for the Elder as well as the researcher. Kovach (2005) articulates two ethical considerations regarding the questions: “How much is to be shared?” and “What is to be written?”

How much is to be shared?

“We need to ask how much knowledge do we share for the common good, and what knowledge needs to be kept sacred?”⁷⁶ (Kovach, 2005; p. 31). Couture (1991a) explains it in this fashion: “a Native Elder . . . says what he/she thinks himself entitled to say according to his own experience from within a spiritual world” (p. 68).

While Indigenous knowledge is available for everyone to learn, certain protocols and processes must be followed and ample time taken so that anyone seeking knowledge understands the learning through the actual experiences of doing, underscoring the significance of “earning the learning.”⁷⁷ To share indiscriminately particular depths within Indigenous knowledge

⁷⁶ Sacred, in this sense, does not mean restricted in that only a certain few may have access to Indigenous knowledge. Rather, it means the learning must be earned through exhibiting respect for the knowledge. Respect is shown by taking time to develop relationships with the Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, helping in ceremonies, and/or helping Elders or communities in other ways. (Michael Thrasher, personal communication, August 2012). See the next footnote for more on “earning the learning.”

⁷⁷ In “earning the learning,” the initiate/helper proves his/her temperament, abilities, and truth in intentions, which become apparent to the Elder over time. The more time spent, the more is learned through the experience. As the helper follows protocols and processes, gains understanding and knowledge (i.e., as he/she proceeds through the stages of Indigenous learning), the Elder gauges his/her progress and introduces new learnings and

disrespects those who have carried the knowledge before and disrespects the knowledge itself. Care must be taken in deciding what is appropriate for public consumption and what must be reserved for “earning through learning.” Huntington and Watson (2012) concur with this notion that some knowledge is not to be shared:

One must understand . . . that not all Native ways are to be shared with non-Natives, no matter the amount of trust and good intentions by the non-Native. It is not meant to be disrespectful or to hide anything, but it is a way of keeping what is ours, for our own use and belief. Some is only for our next generations, who may not understand all that we teach them. It is our way of keeping our own diversity. And researchers need to respect this, and learn ways to be humble and accept the existence of mystery (pp. 68-69).

This notion of respect and choosing not to share certain knowledge relates to the previous discussion highlighting the difference in interpretations of ownership, between European-based “rights” and Indigenous “responsibilities.” According to Indigenous ways of being, knowledge cannot be owned; Elders hold knowledge and have been responsible for handing it down through the millennia for the benefit of the people so that they may survive and live in accordance with the laws of nature (Corntassel, 2008; Gaudry, 2011). Wheeler (2005) characterizes this perspective as knowledge being held in trust. She reiterates the concern about sharing knowledge that is then deemed “owned” by the researcher and equates this with stealing, which is a serious infraction of anyone’s trust:

In Cree, any and all theft is considered unconscionable. To take a story and claim ownership without permission when it was only shared with you is stealing. Indigenous copyright systems are built on trust, and breach of that trust constitutes theft (p. 203).

For all these considerations, “what is to be shared” is a question Michael Thrasher considers with caution. He must keep in mind his responsibilities to the Indigenous community

protocols as appropriate. Is this any different than the protocols and processes required for a doctorate? As Mooshum shares, following the protocols as established over the ages has proven to be effective in sorting “the wild rice from the chaff” (personal communication, February 2012 and September 2013).

– including those who have come before and those who are yet to be. Given the history and recent tragic events, Elders who carry knowledge, understandably, are hesitant and wary to participate in research projects. Elders remain uncertain about the academy’s intentions. They walk a fine line between wanting to share certain knowledge⁷⁸ for the benefit of humankind and Creation, and wanting to protect the knowledge from appropriation and abuse. In research, therefore, the researcher must respect the decisions of the Elder(s) regarding what he/she chooses to share and not to share. With regards to the “rights” of the academy in light of the responsibilities of the Elders, in my opinion, the Elders take precedence, and they may choose to share less knowledge, erring on the side of caution.

What is to be written?

Entwined with the challenge of determining what is to be shared is the question of what is to be written (Wilson, 2008; Clark, 2007). As Indigenous knowledges are grounded in oral traditions, writing seems counterintuitive. Struthers (2001) and Thorne (1993) summarize an issue of primary concern:

Representatives of many indigenous cultures argue that writing absolves individuals from remembering and, therefore, dilutes the complexity of knowledge that can be kept alive within any society (Struthers, 2001; p. 126).

Along with this concern, agreeing to share knowledge and allowing it to be converted into the written word, people fear, diminishes the knowledge, opening itself to misinterpretation and decontextualization (Kovach, 2010). Couture (1991a) emphasizes the benefits of the oral tradition over the written word:

Native ceremonies are the primary oral literature, and remain the main traditional source of psychic energy for thinking, for identity development and control, for

⁷⁸ Certain knowledge is available for everyone to learn through Western and Indigenous research methods. Other knowledge, specifically certain knowledge pertaining to ceremonies is only accessible through attending ceremonies, helping in ceremonies, and spending time (i.e., years) in ceremonies and with Elders.

survival and its enhancement. The oral literate mind displays a capacity to integrate, to form patterns, a process that penetrates and transforms the experiences obtained in and through a dynamic, non-print environment (p. 58).

This description highlights, once again, the integrated, holistic purposes of Indigenous ways of knowing for personal development and community sustainability, living in balanced relationship with Creation. As already noted, solely reading about Indigenous knowledge removes people from the experiential facet of oral tradition, limiting one's ability to access its full benefits as described by Couture (1991a) above and hindering its effective transmission from one generation to the next (Cruikshank, 1998). Telling the stories is only one aspect; listening, thinking about, coming to understand the "riddles" in the stories (Huntington and Watson, 2012) and applying the lessons in one's own life experiences are all integral to the oral tradition. Indeed, even the telling of the story is much more than merely words, as Kovach (2010) explains:

Can we ever bring the full nuance of the oral tradition into academia? Not likely. . . Sitting in the now of the story can never be captured through the research transcription. The knowledge that we gather in the ephemeral moment of oral story, as told by a teller, as we sit in a specific spiritual, physical, and emotional place, are of a different sort (p. 102).

Kovach (2010) recognizes that, "Writing story becomes a concession of the Indigenous researcher" (p. 101) who is faced with the daunting challenge of relating effectively through the written word "the holistic, relational meaning" within a story (p. 102). Wheeler (2005) quotes Maria Campbell, a Cree Elder, who describes the enormous responsibility associated with this "daunting challenge:"

Our new storytellers have a big job. They must understand . . . the new language and use it to express their stories without losing the thoughts and images that are culturally unique to them. This new storyteller must also be a translator of the old way, so that it will not be lost to a new generation. And all this must be done on paper, for that is the new way (pp. 204-205).

The commitment Mooshum and I made before I began my doctorate reflects Maria Campbell's point, in Mooshum's words, "to make sure whatever gets written stays true to the oral form in its intent of spirit and intelligence."⁷⁹ Throughout this doctoral journey, I have endeavoured to remain true to the stories and Medicine Circle learnings and, at the same time, effectively translate them in a way that others may understand them in the context of sustainability thought and practice. I have often found myself contemplating how best to write an idea down, balancing a tendency to return to the Western way of thinking in which I was raised with remaining in an Indigenous paradigm, all the while conscious of the academic requirements of writing a dissertation in a Western institution of higher learning. I realize that the higher learning of Indigenous ways is new to the academy. This wisdom presents a new (old) frontier for learning so that the "intent of spirit and intelligence" is not only appreciated in academic discourse, but also integrated into everyday living, especially given the sustainability challenges we face as a species.

A cautionary note accompanies documenting an oral tradition in print media (the "new way" as noted by Maria Campbell) and involves correcting previously published misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and cultures in the name of anthropological and historical research. For example, Kovach (2010) cites Martin and Frost (1996) in recounting the historical treatment of Indigenous peoples in "smash and grab" ethnographies where qualitative data are gathered in quick in-and-out interview sessions (Martin and Frost, 1996; p. 606). Kovach (2010) explains that these early qualitative studies were largely influenced by positivist reductionism where conducting "'objective' studies of the 'other'" (p. 27) was an underlying assumption in anthropology and history, among other disciplines. Kovach (2010) concludes,

⁷⁹ This was most recently discussed with Michael Thrasher, personal communication, September 12, 2013. In our first conversations about my doctorate, beginning in 2008, we have shared this common goal.

“These early qualitative studies were responsible for extractive research approaches that left those they studied disenfranchised from the knowledge they shared” (p. 27).

Understandably, trust by Indigenous communities is not easily forthcoming in current day research projects for fear of further exploitation and appropriation of their knowledge (Haig-Brown, 2010; Kovach, 2010). Reluctance to condone writing their stories is a logical reaction to past experiences and why Smith (1999) has labelled “research” a dirty word among Indigenous peoples. The late Eddie Bellerose has put it more bluntly, commenting to Mooshum Michael, “Indians have been studied to death.”⁸⁰ On the same token, in decolonizing efforts, Smith (1999), Wilson (2008), and Kovach (2005, 2010), among other Indigenous scholars (e.g., Wilson & Restoule, 2010), are turning the word into a more positive experience. If stories are to be written down, *how* that is done will be through a positive relational process of Indigenous design.

Indigenous research design stresses if writing down oral tradition is an unavoidable reality, the counter-stories must be told and Indigenous peoples’ histories and knowledges reclaimed. These counter-stories are the stories according to Indigenous voices as contrasted to what most of us have been taught growing up (Cruikshank, 1998; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Smith, 1999; Thomas, 2005; Wilson, 2008; Weber-Pillwax, 2001). Cruikshank (1998) questions and Thomas (2005) echoes the researcher’s need to ask: “. . . whose voices are included and whose are left out” (p. 243).

Such are the responsibilities of the researcher to collaborate with the Elder and/or Indigenous community, ensuring that what is written is true to the original intent of the oral form, that the knowledge is kept whole to the best of their abilities, that the researcher is trustworthy, accountable, and respectful of “all our relations” in both process and content, and that all voices are heard in the words on the page, not just the loudest, domineering voices.

⁸⁰ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 4, 2013.

How does the Southern Direction Relate to Sustainability?

This chapter has been focused primarily on exploring the southern direction of the Medicine Circle as it pertains to the relationships central to my doctoral research process. Who are the Elders with whom I have learned? What are the relational responsibilities of working with an oral tradition and respecting Indigenous ways of knowing?

In this section, I return to drawing connections in the Medicine Circle with the notion of sustainability. Specifically, how do learnings in the southern direction relate to sustainability? On a general level, the very fact that Indigenous knowledges in North America are still in existence is an exemplar of sustainability in practice. Even with all the challenges Indigenous peoples have endured over the last 500-plus years of colonization and its concomitant impacts, Indigenous peoples have survived, albeit not without difficulties still being experienced today. Notwithstanding ongoing poverty, disease, and social inequalities on- and off-reserve, as well as intractable vestiges of prejudice and ignorance remaining in “white” society, Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders have successfully transmitted their oral traditions and cultures across the generations to the present day. To be sure, some cultures are more intact than others. Significant losses within numerous Indigenous knowledges have been incurred. Still, the experiences I have been fortunate to have, learning the Medicine Circle through ceremonies for almost three decades, have shown me that significant amounts of knowledge have persevered and remain viable, vital foundations of wisdom for all peoples to appreciate.

In the previous chapter introducing the Medicine Circle, four central learnings are presented and worth revisiting here in relation to the southern direction and sustainability: time, relationship, balance and holism.

Time and Relationship, Balance and Holism

Louise Erdrich, a literary author of Anishnaabe and European descent, writes (2001) about “all our relatives:”

In saying the word *nindinawemaganidok*, or my relatives, we speak of everything that has existed in time, the known and the unknown, the unseen, the obvious, all that lived before or is living now in the worlds above and below (p. i).

The concept of being respectful to “all our relatives” has been seemingly lost in neoliberal circles in terms of our relationship with our environment, not to mention with all that we cannot see.

The connections, while perhaps acknowledged, are not fully appreciated in temporal terms. That is, for the majority of dominant Western society, long-term implications for the future of actions taken today are frequently minimized in favour of short-term financial gain. As introduced in the Pre/Amble and explored more fully in the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle, the economy often trumps respect for environmental and societal issues (Victor, 2008). The ideal of sustainability is that these facets of life are all one web of complex interconnections and relationships to be holistically balanced, strengthening resilience and adaptability over time.

Many examples in the name of sustainable development illustrate how efforts to achieve this balance have been deficient and negative repercussions have resulted. Early World Bank projects such as hydro-electric dams which were constructed in India, China, and Indonesia (as well as other countries) in the 1980’s and ‘90’s provide a case in point (Fox and Brown, 1998; Kapur, Lewis and Webb, 1997). While the aim of these dams has been to provide electricity, drinking water, and irrigation to communities and agricultural lands downriver, the dams that have been completed have displaced thousands of people, destroyed habitats, impacted biodiversity, swept away livelihoods, and increased rather than reduced poverty (Fox and Brown, 1998). How could the magnitude of the impacts from these mega-projects been so inadequately anticipated? Or were the interrelationships between the people and their lands simply ignored?

Critics have pointed to the World Bank catering to multinational corporations, loaning funds to corrupt or insecure governments, as well as ignoring human rights and environmental implications of sustainable development projects (Fox and Brown, 1998; Govindu, Singh and Saranathan, 2010). These complaints seemingly highlight a stronger relationship evident with the dollar than with “all our relatives,” human and non-human alike.

Also connecting time, relationship, balance and holism to sustainability is climate change. A direct relationship exists between fossil fuel-driven lifestyles in industrialized and urbanized centres to the south and impacts being experienced in the far north (Leduc, 2010). The ecology of climate change illustrates the delicate, holistic balance and interrelationship between the land, oceans and air. Over time, increasing greenhouse gas concentrations from burning fossil fuels trap heat in our planet’s atmosphere, causing temperatures to rise, which in turn melt our glaciers and polar ice caps. The retreating ice caps increase the expanse of open sea, which absorbs more heat, increasing temperatures further, causing more ice to melt, sea levels to rise, the jet stream to weaken, and more extreme weather events to occur.

In the north, lives that depend on the snow and ice are being impacted (Leduc, 2010). The Inuit have relied on their traditional knowledge of their climate and weather to survive in this environment throughout time. With changes in weather patterns unseen before, Inuit have found it increasingly difficult to anticipate conditions that used to be predictable. With later ice freeze-up, the polar bears in certain areas are experiencing more stress and their behaviours are becoming less predictable (Leduc, 2010; Rode et al, 2014; Stirling, 2011). For example, Leduc (2010) shares discussions with Inuit along the northwest coast of Hudson Bay who, as a result of a ban on polar bear hunting, are encountering more polar bears in their communities, something they rarely saw as children. With no controls on the bear populations, Inuit are seeing more

bears looking for food in town at a time when they should have been on the sea ice, which is freezing up later and melting earlier due to climate change. The increasing frequency of these observations illustrates the disruption occurring in Arctic food web relationships, of which the Inuit are a part. International pressure to “save the bear” has contributed to this imbalance, resulting in more dangerous human-bear interactions (Leduc, 2010). These and other climate change impacts in the north show how connected we all are. We are truly all related in the sense that our actions far to the south reverberate thousands of miles away.

Summary

This chapter has been dedicated to the southern direction of the Medicine Circle, which represents the gifts of time and relationship, teaching the importance of taking time to respect “all our relations.” As has been noted more than once, “all our relations” is a central concept in Indigenous knowledges and is inclusive of self, others, and all Creation. Underlying this tenet is the learning of being “care-full,” that is, full of care as opposed to “care-less” in our relationships, including the places we live. Vine Deloria, Jr. (1999), using different words, describes this choice in terms of a moral responsibility, somewhat resembling the precautionary principle:⁸¹ “The wise person will realize his or her own limitations and act with some degree of humility until he or she has sufficient knowledge to act with confidence” (p. 46). Humility is key in recognizing gaps in knowledge, respecting mystery and unknowns, and choosing to act “care-fully.”

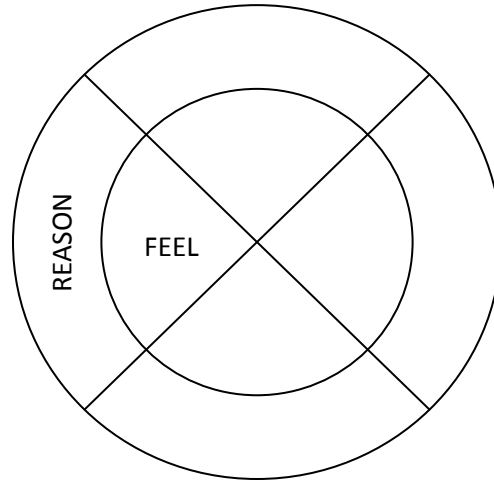
This chapter has also examined “being care-full” in terms of the complex responsibilities Elders have today with the knowledge entrusted to them. As part of an oral tradition, they have

⁸¹ The precautionary principle, in its original definition, states, “When an activity raises threats of harm to human health or the environment, precautionary measures should be taken even if some cause and effect relationships are not established scientifically” (Raffensperger and Tickner, 1999; p. 8). For more information, see Goklany, 2001).

an immense obligation. They are the link between the past and the countless generations of Elders who came before them and the present generation, and are responsible for ensuring the knowledge continues on to those yet to be born.

Pre-contact, the Indigenous peoples of this land looked to their Elders for the knowledge to sustain them through each coming season, from one generation to the next. Today, the responsibilities of such trust are significant, especially with the challenges facing oral traditions by print media, modern technologies, and continued threats of misappropriation and abuse. The weight upon their shoulders is great, considering the forces of assimilation and the difficulties of finding young people who are willing to dedicate the time necessary to learn the ceremonial protocols and carry them into the future. Still, the test of time has proven the adaptability of Indigenous knowledges and how they have remained dynamic, not static (Allen, 1992; Battiste & Henderson, 2000; McGregor, 2009), evolving and innovating with the ever-present forces of change. Adaptability, dynamism, durability – all keys to sustainability which demonstrate the relevance of Indigenous knowledges and oral traditions for the future of humanity going forward.

Chapter 3 – WEST: Learning through Ceremonies and Positionality



My first time at ceremonies, as I have already shared, was eye-opening to say the least. I made many mistakes; but that is how we learn, is it not? This story highlights my inexperience in ceremonies and my Jewishness coming into contact with Indigenous ways.

I had grown up in a kosher household. When I moved away to university and then to work in Washington, DC, I lived with non-Jewish housemates and so I did not keep a kosher home. I did, however, refrain from eating pork and shellfish and from mixing milk and meat; so I followed a modified version of kosher rules.

I was still living in the States at the time, so I drove up to Canada and Mark and I set out for ceremonies. Mark had taken care of pulling together all the camping equipment we would need. When we arrived in Haliburton, I did the bulk of our grocery shopping.

Being my first ceremonies, I was unsure of what to buy. However, I knew I was not going to purchase any bacon, ham or sausages. I did not even know how to cook them, so why should I? I planned on morning breakfasts of scrambled eggs and toast, oatmeal, or cold cereal.

I soon learned that Mooshum Peter O'Chiese rotated to different camps for breakfast each morning. I hoped he would not come to our camp as I would not know what to say to him. When Mark ran up to me and said, "Peter's coming!" I got very nervous. But I thought at least I could cook him breakfast, no problem.

I broke the eggs into a bowl, added the basil and dill that I usually do, and started scrambling them in a fry pan with our Coleman stove, not thinking that maybe Peter would not like herbs in his eggs. Peter sat patiently in a chair, waiting, enjoying the early morning sunshine. As I started cooking the eggs, Mark looked at the pan and said, "No!! You can't add herbs to his eggs!! He won't eat that!!!"

Oy! What was I going to do with all these eggs? Not thinking, I tossed them out; I was so flustered. I hate wasting food. Maybe I could have saved them, but we only had the one pan and I needed to work fast!!! I couldn't keep the Elder waiting!!

So I quickly scrambled some plain eggs and toasted some bread in the pan and, feeling totally humiliated, I handed Mooshum Peter his breakfast – with no meat even, which I felt badly about because I knew he liked a hearty breakfast to carry him through the morning.

Needless to say, he did not visit my camp for breakfast again.

Introduction

This embarrassing story reveals something about myself, namely that I had a lot of learning to do after that first year – including how to cook sausages! I can laugh at this story now, but not at the time. The purpose of this chapter is to share background information with the reader to locate myself with respect to my research (my culinary skills with a camping stove notwithstanding). How does this fit with the western direction of the Medicine Circle? As introduced in Chapter One, a gift of this direction is water. Rains come from the west, which is one of the four elements for life to exist (Figure 1.6). As human beings, we are conceived and we develop in our mother's womb - in water. Water is a necessity for plants to grow. As well, throughout our lives, we shed tears of joy and tears of sorrow so it is no wonder that the western direction is the place of feeling. Our feelings give rise to our thoughts,⁸² and so the west is the direction of reason, reminding us that our thoughts and feelings need to be balanced and reconciled as we walk through life.

A fundamental requirement within Indigenous research methodologies is to locate oneself with respect to one's research (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Indigenous research openly acknowledges the presence of subjectivity in inquiry and analysis, seeing as the heart and mind, feelings and thoughts, are closely connected. This approach is different from rationalist and empirical approaches claiming research must be objective (Hampton, 1995; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). When one thinks about it, no

⁸² This order, that feelings give rise to thoughts, is grounded in the laws of nature. Elders who have studied this through the ages have understood that from the moment of Creation to the present, everything was and is formed of energy: movement, light, heat, and gravitational force, the four original gifts shown in a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle, forming the basis for this dissertation. In evolutionary and developmental terms, human beings were and are sensory beings before conscious thought emerged. In Western circles of thought, some philosophers and scientists support this order; some profess that feelings arise from thoughts. In Indigenous thought, no point of view is discounted as wrong; diversity of thought strengthens one's understanding of the whole (Michael Thrasher, personal communication, 1987-present; Mark Dockstator, personal communication, March 28, 2014).

research may be purely objective because the researcher is a thinking, feeling person whose culture and worldview consciously or unconsciously influence one's work.⁸³ Eber Hampton (1995) speaks emphatically on this topic:

Feeling is connected to our intellect and we ignore, hide from, disguise, or suppress that feeling at our peril and at the peril of those around us. Emotionless, passionless, abstract, intellectual, academic research is a [expletive deleted] lie, it does not exist. It is a lie to ourselves and a lie to other people. Humans – feeling, living, breathing, thinking humans – do research. When we try to cut ourselves off at the neck and pretend an objectivity that does not exist in the human world, we become dangerous to ourselves first, and then to people around us (p. 52).

These dangers, for example, may end up harming people because of wrongfully-drawn judgments based on an unacknowledged bias. Situating oneself in relation to one's research, therefore, is imperative in Indigenous research, especially considering the harm already done to Indigenous peoples in the name of research (Smith, 1999).

Kovach (2010) agrees, pointing out that “self-location anchors knowledge within experiences, and these experiences greatly influence interpretations” (p. 111). Sharing one's “cultural grounding” (p. 115) is important for a number of purposes, building on those already noted above. First, Indigenous protocols exist for introducing oneself and include sharing where one is from to be clear about one's cultural identification (Kovach, 2010; p. 114). Also, sharing one's background “shows respect to the ancestors and allows community to locate us” (Kovach, 2010; p. 110). For this dissertation, one such community is the group reading this dissertation. I am also showing respect to my Jewish ancestors as well as to my ceremonial community. Finally, because of its subjective nature, Indigenous research involves an element of self-reflexivity (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008). To be so honest as to share stories from one's past and to openly express one's innermost thoughts and feelings makes one vulnerable,

⁸³ Post-positivist methodologies, such as feminism and critical theory, among others, share similar sentiments. For more information, see Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Denzin, Lincoln & Smith, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008.

but doing so hopefully earns the trust of those involved in the research project as well as those reading the final product. For readers, learning about the authors provides context to evaluate the work as a whole based upon who the researchers are and from where their points of view originate (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008).

This chapter, therefore, positions myself for the reader with insights into my thoughts and feelings in relation to my doctoral work. How did I learn about Indigenous knowledge through ceremonies? How does my identity as a Jewish woman with a love for nature correspond to my learning about Indigenous knowledge? As a non-Indigenous person, how am I able to do this work? What are the research challenges and questions which I have encountered as I have pursued this doctorate? These are some of the questions explored in this chapter.

A note on the organization of this chapter: I have chosen not to separate this chapter into distinct sections to discuss my youth, my Judaism, my feminism, etc. To segment myself into parts and examine my identity in a reductionist manner feels inorganic, potentially leaving the reader with an compartmentalized understanding of my positionality with respect to my work. The following discussion, therefore, proceeds in a nonlinear fashion, weaving through my memories, thoughts and feelings, unfolding for the reader what I hope to be a more organic, holistic understanding of my positionality.

In addition, throughout this chapter a cautionary tale is woven for the reader. Sharing these thoughts, feelings and memories, I wish to convey the importance of time in learning about Indigenous knowledge, and specifically about the Medicine Circle. I have spent decades attending and helping in ceremonies and have been extremely fortunate to have gotten to know and learn from so many people in our ceremonial community, Mooshum included.

Unbeknownst to me when I first began attending ceremonies in 1986, I began a journey of deep learning through experience of actually *doing* and *applying* what the Medicine Circle teaches. In Chapter One, I introduced the four stages of learning from an Indigenous perspective. My first years attending ceremonies may be considered an awakening, gaining awareness of what the Medicine Circle is, what the four directions' gifts are, etc. After a number of years, awareness grows into deeper understanding where what one is learning has great benefit for those of us in ceremonies, fasters and helpers alike. As discussed earlier, "double-understanding" begins to occur, and the understanding becomes knowledge that what is applicable in ceremonies is meant for everyday life. Only by spending the time do the central relationships have an opportunity to develop so that such learning is possible. To reiterate once more, reading about Indigenous knowledge in books – including this dissertation – merely opens a small window to the deeper learning possible when one spends the time, dedicates oneself to the relational learning experience, and learns by actually *doing*, not just reading, conceptualizing, and theorizing.

I happened to learn primarily through ceremonies, as I was fortunate to have an entrance to them by virtue of my marriage (at first, my relationship-then-engagement). Gaining access to ceremonies otherwise may be difficult, but not impossible, as "gatekeepers" who are responsible for "guarding the door" ensure certain criteria are met before entry is permitted.

Thankfully, other ways of learning Indigenous knowledge exist. In fact, I have spent a great deal of time with Mooshum – and other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders – outside of ceremonies. In the 1980's, I helped organize and attended a number of cultural workshops based on the Medicine Circle, which Mooshum led in association with his consulting work. I have attended countless Elders Gatherings at Trent University and have listened to

stories and the wisdom of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders there and elsewhere. As well, Mooshum and I have visited extensively when he has come to stay with us on his travels from Vancouver Island. He calls our home his eastern home. We have shopped, laughed, walked, eaten, prayed, smudged, sang, cried, and sat in quiet contemplation together. Mooshum has helped our family in times of happiness and sadness, through birth and death. Over all this time together, I have been fortunate to learn through everyday living what has been grounded for me through ceremonies.

Describing her learning experiences, Winona Wheeler (2005) relates the time she has dedicated to the relationships important to her:

Let's face it, doing oral history the "Indian way" is hard work. Traipsing around Indian country, chauffeuring old people, picking berries, hauling wood, smoking meat, digging wild turnips, hoeing potatoes, or taking them to and from the grocery store or bingo is a lot of work. Our finely tuned grey matter has difficulty equating chopping wood with intellectual pursuits, because it is a totally different kind of pedagogy that requires us to learn a new way of learning. . . Traditional copyright teachings came in the wee hours of the morning over cold Tim Hortons coffee in a 4 X 4 truck heading down the Peace River highway. One of my teachers has a propensity for second-hand store shopping – entire days have been spent mining sale bins for gold. Once it took us almost two days to make a ten-hour road trip because we stopped at every second-hand store and garage sale along the highway. Cree education is based on interactive and reciprocal relations, and all knowledge comes with some degree of personal sacrifice (p. 199).

To summarize, one may learn Indigenous ways of knowing by setting aside time and developing relationships with Elders or a community. One may learn a great deal with "a thousand cups of tea."⁸⁴ I have spent almost three decades learning through different ceremonies held during the year, mainly spring ceremonies. My family has made it a priority to set aside enough time each spring, having only missed a few. By spending time with Elders or in a community in a more concentrated way, one is able to learn in a shorter time frame.

⁸⁴ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 1, 2013.

Long before I began my learning Indigenous ways of knowing, I have enjoyed a deep affinity for the outdoors and being in nature. To provide the reader with insight into my positionality, I continue this chapter beginning with a reflection about my childhood and memories growing up exploring my backyard.

Connecting with Nature and Indigenous Ways of Knowing

I was four years old when my parents moved from a home with a backyard to a home situated on three acres of land. I grew up in this house in a suburb of Brighton, New York, along the banks of Allen's Creek. Two picture windows framed a yard with ancient summer willows banking this slow-moving creek at the bottom of a sloping hill.⁸⁵ During those first years I explored our backyard with my older brother and sister. Then I ventured out on my own. I had found a small clearing in the middle of some brush in one of the furthest parts of the land where I could hole up. I loved hiding there surrounded by all those bushes that seemed to protect me. Other days, I would just lie in the grass nearer the house, looking up at the sky watching the clouds float by and the summer willows moving gently in the wind, changing shades of green in the sunlight as the leaves flipped and swirled. Lying there, I would turn over and explore the clover and grass and wonder at the bigness of the place juxtaposed with the smallness of all the life crawling there. It was a whole other world!

Some days I would grab a big stick that I had found, tie a piece of string with a hook on it, and with a chunk of bread for bait, go fishing. Mallard ducks would waddle up the hill and my brother and sisters and I would feed them. Every spring a new family of baby ducks would appear. Birds (squirrels, too) enjoyed the seed that Dad put in the bird feeders. Woodchucks, squirrels, rabbits, chipmunks, and even deer would visit our yard. We had a garden so some invariably helped themselves to our vegetables. I loved going out in the early morning to pick raspberries for my breakfast. I had to stop myself from eating them all before I brought them inside. I would enjoy each season as it came, revelling in the beauty of the newest leaves in spring with their verdant green colour. In summer, the full canopy of the trees would sway in the breezes and bend to almost breaking when a big storm kicked up. In fall, the leaves would turn colour and we loved jumping in the piles we raked. Newly fallen snow topped the huge tree branches, creating a winter wonderland.

What did I feel? I felt awe at the beauty just in my backyard and wondered if my backyard was so beautiful, what did the rest of the world look like? I felt so alive as I breathed in the air, whether it was rich summer, crisp fall, freezing winter, or damp spring. How lucky was I to have this backyard for my playground!

My backyard is the place where I first awakened to my connection with the land, our environment, the earth - however one wishes to verbalize the place we call home. My wonder as a little girl at the beauty in this corner of the world expanded a thousand-fold when my family

⁸⁵ With the spring thaw, this slow-moving creek became very fast, overflowing its banks to flood the other side of the creek all the way to the back brush.

drove cross-country when I was eleven.⁸⁶ The awesomeness of Creation in such places as the Snake River Canyon, Grand Canyon, Yosemite, and the Grand Tetons (and so many other places we visited) filled me with even more wonder, rendering me speechless. I felt miniscule amidst the splendour and diversity of this land, and I was in awe of its beauty.

So many experiences in my growing-up years enriched a deepening connection with nature, too numerous to recount here, but which include three high school Biology courses with inspiring teachers and outdoor experiential components, six weeks living in the bush in Michigan's Upper Peninsula learning field skills and environmental sciences, and camping and canoeing on Lake Chateaugay in New York's Adirondack Mountains for two summers. Amidst formal learning were quiet moments breathing in the fresh air, enjoying the peace brought by gentle breezes, gazing wide-eyed at the twenty-billion and more stars in the night sky, revelling in being and in the very gift of life. Maybe the feelings were unconscious at first, but for my well-being and peace of mind, I needed to be in nature to warm my spirit.

These feelings grew into and reinforced my desire to pursue an undergraduate degree in environmental science at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. In my final year (1982-83), wondering about the First Peoples of North America and their relationship with the land, I enrolled in an "American Indian Literature"⁸⁷ class and read 1970's fiction and non-fiction by various authors (McLuhan, 1971; Niehardt, 1959; Storm, 1972; Rosen, 1974; Dodge and McCullough, 1976; Silko, 1977). The 1969 protest on Alcatraz Island and the 1973 standoff at Wounded Knee are fresh in many of these authors' minds. Both prose and poetry interweave images from nature throughout, yet clearly express the authors' distress for their homelands and

⁸⁶ The year was 1972. The first Earth Day had taken place two years before. The "Keep America Beautiful" media campaign was in its prime.

⁸⁷ The term "American Indian" is used in this context because, during the 1960's, 1970's and 1980's in the United States of America, this was the phraseology of the day.

anger at their peoples' condition as a result of the injustices they have suffered at the hands of the "white man." Their concern for their lands, culture and identity is apparent amid their proclamations to rise up and retake control of their lives and their destiny and that of their future generations. Vine Deloria, Jr. summarizes these sentiments in his Foreword to *Voices from Wah'kon-tah* (Dodge and McCullough, 1976):

In the poetry of the modern Indian we find a raging sense of having been and a desperate pronouncement of future being, an effort beyond nobility that calls for recognition of the humanity and nationality of Indian existence (p. 11).

As a Jew, I am only too familiar with oppression and persecution and to being a minority, having grown up one of a handful of Jewish people in my high school during a time when print and broadcast media carried stories about the plight of Soviet Jews. The perseverance of the Jewish people through history is testimony to our collective will to keep alive our nationhood, our culture and way of life.

So it is that even before I met my husband, I felt some sense of connection with the Indigenous peoples of North America on three levels – because of my strong, personal connection with nature, of the extreme hardships experienced by both peoples at the hands of hegemonic, ethnocentric societies, and of the perseverance of both peoples through all the darkness. One major difference, of course, is that Indigenous peoples, not only of North America but throughout the world, continue to suffer injustices in their homes and homelands. This, however, is a topic for another dissertation.

I am a Jewish woman, married to a Haudenosaunee man, with two Haudenosaunee-Jewish sons. Being a part of these two cultural groups, one by birth and one by marriage, I have come to acknowledge my identity as bi-cultural. As I am a Jew by birth, I will explore these roots first.

I am of Eastern European descent, my ancestors being from what were once Austria-Hungary, Galicia, and the Russian Pale.⁸⁸ My ancestors, who came over in the late 1800's-early 1900's, while not instigators of colonialist transgressions in North America, certainly benefited from the European settlement of this continent. Subject to pogroms, discrimination and other acts of prejudice and oppression in Eastern Europe, my ancestors fled the "Old Country" in search of religious freedom and peace. One family settled in Rochester, New York; the other found their way to family in Ohio. In the sense that my family is from Europe, therefore, I am automatically perceived by "Others"⁸⁹ (Said, 1978) to be part of the white, dominant, colonizing society.

However, how I perceive myself is more nuanced than this simple categorization with its concomitant stereotypical, hegemonic implications. My Jewish education opened my eyes to my people's history and how, through the ages, we have been Other to the dominant peoples in society (Said, 1978). We have been exiled; we have been discriminated against, persecuted, and murdered because we were Other. The travesties of the Spanish Inquisition, the horrors of the

⁸⁸ While my paternal grandfather's family's origins in Eastern Europe are unknown, I learned that they spent a number of years in England before coming to America through Ellis Island. My paternal grandmother is from a small town named Smorgon, between Vilna and Minsk. On my maternal grandparents' side, the borders have shifted and the countries have changed names, but the present day locations are in and around Poland, Hungary and the Ukraine (Poryck is one of the towns we came from; it is about 80 km from the small town of Luts'k, in the state of Voliner). Special thanks to my mother and father, Elaine and Leonard Simon, and our cousin Gloria Kay for this information.

⁸⁹ Heretofore, "Other" will appear without quotation marks. When I speak of the Other, I am referring to the perception by Westerners (i.e., those of European ancestry) that they are superior to anyone different from themselves. This belief has imperialistic roots dating back to the exploration and colonization of the world by Europeans (Chilisa, 2012). Edward Said (1978) explores this topic in the context of European attitudes towards the Orient, whereby Euro-Westerners (the "Occident") presume to know about the Orient by "dominating, restructuring, and having authority over [it]" (p. 3; in Said's book, *Orientalism*, the Orient is the East inclusive of Arab nations and Islamic peoples). Gayatri Spivak (in Ashcroft et al, 2000) coins the term "Othering" to "denote a process through which Western knowledge creates differences between itself as the norm and other knowledge systems as inferior" (Chilisa, 2012; p. 8-9). Through "Othering," people have been marginalized on the basis of ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, and possibly any other demographic descriptor one may choose (Chilisa, 2012). Many problems associated with research of Indigenous peoples are based upon this presumption of superiority and universal truth by Euro-Western researchers (Smith, 1999).

Holocaust, the persecution of Soviet Jews, the plight of Falasha Jews, as well as modern day acts of anti-semitism, are testament to being Other.

As an impressionable teenager learning about my people's history and of the adversities Jews around the world continued to face in the 1970's, I internalized these feelings of Otherness. While I was fortunate not to have been subject personally to acts of prejudice, I certainly came to empathize with those who were, both among Jewish and Other minority groups – for I felt part of a minority growing up in a predominantly secular, Anglo-Saxon school district, acutely aware of my people's history and sensitive to present day incidents of anti-semitism. So to say that I am a white colonialist does not fit with how I feel as an individual.

I certainly recognize that how I perceive myself is not necessarily how the Indigenous peoples of this land may perceive me because of the advantages my family has enjoyed as a result of the colonization of North America. I have been conflicted over being white and benefitting from the suffering of Others. To resolve this inner struggle, I have educated myself to become consciously aware of the history and ongoing challenges facing Indigenous peoples of North America and around the world. Being conscious of *my* Otherness has sensitized me to Others' Otherness. This sensibility has influenced how I live my life, how I think and feel, and who I am as a person. So, while I am a beneficiary of this land's colonization, I do relate emotionally and intellectually to being Other. As such, I strive to live in a way that remembers the tragedies that have befallen both my people and the Indigenous peoples of this land. Unable to change the past, I have chosen to live my life in a decolonizing way, shunning prejudice and supporting Indigenous peoples through my everyday living, in my family life, with this doctorate, and in my work.

This brings me to the other half of my bi-cultural self. My husband and I have consciously lived our lives together in an inter-cultural way. We have raised our sons with both our traditions, weaving them together into the fabric of our being – as a couple, as a family. Having only known one way of seeing the world as I was growing up, at the age of twenty-five, I began learning another way of seeing the world when Mark invited me to attend spring ceremonies with him in 1986. We traveled to Ontario’s Haliburton Highlands to ceremonies with Mooshum Peter O’Chiese and about fifteen people. Thus began my “structured learning” in Indigenous knowledge, a way of knowing and being according to Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle learnings.

The embarrassing story I shared at the beginning of this chapter shows that my Indigenous education had a rocky start, and that not everything went smoothly for me at ceremonies. Over the years, I have learned to cook traditional foods, including elk stews, moose, bison, and venison, wild rice, bannock and more. While I still do not buy pork, I have learned to cook elk and bison sausages. I am grateful to my aunties and kokums for their patience with me as I have stumbled, not only in the kitchen but also at other times during ceremonies. Thankfully, nothing has gone wrong too seriously. We laugh at all our mistakes, some of which I am happy not to be the guilty party. For example, one year a woman reheated some spaghetti. She wanted to add some water so the pasta would not stick to the pot. She picked up a kettle and poured in what she thought was water but which turned out to be coffee. So, “coffee spaghetti” was invented! We ate it anyway. These stories are recalled in later years, and we have a good laugh while we work.

This is all part of “earning the learning,” about which I have already spoken, and is a mixture of hard work over a long period of time with laughter, and learning not to take oneself

too seriously. The following story is another reflection of mine from my first year in ceremonies.

This story is more hard work than humour.

The first couple days in ceremonies are intensely physical. The women have several important responsibilities in preparation for the fast. In my first ceremonies, I had no clue why we were doing what we were doing but, intuitively, I felt it was inappropriate to ask "why?" I followed the head woman, Shirley Williams, and the other women and helped to the best of my ability in any way I was directed. Without fully understanding the 'why' of everything, I observed by working alongside the other women that how we were going about what we were doing was out of the deepest respect and appreciation for the gifts of Creation. We smudged each day so that we were 'clean' and 'of good minds' and focused for the day's work ahead. When we gathered our materials from the land, we offered tobacco to express our gratitude for these gifts, to assure them we were using only what we needed and only for a good purpose. We gathered cedar. As there was not a lot of cedar to be found, we also collected bulrushes. We had to clean the cedar and bulrushes and line the floors of the tepee and the sweat lodge, both of which the men had constructed. We had to find and gather rocks for the turtle and then we had to make the turtle, digging the rocks into the earth around the central fire pit in the tepee. These first two days of ceremonies were extremely busy. Then the feast before the fast had to be prepared – all in one day.

All the while, the men were fulfilling their responsibilities: erecting the tepee, gathering materials for and building the sweat lodge, gathering the sweat rocks, chopping wood for the tepee and the sweat lodge, among other obligations.

During the next four days, while the fasters were doing their hard work all alone, in the camp we worked to be of good minds and in good spirits, supporting the fasters with our positive energy, our good humour and laughter. Each night in the tepee, we would smoke the pipe, sing and drum, offer tobacco, listen to Mooshum Peter, and express our gratitude for the fasters and the hard work they were doing. On the final day, we were all very happy the fasters were 'coming out.' We prepared a huge feast to welcome them back.

Of course, as I have already mentioned, I had no clue about anything during my first spring ceremonies. I thought I was going to be camping with Mark for ten days in the wilderness. Little did I know (or did Mark, for that matter) that he would be fasting. On the second day Mooshum Peter said to Mark that he should think about fasting, which Mark interpreted as he should be fasting. In essence, then, I was camping on my own in the Haliburton Highlands with a whole group of people I had never met before. I was helping with tasks about which I had no understanding why I was doing them, how they were important, or why they were being done in a particular way. It was quite the initiation!

I remember one of the biggest questions in my mind during this first year was about the division of labour. As a teenager in the 1970's during the peak of the women's liberation movement, in a household where the women outnumbered the men, I along with my sisters were extremely vocal about making sure our brother completed his chores and did not shirk his responsibilities. At these first Spring ceremonies, I silently questioned certain practices: the distinct separation of roles, the dress code where women were required to wear long skirts, men

keeping fire and chopping wood, women taking care of the food and water. A few years earlier, I had had to chop wood for my cabin's wood stove for six weeks in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan in sub-zero weather so I was quite capable with an axe. However, I was not allowed to chop wood during ceremonies. I refrained from asking 'why' as I did not want to disrespect the ceremonies or these protocols which had been followed for generations. While I was not the only "white" person there, I was certainly the newest and, again, I deferred to my intuition. I knew that these protocols must have had good reason for being upheld for they had persevered for centuries.

This and other questions ran counter to how I was raised and who I understood myself to be as a young woman growing up during the second wave of the feminist movement (Hewitt, 2010). Over the next twenty-eight years, however, I have learned about Indigenous holistic thinking through the experience of doing ceremonies, and I have come to "double-understand" reasons for the distinct protocols for women and men. For those ten days or so, I have been able to set aside my Western training in binary-dualist thinking while the community gathers to practice another way of knowing and being. I have come to realize that male and female roles, while different, are not the lesson to be learned; the *follow-through* is the lesson – how we live together, how we relate, how we behave, how we think. Indigenous thinking requires a holistic view, an understanding of community and the larger purpose of how to live together and in balance, not simply the specific tasks at hand. Mooshum Michael and Mooshum Peter summarize this as "chop-wood-carry-water," stressing that all tasks performed together are essential for ceremonies to be successful and fasters supported in the best way possible. Setting aside my Western-based binary-dualist thinking in terms of the distinct tasks reserved for women and those for men, setting aside my ego, I have come to understand that the learning embedded

in the process and protocols of fulfilling the various tasks is what is important, as these learnings (not the differences in roles) are meant for everyday living.⁹⁰

Of course, I did not learn this lesson that first year or even the second. This realization arose after many years of attending ceremonies when I discerned how amazingly all tasks contributed to the whole – the “whole” being ceremonies where everyone worked with a common goal, a focused intention to be of good mind as we supported the fasters on their journeys.

One of the lessons learned is the great deal of hard work required long before ceremonies even commence, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. Wilson (2008) emphasizes this point with an observation shared by Minnecunju Elder Lionel Kinunwa: “A ceremony . . . is not just the period at the end of the sentence. It is the required process and preparation that happens long before the event” (pp. 60-61). At the end of one year’s ceremonies, we look at the calendar and the new moons for the following spring and tentatively establish the dates for the next year’s ceremonies. A lot of hard work and sacrifice, not just on our part, are required in preparing for ceremonies. Mark has to plan to take time off work. I have to make sure my volunteer and professional responsibilities are covered, and when our sons Jake and Michael were in elementary and secondary school, I had to meet with teachers and prepare them for the extended absence, explaining that no schoolwork would be completed while we were away.

During the year, we are on the lookout for additional gear we may need, including specific items for the ceremonies themselves. When we hosted ceremonies in Ontario, we were responsible for purchasing a tepee and other resources so we had to budget accordingly. When

⁹⁰ So, while I suspend my Western-based habits of binary-dualist thinking during ceremonies, Indigenous learnings of holism and inclusive perspectives for different points of view have influenced how I think in everyday living in Western society outside of ceremonies. These learnings are not dissimilar to alternative Western views, such as in ecofeminist thought.

we have traveled to British Columbia (BC) for ceremonies, again, we have needed to set aside sufficient funds. Each year, we have gathered our ceremonial articles and have prepared for backwoods camping with cooking gear, tents, sleeping bags, etc., and for all weather as we have held ceremonies in rain, snow and hail. As ceremonies approach, our anticipation builds and we prepare to arrive with a good mind and good heart.⁹¹

My husband and I brought our sons to their first ceremonies when they were four-and-a-half and three years old. Actually, we were in BC for ceremonies when I was pregnant with our first child in the spring of 1990. My experience that year influenced how I prepared for and what I packed in 1995:

In 1990, I turned out to be the only woman in camp! I was still fairly new to ceremonies so that was a big learning in and of itself. Luckily, Mooshum Michael helped me as did his wascapeos. Also, some women came for the final feast so I had help preparing the meal. Being pregnant was not an issue as I was just at the beginning of my second trimester.

The issue was the "outhouse," which was actually an open area set away from the rest of the camp. I will never forget this outhouse. To get to the seat, I had to walk along two logs and sit down facing an incredibly magnificent view. The ocean was miles away in the distance. Sometimes a bald eagle soared passed. The forest was all around me. We were high on a mountain and this outhouse was open to the elements, one of which was a precipice a few feet in front of where I was perched, straight down! The vista was breathtaking. So was the cliff! Not knowing what to expect in 1995, with my two small boys, I envisioned a similar outhouse and so I came prepared, insisting that Mark find some space in our luggage to pack the port-a-potty.

Well, when we unpacked the port-a-potty, immediately it became the object of many a joke. To this day, we laugh about it. The wascapeos who prepared the site for camping had dug deep holes for a couple of outhouses, which were supported by wood and wrapped in canvas with a standard wood plank on which a plastic toilet seat rested. Another learning that I should not have worried, as the wascapeos would have ensured a safe place for my sons to take care of business.

This is another camp story which has become an entertaining memory for my ceremonial family. While some stories are rather embarrassing, I take it all in stride as I am not the only source of humour. We all get to laugh at each other and with each other. Over the years, these

⁹¹ Spiritual, mental, and physical preparations to go on a fast are other aspects to preparing for ceremonies, and I share a bit about this in Chapter 7.

stories have accumulated and have provided a constant source of amusement as we work hard or are relaxing and visiting around a campfire.

Being a Helper

I helped in ceremonies for twenty-one years before my first fast. In the early years, when I first started helping in ceremonies and I was becoming aware of the depths of meaning in the Medicine Circle, I truly did not think I had a right to fast. After all, I am not an Indigenous person; this was not my culture and I did not want to overstep my bounds. Over the years, I developed a deep respect for this way of knowing and I continued to think that my place, as a non-Indigenous person, was as a helper. After all the white colonizers did to the Indigenous peoples, appropriating their lands, banning their ceremonies, prohibiting their languages, killing them and destroying their ways of life and their connections to the land, the last thing I thought I could do was fast, which to me seemed to be another example of stealing. I did not wish to perpetuate imperialist actions and be looked upon as another white person helping herself to something so central to the Indigenous peoples who, after centuries of oppression and repression, were beginning to renew themselves and their ways. I wished to help this renewal and restoration of their culture.

So I was content with working hard and helping, supporting Mark in his fasts and the others in their fasts. When our sons were old enough, I was proud to support them in their fasts. Four, eight, twelve, sixteen, then twenty years passed. Over this period of time, my role in ceremonies evolved from helper to teacher, as newer helpers started asking me questions and I was able to answer them. When I finally presented Mooshum Michael with tobacco to discuss the appropriateness of me fasting, he asked, “What took you so long?”

Reflecting on all of this now as I write this story, I realize that my thinking obstructed what I was feeling. I finally acknowledged this feeling when I intuitively felt that a fast was the best way for me to sort through some issues and I drummed up the courage to present Mooshum with tobacco. As noted at the beginning of this chapter, these two qualities, thinking and feeling, both reside in the western direction of the Medicine Circle. They balance each other. One has to reason through different issues; part of that reasoning process *must* be to check one's feelings. I had denied myself that important step for many years.

What I was feeling was a deepening connection with and commitment to an Indigenous way of knowing and being. After attending ceremonies for a number of years, I began understanding the Medicine Circle in new and profound ways, and the inherent connections I had with nature strengthened into a living relationship. Over twenty years of helping, I had developed an understanding of this *other* way of seeing the world and being in the world, distinct from how I grew up in the Western mindset. I had learned so much, in fact, that people in ceremonies were turning to me for answers to their questions. I resisted formally acknowledging this change in my role with a fast as I was ever-conscious of the fact that I was not Indigenous and for all the intellectualizing I had been prone to do (as discussed above), not feeling it was my place to fast.

At a deeper level, however, this different way of knowing fit so well with the core of my being. Joseph Couture, a Metis-Cree, affirms what I was feeling in this way:

Regarding the "sharing of secrets," there are those who fear and object that the white man will take over Native spirituality, were he to learn the "secrets," and again, one ultimate time, leave the Native absolutely bereft. This is a most understandable and significant apprehension which, on closer examination however, falls away because the requirements of the "learning" of the "secrets" are such that, were non-Indians to acquire the "knowledge," they would be "trustable"- for, in a sense, they would no longer be non-Indian! (1991a, p. 67).

While I will never claim to be Indigenous, I have endeavoured to be “trustable” with respect to ceremonies and learning these ways. Couture’s words encapsulate what I was thinking together with what I was feeling and what I needed to acknowledge within my persona. I had come to a point in my life where I could not ignore the connection between what I had come to know and understand in my mind and what I felt with my whole being. I needed to acknowledge this understanding and express my gratitude. I also needed to reflect on years of volunteering in my community (including a challenging year as president of my synagogue), having had little time for myself, by myself over the course of several years. Unable to ignore my weariness any longer, the time had come to take care of myself. What better way to do this than through a fast?

Others may imagine different ways of taking care of oneself – going to a spa, going on vacation, escaping to a cottage on a lake. Fasting? Yes. I *needed* to do this, for this Indigenous way of being had become part of who I am and how I view the world.

Exploring my Positionality in Research with the Medicine Circle

In summary, while I acknowledge the Western paradigm in which I was raised, I also acknowledge the significance of the Indigenous way of knowing and being in the world. I fathom both worldviews as contributing existential meaning in equally important, yet distinct manners. This stance, and hence my location with respect to my research, may be illustrated using the Medicine Circle. Another layer of the Medicine Circle depicts Western and Indigenous knowledge systems as two parts of a whole, as illustrated in the diagram below:

Figure 3.1: A Medicine Circle and the Four Original Peoples of Creation⁹²



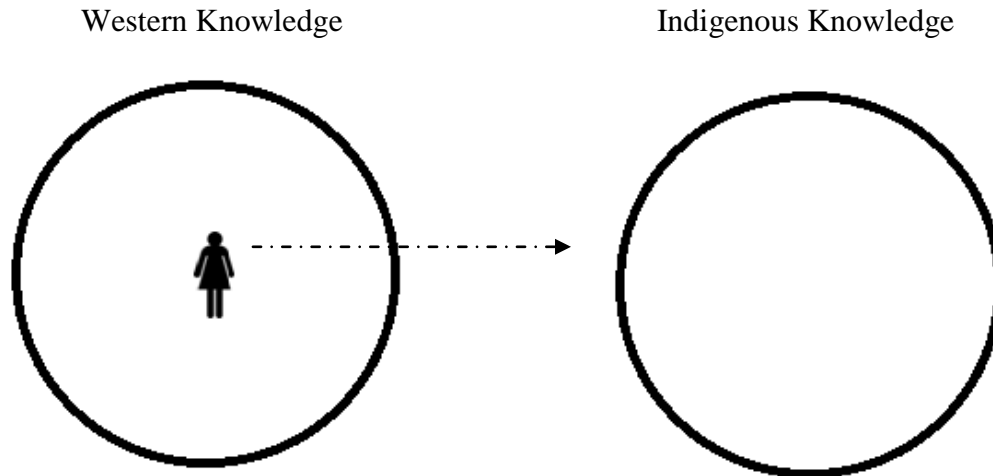
As Figure 3.1 reveals, according to the Medicine Circle, all peoples living in the world today derive from four original peoples.⁹³ Mooshum Peter has said that the sun shines equally on all peoples. This impartiality on the sun's part is extended to the respective knowledge systems of all peoples. All knowledge systems are equal and have inherent gifts to be appreciated by and shared with all peoples. A common misconception of this Medicine Circle is that it is based on race (i.e., skin colour). This is not the case. This teaching is based upon societal characteristics or "gifts," which each of the four peoples of the world contribute to the whole of existence. While further explanation is beyond the scope of this dissertation, suffice it to say, each of the gifts are parts of the whole, and as such, each are equally essential. As alluded to above, these gifts are embodied in the respective knowledge systems.

⁹² Source: All Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circles presented are as taught by Peter O'Chiese and Michael Thrasher, personal communications, 1986-present. The four colours represent many things, beginning with the four original gifts of Creation. All peoples possess and share these abilities. Some peoples have a certain affinity for a particular gift as has become evident in their cultures and knowledge systems.

⁹³ Today, the distinct lines are blurring as more people are of mixed heritage. The original gifts remain intact, though, and more than one set of gifts may be available to an individual of mixed heritage. Framing this in terms of the laws of nature, the one constant in natural law is change, so these changes are, in some sense, to be expected. That is, even though distinct lines are shown in a Medicine Circle to delineate the equinoxes and solstices (as in Figure 1.4), in life a period of transition accompanies the change in seasons, as their actual onset shifts from year to year, blurring the lines. Change is inevitable, and each year is different.

The above Indigenous perspective on world knowledge systems differs markedly from the Western approach, which may be illustrated in the following manner:

Figure 3.2: Western View of Western and Indigenous Knowledge Systems



As illustrated, a Western assumption regarding Indigenous and Western knowledge systems is that they are two distinct entities, perpetuating a discrete (i.e., limited and bounded), binary-dualist attitude (Waters, 2004). That is, there is one knowledge system superior to all Other knowledge systems. A duality connotes two of something. Western dualist thought tends to reduce a whole into distinct (i.e., bounded) parts; in their simplest form, they are characterized as one and the Other. Binary oppositional thinking is the evaluative component of reductionism, in which the two are compared to each other to determine which is better or worse, right or wrong. Binary dualist thinking places Western knowledge as superior to Other knowledges (Waters, 2004).

In research circles, the conventional approach to examining Indigenous peoples and their cultures has been from a Western perspective, through such Western fields of study as anthropology, ethnography, and the like, using a Western research methodology. Smith (1999) summarizes the implications of past research of Indigenous peoples:

From the vantage point of the colonized . . . the term ‘research’ is inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism. The word itself, ‘research’, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world’s vocabulary. . . Just knowing that someone measured our ‘faculties’ by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are. It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us. . .

This collective memory of imperialism has been perpetuated through the ways in which knowledge about indigenous peoples was collected, classified and then represented in various ways back to the West, and then, through the eyes of the West, back to those who have been colonized (pp. 1-2).

As one can imagine from Smith’s mention of such an extremely objectivist and objectionable research method as to use millet seeds to measure one’s intelligence, the conventional, positivist Western approach to research has been fraught with resistance and animosity. Indigenous peoples have been treated as objects of study since colonial times and the breadth and value of their knowledge systems have been trivialized (Chilisa, 2012; Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Haig-Brown, 2008; McGregor, 2009; Smith, 1999). Western attitudes have served to denigrate and demean anything other than the West’s paramount system of knowledge. Indeed, historically, Indigenous peoples were considered to be “uncivilized” and in need of “salvation,” as they were seen to be “uneducated” as evidenced by their “unsophisticated”⁹⁴ means of communication, that is, the absence of the printed word (Smith, 1999; Battiste and Henderson, 2000).

Returning to the diagram above (Figure 3.2), this Western approach to viewing Others in the world and conducting research about them is illustrated by placing the researcher in the Western circle of reference, using a Western paradigm to examine Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges. The white colour symbolizes the homogenizing tendencies of positivist

⁹⁴ These words are placed in quotations because they are indicative of the value judgments commonly made by Western peoples as they explored and colonized the world beginning in the 15th century.

research when viewing Others through a universalist, diffusionist lens (i.e., the belief that there is one Truth that needs to be spread to all peoples of the world; Battiste & Henderson, 2000).

While positivist methodologies based in the scientific method and experimentation still exist as they have a valid role to play in certain research (i.e., primarily quantitative analysis in the physical sciences), alternative Western research paradigms have evolved for qualitative research in the social sciences, which aim to be less objectifying and more culturally sensitive (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Denzin, Lincoln, & Smith, 2008). For example, critical theory is considered a logical starting point to adapt feminist and participatory action research methodologies, among others, addressing shortcomings of earlier research methods based on positivist and post-positivist approaches (as defined by Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Wilson, 2008). These adaptations strive for more beneficial processes and outcomes and promote collaborative methods between Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 2008; Saavedra and Nymark, 2008; Tomaselli et al, 2008; Jones and Jenkins, 2008).

Beginning with Smith's groundbreaking book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (1999), Indigenous scholars have begun articulating their own research methodologies. If research is to be conducted about Indigenous peoples and their cultures, then Indigenous peoples themselves are to dictate the parameters and processes of that research from a distinctly Indigenous paradigm (Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008).

As the subject matter of my doctoral research involves Indigenous knowledge, therefore, I have chosen to apply an Indigenous research methodology. I am placing myself in a location where I am able to examine Western knowledge (regarding sustainability) using an Indigenous paradigm. In essence, the tables have been turned. That is, I am applying an Indigenous framework to examine Western concepts of sustainability, as illustrated in Figure 3.3. This

approach is conflated with an exploration of how Indigenous knowledge may contribute to the dominant discourse and inform a path forward, given the uncertainties we face in the future with respect to climate change and adaptability.

Figure 3.3: Viewing Western Sustainability from within an Indigenous Paradigm



This Indigenous approach contrasts with the binary-dualist view of the world as perpetuated by dominant Western society (Waters, 2004). Instead, there is one circle. Each of us stands in the centre of our own circle, understanding that there are many perspectives to viewing the world, which is consistent with the holistic nature of Indigenous thinking. The Indigenous perspective understands that abstract boundaries do not exist, that there is no such thing as binary-dualism, where oppositional constructs of superior/inferior, good/evil, and right/wrong govern one's view of the world. All knowledges, all perspectives, exist within a whole, are equally valid, and contribute to all that is possible to know in distinct yet valuable ways, as we are all part of one Creation. Indeed, there are many different perspectives within the world represented by the different points on and within the circle (or the immeasurable number of degrees if one thinks of a sphere).

As a non-Indigenous woman raised according to Western ways which promote discrete, binary dualities, I have had the privilege of being able to learn through ceremonies another way of knowing and being in the world, one which professes the complementary nature of integrated analysis and reason from different points of view. I acknowledge that common ground exists between ecofeminist principles that I endorse in Western thought and Indigenous ways of knowing. For example, both respect the interconnections between human and non-human life and communal, reciprocal relations (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). Like Indigenous ways of knowing, ecofeminism challenges dualistic thinking (Plumwood, 1991) and influences discourse to critically examine conventional, hierarchical ideologies by considering Others' perspectives (Cannella & Manuelito, 2008). So, my doctoral work correlates/co-relates well with ecofeminism. Yet, I do not label my approach as ecofeminist as that would be applying a Western label to an Indigenous process. I respect their distinctiveness and their mutuality.

How does the Western Direction Relate to Sustainability?

This chapter, so far, has been about my learning journey and my positionality. As the western direction of the Medicine Circle teaches learnings about balance (i.e., balancing thoughts and feelings), I speak of balance in terms of my considered choice to locate myself within an Indigenous research paradigm. I turn the tables, so to speak, privileging an Indigenous approach to explore the Western construct of sustainability and how Indigenous ways of knowing may inform the discourse, rather than the conventional imposition of a Western lens for research about all things Western. Indigenous, or otherwise.

To relate briefly this western direction of the Medicine Circle to the topic of sustainability (as much more will be discussed in the Second Journey), I focus also on balance, as it is an important aspect in the pursuit of sustainability. First, equitable consideration of

environmental and social issues with economic priorities is one ideal of sustainability which has been introduced earlier in this dissertation (recall the three-legged stool and other representations in Figure 1.1). The imbalance which has occurred in practice, favouring profit over people and the planet, is an obstacle hindering progress toward sustainability objectives (Victor, 2008).

Another example of how balance is a fundamental aspect of sustainability is shown in Figure 3.1, which illustrates the Medicine Circle learning that all peoples of the world are equal under the sun. A sustainability challenge is the imbalance that exists among peoples of the world, that all peoples are *not* equal in their capacity to meet basic needs for survival (Brown, 2008; Lozano, 2013). One purpose of the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle is to explore how Indigenous ways of knowing may inform sustainability discourse to address this and other social inequities, balancing Western with Indigenous points of view. Briefly presented here is a general overview of the concern.

One of the Brundtland Report’s main objectives of sustainable development is to reduce poverty around the world. To do so, the WCED report promotes economic growth initiatives with environmental protection as a priority (WCED, 1987). In reality, as shown with the hydroelectric projects in the previous chapter, some sustainable development projects have failed to eliminate poverty. Whereas some people have benefitted from increased access to irrigation and electricity, others have suffered tremendously.

As well, examining current trends, industrialized nations are seeing a growing disparity between rich and poor within their own borders as well as with developing and emerging countries (Brown, 2008; Lozano, 2013). Socio-economic indicators in Canada, for example, illustrate the gap between many Indigenous peoples and other Canadians. According to the 2011 National Household Survey, the average income for Aboriginal earners is \$29,780; for non-

Aboriginal income earners, it is \$40,500. The Aboriginal unemployment rate is 15%, compared to 7.8% for the rest of Canadians. For people ages 25 to 64, 48.4% of Aboriginal people (compared to 64.7% of non-Aboriginals) have a postsecondary qualification.⁹⁵ For the rest of Canada, a Statistics Canada analysis shows: “In 1982, the median income of the 1 per cent was \$191,600, and that of the 99 per cent was \$28,000. By 2010, the median income of the one per cent had risen to \$283,400, and that of the 99 percent increased by only \$400, to \$28,400.”⁹⁶

Similar disparities may be found around the world, preventing sustainability from even being considered as long as these inequities continue (Missimer et al, 2010). For example, the World Bank notes that about 1.4 billion people in the world still live on less than \$1.24 per day (in United States currency; Missimer et al, 2010). Fair Trade and other non-governmental organizations, such as Rainforest Alliance, recognize the imperative of sustainable livelihoods as part of their mandates and work toward ensuring livable wages. Yet disparities prevail and the world is a long way from being sustainable for all peoples everywhere. As this topic is not the focus of my dissertation, I am unable to fully explore the complexities and range of socio-economic, environmental, and political issues contributing to inequities around the globe. However, the western direction’s relevance to this subject will be revisited in the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle.

Summary

Wilson (2008) stipulates, “. . . [Y]ou are answerable to *all* your relations when you are doing research” (p. 57). Weber-Pillwax (2003) observes, “All forms of living things are to be

⁹⁵ For more information on statistics, see <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/index-eng.cfm>. These statistics are not meant to detract from the many Indigenous peoples who are overcoming impacts of the Indian Act and residential schools to live better lives.

⁹⁶ Retrieved February 13, 2014 from: <http://www.canadianprogressiveworld.com/2013/01/28/canadas-richest-1-grabbed-10-6-of-all-income-rich-poor-gap-widened-statscan/#.UvOS4fldXuE>. The calculations for the top one per cent are based on a total of 25.5 million tax filers.

respected as being related and interconnected . . . Respect means living that relationship in all forms of interactions” (pp. 49-50).

I have dedicated this chapter to locating myself in relation to my research with these tenets in mind. As a non-Indigenous, Jewish woman situating myself within an Indigenous research paradigm, I live according to my Jewish upbringing and aim to be true to my ancestral roots. I also acknowledge my family’s Indigenous heritage and my deep connection with the Cree-Nishnaabe Indigenous way of knowing that I have learned through years of helping in ceremonies and spending time with Elders and other Traditional Knowledge Holders. This Indigenous way of being influences my everyday living through how I see the world and how I care for all my relations, which favourably coincide with my Jewish values and way of life.⁹⁷ As my dissertation juxtaposes Indigenous ways of knowing in a balanced examination of Western sustainability, I have dedicated my doctoral journey to honouring an Indigenous approach to my studies and my research. In doing so, I am accountable to my ceremonial community, and I present this dissertation as a demonstration of how Elders’ wisdom passed down generationally and through traditional means is compatible with, and may be applied equitably in concert with, the academy’s goals for doctoral candidates.

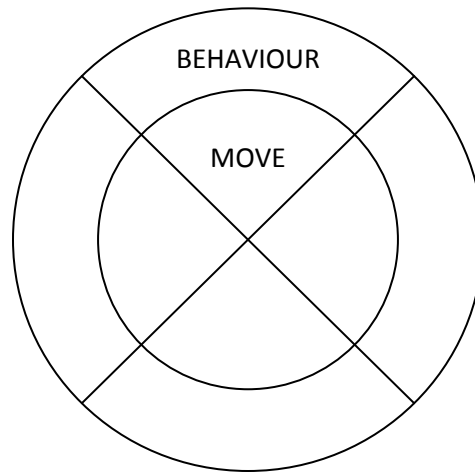
Distilling this discussion down to a single concept, the one that I return to is time, a central theme of this dissertation. Wheeler (2005) notes, “to acquire certain kinds [of knowledge] one is obligated to adhere to the rules of its acquisition. Access to knowledge requires long-term commitment, apprenticeship, and payment in various forms” (p. 203). She concludes,

⁹⁷ Exploring how Indigenous ways of knowing and my Jewish values and way of life intersect is a topic for another dissertation. Due to space considerations, I have examined reflexive topics primarily from the perspective of Indigenous ways of knowing, as this dissertation is located within an Indigenous framework.

. . . [I]t is vital that researchers become fully informed about their roles, responsibilities, and limits according to local standards and protocols. Clearly [researchers] willing to engage in oral history research must take the time to learn how to learn. Learning how to learn from another people's point of view is not a revolutionary concept, but it is hard work (pp. 203-204).

Time is a fundamental prerequisite when learning about Indigenous knowledge through ceremonies. Taking the time to learn this way, one understands one's "roles, responsibilities, and limits" and, at the same time, "how to learn" these ways, which is, indeed, "hard work" – not just physically, but mentally and spiritually as well. Shortcuts taken through reading about Indigenous knowledge are prone to produce incomplete understandings of the whole. Those wishing to conduct work associated with Indigenous peoples and Indigenous knowledges will need to understand that more time than less is necessary to cultivate relationships, establish trust, and honour expectations for accountability. As well, more time is required to gain understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing with a Medicine Circle in order to wholly appreciate the depth of its learnings. Perhaps twenty-eight years of attending ceremonies is not required by everyone. For myself, I am grateful to have had this time. I am also grateful to be able to look forward to more time with all my relations both in ceremonies and in the everyday ceremony of life.

Chapter 4 – NORTH: Preparing for the Second Journey ‘Round



“First, let’s talk about it; then let’s pray about it; then get organized; then get mobile.” When Mooshum Peter O’Chiese said these words at my first ceremonies, I thought he was giving us actual instructions – which he was. Unbeknownst to me that introductory year, he was also referring to the four directions of the Medicine Circle. Mooshum Michael shares the story of his first years in ceremonies with Peter. Initially, each year was dedicated solely to just one of the directions. He or another wascapeos asked a question and Mooshum Peter answered, “Let’s talk about that.” They would spend the entire ceremonies that year on the eastern direction. The next year, Mooshum Peter said, “Let’s pray about that” to the question that was posed. That year, ceremonies focused on the southern direction. The third and fourth years, respectively, were dedicated to “getting organized” and “getting mobile.” Throughout the years, Mooshum Peter and his wascapeos pursued deeper understanding of Creation and the laws of nature with the Medicine Circle. Talk about taking one’s time to learn! The rigour and protocols to which they adhered yielded a degree of higher learning that is certainly on par with a doctorate!

Fast forward to when my sons were beginning to attend ceremonies. When they were old enough, they began fasting – first from sunrise to sundown; then one or two whole days; then four days. When they fasted for a day, Mooshum Michael would instruct them to carry one of the coloured prints and think about that particular direction, beginning in the east. In reality, they probably just slept the day away or whittled a stick or built a chair out of wood – such is the attention span of a seven or ten year old – or even a thirteen year old, urging time to pass more quickly so they could return to camp – and EAT!!

When we returned home after ceremonies, Mark would hang the print in their rooms in each of their respective directions to serve as reminders that the learnings of the Medicine Circle are intended for everyday life outside of ceremonies. When sibling rivalry reared its head or if one had an issue that troubled him at school, I recall sitting with each of them on their own, talking about the Medicine Circle and how they could use it to help them clarify the issue, cool off, sort out their feelings, and figure out a way to resolve the problem. Sometimes it worked, sometimes it didn’t – but at least it allowed them to catch their breath and remove themselves from the heat of the moment so their heads would not explode in anger at their brother or in frustration at school.

Introduction

The northern direction of the Medicine Circle focuses on movement and action, the “doing” of something; in other words, “getting mobile.” This chapter, therefore, is dedicated to preparing to “get mobile” for the next journey around the Medicine Circle. In essence, the First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle has explored how my doctoral project has been a demonstration of “research as ceremony” as described in Shawn Wilson's book (2008), *Research is Ceremony*. The Second Journey explores how my experiences in ceremonies have influenced me and have informed my research on Western sustainability and Medicine Circle learnings for sustainable living.

To prepare for this journey, I have organized this chapter according to the learnings from the above, introductory story. Figure 1.5 illustrates how these learnings are grounded in Creation. In “Talking About It,” I spend time exploring the northern direction and how it relates to sustainability by introducing the foundational learning of “miyopimatisiwin,” the Cree word for “way of the good life.” This learning is key to what is shared in the upcoming chapters.

In “Praying About It,” I spend time reflecting on points raised during the First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle. I focus on some of the challenges I have encountered, being non-Indigenous, a woman, and educated according to conventional, Western dualist thinking yet working within an Indigenous thought paradigm. The reflections shared may provide insights to others who may find themselves in a similar position, conducting research with Indigenous communities or organizations. In “Getting Organized,” I introduce the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle, fulfilling my promise in the Pre/Amble. Finally, “Getting Mobile” summarizes the chapter and invites the reader to continue the journey.

“Talking About It”

“Talking about it” in Indigenous ceremonies is the process of clarifying a particular subject or question. Time is spent articulating a problem and working to understand it from different points of view. In each chapter during the First Journey ‘Round, I have dedicated space to exploring how each direction pertains to the main focal point of the Second Journey ‘Round – sustainability. My purpose in doing so is to highlight key aspects of sustainability and share my understanding of how Indigenous learnings relate with and interpret these elemental considerations. In this section, I spend time doing so for the northern direction of the Medicine Circle.

Relating the Northern Direction to Sustainability

A fundamental learning of the Medicine Circle is the *miyopimatisiwin* in Cree. In Ojibwe, the phrase is *mino-bimaadiziwin*. An English translation is “the way of the good life.” In my first years in ceremonies, I recall Mooshum Peter referring alternately to the Red Road and the Sweetgrass Road. Mooshum Michael uses these words as well. As I do not know Cree, whenever they used the term “*pimatisiwin*,” my ear failed to catch the word, let alone its significance. Only after a few years of attending ceremonies did I begin picking up the word in songs and prayers. What is this Sweetgrass Road?

Sweetgrass is one of the four original medicines.⁹⁸ “Medicine” here is used in two ways. The first is the physical properties of sweetgrass: it smells sweet and when burned in a smudge, it blankets people with smoke to connect them with what the sweetgrass represents – kindness. As Mooshum Michael shares, “Grass is always kind to you, always gentle.”⁹⁹ Grass carpets the

⁹⁸ The others being tobacco, sage, and cedar.

⁹⁹ Thrasher, M. 1987. *The Blue Book*. An unpublished booklet prepared for workshops with counsellors and workers in social services programs for Aboriginal peoples.

earth, making the ground soft on which to walk and rest. In ceremonies, the gentle smoke of the smudge wafts over us, preparing and reminding us to be kind like the sweetgrass, to be of good mind in our work so a positive energy flows through the camp, supporting everyone in the community, helpers and fasters alike. Carrying this over to everyday living, sweetgrass reminds us to approach each new day with a good mind, being kind to “all our relations.”

The second way sweetgrass is “medicine” is with the sweetgrass braid. Again, Mooshum Michael notes, “One little strand [of grass] breaks easily; bring it together (braid it) and it is a rope, it has strength.”¹⁰⁰ Three cables of grass are woven together in a braid, which is used in the smudge for ceremonies. The braid represents the strength of our mind, body, and spirit, which weave together to form our whole selves. The kindness of the sweetgrass reminds us to be kind to ourselves. If just one of these links is weak, our health suffers. A physical ailment causes our bodies to suffer and, if prolonged, most likely has a negative effect on our mental fortitude and our spirit. Anyone who has cared for a loved one who has been ill for a long time is most likely affected mentally and spiritually, if not physically as well from worry and lack of sleep. Similarly, someone who has suffered a mental or emotional trauma which is ignored may become physically ill; one’s spirit certainly suffers in these instances. The sweetgrass braid emphasizes the importance of caring for all three equally – our bodies, minds, *and* spirits – so that all three remain strong for our overall health and well-being.

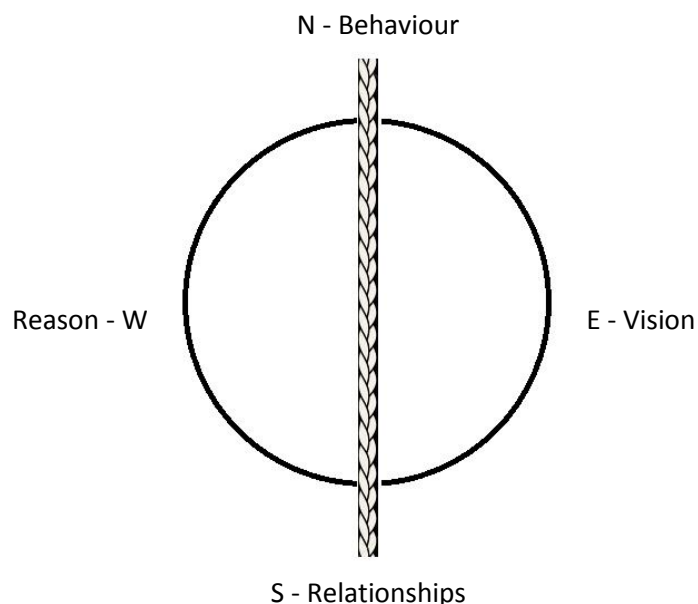
By extension, “the Sweetgrass Road,” refers to the combination of these two learnings about sweetgrass’ “medicine,” which begins with self-care. By taking care of ourselves, being of strong mind, body and spirit, we sustain ourselves in a healthy, balanced way. By being of good mind, living each day with kindness with “all our relations,” we are *walking* the Sweetgrass Road. This “walk” – a verb evoking an active, conscious process - begins with being kind to,

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

and taking care of oneself, taking responsibility for one’s behaviours, and having a good relationship with self. Achieving and maintaining our personal well-being enables each of us to extend that kindness to others - to “all our relations,” including human and non-human beings, including the earth. In ceremonies, helpers and fasters alike are working and living each day with these thoughts in mind – respect, caring, empathy, and sharing – practicing these kindnesses together so that we are better able to “walk the Sweetgrass Road” not just in ceremonies, but in our everyday lives.

This Sweetgrass Road is the miyopimatisiwin and is learned through understanding the connection between the north-south axis in the Medicine Circle (see Figure 4.1 below). The north-south axis connects our behaviours (movement in the north) directly with our relationships (in the south). Learnings associated with time (in the south) emphasize care for “all our relations” through kindness in our everyday actions/behaviours (the north) – toward ourselves, toward others, with all Creation.

Figure 4.1: The North-South Axis of the Medicine Circle – Miyopimatisiwin, the Sweetgrass Road



Our relationship with Creation is central when applying these learnings of miyopimatisiwin to the contemporary sustainability movement. Taking care of where we live is a fundamental tenet of both the sustainability movement and miyopimatisiwin. All relationships are two-way, reciprocal; in order to receive some benefit from a relationship, one is expected to give something in return. The other cannot be taken for granted; otherwise, the relationship is “kaput” – a Yiddish word for “lost” or “broken.”¹⁰¹ This concept is no different when dealing with our relationship with the earth. So far, the earth has sustained our lives unselfishly. What have we given in return for this generosity? “Take care of the land and it will take care of you” – Mooshum Peter’s words resonate here. The natural world upon which we rely for our very existence requires our care in return for its care of us.

In fasting ceremonies, a faster goes without the tangible necessities of life, food and water, for a number of days to be able to work on oneself, focusing on the health of mind and spirit rather than the pleasures of the body. Food and water are located on the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle in the east and west, respectively, as has already been shown in Figure 1.2. Take these physical necessities of life away, and the faster is left only with the north and south (air and sun for warmth, two gifts we cannot do without for more than a few minutes). On another level, the individual goes without food and water (the east and west) to be able to focus, reflect and work on one’s behaviour (the north) in one’s relationships (south). By removing food and water, the other gifts in the east and west become more accessible – looking inward (vision in the east) and reasoning through feelings and thoughts (in the west) so as to improve our relationships with self, others and the rest of Creation. Striving for better relations – being

¹⁰¹ Mooshum Peter O’Chiese used this word often. Retrieved October 19, 2013 from: <http://www.yiddishdictionaryonline.com/> and from: <http://www.cs.uky.edu/~raphael/yiddish/dictionary.cgi>.

kinder to self, others, and all Creation – brings each of us closer to walking that Sweetgrass Road, the miyopimatisiwin, which is “the way of the good life.”

Walking the Sweetgrass Road in our everyday lives – I envision this to be a sustainable way of living, “the way of the good life.” The Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle explores this possibility.

“Praying About It”

“Praying about it” in the context of the Medicine Circle is not the same as the Judeo-Christian understanding of prayer, bending or getting down on one’s knees and reciting written words to one’s Creator. In general terms, while prayer occurs in ceremonies in different ways, “praying about it” is taking the time to ponder more deeply a question or problem. Mooshum likens this to “peeling back the layers of an onion” to find what is hidden underneath.¹⁰² In a fast, “praying about it” is a turning inward, reflecting on personal decisions, examining one’s behaviour and understanding on a deeper level the reasons for certain choices. This is hard work and takes time.

“Praying about it” in Indigenous research, therefore, is to be understood as a process of self-reflection. As this is the final chapter of the First Journey ‘Round, which has provided the research context for this dissertation, I find this an appropriate section to share personal reflections and observations regarding experiences I have had during this doctoral journey. First, I reflect upon “research as ceremony;” second, upon challenges I have encountered as a non-Indigenous woman conducting research from within an Indigenous paradigm. Perhaps others finding themselves in similar circumstances may glean worthwhile insights and suggestions.

¹⁰² Michael Thrasher, personal communication, ceremonies, 1987-present.

Reflections on “Research as Ceremony”

The “three-R’s” – respect, reciprocity, and relationality, according to Weber-Pillwax (in Steinhauer, 2002; p. 73) – have been discussed by various authors advancing Indigenous research (Hoffman, 2013; Smith, 1999; Steinhauer, 2002; Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). When research is regarded as ceremony, all three principles are fundamentally essential to honour. Much has already been said regarding each of these in one form or another throughout this First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle. To summarize, respectful behaviour involves many responsibilities, including honouring the customs and following the protocols of the Elder(s) and/or community(ies) (Lightning, 1992; Wilson & Restoule, 2010). Depending on the customs of the people, presenting tobacco may be involved. This presentation, however, is only one aspect of respectful behaviour, which is usually done at the outset of one’s journey. Other expectations invariably exist to establish trust and maintain good relationships. Reciprocity is the notion of giving back. Based upon the premise, “Take care of the land and the land will take care of you,” to ensure a research process is reciprocal, Shawn Wilson raises these important questions for researchers to answer: “What am I contributing or giving back to the relationship? Is the sharing, growth and learning that is taking place reciprocal?” (p. 77). Relationality is the understanding of the centrality of relationships in our lives and when in a relationship, research or otherwise, one is expected to take care of those relationships, act responsibly, and be accountable for one’s actions (or inactions) (Wilson, 2008).

At the root of this discussion of the three-R’s is the requirement of time, a recurring theme throughout this dissertation. I have already quoted Wheeler (2005) who emphasizes the long-term commitment required to show one’s trustworthiness and gain access to certain kinds of Indigenous ways of knowing. Lightning (1992) echoes Wheeler’s point when he speaks of the importance of following customary protocols when in a learning relationship:

[The] term, the protocol, refers to any one of a number of culturally ordained actions and statements, established by ancient tradition, that an individual completes to establish a relationship with another person from whom the individual makes a request (p. 216).

“Rules” and “protocols” as used in these two quotes are synonymous. These take time, and honouring them is a necessary prerequisite in developing good relationships, building trust through one’s “actions” as well as “statements,” and being accepted as trustworthy. The benefits of taking one’s time and following the protocols are evident in the reciprocity one experiences. I have spent most of my adult life learning through ceremonies; knowing that I have been helping my ceremonial community continue its work to ensure their knowledge is kept alive and passed onto the next generation. The gifts of friendship and the learnings I have realized are beyond measure.

Through attending ceremonies over the years, I have internalized these Indigenous principles of respect, reciprocity and relationality, which have become second nature to me. I must admit that my parents had instilled in me these values as a child. Learning about them from an Indigenous perspective has broadened and enriched this foundation.¹⁰³ As such, from before its inception, I have endeavoured to proceed along this doctoral journey with these principles not only in mind but also in practice. When I first began my doctorate in 2009, I had yet to read the literature to see how authors had articulated these principles and the importance of time and relationship in Indigenous research. Having already internalized them, they have guided my doctoral work throughout these several years, as they have guided my everyday living as well.

These principles certainly form the epistemological, ontological and axiological foundation upon which my “research as ceremony” is grounded. From the outset, I can say that

¹⁰³ Learning from an Indigenous perspective has also reinforced for me the belief that while our cultures are distinct, common ground exists within Indigenous and Western foundational principles respecting human relationships. This is a topic for another dissertation.

my relationship with Mooshum is one deeply rooted in trust, respect and kinship. After twenty-eight years of helping and fasting in ceremonies, where the helpers and fasters who return each year have become a close-knit family, as a non-Indigenous person I am humbled to be part of this community. Mooshum has come to regard us as part of his family and he is certainly part of ours. He has known our sons since before they were born; he is their Mooshum.

With these understandings of relationality and reciprocity, the communal responsibility I hold in my doctoral research is to the ceremonial community of which I am a part. Throughout my doctoral journey, I have aimed to conduct myself and my doctoral work in such a way as to respect the relationships I have with my extended ceremonial family. By extension, as Mooshum represents the line of Elders who have cared for the knowledge upon which our ceremonies are based, I have endeavoured to honour the trust Mooshum has given me, hold dear our relationship, and respect the proper protocols for the knowledge he shares. Part of my responsibility in our relationship, as my “research is ceremony,” is to help Mooshum in his work by ensuring this dissertation is usable by and useful for the Indigenous communities and individuals he helps.

Reflections on Being Non-Indigenous in an Indigenous Paradigm

In Chapter Two, I explore various issues associated with “being care-full” for anyone involved in Indigenous research. In Chapter Three, I discuss how I, as a non-Indigenous person, am able to locate myself within an Indigenous research paradigm. In this section, I reflect upon some of the challenges I have encountered in doing so.

The first challenge I share may be common to anyone Indigenous or non-Indigenous trained in a Western educational system. Simply stated, so ingrained is a tendency to categorize, evaluate, and choose that which is preferable, that I have to be consciously aware of this binary-

dualist predisposition within the Western-trained thought process. Even though I say I am situated within an Indigenous thought paradigm, sometimes I forget and fall into the old habit of hierarchical thinking, assessing which is better or correct and which is worse or wrong. Indigenous ways of thinking consider all information as important contributors for a more complete understanding of the whole picture.

As an example, one of my professors pointed out that while some Western philosophers agree with my observation at the beginning of Chapter Three that feelings give rise to thoughts, others profess the opposite – that thoughts give rise to feelings. I immediately began drafting an explanation how the Medicine Circle traces this observation back to Creation and the laws of nature and, therefore, must be true, thinking the other must be false. Discussing this example with my husband, a professor of Indigenous Studies, he immediately reminded me that Indigenous ways of thinking evaluate issues based upon “either-and” rather than “either-or.”¹⁰⁴ That is, both/all perspectives are equally valid as diversity of thought is critical for better decision-making.

Mooshum shares the historical practice among tribal councils to sit and meet for days in order to determine which families would live in which parts of territories until it is time to reassess once again. Heads of clans would each have an opportunity to speak and share what they know about the land, how many are in their families/clans, and what their needs are. Having as much information as possible was the difference between life and death. Only after all the information was gathered and carefully considered were decisions made as to who will live where.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ Mark S. Dockstator, personal communication, March 21, 2014.

¹⁰⁵ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, October 28, 2013.

Since my first ceremonies, negotiating both Western and Indigenous mindsets has been at times confusing. When I catch myself beginning to evaluate an issue according to a Western-based binary-dualism, I have to remember to apply the holistic perspective of Indigenous thought. While I cannot fully reconcile the different ways of thinking (because their differences are how they are individual and distinguishable from the other), I acknowledge the various interpretations, because contributions from all points of view enrich and result in a more thorough understanding of the whole. I endeavour to be inclusive, consciously aware, and “care-full.” What else can I do? I do take heart in knowing I am not alone in this struggle. Waters (2004), for example, discusses her difficulty teaching the subject of logic to First Nations students in a way which engages them in a Western philosophical approach to reason and analysis and, at the same time, acknowledges and validates their Indigenous worldview as an equally effective means of conceptualization and reason.

I recall the first time I was confronted with this challenge in my first ceremonies in 1986. I have already related the story about the internal conflict I felt with respect to women’s roles in ceremonies – how I knew how to chop wood, but this was not something women were allowed to do in camp. From a Western, dualistic standpoint, I was viewing the situation through a lens that perpetuated a hierarchical, male-dominating mindset. I questioned whether I was being disrespected as not equal to men. Women were responsible for a number of tasks, including cooking the meals. Was I being relegated to the kitchen and placed in an inferior role?

From an Indigenous perspective, however, the understanding is quite different. Women and men have equally important roles in ceremonies, and all the different tasks must be done and protocols followed in support of one purpose – to support the community *as a whole*, inclusive of *all* Creation. To illustrate the balanced relationship between men and women in ceremonies,

Mooshum explains that a wascapeos' learning journey, as he takes on more responsibilities, includes specific practices to better understand women's roles. Through these experiences, the Elder is able to take another measure of a wascapeos and ensure he learns the respect due women. Mooshum also talks about the balance between men and women in the highest ceremony of them all – the Sundance. While the men may conduct the ceremonies, the “Grannie” selects the centre pole, showing that ceremonies could not function, or in some cases even begin, without women.¹⁰⁶ Paula Gunn Allen (1992) explains: “Every part of the oral tradition expresses the idea that ritual is gender-based, but rather than acting as a purely divisive structure, the separation by gender emphasizes complementarity” (p. 82). To summarize, while dualist thought generating oppositional or hierarchical positions has no place in ceremonies, the same holds true in research processes set within an Indigenous, holistic thought paradigm.

Apart from any confusion I personally have experienced juggling both thought paradigms, another challenge is translating this knowledge into the written word clearly enough for the reader to understand. Many iterations of various sections of my dissertation have been drafted as I have striven for clarity. An example to illustrate how these written words may be misread rests again with how ceremonies are organized. Protocols are established according to two facets of Creation: sun/fire (male) and moon/water (female). Someone reading this from a Western point of view may identify the two as a duality, which is accurate.¹⁰⁷ If not clear already, dualities are found throughout Creation (e.g., wet/dry; hot/cold; light/dark, etc.); oppositional binaries, however, are not found in Creation (e.g., right/wrong; better/worse;

¹⁰⁶ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 7, 2013.

¹⁰⁷ I acknowledge that this dualism is blurring with two-spirited, transgendered, bi-sexual, lesbian, and gay peoples. Given the above discussion, these gender distinctions may be viewed as existing along a spectrum or in a sphere. In ceremonies, roles are grounded in the oral tradition as it has been handed down across the generations. As Mooshum has explained to me, accommodations are made on an as-needed basis (Michael Thrasher, personal communication, March 11, 2014).

superior/inferior, etc.). From an Indigenous perspective, therefore, dualisms exist and may be understood as two points on a spectrum (or in a sphere), along which exist many points of view and different ways of organizing something. As in ceremonies (as grounded in Creation), hierarchical and oppositional value judgments (i.e., binary thinking) are not part of protocols. Part of a process may involve dividing the whole into parts while a later part of the same process requires fathoming the whole as one. Trying to explain clearly enough with the written word is challenging, especially when learning through experience is a key part of understanding.

In summary, keeping in mind the “either-and” and “either-or” distinction helps me negotiate both Western and Indigenous mindsets. That is, I strive to suspend (sometimes with lapses) the Western tendency toward binary, hierarchical thinking. Using this doctoral work as an example, while part of this dissertation is a critical examination of the dominant, neoliberal approach to sustainability, the critique is not to challenge Western advances in the field, but to challenge exclusionary positions. A purpose of this dissertation is not to choose between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing, but rather to see and balance their complementarities. I hope this discussion assists others wishing to conduct research within an Indigenous thought paradigm.

Another set of challenges I have faced during my doctoral journey pertains to the fact that I am non-Indigenous conducting Indigenous research. I have read a number of dissertations by non-Indigenous scholars who are in similar circumstances. Lambe (2004) identifies a number of criticisms leveled at such endeavours, which I address as follows. First, this research is not an effort to continue “a colonial legacy of assimilation” (Lambe, 2004; p. 25). Nor is it an effort to distort, manipulate or fabricate “oral traditions and cultural expressions of . . . Indigenous peoples” (Lambe, 2004; p. 25). I am not interested in appropriating Indigenous knowledge or

decontextualizing it. Finally, I am not “motivated by career interests with little or no concern for [Indigenous] culture or communities” (Lambe, 2004; p. 25). Throughout my doctoral studies I endeavour to uphold cultural protocols and ethics so that the final product – the dissertation, as well as the journey, are examples of how a non-Indigenous person can “respectfully participate in the field of Indigenous scholarship” (Lambe, 2004; p. 50). These principles are important guides for all researchers approaching their work with Indigenous communities from within either an Indigenous or Western research paradigm.

Indigenous scholars and community leaders may be critical of a non-Indigenous person engaging with Indigenous scholarship and employing an Indigenous research methodology (see for example: Nandy, 1983; Smith, 1999; Youngblood Henderson, 1997; Battiste & Henderson, 2000). To those critics, I can only say that I do not take this responsibility lightly. I do this work with humility, knowing that those who have taken care of this knowledge throughout the millennia, passing it from generation to generation, know infinitely more than I do. I am not pursuing this path to appropriate Indigenous knowledge or spirituality. Hoffman (2003) states, and I concur, the threat of appropriation is “a real and serious issue around the globe, and it is one that I do not want to be associated with in any way” (p. 250).

Put another way, I relate a story shared by Hoffman (2003), another non-Indigenous doctoral student, who completed his degree in Native Studies at Trent University in 2006. Hoffman speaks of the challenges he faced as a Caucasian male in an Indigenous Studies program and how he was sometimes confronted by Native students about whether he could speak to certain issues.¹⁰⁸ Like me, Hoffman is part of a ceremonial community and has been for years. He had to make a presentation to the department, which required him to draw upon his learnings

¹⁰⁸ In 2003, the Trent University department was named the “Department of Native Studies.” The term “Native” to refer to the department and to Indigenous students was the accepted vernacular of the day.

about “the interrelationship between faith and trust on one side and ego and fear on the other” (p. 251). Hoffman (2003) recalls,

I lived up to my responsibilities by practicing and sharing what I had learned over the years from traditional teachers. I did not hold back. I did not attempt to rationalize, analyze, or apologize for who I am. When my presentation came to a close, I was embraced by open arms, open hearts, and open minds. One of the leaders told me I was “a true Naskapeeo,” one who helps” (p. 251).

Like Hoffman who said, “I now understood my role in the discipline of Native studies was the same as my role in the Native community” (2003; p. 251), I understand my role in life (and now my doctoral studies) to be the same as my role in ceremonies – as “one who helps.” I have discussed this project with a number of Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, presented tobacco, and have endeavoured to progress along this journey with honesty and according to proper protocols. The Elders I have consulted have permitted me to do this work, acknowledging my twenty-eight years of helping in ceremonies and learning.

Others who may wish to engage in Indigenous research are encouraged to spend the time necessary to learn and develop good relations, something I have already written about at length. While twenty-eight years of learning and relationship-building may be excessive for some, respecting the importance of taking one’s time is critical. Being clear about “the three R’s” of Indigenous research (Weber-Pillwax in Steinhauer, 2002; p. 73) and one’s role being-in-relationship with a community, an Elder, or Traditional Knowledge Holder is vital. Part of this relationship is the responsibility of following accepted protocols, not only as established by the individual or community, but also by the larger Indigenous community. For example, Indigenous organizations have established clear guidelines to retain control over their knowledge (McGregor, 2009; Danard, 2010). These guidelines are summarized as “ownership, control, access and possession” or OCAP (Schnarch & First Nations Centre, 2004), which affirm the

“collective ownership of group information; First Nations control over research and information; First Nations’ management of access to their data and physical possession of the data” (Schnarch & First Nations Centre, 2004; p. 80). Honouring these and other considerations facilitates a “care-full” research process.

A final challenge as “one who helps” (Hoffman, 2003; p. 251) concerns my intention to *share* what I have learned with permission and in an appropriate way, upholding Indigenous knowledge as an equal partner in the whole of global knowledge. This dissertation is a step toward this aim, responding to calls by many authors who are inviting others “to help” in efforts to transform the status quo and demonstrate the respect due Indigenous knowledges (Alsop & Fawcett, 2010; Cajete, 2004; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Graveline, 1998; Haig-Brown, 2008; 2010; McGregor, 2009). McGregor (2009) upholds the “kaswentha,” the two-row wampum, to reinforce a vision of “co-existence, co-operation, and respect” (p. 94). The kaswentha is a treaty between the Europeans and the Haudenosaunee when settlers first began arriving on North American shores. McGregor (2009) articulates: “Instead of competing with one another, or having one dominate the other, the two systems can benefit from a mutual exchange of information and a sharing of lessons learned” (p. 94). Haig-Brown (2008) asks, “How can [Indigenous] knowledge . . . move . . . to a place of being seen as ‘normal,’ as part of the progression of knowledge, as everyday engagement in scholarship rather than the exotic or archaic?” (p. 258). She observes the prevailing responses to Indigenous knowledges as “still arising out of notions of Western European superiority brought to the shores of the Americas by Enlightenment mentalities” (p. 258) and envisions “creating a long overdue space for Indigenous Knowledges to perform their critical work, for epistemologies outside the conventional in

academe to be respected for their integrity, resilience, and adaptability” (p. 259). Sheridan & Longboat (2013) observe:

The first principle of ecology is that diversity must be recognized and maintained for perpetuity to be enabled. We make the same case for broadening the paradigms of environmental studies and environmental science from a monocultural one to encompass a rich diversity embedded within biocultural systems, whose diversity must be the foundation of the diverse ways we see the world (p. 2).

I assert that this practice of “co-existence, co-operation, and respect” (McGregor, 2009; p. 94) is meant for not only environmental studies and environmental sciences, but all academic departments and society in general with respect to Indigenous knowledges. Deloria (2001) concludes simply that such a “meeting ground [presents] an opportunity for the two cultures to both teach and learn from each other” (p. v). As an illustration of this “meeting ground,” my dissertation balances both knowledge systems, treating them as equals but elucidating where Western thought has over-reached and underperformed in the field of sustainability. My aim is to demonstrate how Indigenous ways of knowing present a path forward, respecting both as contributing to the whole for the benefit of our global community. My research process has been to do so in a culturally appropriate and acceptable way, being “care-full” in all the ways this dissertation describes. Other researchers who may choose to follow this dissertation’s example, given all my stories – both insightful and embarrassing, will find this endeavour simultaneously challenging and rewarding.

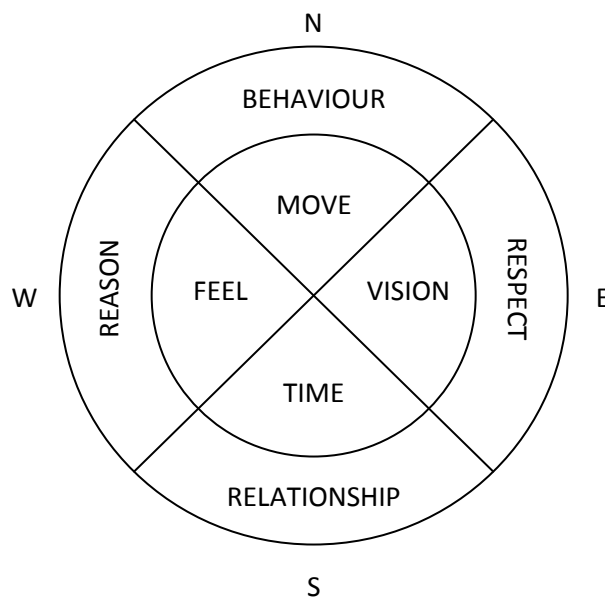
“Getting Organized”

“Getting organized” is all about preparation. I have written about the importance of coming to ceremonies prepared; so, too, in this dissertation. That is, one of the purposes of the First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle has been to prepare the reader for the Second Journey ‘Round. I have endeavoured to lay a foundation of awareness about the Medicine Circle,

working with Elders and oral traditions, and my positionality in the hope that the Second Journey ‘Round is meaningful and received in the helpful spirit and intent with which it is shared.

To review, Figure 4.2 below summarizes the four gifts of Creation and the four learnings about self-in-relationship, which have informed this dissertation in fundamental ways. This Medicine Circle is but one of many. Other layers to this Medicine Circle exist which are not depicted here. As well, other Indigenous cultures have Medicine Circles specific to their peoples and lands. I am only able to speak to the one about which I have learned, understanding that I have so much more to learn. This knowledge has been passed down through oral tradition over

Figure 4.2: A Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle¹⁰⁹



generations. Each word in Figure 4.2 represents many more words and their associated learnings and all must be understood as one whole. After all, it is one circle and the whole is certainly greater than merely the sum of its parts.

¹⁰⁹ From Thrasher, M. (1987). *The Blue Book*. Unpublished workshop material.

Willie Ermine (1995), in his chapter *Aboriginal Epistemology*, explains how Indigenous knowledges and Medicine Circles have developed over the ages:

Those people who seek knowledge on the physical plane objectively find their answers through exploration of the outer space, solely on the corporeal level. Those who seek to understand the reality of existence and harmony with the environment by turning inward have a different, incorporeal knowledge paradigm that might be termed Aboriginal epistemology (p. 103).

Ermine (1995) is juxtaposing how Western and Indigenous peoples have studied the universe through the ages. Western cultures have developed their ways of knowing primarily through scientific experimentation on all that is observable, believing that what is seen, microscopically to telescopically, represents all that exists. Indigenous peoples also practice close observation of Creation to learn about the places where they live and how to survive in them. Included in this approach, however, is the mystery of all that cannot be seen, the “incorporeal” and “metaphysical,” all that transcends physical, tangible space. They acknowledge that “turning inward” reveals a great deal about the cosmos and the multidimensionality of Creation. Ermine (1995) explains this practice of “turning inward:”

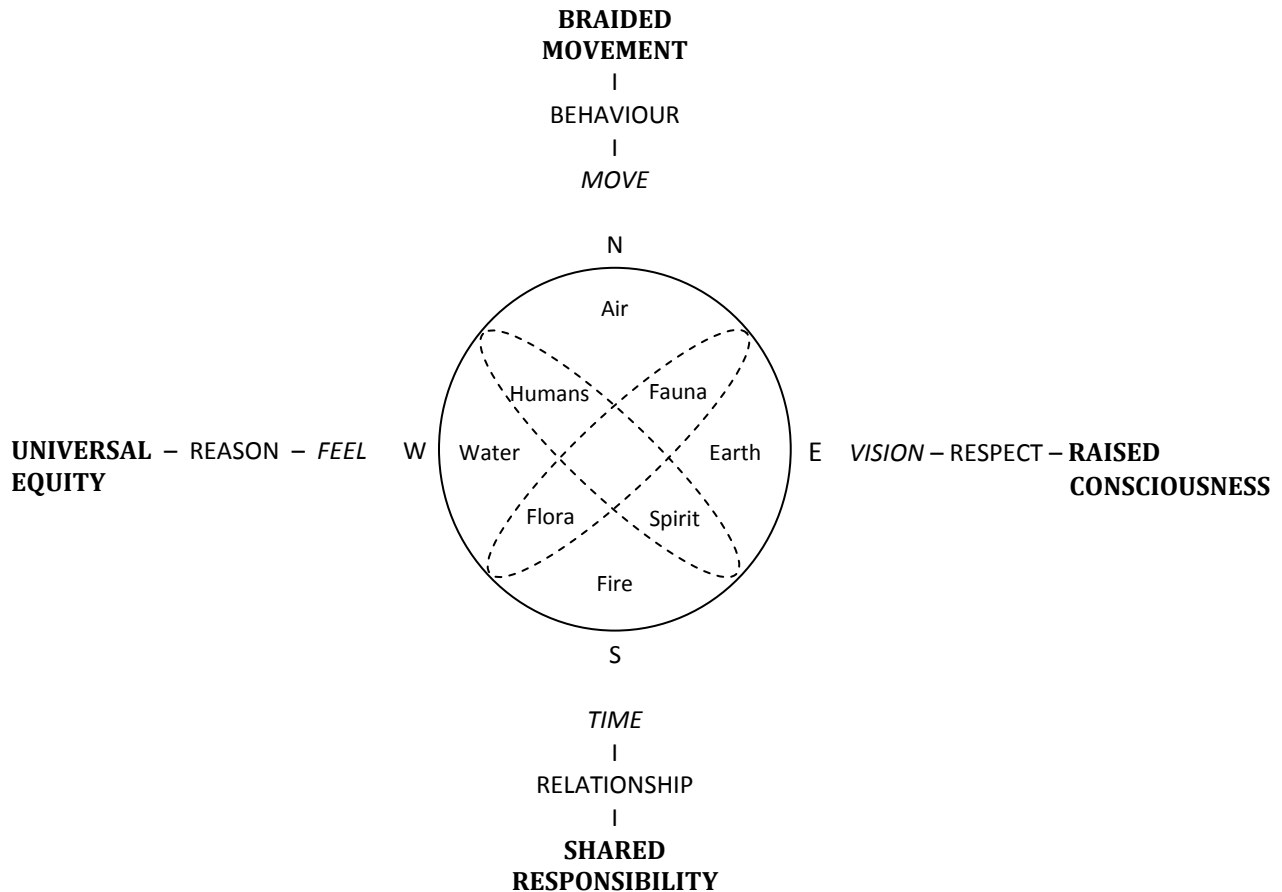
The plants and animals were a vital nexus in comprehending the sophisticated directional maps into the metaphysical. Only by understanding the physical world can we understand the intricacies of the inner space. Conversely, it is only through journeys into the metaphysical that we can fully understand the natural world. Those Old Ones who made countless journeys into the inner space have embedded these principles in Aboriginal education systems so that future generations can continue the research (p. 107).

One such “Aboriginal education system” is the Medicine Circle. The Medicine Circle depicted in Figure 4.2 (as well as others) has been handed down over millennia from generation to generation to guide people’s behaviour in all our relationships, to walk the Sweetgrass Road (the north-south axis as shown in Figure 4.1).

While the Medicine Circle in Figure 4.2 guides human beings in all relationships, including with Creation, the Second Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle explores more closely this latter relationship. My intention has been to articulate more deeply how human beings may live in balance (that is, sustainably) with Creation according to the Medicine Circle. The culmination of all that I have explored in this doctoral journey and now share in this dissertation is grounded in the original four gifts of Creation, and is introduced in Figure 4.3.

**Figure 4.3 An Introduction to a Multidimensional Medicine Circle:
Exploring More Deeply Humans in Relationship with Creation**

Please note that the circle below is to be interpreted as a sphere. While all things within the sphere have spirit, the distinction of “Spirit” between “Earth” and “Fire” refers to the spirit of Creation that permeates the entire cosmos.



Without going into specifics at this time, this diagram previews what is discussed more thoroughly in Chapter Eight. In its simplest terms, it presents an Indigenous approach to living

sustainably with Creation. More details exist to this Medicine Circle which are not shown here, and Chapters Five, Six, and Seven, together with what has been shared in the First Journey ‘Round, prepare the reader for all that is presented in Chapter Eight.

Chapter Five revisits the eastern direction, and learnings associated with *vision*¹¹⁰ and *respect* are applied in an introduction to Western sustainability. Chapter Six revisits the southern direction and focuses on *relationships*. Specifically, what are Western and Indigenous relationships with power, nature, time, and science and technology? The two knowledge systems are juxtaposed to delve deeper for a better understanding of the distinct approaches to these underlying issues, which in turn influence how the two knowledge systems approach sustainability. Chapter Seven in this second visit to the western direction focuses on one of these underlying issues – time. As this direction relates to thoughts and *feelings*, I share a story from one of my fasts, which upon reflection has helped me understand time in ways that I believe to be relevant and, so, important to recount. I then *reason* through the learnings from my fast and relate them to sustainability and the Sweetgrass Road. Finally, Chapter Eight’s return to the northern direction builds upon all that has come before, culminating in an in-depth exploration of Figure 4.3. As this direction relates to *behaviour*, and is part of the north-south axis which is the Sweetgrass Road, I explore how the Medicine Circle may provide direction for a sustainable way of being from an Indigenous perspective. Sharing stories and learnings from Mooshum, I explore the Medicine Circle with respect to human beings in relationship with Creation.

The last chapter is entitled “Re/spect” and Double Understanding.” In essence, it is a final visit to the eastern direction and encourages the reader to begin one’s own journey of learning about Indigenous ways of knowing for a more sustainable way of being.

¹¹⁰ Italicized words in this paragraph match the words in the Medicine Circle in Figure 4.2 as well as the inner layers of Figure 4.3.

“Getting Mobile:” Summary

“Getting mobile” means simply “doing.” North is the direction of movement and behaviour. After all the preparations, one must go ahead and do, which involves not only acting upon one’s choices, but also beginning the circle anew to review, relate, reason, and revise accordingly. In ceremonies, “getting mobile” is the actual conducting of ceremonies as well as applying what has been learned to one’s everyday living once ceremonies end.

At the beginning of this chapter, I introduced the miyopimatisiwin, the Sweetgrass Road, which teaches learnings about living in balance with “all our relations.” In essence, striving for better relations and walking the Sweetgrass Road is the overall purpose of ceremonies. Lewis Cardinal, in Shawn Wilson’s book (2008), *Research is Ceremony*, agrees:

That’s the spiritual part of it [ceremonies] . . . when it all comes together and all those connections are made. ‘Cause that’s what ceremony is about, is strengthening those connections (p. 89).

“Those connections” are all our relationships – with self, with others, and all Creation. How human beings are able to care for “all our relations” may be learned with a Medicine Circle¹¹¹ and is the focal point of this Second Journey ‘Round. Both the Western concept of sustainability and the Indigenous concept of miyopimatisiwin envision distinct approaches to caring for the earth upon which we depend for our very existence. One without the other is incomplete; both Indigenous and Western knowledges are necessary, and better, more balanced relations (i.e., stronger connections) are essential. Embarking on the Second Journey ‘Round is itself a step toward “getting mobile” toward this imperative.

¹¹¹ Other ways to learn exist. I am focusing on learning with a Medicine Circle.

SECOND JOURNEY 'ROUND THE MEDICINE CIRCLE

Chapter 5 – EAST: A Review of Modern Western Sustainability

To me, the story of the Three Sisters is a wonderful example of a sustainable and mutually beneficial relationship. I was first introduced to the Three Sisters by Shirley Williams, an Ojibwe who was the head woman at my very first ceremonies with Mooshum Peter O'Chiese. We were preparing a dish called the Three Sisters as part of the final feast to welcome the fasters back from their fasts. Shirley talked about how, traditionally, the three plants – corn, beans, and squash – are planted together because they had a special relationship, helping each other to thrive and grow strong and healthy.

The corn stalk provides support for the beans as they grow. The beans fix nitrogen from the air and convert it to a usable form in the soil, providing important nutrients for both the corn and squash and replenishing the earth. The large leaves of the squash plant shelter the ground, preserving moisture, inhibiting weed growth, and shading the roots of all three plants, keeping them cool. All three working together enhance each other's growth. This scientific knowledge has been understood by Indigenous peoples of North America for centuries and has been shared for generations, teaching the people not only about a wise agricultural practice, but also about the importance of collaboration and of the mutual benefits realized from caring for each other in all our relationships.

When we combine the corn, beans, and squash with cream and warm it all together, the Three Sisters is a delicious and popular addition to any feast. I share this story to shed light on some of the characteristics of sustainability as understood from an Indigenous perspective. This next chapter is an exploration of sustainability from a Western perspective.¹¹²

Introduction

Beginning the Second Journey 'Round the Medicine Circle, we revisit the east, the direction of vision. As this is where the sun rises, bringing light and energy to a new day, the learnings associated with this direction teach us about illuminating a topic of interest, clarifying its issues and complexities. This direction teaches us that, to explore a topic fully, one must look not only outward in different directions to learn, but also inward to examine one's thoughts and feelings so as to reason through a subject and gain deeper understanding. In this way, the east

¹¹² Shirley Williams, personal communication, Spring 1986. Also, some material for the re-telling of this story was gleaned from the following websites, retrieved October 2013: <http://www.matrifocus.com/LAM05/earth.htm>; http://www.iroquoismuseum.org/three_sisters.htm; and <https://sites.google.com/site/haudenosaunenw/foods-for-midwinter/three-sisters-story>. For more information on the gifts of the Three Sisters, please see: Haudenosaunee Environmental Task Force (1999). *Words that come before all else: Environmental philosophies of the Haudenosaunee*. New York: Native North American Travelling College.

and west of the Medicine Circle work together along an east-west axis guiding one's learning, analysis, and comprehension.

A related learning in the east is that of respect. As has already been shared, the sun shines equally for everyone. Hence, all peoples and their knowledges are commensurate and deserving of balanced, equivalent respect. Those who created the first Medicine Circles long ago knew of the presence of the other three peoples, acknowledging their respective gifts and knowledge systems as essential parts of one global knowledge network (as illustrated in Figure 3.1). As such, the knowledge systems are not opposed to one another; they are distinct. In their difference, they have the potential to be complementary as long as they are in balance with and respectful of each other. This theme of respectful balance recurs throughout this Second Journey 'Round the Medicine Circle.

This chapter is primarily a look outward at the literature to explore the Western concept of sustainability. My intent with this presentation is to provide the reader with a general understanding of the current approach to sustainability by dominant Western society (as defined in the Pre/Amble). Because I am looking outward at the literature, the tone of this chapter is more third-person objective than first-person relational. In keeping with holistic, Indigenous ways of thinking, I ask the reader to keep in mind that this chapter is one of four in this circle and contributes to the whole by providing foundational material upon which the ensuing chapters build. Process is key for this Second Journey 'Round. That is, the main purpose of this chapter is for the reader to gain a basic awareness of the concept of Western sustainability, gathering information that later will inform a more evaluative and deeper discussion. So the first task for the reader in this Second Journey 'Round is "to listen," so to speak, to the prevailing discourse on the subject. My task in this chapter is to present the information as clearly as possible. In

accordance with Indigenous ways of knowing, at this point in the process my purpose is not to critique as is customary in a Western approach, but to raise the various issues and questions that need to be carefully considered and balanced in order to determine a holistic, cohesive plan for moving forward. Critical analysis unfolds in the subsequent chapters. Walking the circle, following the process, the reader participates in a learning journey from an Indigenous perspective, first becoming *aware* of Western sustainability concepts and strategies, seeking to *understand* Indigenous insights into various questions and concerns, reflecting upon *knowledge* gained through personal experience, all toward respecting a way forward grounded in ancient, vital (i.e., essential, relevant, and dynamic) *wisdom*.¹¹³

Since the term “sustainable development” became popularized in the 1987 publication of the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future* (WCED, 1987), the field of sustainability thought and practice has evolved in significant ways. To elucidate this topic, this chapter is organized according to the gifts associated with vision in the eastern direction (as shown in Figure 4.3). In the section entitled *Vision*, the concept of sustainability is illuminated and the challenges inherent in its definition are explored. A few illustrative examples are reviewed briefly to demonstrate how sustainability has been pursued in practice. In *Re/Spect*, respecting other points of view, a second look at sustainability examines the range of alternative Western perspectives on the subject. The final section of this chapter offers a reality check of sorts by considering some impediments besetting overall progress toward sustainability. I title this section “*Obscuring Raised Consciousness*.” As the reader notes in Figure 4.3, a new (old) learning – *raised consciousness* – is (re)introduced in the eastern direction. As it pertains to sustainability, this learning relates to respect for a broader perspective to help guide society toward sustainable living, a perspective understanding and inclusive of Indigenous ways of knowing. What in

¹¹³ The italicized words serve as a reminder of the Indigenous approach to learning as introduced in the Pre/Amble.

modern Western society prevents people from expanding their horizons and consciousness? This chapter's final section explores what I see as contributing factors obscuring this opportunity.

To place this chapter in context within this Second Journey 'Round, Chapter Six explores more deeply its conclusion – that problems have arisen because dominant Western society has not respected other peoples' knowledge systems, to the detriment of all Creation. Chapter Seven presents my reflections regarding this imbalance. Finally, Chapter Eight offers a framework to rebalance and respect both knowledge systems, imagining a collaborative relationship in which we learn and benefit from each other's gifts.

Vision – What is Sustainability?

The modern Western concept of sustainability has its origins in phrases such as “sustainable society,” “sustainable steady state” and “sustainable future,” which were seen increasingly in various publications dating back to 1972 (Ward and Dubos, 1972; Daly, 1973; Meadows, 1977; Pirages, 1977; Brown, 1981; Brown and Shaw, 1982; Daly, 1991; Gibson and Hassan, 2005). The International Union for the Conservation of Nature and Natural Resources (IUCN), in its 1980 World Conservation Strategy (WCS), may provide the “first clear articulation of the principles of sustainability” (Whitehead, 2007, p. 16) in the chapter, “*Living Resource Conservation for Sustainable Development*.” Whitehead (2007) comments that the WCS focuses on “. . . the ecological management of global croplands and watershed forests, and emphasize[s] the need to preserve genetic diversity in these ecosystems and to develop sustainable utilization strategies” (p. 16), highlighting one objective of the WCS aimed at preserving species biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem health (IUCN, 1980).

Critics have noted that this is too narrow an approach to sustainability (Davoudi and Layard, 2001; Soussain, 1992). Soussain (1992) explains that the WCS seems to blame “. . .

poverty and the actions of the poor as one of the main causes of non-sustainable development, rather than recognizing that poverty and environmental degradation are both consequences of existing development patterns” (p. 24). Davoudi and Layard (2001) underscore this criticism of the WCS, noting that neither humanity nor the environment should be isolated from the other as human activities are an integral part of the habitats IUCN endeavours to conserve.

In light of this appraisal of the WCS, the WCED focuses much of the discussion in the Brundtland Report, *Our Common Future*, on alleviating poverty and grounds its definition of sustainable development in both inter-generational and intra-generational equity (Davoudi and Layard, 2001). While the term appears in the 1980 WCS, it is not until 1987 when “sustainable development” is popularized in the Brundtland Report with its oft-repeated definition: “Sustainable development is development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (WCED, 1987, p. 43; Gibson and Hassan, 2005). The intent of the Brundtland Report is to link the environment with development and human well-being. Gibson and Hassan (2005) state,

“Environment and development, the Commission argued, had to be addressed together because they are interdependent – both as problems and as solutions. Poverty cannot be overcome in a world of ecological decline and resource depletion. Environment cannot be rehabilitated in a world of deprivation and desperation. The aim of development must therefore be to build conditions and capabilities that will allow people to sustain themselves while also sustaining the environment that is the foundation for their lives and livelihoods” (p. 48).

In the words of the Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987), environmental stresses and “the lot of humankind” are linked with patterns of economic development. It calls for economics and ecology to become

“. . . completely integrated in decision-making and lawmaking processes not just to protect the environment, but also to protect and promote development.

Economy is not just about the production of wealth, and ecology is not just about the protection of nature; they are both equally relevant for improving the lot of humankind” (pp. 37-38).

The Brundtland Report (WCED, 1987) articulates use of the term ‘development’ in its ‘broadest sense’ (p. 40). While the report does not elaborate, the inference throughout is that the ‘broadest sense’ connotes human development in a qualitative manner, aiming to improve the quality of life for present and future generations rather than focusing narrowly on only economic development solely for profit.

The Brundtland Report’s vagueness, since the time it was published, has allowed governments, agencies, and other powers-that-be to define ‘development’ primarily in terms of economic growth, believing that through economic growth, progress can be made toward alleviating poverty and addressing environmental issues. In fact, the Brundtland Report endorses growth as an effective means to improving living standards and quality of life. The report specifically encourages higher growth objectives to have “any impact on absolute poverty” (WCED, 1987, p. 50) and for countries to “. . . require overall national income growth of around 5 per cent a year in the developing economies of Asia, 5.5 per cent in Latin America, and 6 per cent in Africa and West Asia” and of 3-4 per cent in industrialized nations, promoting an ever-expanding world economy (WCED, 1987, pp. 50-51). Indeed, “Far from requiring the cessation of economic growth, [sustainable development] recognizes that the problems of poverty and underdevelopment cannot be solved unless we have a new era of growth . . .” (WCED, 1987, p. 40).

As discussed, however, in the First Journey ‘Round the Medicine Circle, social inequities and income disparities still remain (and appear to be deepening) after decades of preference

given to economic growth initiatives.¹¹⁴ Critics have denounced sustainable development for its broadness and disposition toward economic growth. Redclift (2005) describes the dichotomous juxtaposition of the two words as an oxymoron. Lélé (1991) echoes O’Riordan (1985) who calls it a “contradiction in terms” (p. 608).

These and other authors have investigated numerous questions to expose sustainable development’s inherent paradoxes and inequities (Agyeman, Bullard & Evans, 2003; Dale, 2001; Davidson, 2009; Davison, 2008; Gibson & Hassan, 2005; Redclift, 1987, among others), as summarized by the following questions: What are the respective definitions of “development” and “sustainable?” Who decides what is to be developed and how? Who really benefits: the impoverished people or the governments and multi-national corporations who are awarded the development contracts? Who decides what quality of life is desirable for whom? Is the Western, industrialized nations’ standard of living attainable for everyone, or even desired by everyone? Who has a voice in determining one’s future? When defining ‘development’ in terms of continuous economic growth, how can perpetual growth be considered sustainable in a world with finite limits? Looking more closely at interpretations of “development” and “sustainable,” what exactly is to be sustained? Is “development” to be sustained, where development is an end in and of itself and the type of development is aimed at economic growth above all else? Is one natural resource to be sustained, such as timber or a fishery, or is the scope broader to consider entire ecosystems or watersheds? Is sustainable development simply a matter of “satisfying basic human needs” for food, water and shelter? Or does the notion include broader social and personal development goals, such as Max-Neef’s nine fundamental human needs (i.e.,

¹¹⁴ Holding to the holistic process of the Medicine Circle in this Second Journey ‘Round, issues foundational to such an imbalanced approach to sustainability are discussed in the ensuing chapters, while this chapter focuses primarily on providing an introduction to the dominant Western approach to sustainability.

subsistence, protection, participation, leisure, affection, understanding, creation, identity and freedom; Ekins and Max-Neef, 1992)?

While all of these questions are deserving of a detailed response, I ask them for the sole purpose of highlighting the complexities and concerns prevailing in sustainability discourse. The points raised by each query suggest that sustainability agendas are susceptible to pre-emption by those in positions of power who emphasize profitable gain more so than the well-being of people or the planet in their decision-making processes. Davison (2008) concurs with this assessment, noting that a consequence of these questions and ambiguities is “. . . the actual and unavoidable messiness of efforts to materialize sustainability” (p. 194). He states that “the encompassing nature of the language of sustainability makes it prey to co-optation by entrenched ideological and economic interests, dominant discourses and empowered institutions” (Davison, 2008, p. 191). While exploring in detail each issue posed in the above questions is not possible given space considerations, the imbalance revealed therein and underpinning philosophies held by dominant Western society contributing to this imbalance is a focus of the remaining chapters of this dissertation.¹¹⁵

Davison (2008) attempts to address the inherent “messiness” of sustainability as exposed by these questions and quotes Dale (2001), who has observed that we “appear to be living in ... a time of paradoxes” in that “... moving towards sustainable societies may well lie in learning to reconcile the tensions within the paradoxes rather than in denying their existence” (pp. ix-x). To deal with these “tensions within the paradoxes,” Davison (2008) suggests subscribing to “ambivalence” letting go the need to clarify, articulate and pontificate and applying “practical

¹¹⁵ Many authors have explored these issues rigorously, some of whom include Agyeman, Bullard & Evans (2003), Baehler (2007), Barrett & Odum (2000), Bartlett (2006), Brennan (2007), Brown (2008), Dale (2001), Davidson (2009), Davison (2008), Davoudi & Layard (2001), Eckersly (2004), Gawor (2008), Gibson & Hassan (2005), Hallman (2000), Kemp, Parto & Gibson (2005), Leduc, (2010), Lélé (1991), Lélé & Norgaard (1996), Nilsen (2010), Orr (1992), Redclift (1987), Victor (2008), Warner (2010), Williams & Millington (2004).

reason” (p. 197) where evaluative, wise judgment is the order of the day, as opposed to absolute certainty.¹¹⁶

Agreeing with Davison (2008) and Dale (2001), who see the value in ambivalence to move beyond the paradoxes and semantic issues, Gibson and Hassan (2005) observe:

Constructive ambiguity . . . has helped to ease concerns about a new and unfamiliar concept. It has allowed incompatible interests to embrace the idea and wildly diverse advocates to attempt application. In the process there has been learning and a gradual spread of confidence that substantial gains can be achieved under the banner of sustainability (p. 39).

Concurring, Victor (2008) notes that with the ambiguities in the concept, “the Brundtland report helped make it possible for governments, businesses, and others to adopt the goal of sustainable development without compromising their adherence to economic growth,” (p. 19) which has remained their top policy objective. While in an ideal world, social and environmental concerns are to be balanced equally with economic considerations, in reality given the ongoing hegemony of neoliberalism, the dominant mindset of “finance trumps environment” (Victor, 2008, p. 20) has, more often than not, prevailed in the pursuit of sustainability goals.

The preceding discussion provides an overview of the academic discourse around the concept of sustainability. How has sustainability been pursued and put into practice by society? As shown in Figure 1.1, sustainability has been envisioned as pillars, a three-legged stool, and in circular, nested representations, balancing environmental, social, and economic concerns. Ideally, achieving this balance produces a society where people’s needs (now and in the future) are met and quality of life is equitable, where the environment is clean and biodiversity plentiful, and where profits and personal savings are secure.

¹¹⁶ Whose “wise judgment” and whose “practical reason” are two additional questions worth asking. Power imbalances in the pursuit of sustainability are an underlying theme throughout this Second Journey ‘Round, mainly as a result of colonization and modern Western science’s dominance over Indigenous ways of knowing.

Notwithstanding the “greenwashing”¹¹⁷ that has occurred in the name of the environment, numerous initiatives have been established to assist in the pursuit of this lofty sustainability vision. For example, Agenda 21 is a non-binding, voluntary action plan which was adopted by 178 countries during the 1992 Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since then, cities around the world have endorsed Local Agenda 21 processes as developed by the International Council of Local Environmental Initiatives (ICLEI). Local Agenda 21 initiatives require the meaningful involvement of all sectors and stakeholders, including but not limited to, agriculture, labour, business, citizens, women, youth, seniors, health and social services, environment, as well as government sectors. Representatives from these (and other relevant) sectors are involved in the planning and implementation of local sustainability plans.

In Canada, these sustainability plans have taken the form of Integrated Community Sustainability Plans (ICSP) or revisions to Official Plans. According to the Federal Gas Tax Agreement, an ICSP is “a long-term plan, developed in consultation with community members that provides direction for the community to realize sustainability objectives it has for the environmental, cultural, social and economic dimensions of its identity” (Infrastructure Canada, 2005). While Ontario only requires an Official Plan (OP) which articulates sustainability objectives, many municipalities in the province are increasingly recognizing the value of preparing an ICSP in addition to the OP. The OP is primarily a land use planning document, applying primarily to the work of planning departments and developers. The ICSP applies to the entire corporate structure of a municipality as well as to the community at large, not just dictating how a community infills and expands (or does not expand), but engaging residents and

¹¹⁷ “Greenwashing” stems from “whitewashing” and, according to the Oxford dictionary, means: “disinformation disseminated by an organization so as to present an environmentally responsible public image” (Retrieved April 18, 2014 from <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/>). While many cases of greenwashing exist, in order to illustrate how sustainability has been pursued, I focus this overview on more serious endeavours.

organizations alike to address broader health and social service needs as well as environmental integrity and economic prosperity issues. Households to businesses are encouraged to reduce waste and energy usage with the overall goals of reducing a municipality's ecological footprint and improving the health of the natural environment. Other ICSP initiatives are aimed at ensuring access to quality health and social service programs and enhancing the long-term economic stability of the community.

Several guides have been prepared to assist municipalities across Canada in their work to prepare and implement ICSPs (e.g., toolkits are available from Associated Municipalities of Ontario, Alberta Urban Municipalities Association, and The Natural Step, to name a few). A few factors are key for not only successful preparation of the ICSP, but also its effective implementation. As Clarke (2010) discusses these include, but are not limited to: strong leadership by the municipal government; committed partnerships between the government and key stakeholders (e.g., corporations, academic institutions, etc.); a common understanding of what sustainability is for the community (including a shared vision for long-term sustainability); an excellent public involvement plan which includes representation from all sectors in the community; as well as an effective communication plan to regularly inform, update and encourage participation of the broader community. Finally, a thorough monitoring, assessment and review process is essential for the implementation of the ICSP to result in meaningful progress toward the community's sustainability vision (Clarke, 2010). A number of communities across Canada have followed these recommendations to varying degrees and with a range of results.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Such as Calgary, Toronto, Vancouver, Guelph, Kingston, Ottawa, among several others too numerous to list here. For more information on specific communities, please see Clarke (2010) as well as The Natural Step Canada website at <http://www.naturalstep.ca/case-studies>. 'Google' any town or city to review sustainability initiatives.

Another means of pursuing sustainability is through grassroots initiatives. A growing number of citizens in communities around the world are organizing and taking action on their own, without government leadership. The Transition Town movement, which began in England in 2005, has arrived in Canada in force (Hopkins, 2008). Whether combining with municipal-led ICSP processes or on their own initiative, citizens are self-organizing to address the following question:

For all those aspects of life that this community needs in order to sustain itself and thrive, how do we significantly rebuild resilience (to mitigate the effects of peak oil and economic contraction) and drastically reduce carbon emissions (to mitigate the effects of climate change)?¹¹⁹

In Ontario, Dundas, Peterborough, London, Ottawa, Guelph, Barrie, and Poplar Hill First Nation are all official Transition Towns, with several others organizing to achieve “official” status. Briefly, citizens wishing to improve their town’s adaptability in the face of future uncertainties (economic and environmental) convene, organize, and follow a number of prescribed steps to transition into a “resilient” community, one that is increasingly self-reliant and is working to eliminate its carbon (and other) emissions (Hopkins, 2008). Efforts are all based on citizen volunteers coming together with or without municipal support. One limitation to the Transition Town movement, in terms of overall sustainability, however, is the primary emphasis on environmental aspects of sustainability. Communities are beginning to expand into more social issues after an initial focus on food, energy and transportation.

A final grassroots effort worth noting is in the Cree community of Oujé-Bougoumou, Quebec. Tired of its history of displacement, abuse and neglect by government and industry, the First Nation has begun to take matters into its own hands, articulating a new vision for its future and motivating the entire community to act upon that vision, moving toward sustainability and

¹¹⁹ Retrieved February 2, 2011 from: <http://www.transitionnetwork.org/support/what-transition-initiative>.

self-reliance through both innovation and tradition.¹²⁰ For example, affordable and energy-efficient housing is built locally and provided for all Ouje-Bougoumou members who wish to own a home (home ownership is an important component of the Ouje-Bougoumou Housing Program as the Indian Act has historically prevented Canada's Indigenous peoples from owning property). Affordable, quality rental units are also available for those yet unable to purchase a home. A district heating system, fuelled by waste sawdust from local mills, heats the dwellings. Ouje-Bougoumou has also established a cultural centre, a healing centre, economic development initiatives, and programs to assist students at every level of education, all of which contribute to a vision of self-sufficiency, sustainability, and overall community well-being.

In the private sector, more and more private corporations are seeing the value of incorporating sustainability objectives into their mandates. Some are guilty of greenwashing, but many are integrating sustainability into the very fabric of their companies, rearranging corporate structures, revising mission statements, appointing sustainability leaders, and involving and engaging employees. With the help of process-oriented NGOs, such as The Natural Step, and NGOs with certification and verification programs, such as Rainforest Alliance, some private enterprises are becoming sustainability leaders, reducing their ecological footprints by closely examining upstream sources of materials and downstream distribution and end-of-life concerns. Private enterprises are also pursuing objectives related to the culture of the corporation, employee conditions, and social equity considerations within the organization as well as with corporations around the world with which they do business. What innovations are possible to continually reduce their ecological footprint? How can employees as well as customers be encouraged to be a part of the creative process in addressing both environmental and social concerns within and outside the corporation? How do suppliers treat their employees? Where

¹²⁰ Retrieved March 21, 2011 from: <http://www.ouje.ca/>.

do suppliers source their raw materials? These and other questions become integrated into the everyday decision-making of each and every employee, from executive management to line workers.

Two examples of corporations leading the way are InterfaceFLOR and Nike.¹²¹ For InterfaceFLOR the founder, Ray Anderson, became a strong advocate for sustainability after reading Paul Hawken's *The Ecology of Commerce*. With ideas encouraged from amongst employees, the company pursues Mission Zero, its vision to eliminate (and not merely reduce) waste through resource recovery, reuse, and other initiatives in its carpet manufacturing processes. End-of-life recovery of used carpet from consumers is a key feature in InterfaceFLOR's strategy; recycling is seen as a last resort.

After being criticized for human rights violations in its sweat shops around the world, Nike adopted sustainability as a core value. Its North Star vision guides all facets of Nike's operations and includes "closing the materials loop, using only sustainable materials, achieving climate stability, water stewardship, thriving communities in its supply chain, and athletes acting as change agents."¹²²

Corporate social responsibility and sustainability initiatives are gaining traction as companies begin to see tangible results in not only financial savings and profit margins, but also corporate culture and consumer loyalty (Willard, 2002). Benefits to their corporate images are also welcomed. Granted, corporate sustainability initiatives remain the exception rather than the rule, but more companies are taking leadership roles in choosing a "higher purpose" other than simply the profit motive (Gudz, personal communication, 2010).

¹²¹ Gudz, Interface Canada, personal communication, 2010; Vogel, Nike, personal communication, September 22, 2009. Also, see: http://www.naturalstep.ca/sites/default/files/case_study_nike.pdf, <http://www.naturalstep.ca/guardian-sustainable-business-interfaceflor-closing-the-loop-in-the-manufacturing-process>.

¹²² Retrieved April 18, 2014 from: <http://www.naturalstep.ca/nike>.

Re/Spect – A Second Look at Sustainability

The purpose of the preceding discussion has been to provide the reader with a general introduction to sustainability and an overview of how it is currently being pursued in modern Western society. With this clearer *vision* or understanding, a second look at the subject follows. A Medicine Circle learning with the word “respect” encourages exploring different perspectives for a more complete appreciation of the subject matter. Mooshum points out the Latin origins of the word: “re” means “again” and “spect” means “to look” – “to look again.”¹²³ He has often used this interpretation of re/spect to emphasize the importance of “taking (at least) two looks” when evaluating an issue – to explore a topic from different vantage points so as to better understand as many facets to the problem as possible. In the context of this chapter, “re/spect” encourages a look at different perspectives of sustainability.

The range of views on sustainability exists along a spectrum from weaker to stronger sustainability (Williams and Millington, 2004). Much of the chapter up until this point has discussed weak sustainability initiatives which comprise the prevailing approach pursued in today’s industrialized world. Those at this end of the spectrum believe that continued economic growth and progress in science and technology enable societies to extend ecological limits beyond their original capacities and that “the benefits of increasing economic growth would trickle down to poorer members of society” (Hulse, 2007; p. 22). Toward the other end of the spectrum, those subscribing to strong sustainability warn of thresholds to limits being exceeded irreversibly and that no human-made substitutes exist for the myriad ecological processes in nature which are threatened by the very scientific and technological innovations defended by proponents of weak sustainability (Williams and Millington, 2004; Davison, 2008; Seghezze,

¹²³ Thrasher, M. 1987. *Blue Book*. Unpublished workshop manuscript. Also, please see <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>.

2009). Rather than the anthropocentrism of weak sustainability, strong sustainability advocates “biocentric egalitarianism” (Williams and Millington, 2004; p. 102) where non-human or biotic rights are recognized and respected.¹²⁴

One perspective toward the stronger end of the spectrum is the deep ecology movement, founded by Arne Naess. Deep ecology reflects more ecocentric philosophies (relative to anthropocentrism and biocentrism), maintaining the holistic notion that humans are part of, rather than separate from nature and nature, in and of itself, has intrinsic value (Rowe, 1996; Sessions, 1987). Highlighted is the interdependency between humans and nature and the belief that “[n]ature is seen to have a right to remain unmolested that does not require justification in human terms – just as there are inalienable ‘human rights’ that require no justification” (Williams and Millington, 2004, p. 102). In terms of economic growth and development, ecocentrism calls for a redefinition of “wealth” to mean “well-being” instead of merely the acquisition of material goods (Williams and Millington, 2004) so that demands made on the earth are lessened and the focus turns from ‘sustaining development’ as in weak sustainability to “sustaining environment, nature, ecosystems or the Earth’s life support systems” (Williams and Millington, 2004, p. 102).

Also toward this end of the spectrum is the ecofeminist contribution of incorporating gender, race and class issues into the discourse (Buckingham, 2004; Warren, 1997). Williams and Millington (2004) claim that ecofeminist thought is a stronger sustainability discourse than deep ecology: “Ecofeminism has argued that it is not just human-centredness (anthropocentrism) that engenders the environmental problem, but rather male-centredness (androcentrism)” (p. 103). Merchant (1980) explores this notion of androcentrism by shedding light on society’s

¹²⁴ An Indigenous, holistic perspective may not subscribe to these compartmentalized categories. I examine Indigenous perspectives in the next chapter.

“mechanicism” (our dependence on technology at the expense of nature), which arises as a result of male-dominated scientific revolution and industrialization. She calls for a rebalancing of our mechanicism with a return to a degree of “organicism” – where the centrality of nature in supporting and sustaining life is once again acknowledged and protected. Code (2006) articulates how the third wave of ecofeminism expands the discourse beyond the dominion of man to include Others: “Ecological thinking works against the imaginary of God-given human dominion over all the earth and, more precisely, of dominion arrogated to certain chosen members of the human race, not just over the earth but over human Others as well” (p. 32). She further explains:

. . . [ecofeminist ecological thinking] conceives of human interventions throughout the world, both physical and social, as requiring sensitivity to, and responsibility in relation to, specificities of diversity and detail, placing respect above mastery, preservation before control . . . (p. 32).

Gaia, another alternative philosophy, is even stronger in its earth-centredness, yet less focused on issues of human equity and well-being (Lovelock, 1995; Primavesi, 2003). Gaia Theory professes the earth as a living, self-regulating being of which human beings and all life and life processes are interconnected, symbiotic, and dependent upon a reciprocal relationship with the earth.

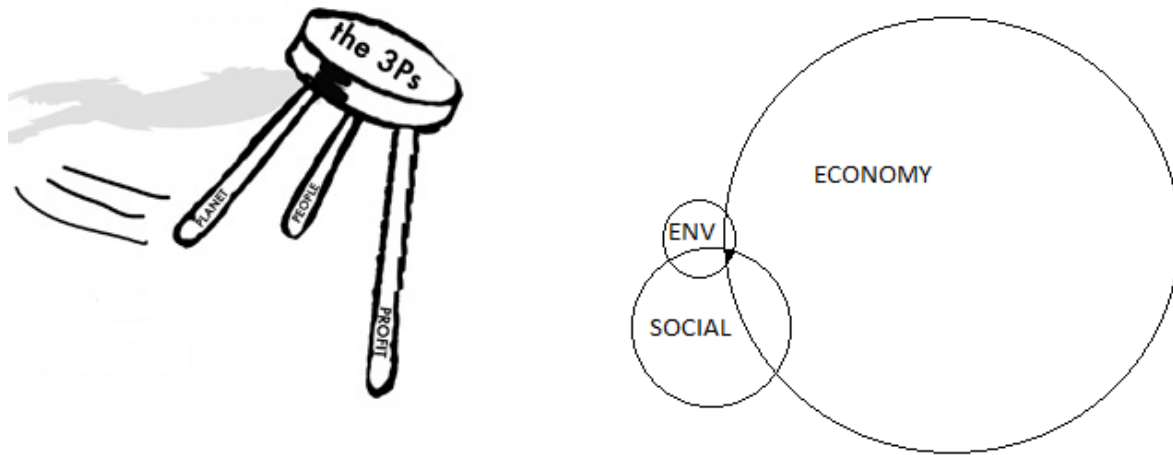
Somewhere in between the weakest and strongest stances of sustainability lie hybrid approaches which combine ecocentric values of nature’s equality and interconnectedness with humanity with anthropocentric support for sustainability through economic development. The present day environmental justice and just sustainability movements represent examples of this middle ground where “economic growth can continue but there is a need to redistribute the costs and benefits more equally on an intra- and/or inter- generational level” (Williams and Millington, 2004, p. 101). Similarly, Fawcett (2013) promotes “hybrid ecological communities of

environmental justice” (p. 414) for integration in environmental education research and pedagogy.

Williams and Millington (2004) conclude that this spectrum, from weaker to stronger approaches to sustainability, represents a range of stances that “. . . to differing degrees seeks concessions towards environmental protection” (p.101). For example, in the 1960’s and 1970’s, more ecocentric views attained significant sway in North America, resulting in the enactment of important legislation for environmental protection, including among others the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, and National Environmental Protection Act in the USA as well as parallel legislation in Canada (Appleton, 2006).

While alternative, more biocentric and ecocentric perspectives have been a part of environmental discourse, their influence remains at the periphery in mainstream society. Stronger sustainability perspectives point to the incongruous treatment of environmental and social issues relative to the prevailing importance given economic considerations. Rather than the balanced presentation shown in Figure 1.1 which is the ideal, reality may be more accurately represented by the illustrations in Figure 5.1, emphasizing existing inequities. Proponents of stronger approaches to sustainability argue that dominant Western society is too entrenched in perpetuating the consumption-oriented status quo rather than recognizing the need for transformative change toward balancing holistically environmental, social, and economic needs in personal, communal, and corporate decision-making.

Figure 5.1: Illustrations of the Current Imbalance in Dominant, Neoliberal Approaches to Sustainability¹²⁵



Obscuring Raised Consciousness

The transformative change for which these alternative perspectives are advocating involves a different consciousness than the one currently held by dominant Western society and current mainstream efforts in sustainability (i.e., weak sustainability). In short, this “raised consciousness” is a more “participatory mind” (Bai, 2009; p. 139) than the prevailing subscription to anthropocentrism in which nature is viewed separately from human beings. This “raised consciousness” is a hybridized sensibility inclusive of “ecocentric, biocentric and other centred and non-centred perspectives” and attentive to social and environmental justice issues (Fawcett, 2013; p. 414). A deeper discussion of the notion from an Indigenous perspective is presented in Chapter Eight. This present discussion focuses on what, in my opinion, is obscuring the path to a more collective “raised consciousness.”

¹²⁵ Images retrieved November 4, 2010 from: <http://www.sustainability-now.org/csa.htm>; <http://www.calacademy.org/teachers/lounge/?p=600>; <http://www.ivanenviroman.com/the-triple-bottom-line-still-includes-people/>; Source for unbalanced Venn diagram: Larry Onisto, Senior Scientist, Ontario Power Generation, personal communication, presentation at the Region of Halton, Ontario, Canada, December 22, 2008. Also see: IUCN and Adams, 2006, p. 2 and <http://www.iucn.org/programme/>. See also Lozano, R. 2008.

First, many authors note current trends away from sustainability goals. Victor (2008) comments that continued economic growth cannot be sustained for much longer as “the world’s economies are or will be confronting severe constraints as we discover that nature’s bounty is being run down, even to the point of exhaustion” (p. 21). Likewise, Gibson and Hassan (2005) note the less than impressive results seen to date:

While thousands of specific initiatives have been undertaken at all levels from the neighbourhood to the planet, they have so far remained mostly counterpoints to the dominant practice. Certainly they have had far too little evident effect on the two key trends that agitated the Brundtland Commission – the continuing degradation of ecosystems and resources, and the expanding gap between rich and poor (p. 49).

Data in recently published reports substantiate these claims. According to a 2013 World Meteorological Organization report, atmospheric concentrations of greenhouse gases continue to rise, as are global temperatures, resulting in shrinking sea ice, rising sea levels, and increased instances of extreme weather events.¹²⁶ The World Wildlife Fund (WWF) *Living Planet Report* (2012) advises that global biodiversity is declining and that the earth’s carrying capacity has been exceeded. Statistics in the report show, for example, that “across the globe, vertebrate populations were on average one-third smaller in 2008 than they were in 1970” (p. 18). This report also calculates that humanity’s ecological footprint (EF) equals 18.2 billion global hectares (gha),¹²⁷ or 2.7 gha per person, significantly more than the Earth’s carrying capacity, which in 2008 was 12.0 billion gha. Canada, WWF reports, has the eighth largest ecological

¹²⁶ World Meteorological Organization (March 2013). *A summary of current climate change findings and figures*. Retrieved June 5, 2013 from:

<http://www.wmo.int/pages/mediacentre/factsheet/documents/ClimateChangeInfoSheet2013-03final.pdf>

¹²⁷ A global hectare equals “a biologically productive hectare with world average productivity” (WWF, 2012; p. 38).

footprint per capita: “If the entire world lived like Canadians do, it would take 3.5 Earths to support the demand.”¹²⁸

Another report recently published is the 2013 Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report, *Climate Change 2013: The Physical Science Basis*. This report verifies the warming trends of our atmosphere and our oceans; the diminishing glaciers, sea ice, and spring snow cover; and rising sea levels and carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations, concluding “human influence on the climate system is clear” (p. 10).¹²⁹ Other studies and publications document our world’s diminishing freshwater resources, dead zones in oceans, melting permafrost, deforestation, and collapsing fish populations, among other environmental problems (WWF, 2012; Annin, 2006; Shiva, 2002; Tirado, 2008; Roberts, 2012, Mathez and Smerdon, 2009; Folmer and Van Kooten, 2006; Rose, 2008; Rogers, 1995).

These statistics and reports shed a gloomy light on the health of our planet. Statistics regarding social and economic trends are equally disturbing. For example, with respect to socio-economic equity, the gap between rich and poor is widening, not narrowing (as already discussed in Chapter Two). Lafferty (2004) summarizes succinctly, “. . . the ‘world’s poor’ are not only still with us, but . . . their total numbers have increased; their relative position vis-à-vis the ‘world’s wealthy’ has decreased; and they are no closer to having their essential needs met today than in 1987” (p. 353). Another way to look at this trend is with the 80-20 rule. This rule holds that eighty per cent of the wealth has been traditionally held by twenty per cent of the population. Paul Krugman (2006), however, notes that the benefits of the last thirty years have been concentrated largely in the top one per cent of the population.

¹²⁸ *WWF report criticizes Canada’s ecological footprint* (May 15, 2012). Retrieved June 5, 2013 from: <http://www.cbc.ca/news/technology/story/2012/05/15/world-wildlife-fund-report-canada.html>

¹²⁹ Retrieved October 21, 2013 from: http://www.climatechange2013.org/images/uploads/WGIAR5-SPM_Approved27Sep2013.pdf.

In summary, sustainability remains elusive given these overall trends. What is preventing real progress? What is obscuring a “raised consciousness?” In deliberating these questions, I focus attention on what I consider to be a few concerns which stand in the way of any change, transformative or otherwise. While not exhaustive, the ensuing discussion highlights present-day neoliberalism, personal attitudes and values, and pocketbook realities as contributing deterrents.

Power and Neoliberalism

The current times in which we live are often described as neoliberal, an ideological paradigm that prefers the language of markets, promotes consumer choice and consumerism, and supports individual autonomy over government control (Larner, 2000). Neoliberalism prefers the minimalist state where “[m]arkets are understood to be a better way of organizing economic activity” (Larner, 2000, p. 5) than government; hence, deregulation and privatization are central tenets of neoliberalism.

How does this relate to sustainability? In general, with respect to government decision-making, those with power shape and establish policy. Governments and elected officials are, and will continue to be, influenced by powerful lobbies with significant financial resources. Given the neoliberal times, decisions often favour more privatization and less government regulation. As a result, compared to economic prosperity issues, social justice and environmental protection have been considered, in general, lower priority items by government (Victor, 2008).

In Canada’s neoliberal society, for example, over the last few years the federal government has weakened environmental legislation through Omnibus Budget Bills C-38 and C-45. Key scientific and environmental initiatives have lost funding and central pieces of legislation have been revised, such as the Fisheries Act and Navigation Protection Act (previously the Navigable Waters Protection Act), removing protections from 99% of Canada’s

natural water bodies.¹³⁰ Updated oil and gas regulations to address carbon and other emissions remain outstanding. According to a 2010 report on social determinants of health,

Canada compares unfavourably to other wealthy developed nations in its support of citizens as they navigate the life span. Our income inequality and poverty rates are growing and are among the highest of wealthy developed nations. Canadian spending in support of families, persons with disabilities, older Canadians, and employment training is also among the lowest of these same wealthy developed nations.¹³¹

Detailing this “unfavourable” record, a 2008 report by the Canadian Human Rights Commission assesses social inequality based on gender, class, age, sexuality, ability/disability, as well as for Aboriginal peoples.¹³² Affirming significant disparities in Canada, the report notes that compared to non-Aboriginal citizens, for example, Aboriginal peoples experience higher unemployment rates, disadvantages in education and health status, higher incarceration rates, problems accessing clean drinking water, and ongoing racial discrimination, among other inequities and injustices. Meanwhile, the Progressive Conservative federal government continues to implement policies and tax breaks favouring private enterprise. The omnibus bills noted above, for example, benefit corporate interests by easing environmental assessment requirements and weakening pollution regulations.¹³³ Neoliberal capitalist interests have worked to maintain the status quo – in favour of the pocketbook, financial bottom line, or other narrow interests.

¹³⁰ The Council of Canadians (Fall 2013). “The Canadian Economic Rethink: At War or Getting it Right?” Retrieved April 20, 2014 from: <http://www.fdnearth.org/files/2013/09/Canada-Stephen-Harper-Report-Card.pdf>.

¹³¹ Retrieved April 20, 2014 from: http://www.thecanadianfacts.org/The_Canadian_Facts.pdf; p. 8.

¹³² Retrieved April 20, 2014 from:

http://lib.ohchr.org/HRBodies/UPR/Documents/Session4/CA/CHRC_CAN_UPR_S4_2009_CanadianHumanRightsCommission_ENG_NHRI.pdf.

¹³³ The Council of Canadians (Fall 2013). “The Canadian Economic Rethink: At War or Getting it Right?” Retrieved April 20, 2014 from: <http://www.fdnearth.org/files/2013/09/Canada-Stephen-Harper-Report-Card.pdf>.

Attitudes and Values

Another challenge obscuring a “raised consciousness” needed for effective progress toward sustainability ideals is that not everyone’s attitudes and values support the notion of sustainability. In any heterogeneous community where there is a multiplicity of cultures, classes, religions, and ethnicities, unanimity of thought on the subject is improbable (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001). Where people are concerned about protecting their individual liberties and minimizing government controls and regulations, for instance, sustainability initiatives most likely encounter some degree of opposition or dismissal. Even though these plans may have been devised through collaborative processes, in the end, they may be perceived as “top-down” change. Individuals unsympathetic to the overall concept and vision of sustainability, who do not like to be told what to do and how to live their lives, are likely to resist any change which may affect their lifestyle and freedom of choice. As an example, the following commentary is from a blog entitled, “The History of Sustainable Development: Connecting the Dots:”

The concept of sustainable development is basically a sham...it is a veneer to fool people into thinking that somehow giving government more power over business, property rights and development will create a more ecofriendly, “sustainable” environment. The fact is, it is a free market that will use resources efficiently. Next time you drive through mile after mile after mile of sprawl, ask yourself: Wasn’t this the result of government planning? Left to its own devices, the free market would have used land a lot more efficiently (i.e. density would be higher) and there would be a lot less sprawl and a lot more open space. Just think how much asphalt was used, how many acres of forest were destroyed, how many wildlife habitats were impacted, all because local governments said this was the way to do “comprehensive” planning. Do you trust these people to figure out what is “sustainable”. [sic] Here is the answer. The only thing sustainable is a free market. Sooner or later everything else fails.¹³⁴

Setting aside for now the exceptions one could take with the above quote, one may focus on the tone of the narrative, which is based on values of limiting government, supporting the free

¹³⁴ Retrieved January 28, 2011 from: <http://disruptthenarrative.wordpress.com/2010/10/17/the-history-of-sustainable-development-connecting-the-dots/>

market system, and protecting property rights. It would be difficult to convince this individual to broaden his focal length and consider the needs of future generations. As well, this individual may not recognize that the root cause of the poor planning he describes may be due to the influence of developers and other neoliberal business interests who are funding politicians and actively lobbying to build sprawling subdivisions, destroy forest and other wildlife habitat, and pave over prime agricultural farmland.

Lélé and Norgaard (1996) point out, “Some people may not or cannot care as much about the future as others” (p. 355). The above example illustrates the point that contrary value sets pose a challenge for obtaining widespread endorsement of sustainability initiatives within a heterogeneous community. Just as NGOs and citizens are sympathetic to the vision of sustainability and comprise the “ineradicable antagonism” to hegemonic neoliberalism (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; p. xvii), a significant portion of a community’s population exists as the “Other” to sustainability planning initiatives. They are the “ineradicable antagonism” unresponsive to sustainability, wishing to maintain “business as usual” because they are content with how the status quo maintains their current lifestyle and individual liberties. Indeed, in the opinion of this blogger, “the only thing sustainable is a free market” and in like-minded individuals the free market may be the only thing worth sustaining.

At another point on the spectrum of attitudes and values, many Canadians “value nature and want a healthy, safe environment” (Nisbet et al, 2007; p. 202), but various studies have examined potential reasons why anticipated behavioural change remains unrealized (Allen & Ferrand, 1999; Bechtel & Churchman, 2002; Dunlap & Mertig, 1995; Kaiser, Wolfgang & Fuhrer, 1999; Kaplan, 2000; Nordlund & Garvill, 2002; Pelletier et al, 1999). Structural reasons include the lack of local programs, such as recycling or public transportation, preventing

participation in environmentally more sustainable practices. Some psychological reasons include, but are not limited to: feeling overwhelmed or helpless, not feeling confident in the environmental strategies available, feeling ineffectual in one's ability to make a difference, or feeling no imminent threat because local impacts have not yet materialized (as in ozone depletion or climate change). Nisbet et al (2007) conclude that these and other reasons "may explain why the best efforts at educating people about environmental issues do not always result in behaviour change" (p. 203). So even if a positive attitude and concern for the environment exist, hidden psychological barriers remain a sustainability challenge.

Perhaps these barriers boil down to a fear of change (Washington & Cook, 2011). Not knowing what the future holds, people hold onto what is known: the status quo. Whatever the reason, our attitudes and values, consciously or subconsciously, inform our actions or inactions and, in my opinion, have contributed to obscuring a raised consciousness.

Pocketbook Reality and Pocketbook Complacency

A third challenge I consider worth noting that is obscuring a "raised consciousness" is connected to one's financial stability. Two sets of income brackets frame the discussion around one's income and implications for actively supporting sustainability initiatives. At one end of the spectrum are citizens who are struggling just to make ends meet, place food on the table, and maintain a roof over their heads (not to mention those who have no place to call home). As Lorne Gunter of the National Post commented, many people consider "... the environment as a luxury good. That when economies are strong, environment rises up in people's concern levels and ... goes down when times are bad. ... People are worried about their mortgages, ... about their jobs, ... about their children's education and their future and that displaces their concern

about the environment.”¹³⁵ Given the growing income disparity between the rich and poor, this reality presents a challenge for sustainability advocates and practitioners. For people struggling financially, the demands of day-to-day living overshadow any opportunity to take a longer-term worldview that sustainability initiatives require.

Even though people in lower income brackets are more populous, the financially wealthy, although a minority, “place a far greater burden on the Earth’s life support system than the billion who live in extreme poverty.”¹³⁶ One report concludes that the rich minority “squander resources and consume insatiably” (Council of Canadians, 2013). Of course, exceptions to the rule exist, but over-consumption and our throw-away society have led to what some are labeling “affluenza” – “a socially transmitted condition of overload, debt, anxiety, and waste resulting from the dogged pursuit of more” (de Graaf et al, 2002; p. 2). Affluenza affects “the poor as well as the rich, and our two-tiered system (with rich getting richer and poor poorer) punishes the poor twice” (de Graaf, 2002; p. xiii). Whether poor or rich, or somewhere in between, life in an entrenched consumer culture is “the established order” (Marcuse, 1964; p. 57) in which various facets of neoliberal society, such as the advertising industry, are geared to “indoctrinate and manipulate – promote a false consciousness” (Marcuse, 1964; p. 57). The neoliberal machine has become “a way of life” in its own right and “militates against qualitative change” (Marcuse, 1964; p. 12). Jickling (2004) concurs with Marcuse (1964), pointing out how many have become subsumed by the dominant cultural perspective and have “[slipped] into conformism and a collective unconsciousness” (Jickling, 2004; p. 11). In other words, a consumption-based coma, so to speak, has led to complacency, obscuring a raised consciousness (de Graaf et al, 2002).

¹³⁵ The Current with Anna Maria Tremonti (June 21, 2010). *Environment & G20*. An interview with Maurice Strong, Jim MacNeill, and Lorne Gunter. Retrieved January 30, 2011 from: <http://www.cbc.ca/thecurrent/2010/06/june-21-2010.html>.

¹³⁶ The Council of Canadians (Fall 2013). “The Canadian Economic Rethink: At War or Getting it Right?” Retrieved April 20, 2014 from: <http://www.fdnearth.org/files/2013/09/Canada-Stephen-Harper-Report-Card.pdf>.

I have highlighted in this section just a few pragmatic and political issues hindering progress toward a Western ideal of a sustainable future. Sustainability advocates and enterprises strive to craft language, develop innovations, and implement strategies to overcome these challenges. Other impediments “obscuring a raised consciousness” certainly exist. One of which is the premise of this dissertation – that dominant Western society has, for the most part, limited its sight lines, dismissing Indigenous ways of knowing and ignoring their wisdom that has sustained Indigenous peoples for millennia. The remainder of this dissertation (as is my intent throughout) contemplates Indigenous knowledges with the balanced respect I feel is overdue.

Summary

To summarize this second visit in the eastern direction, the gifts of vision and respect have guided the discussion toward a general understanding of dominant and alternative Western approaches to sustainability. Anthropocentric views have, for the most part, commanded Western society’s sustainability agenda.¹³⁷ However, more ecocentric views have certainly shaped policy and continue to contribute to the ongoing, dualistic conversation within the prevailing neoliberal, growth-oriented paradigm. As Nilsen (2010) notes, weaker sustainability stances are a “good description of the situation in the world today” (p. 496) while the alternative – stronger sustainability – is a “normative goal” (p. 496). Chapter Five has explored how weaker sustainability initiatives may strive to consider equally social, environmental, and economic

¹³⁷ Topics outside the scope of this dissertation have been omitted due to space limitations, but their importance in the discourse of sustainability thought and practice is in no way diminished. These topics include, but are not limited to, issues related to north-south tensions, globalization, national security with respect to not only terrorism, but also food and water availability and distribution, consumption trends, and whether natural limits exist to the world’s population growth trajectory. These (as well as other) topics pose a host of challenges to progressing toward a sustainable future and are topics for dissertations in their own right.

issues; yet a reality check indicates otherwise, obscuring a raised consciousness, individually and collectively.

Popular illustrations of sustainability, the three-legged stool and the Venn diagram, expose the lopsided weightings toward profit over people and the planet. Why? I assert that these imbalances have arisen because dominant Western society has ignored and dismissed other peoples and their knowledge systems to the detriment of all Creation. The next chapter delves deeper into underlying philosophies contributing to our penchant for economic growth at the expense of environmental and social considerations. Chapter Six strives to present a balanced discussion of both Western and Indigenous views, highlighting for the reader distinct philosophical differences while respecting both knowledge systems as essential parts of the whole of global knowledge.

Chapter 6 – SOUTH: Balance in Western and Indigenous Relationships

The ceremonies I most often attend are spring fasting ceremonies grounded in old Midewiwin ways.¹³⁸ During these ceremonies, protocols are adhered to in support of fasters who have prepared ahead of time for a fast lasting up to four days, sometimes longer. Everyone – fasters and helpers alike – must prepare in advance of arriving. These preparations usually begin in the winter and when people arrive at ceremonies, they are expected to have sufficient supplies to camp for as long as the ceremonies last, usually anywhere from about ten to fourteen days. Ideally once there, everyone remains without leaving. Pipe ceremonies, drumming and singing, sweat lodge ceremonies, feasts and a final giveaway are all taking place during this time together.

An important learning regarding time when attending ceremonies is to be present. This does not mean merely showing up. Rather, being present has many different facets which are related to how one has prepared. Being prepared enables one to be present during ceremonies, which means being of a good mind and dedicating oneself to participate with one's best focus and effort to honour the protocols in support of Creation, each other and the fasters. I have come across a quote which resonates with me, summarizing this aspect of time. When I read who had said it, I recognized the name as one of Mooshum's teachers. He said, "Everybody has a song to sing which is no song at all: it is a process of singing, and when you sing, you are where you are."¹³⁹ To me, this learning teaches one to be present "in the moment" during ceremonies and, by extension, in our everyday living.

In other words, when helping in ceremonies, whether singing and drumming, preparing a feast, or fulfilling any task, we strive to focus our thoughts and energy with caring and kindness. Mooshum summarizes this as "being of one mind" in that when the entire group all together achieves unity in thought and purpose, the community as a whole walks the Sweetgrass Road. Likewise, transferring this attitude and consciousness to our lives after ceremonies, we are striving every day to walk the Sweetgrass Road, the miyopimatisiwin. Being present in our everyday lives, having this raised consciousness, is ceremony in and of itself. In essence, ceremonies do not end; choosing to live every day in this way is the "way of the good life."

Introduction

During the second visit in the southern direction, I spend more time focusing on relationships. The relationships explored are between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing and the respective foundational perspectives underpinning how each way of knowing approaches sustainability. The objective of this chapter is two-fold. The first is to highlight how the

¹³⁸ See Chapter 1 for definitions of this and other terms.

¹³⁹ Abraham Burnstick, p. 60 in Couture, J. (1991a). *Explorations in Native knowing*. In J.W. Friesen (Ed). *The cultural maze: Complex questions on Native destiny in western Canada* (Calgary: Detselig Enterprises), pp. 53-73.

dominant Western approach of ecological modernization has monopolized society's strategic pursuit of sustainability, precluding the possible consideration of Indigenous (or even alternative Western) approaches. This relational imbalance has led to an incomplete understanding of the whole. That is, Indigenous ways of knowing and their potential contributions to sustainability theory and practice have been largely ignored by dominant Western society. Perhaps dominant society is blind to the existence of Indigenous ways of knowing, not realizing that they have remained viable and important sources of knowledge with physical and metaphysical insights for a more comprehensive, holistic perspective.

The second objective of this chapter is to explore this imbalance between dominant Western and Indigenous ways of knowing by considering the relationship of each with power, nature, time, and technology. The differences in these relationships reveal how dominant Western society's approach to sustainability, while remaining the principal avenue, in my opinion has evolved in a fragmented way, disconnected from place, spirit, and time.

Imbalance and fragmentation have yielded political, economic, and socio-ecological challenges. The historical conflict between North American Indigenous peoples and European settlers and "white" society is a clear example. The ongoing conflicts between Indigenous peoples and dominant society are testament to both the lack of understanding about Indigenous ways of knowing and the imbalance that has occurred due to the imposition of one knowledge system on another.

Exploring the full extent of unequal power relations and their consequences is not within the scope of this dissertation.¹⁴⁰ Rather, this chapter is devoted to understanding the

¹⁴⁰ To read about power issues and relations between Indigenous and Western peoples, please see the following: Alfred (1999), *Peace, power, righteousness*; Alfred (2009), *Wasáse: Indigenous pathways of action and freedom*; McNab (2009), *No place for fairness: Indigenous land rights and policy in the Bear Island case and beyond*; Dickason

underpinning philosophies of these distinct worldviews so that discernment of difference may create space for appreciating the gifts of each. One reading this chapter from a Western perspective may think I am engaging in a binary-dualistic critique. However, I am approaching my dissertation from an Indigenous perspective, which as previously mentioned is not a question of “either-or” but a care-full contemplation of “either-and” along a spectrum of views. Having been trained in a Western educational system and learning another way of knowing, I have become aware of how my thought patterns are often predisposed to binary-dualist judgments. The intent of this chapter (and dissertation in general) is to resist such hierarchical thinking, yet acknowledge philosophical differences and better appreciate that the favouritism shown one way of knowing has contributed to neoliberal capitalism's unbalanced preference for economic priorities over environmental and social needs.¹⁴¹ The demonstration in this chapter of the imbalance between Western over Indigenous knowledges is not to critique which is right and which is wrong or better or worse. Both knowledge systems are valid and important; the key is to balance them with respect.

An important consideration to acknowledge here is that these worldviews are not mutually exclusive. Many Indigenous peoples have internalized Western epistemologies and understand linear thought. They understand Western scientific methods, which complement and supplement Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK, also known as Indigenous science; see Cajete, 1994). Likewise, Western society understands circular reasoning and has begun to appreciate and benefit from the scientific knowledge of TEK to varying degrees. Both

and McNab (2008), *Canada's First Nations: A history of founding peoples from earliest times*; Frideres (2011) *First Nations in the twenty-first century*.

¹⁴¹ Indeed, the emphasis placed upon economic growth at the expense of environmental and social needs is another example of hierarchical, binary-dualist thinking. Arguments are frequently heard pitting the economy against the environment when the issue is not either jobs or the environment, but balancing the need for both.

worldviews are essential knowledge systems contributing to the whole of our relationship with Creation.

A second consideration is to recall that just as there are different perspectives in Western society, ranging from the dominant neoliberal worldview to more ecocentric ones, such as ecofeminism and deep ecology, many different Indigenous knowledges exist. As presented in the Pre/Amble, I am not homogenizing Indigenous knowledge as one way of knowing, as each people's way of knowing is distinct to the place where they dwell. Yet similarities do exist between them. While I do not presume to know about all Indigenous knowledges, I am able to speak to some degree about the one I have learned these last twenty-eight years in ceremonies, grounded in Cree-Nishnaabe ways of knowing with the Medicine Circle.

A Few Reflections

This chapter presents a partial literature review of dominant Western society's views on power, nature, time and technology.¹⁴² For each of these topics I also present an Indigenous perspective, drawing from the literature as well as my experiences and learnings in ceremonies. Before I begin, however, I would like to reflect upon my writing process. I have been only too aware that the act of writing what previously has been passed down through oral tradition opens up the possibility for misinterpretation, misunderstanding and premature judgment. Premature because the reader has not had the opportunity to experience firsthand what is being read. As emphasized in the First Journey 'Round, learning about IK through reading is inherently an incomplete educational experience as doing is integral to understanding and internalizing what

¹⁴² I acknowledge that alternative Western views, such as ecofeminism and deep ecology, among many others, have different perspectives, providing a wide range of worthwhile ideas in the whole of global knowledge. Due to space considerations, I limit my discussion to views of dominant Western society as defined in the Pre/Amble. Similarly, Indigenous views shared in this chapter are based upon my understanding of the Medicine Circle based in Cree-Nishnaabe ways of knowing and in no way represent the diversity of Indigenous knowledges in existence.

one is striving to learn. Because reading shortcuts the four stages of learning as discussed in the Pre/Amble, will what I have written be misinterpreted and misunderstood?

Such is but one of the concerns I contemplate while writing. I also feel the need to remind the reader about the challenges of writing an oral tradition as, throughout this process, I have continuously been asking myself and discussing with Mooshum the questions discussed in Chapter Two, “What may be written?” and “How much may be shared?” Mooshum once asked another doctoral student “Is your work clean?” referring to the importance of “deep care” and “ethical practice” in one’s work.¹⁴³ Striving to keep my work clean, these and other questions have remained in the forefront of my mind. I have endeavoured to address them by constantly balancing my thoughts and feelings and exercising “care-full” consideration. The process certainly has been a circular spiral with the Medicine Circle, moving through the directions toward new insights.

Balance of Power

To review, our current times are often described as neoliberal, an ideological paradigm that prefers the language of markets, promotes consumer choice and consumerism, and supports individual autonomy over government control (Larner, 2000). The pursuit of sustainability within modern Western society and the dominant neoliberal hegemony has been mixed, ranging from deceptive greenwashing to more authentic, enthusiastic adoption and integration. While the latter is not to be dismissed, as these early adopters are critical in proving the business case for sustainability and for convincing others to follow their lead, acceptance is far from widespread. Resistance to change and entrenched allegiance to unfettered economic growth are reinforced by, as Thiele (2013) articulates, those who are “comfortable with the status quo, and [who] desire a

¹⁴³ Warren, Sandi M. (2008). *Is your work clean? An exploration into Indigenous ethics of deep care*. Doctoral dissertation, Trent University.

future where their considerable wants will continue to be met, even at the expense of other people's needs" (p. 115). As a result, integrating social justice and environmental protection into governance and corporate mandates remains, in general, a lower priority compared to economic prosperity imperatives (Victor, 2008), producing the unbalanced outcomes pictured in Figure 5.1.

From an Indigenous knowledge perspective, balance in power is an essential practice in ceremonies. I have already spoken about the different tasks for which men and women are responsible in Chapter Three. These "chop-wood-carry-water" learnings teach that men's and women's roles are equally important. Balance in numbers and balanced respect for women's and men's voices are sought. Regarding representation, without one or the other, with too few, or if more women are present than men or vice versa, the work that needs to be done supporting fasters and in following protocols, while not impossible, becomes more difficult, making that which we are all striving for together more challenging.

One spring, Mark and I arrived at ceremonies near Sooke, BC with our two nephews. I was pregnant with our first son. As we set up camp, I noticed that no other women were around . . . yet. When I asked Mark about this, he checked with Mooshum who confessed that I was the only woman there that year. Not to worry though, he said, as some friends would drop by food for the feasts so I would not have to do all that work on my own. For all the other tasks, the men would help. We adapted and ceremonies were wonderful in their special way (this was the year with the "loo with the view!"). While I may have missed the camaraderie with other women, I was fortunate to spend extra time with Mooshum as he helped in the kitchen and taught me his delicious fish fry recipe!

Fast forward several years to ceremonies near Grand Forks, BC. After all the fasters had been taken to their fasting grounds, we realized that Mark was the only man on the men's side of the tepee. Mark was extremely busy as Mooshum's wascapeos and fire keeper all in one. The several women and I were wholly entertained by Mark's one man show. During the days, though, Mark and Mooshum found the female energy to be overwhelming at times. That year, we all learned a lot about balance.

With respect to decision-making, the collaboration in ceremonies is a democratic process where equal consideration is given to men's and women's responsibilities. For example, the

head wascapeos and Elders (both male and female), even before the official start date of ceremonies, discuss such logistical questions as the timing of the first feast to ensure both women and men have sufficient time to fulfill all their tasks prior to preparing the meal and lighting the fire. As I have already mentioned, planning prior to arrival is a key part of ceremonies; collaboration and communication are part of this process. This example, on a simplified level, illustrates the equal respect given to both women and men and the balance in power centering their communal relationships.

The overall aim is for men and women to function in concert; individual egos are moderated, and Western dualist thinking is sidelined. Lightning (1992) reinforces this Indigenous mindset: “The mutual help in the performance of the ceremony is a manifestation of unity, an acknowledgment . . . that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts” (p. 247). Walking the learnings about “chop-wood-carry-water” back to Creation, the laws of nature are clear: fire and water are essential life forces, and balancing them together is vital (so, too, with women and men). Without fire, we would freeze; without water, we become dehydrated. Too much water douses the fire; too much fire evaporates the water. Both must be in balance for life to exist, which is truly a gift greater than merely the sum of our cells and genetic codes.

In my readings I came across the phrase, to “braid movement” (Barreiro, 2010; p. xxi). The image which came to my mind when I read these words is that of our actions, our “movement” in ceremonies (and hopefully in our everyday lives) braiding together, where the braid we are creating is the sweetgrass braid - to be strong in mind, body and spirit individually and as a community. This is the Sweetgrass Road we are striving to walk every day, the miyopimatisiwin that Mooshum Peter and Mooshum Michael teach, ever-widening the road, the “way of the good life.”

Extending these learnings of balance and holism to sustainability in dominant Western society, the neoliberal mindset is seen to be out of balance with other ways of knowing, dominating political and economic agendas at the expense of social and environmental well-being. Sustainability, by its very definition, requires balance in examining issues more holistically. This means balancing the needs of the present with those of our future generations; balancing the needs of society with the needs of the non-human world; seeing the bigger picture which includes social and environmental costs and benefits, rather than narrowly focusing on net profit and the financial bottom line. Dominant society and those in positions of power have chosen to privilege the dollars to be made over a holistic balance in which the economy, society and the environment *all* profit. This reality is a path clearly divergent from the Sweetgrass Road.

Ideas of Nature

Beyond issues of power and balance, dominant society's idea of nature has predisposed us to our anthropocentric tendencies. Human beings as part of nature was once Western civilization's ancient idea of nature, one respecting spiritual and reciprocal qualities of the human-nature interrelationship (Glacken, 1967; Oelschlaeger, 1991; Nash, 1982). Glacken (1967) notes that the pre-Socratic Greeks, in their Classical texts, were the first to articulate in writing an acknowledgement of human-nature interdependence. Over time, however, such a perspective has been largely replaced by more domineering philosophies regarding the utilitarian purpose of nature and of humans as separate and distinct from nature (McKibben, 2006; Suzuki & McConnell, 1997; Turner, 1992; Vining, Merrick & Price, 2008; White, 1967; Williams, 2010).

Judeo-Christian constructs have influenced how Western societies have evolved their human-nature relationships. Interpretations of Genesis have promoted dominion over the earth

since the Middle Ages (Holling et al, 1998) and have framed nature as having “no reason for existence save to serve man” (White, 1973, p. 274). White (1967), Livingston (1994), Shepard (1982), Diamond (2005) and others mark the Medieval onset of this separation and superiority of humans over nature roughly at the time when Western peoples began gathering in permanent settlements and began relying on increasingly intensive agriculture and animal domestication to feed their growing populations (Livingston, 1994).

St. Francis of Assisi is acknowledged by many to have been the first to attempt to thwart increasingly domineering attitudes over nature in Medieval times with an alternative Christian view, practicing humility and professing the “democracy of all God’s creatures” (White, 1967; p. 1206). Other traditions and peoples have abided by similar principles, such as the Kabyle people of northern Africa who “demonstrate a dependence upon and solidarity towards nature” (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; p. 155; Bourdieu, 1990). Likewise, Zen Buddhism proffers an understanding of humans as participants in nature (Timmerman, 1988; White, 1967). From these and other peoples and traditions, more ecocentric views have evolved in modern times through ecofeminism, deep ecology and the Gaia movement, aiming to temper attitudes of superiority, domination and utilitarianism with acknowledgement of humanity’s oneness with nature (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). The environmental movement of the 1960’s and ‘70’s is predicated upon these ecocentric principles (Urry, 1994) and has helped shape the passage of key environmental legislation in the 1970’s and 1980’s. Contemporary environmentalism has influenced modern Christianity, Judaism, and Islam (and other religions) to review their historical doctrines and adopt more eco-spiritual philosophies and practices.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁴ For more information on modern religious initiatives, the website for Greening Sacred Spaces and Faith and the Common Good is: <http://www.greeningsacredspaces.net/>.

Still, mainstream Western society remains bound up, for the most part, in predominant Christian dogma (McKibben, 2006; Suzuki & McConnell, 1997; White, 1967). Dominant society's proclivity for controlling nature has been justified as the "continuation of God's creation" where interference "on a massive scale for human use" through agricultural innovation and then the industrial revolution has been sanctified and reified (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; p. 11). During the Renaissance, the philosophies, discoveries, and innovations of Galileo, Descartes, Newton, and Bacon, among others, cemented a human-nature divide through nature's study and objectification in the new sciences of physics, astronomy and mathematics (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Suzuki & McConnell, 1997).

An Indigenous "idea of nature" is difficult to articulate as nature is not recognized as a separate entity distinct from human beings. Very simply, we cannot survive without nature, so how can we separate ourselves from it? "The land" is often the term used to refer to the place where we live, inclusive of the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the plants and animals we consume for food, clothing, shelter and warmth. Knowledge of "the land" is crucial as we depend upon balancing its gifts for our survival. In turn when we die, we return to the earth and replenish the soil, feeding the plants and animals that come after us. The continuous circularity and reciprocity in life perpetuate all Creation, of which we are a part.

We are, however, not a vital part of Creation as Creation (i.e., nature) is very capable of surviving without us. As all Creation stories relate, human beings are the last beings created on earth (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006). All non-human beings – the plants, the animals, the insects – have survived and thrived prior to the existence of human beings. While they can continue on without human beings, we cannot sustain ourselves without them, thus establishing our dependence upon, and integral connection with, "the land."

Close observation of the land provides us with knowledge for survival, inclusive of TEK and knowledge for human development (as already shown with the feather in Figure 3.1). While Indigenous peoples' Medicine Circles may vary depending upon where they live, a central tenet of all Medicine Circles and Indigenous ways of knowing is the reciprocal and wholly integrated human relationship with the land (Sheridan & Longboat, 2006). I have heard Mooshum Peter's words, "Take care of the land and it will take care of you," said in different ways by different Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, including Indigenous professors at various universities. This statement carries with it many meanings. First, the mutual relationality between human beings and the land is clear. Second, by taking care of the land, spending time with it, learning its ways, one learns about oneself. Here, "the land" is the teacher. After all, spending time with the land is how Indigenous peoples developed their Medicine Circles as tools and guides in the first place.

"Being on the land" may take different forms. Living on the land is one way, gathering, hunting, trapping and fishing. Holding ceremonies is another. Pre-contact, these were one and the same, and in some places today they undoubtedly still are. That is, the practice of living on the land includes the conscious acknowledgement of Creation in all of life. For example, the hunt is incomplete if the life and spirit of the hunted animal go unacknowledged. Gratitude is expressed in infinite ways – for the animal sharing its life and providing sustenance to others; for the sun rising each day and providing warmth and light; for water's life force and cleansing, thirst-quenching gifts; for Creation in general for its ceaseless and unselfish giving so that we may live, to name just a few.

Separating daily routines of life from this spiritual aspect to living in conscious gratitude is not possible in an Indigenous worldview, which does not distinguish the physical from the

metaphysical. Indigenous peoples do not accept that this world is devoid of spirit. Returning to the feather in Figure 3.1, a bird cannot fly with its feathers cut in half. By extension, spirit and place together constitute the whole of Creation. Granted, this connection has been frayed with the effects of colonization. European settlers brought with them not only disease and a superiority complex, but also a worldview predicated upon scientific inquiry and rational thought where science is distinct from anything having to do with spirit and Creation's life forces (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Orr, 1999). The worldview of the West has been forced upon Indigenous peoples around the globe. In Canada, the residential school system toiled to erase Indigenous culture and replace it with Eurocentric thought (Battiste and Henderson, 2000; Dickason and McNab, 2008).

Yet once upon a time, Western peoples had a strong, spiritual connection to place and their cultures and ways of being were integrally linked to where they lived, just as with Indigenous peoples (indeed, everyone was, at one time, indigenous to their land). A disconnect occurred, however, severing this integrated human-nature relationship (Cajete, 1994). Livingston (1994) refers to this alienation as humanity's domestication, a term he uses to describe the dissociation of people from place over time and loss of spiritual kinship with nature. He correlates humanity's domestication with the development of Western civilization, questioning the meaning of "civilization" when it has yielded an unhealthy, consumptive, technology-centred ideology. Dominant Western society into the twenty-first century has progressed along this disconnected vein separating spirit and place.

Indigenous knowledge, which was once dismissed out of hand, is now being recognized as having some value in government and scientific research initiatives. Conventional environmental and natural resource management processes are attempting to adapt decision-

making and program implementation to incorporate Indigenous knowledges. Some examples include the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board, the Nunavut Wildlife Management Board, the Southeast Baffin Beluga Co-Management Committee, the Beverly-Qamanirjuaq Caribou Management Board, the Ruby Range Sheep Steering Committee in the Yukon, among numerous other initiatives (Nadasdy, 2005; Stevenson, 2004; Wenzel, 2004; White, 2006).

Unfortunately, however, the whole of IK (i.e., knowledge of both spirit and place) is not what interests these organizations that are rooted in scientific method and reductionist inquiry. That is, they have chosen to consider only information which they deem important, that being TEK which is “easily digested by and integrated into Western scientific thought and praxis” (Stevenson, 2004; 70). As Stevenson (2004) explains,

The practice to date, with rare exception, has been to ‘cherry-pick’ specific elements of TEK, most notably, specific environmental knowledge, from their broader context and to merge them with Western science to inform [environmental resource management initiatives] (pp. 70-71).

White (2006) concurs with Stevenson’s assessment:

[IK] is a far broader concept than TEK . . . , encompassing as it does analyses and prescriptions for all manner of social interaction among people as well as deeply spiritual and philosophical precepts (often implicit and unspoken). . . . [W]hile significant strides have been made . . . towards giving due attention to TEK, the more fundamental aspects of [IK] collide head-on with the bureaucratic matrix . . . (p. 405).

The overriding outcome is that, through this de-coupling or decontextualization, the holistic benefits of Indigenous knowledge are lost, compromising the efficacy of the TEK that is being shared in good faith. Explaining this problem of decontextualization, Spak (2005) shares perspectives held by LaDuke (1994) and Little Bear (2000) who stress the centrality of the spiritual dimension of IK and of the “interrelationships between all entities” (Little Bear, 2000;

p. 77). Spak (2005) summarizes the dominant tendency to de-couple TEK from its spiritual dimension, observing:

From the perspective of many Western resource biologists . . . such fundamental beliefs of Indigenous Knowledge are viewed as religious beliefs that should be separated from the physically observable information they have in mind if they are to believe in the validity and importance of TEK in the first place (p. 234).

Limiting IK to what Western scientists “have in mind” underscores the ongoing dominance of Eurocentric attitudes and beliefs in dictating what is deemed useful and valuable and contributes to the assimilation of Indigenous knowledges (McGregor, 2004b). To some Indigenous authors, this smacks of further efforts at modern-day colonization (McGregor, 2004b; Battiste and Henderson, 2000). In fact, some authors note that it would be more efficacious to integrate Western knowledge into Indigenous knowledge systems as opposed to the conventional converse (Ellis, 2005; White, 2006). If this type of decolonization were to occur, the learning that is possible by respecting the whole of IK, keeping spirit and place interconnected, is significant. As Cajete (1994) affirms:

For Indigenous people around the world, education in Nature is life. For Native people throughout the Americas, the paradigm of thinking, acting, and working evolved *through* their established relationships to Nature. The foundation, expression, and context of Indigenous education were environmental. . . All were inspired through an integrated relationship of living in the reality of their physical environments . . . [T]he natural world was a sacred pathway of knowledge, of learning and teaching the nature of being truly human, truly alive (pp. 87-88).

The natural world is *still* a pathway of knowledge, of learning and teaching. The challenge lies in “raising the consciousness” of *all* peoples, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, as articulated by such authors as John Mohawk (Barreiro, 2005) and Paula Gunn Allen (Allen, 1992). While Indigenous peoples wish to see their knowledges respected as contributing to truth, the dominant Western culture holds fast to a binary dualism that decontextualizes Indigenous knowledge and separates all things from their spirit. Secularity and objectivity are endorsed as

truth, as sole requirements for accessing truth at the expense of a holistic view that includes not just the physical but also the metaphysical. Failing to acknowledge the full meaning of holism, which includes spirit, renders unsustainable the dominant Western construct and dims our future prospects for environmental, social, and economic health, that is, for a sustainable society.

Views of Time

Embedded in the above discussion regarding the evolution (or devolution) of the human-nature interconnection is the changing perception among Western societies of time. Early civilizations' comprehension of time was interlaced with the cycles of nature, such as wet and dry seasons, the phases of the moon, the solstices and equinoxes, sunrise and sunset, birth and death, etc. (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). People's daily and seasonal tasks, and their communal responsibilities, were guided by these environmental markers and time was understood as cyclical and closely connected to the people's knowledge of the place where they lived.

With the advent of the clock, time became abstracted and mechanized. Rather than organizing their tasks according to nature, societies began measuring their work by clock-time (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Sbert, 1992; Sachs, 1992). Nature's role in governing one's daily activities diminished. The clock began to bound the work day, especially with the onset of the Industrial Revolution when people in increasing numbers began working in factories and settling in towns, leaving life on the land. As Macnaghten & Urry (1998) comment, "All phenomena, practices and places became subject to the disembedding, centralising and universalising march of Greenwich clock-time" (p. 146). Indeed, as the clock began to rule more and more lives, the focus of Western societies has shifted from living with nature to "mastery of nature" (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; p. 146; see also: Livingston, 1994; Shepard, 1998; Suzuki and McConnell, 1997).

Western societies' abstraction of time and disconnection from nature have occurred over thousands of years (Urry, 1994; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Sbert, 1992) and have expanded with Europe's colonization of the world (Nanni, 2012). This gradual transfer to clock-time has enabled the conception of linear time. As societies no longer solely rely upon the circularity of the seasons for people's livelihoods, time has become "irreversible and directional" (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; p. 145). Irreversible in the sense that clock time moves forward, not backward. The 'big bang' creating our universe and setting our cosmic time in motion is one obvious example. Irrevocable impacts of technology (e.g., radioactive waste or man-made reservoirs from hydro-electric dams) are another, as Adam (1995) observes:

In real interactions with the environment . . . machine time becomes irreversible: there can be no unmoving, no unpolluting, no reabsorbing the heat and carbons back into the engine from which they emanated (p. 95).

Allegiance to clock-time has also produced a directional "cosmological arrow of time" defining a past, present and future (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; p. 145; Sbert, 1992). Linear time has contributed to dominant Western society's focus on living for the present (e.g., our desire for instant gratification) at the expense of future generations and with insufficient regard for wisdom gained from past experience, showing few tangible results to the contrary (Sbert, 1992; Sheridan & Longboat, 2006; Urry, 1994; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; De Graaf et al, 2002). Our allegiance to a fossil-fuel economy and inability, to date, to stem increasing temperatures from greenhouse gas emissions is just one case in point (IPCC, 2013; Environment Canada, 2013).

History, even though acknowledged as important, has been exposed as often duplicitous, given that the prominent histories espoused as truth are actually incomplete characterizations interpreted by conquering civilizations (Dickason and McNab, 2008). Others' histories have become endangered; especially those based in oral tradition where some languages are being lost

and wisdom accrued over the ages is being threatened by modern day assimilation of youth. To reiterate, the holism of IK (i.e., knowledge of place and spirit that all peoples once knew) is being threatened with attention given to TEK only, teasing out that which is deemed irrelevant by modern Western science and governance (Battiste and Henderson, 2000). With respect to the future, the allure of immediate gratification seems to eclipse implications for future generations (Urry, 1994). Warnings of the environmental consequences we are perhaps just now beginning to experience are either falling on willfully deaf ears or confounding authorities and corporations into paralysis (or both).

A final observation regarding Western time is that instantaneous, nanosecond time is now competing with clock-time and “represents the final abstraction of time and its complete separation from human experience and rhythms of nature” (Rifkin, 1987; p. 15; see also Adam 1990; Peters, 1992; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998). With the advent of the digital age, technologies are being developed to complete tasks in a mere fraction of a second, perhaps with the initial intent of freeing people to enjoy more leisure and family time (Urry, 1994). The opposite, however, seems to be the case. The addictive properties of hand-held devices, video games and the internet, it is argued, have disconnected people further from nature (Rifkin, 1987; Louv, 2008) and from each other (De Graaf, Wann & Naylor, 2005; Urry, 1994).¹⁴⁵

From an Indigenous perspective, time has always been connected to place, to nature. To be sure, contemporary Indigenous peoples have adapted to Western clock-time and digital time; however, the cycles of the seasons continue to inform their ways of knowing. For example, as discussed earlier in this dissertation, the Medicine Circle which I have learned presents *a process through time in space* which may be used to guide everyday living. This process could not have

¹⁴⁵ For more readings about implications of clock-time and instantaneous time on society, please see: Lasch, 1980; Lawson, 1989; Lyotard, 1984; Harvey, 1989; Urry, 1994.

been learned by the ancestors all those millennia ago without spending a great deal of time paying close attention to where they lived. Studying the movement of the sun and stars, observing the changing seasons in relation to the phases of the moon – in short, the ancestors developed a close relationship with their territory. Their knowledge deepened over the centuries through their ceremonial way of life as well as trial and error in their struggles to survive. Time in Indigenous ways of knowing is inseparable from the land because knowledge of the land has grown over time and has sustained them over the millennia.

Further, time has maintained its cyclical nature. The accumulation of knowledge has been cared for and passed down over generations by Elders, sustaining their peoples and growing their circles. Indigenous peoples respect their past and the Elders who care for their knowledge, knowing they are responsible for ensuring its transmission to their youth. The hope is that youth, as they become adults, will be ready to be entrusted with the knowledge and carry it forward to the next generation, continuing the circles.

Living in today's world, having adapted to abstract time, Indigenous peoples maintain the importance of honouring their pasts and maintaining their cultures as best as possible. In addition, as taught by seven generations thinking, they recognize the necessity of evaluating how actions today may affect generations yet to come. The current Idle No More movement is an example of Indigenous peoples standing up to protect the land, water and air for present and future generations, knowing, as Adam (1995) has pointed out, some impacts from living in "machine time" are apparently "irreversible" (p. 95). Future generations are subject to impacts from today's actions. Hydraulic fracturing is contaminating the air and groundwater; oil sands are also polluting the air and waterways; and radioactive-contaminated groundwater from Fukushima continues to seep into the Pacific Ocean (not to mention the spent radioactive fuel

rods accumulating from other nuclear fission plants). These are just a few present-day legacies that impact sustainability from local to global scales.

Medicine Circle learnings, according to Cree-Nishnaabe ways of knowing as I have come to understand them, discuss time in terms of relational reciprocity. To reiterate, if one fails to take time to be mindful and caring, any relationship is likely to suffer, including our relationship with the land.

Non-human beings – the four-leggeds, the winged ones, the crawlers and swimmers, trees and plants – innately know to follow these original instructions. Having learned by observing natural law, Indigenous peoples, pre-contact, strived to respect this reciprocal relationship as well. Gratitude for life was expressed in everyday living; ceremony was wholly integrated into Indigenous ways of being throughout each day. Not just words, but also attitudes and behaviours fulfill one's responsibility to live each day with respect and care, sharing with Creation and living in balance with other beings, human and non-human. Living this way, everyday living was and remains a ceremony.

Taking time to care in this way intuitively necessitates slowing down. In a world of nanosecond computations and an economic growth mindset, slowing down seems an ambitious request given dominant society's fast pace. Shifts proposed by the Slow Movement (Honoré, 2004; 2013) and slow-growth economics (Victor, 2008) are being introduced for deliberation and application in mainstream society in order to establish a better balance with Creation.

Downshifting acknowledges the limits to our finite world and recognizes the responsibility we have for future generations of all life.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ For more on the Slow Movement, please see Honoré, 2004: *In Praise of Slowness*; Honoré, 2013: *The Slow Fix*; Victor, 2008: *Managing without Growth: Slow by Design not Disaster*; Tasch, 2010: *Inquiries into the Nature of Slow Money*; Petrini (2006): *Slow Food Revolution*. For Slow Pedagogy, please see Payne and Wattchow (2008): *Slow Pedagogy and Placing Education in Post-Traditional Outdoor Education*.

In ceremonies I attend, slowing down is part of the learning journey. Taking time out of our busy lives to attend ceremonies is an act of slowing down, in and of itself. Making the commitment to attend ceremonies year after year has yielded a deeper learning that is usually not possible through attending just one, two, or even four years. Learning these ways takes time; years of patience and presence are required.

At my first ceremonies in 1986, I was like so many newcomers; I ached to learn everything all at once. I quickly understood, however, that the custom of not asking questions and learning by doing required an extended time commitment for deeper comprehension. Learning about the time-relationship connection has manifested itself through the lasting friendships I have developed with my ceremonial community and through the close kinship I share with Mooshum. I care for these relationships deeply and willingly take time for ceremonies by being a reliable, perennial helper. As a non-Indigenous person, I have never wanted to abuse the opportunity I have been given to learn about these ways and ceremonies. I have benefitted greatly through coming to understand them in my own time. Perhaps I have erred on the side of caution and taken too much time because I helped seventeen years before I went on my first fast. I do not regret taking so long as what I experienced on that fast was breathtakingly real and true and resonated with the time-relationship interconnection between self and Creation.

Setting that experience aside for the moment, as I will share the story of my fast in the next chapter, I wish to share a few other insights into an Indigenous view of time. First, as the story at the beginning of this chapter teaches, being present in ceremonies is more than just showing up. Being present is focusing one's positive intention consciously in all tasks as an active expression of gratitude, a mindfulness which is meant to be carried into everyday living.

Not only do ceremonies teach us about being present, they are also a time for honouring the past and preparing for the future. In honouring the past, ceremonies are a time for learning from Elders about the knowledge they care for, which has been handed down from generation to generation and is an accumulation of the wisdom from all those who have come before them. Spending time with Elders, whether in ceremonies or in one's community (on- and off-reserve), honours and keeps alive the oral tradition. Regarding the future, whenever children are present, ceremonies take on deeper meaning. Children will grow to take care of their ways of knowing when they become adults, in turn passing it onto their children. The experiences they have in ceremonies reinforce the Medicine Circle learnings by first playing, then helping, fasting, and eventually taking on leadership roles as they mature. I have seen this with my children. As the reader hopefully comprehends, an Indigenous approach to time is holistic and embedded in intergenerational relationships.

Role of Technology

Interwoven throughout the above discussions about power, place, and time, is the role of science and technology. As already noted in discussing "Views of Time," the influence of some technology has narrowed dominant Western society's focus to the here and now (De Graaf et al, 2005). Immediate gratification in the present has produced a rather myopic view of this life with a diminishment of the importance we have placed on both our pasts and futures.

Also, as explored in "Ideas of Nature," technology, even with its numerous benefits, has alienated us from our environment, our sense of place and our sense of the importance of place (Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Robins and Webster, 1999). We have become increasingly dependent on more and different technologies to survive as a species (e.g., as developed through the Iron Age, the agricultural and industrial revolutions, etc.). Livingston (1994) and Shepard

(1982) assert that we have become slaves to our technologies and our servitude has, in turn, alienated us from the natural world that perpetuates us.¹⁴⁷

Ecological modernization (EM) has its roots in technology's influence over human activities, attitudes, and priorities. EM is by far the predominant approach to pursuing sustainability in modern Western society. EM adheres to the notion that any limits to growth, any ecological crisis, may be overcome through technological innovation (Hajer, 1996; Davison, 2008; Seghezze, 2009). A cornerstone of EM is the concept of eco-efficiency, which holds that growth in economic output “. . . does not necessarily mean growth in physical throughput of materials and energy” (Lélé, 1991, p. 609). Industrial processes and consumer products may be designed using less energy, fewer resources and producing lower emissions than at present. Arising from eco-efficiency theories, Factor Four and Factor Ten objectives establish goals for dematerialization whereby a commodity may be produced with one quarter (or one-tenth) of the previous resource consumption and one quarter (or one-tenth) of the previous environmental load (Næss and Høyer, 2009). The Zero Waste movement attempts to go further through redesigning life cycles of products to eliminate all waste and finding useful purposes for all by-products (McDonough & Braungart, 2002).

Green chemistry is an example of EM whereby products with a petrochemical base (e.g., paints, solvents, fabrics such as nylon and polyester, etc.) are being replaced by products with an aqueous or plant base. Green engineering looks for inspiration in nature through biomimicry innovations, developing environmentally benign processes to replace conventional methods that are either stressing environmental thresholds or causing environmental harm. Examples include

¹⁴⁷ For more information on how technology has influenced modern Western society's consumer ethic and attitude toward time and place, see: Robins and Webster (1999) *Times of the Technoculture*; Rifkin (1987) *Time wars: The primary conflict in human history*; Nanni (2012) *The colonisation of time*; Orr (1992) *Ecological literacy: Education and transition to a post-modern world*; Winner (1986) *The whale and the reactor: A search for limits in an age of high technology*.

low impact development (LID) for stormwater management and algae-based processes for treating wastewater. Life cycle analysis (LCA), CSR, Fair Trade, ecological footprinting, ICSPs, Leadership in Energy and Environment Design (LEED) standards, ISO 14000, and market incentives such as tax breaks and cap-and-trade programs, among others, are all EM approaches to sustainability for all of these favour neoliberal capitalist and growth-oriented priorities.

In general, technologies have certainly made life more comfortable and enjoyable for more people, and surviving from one season to the next has become easier in many parts of the world. Knowledge and technological innovation used to be pursued for everyday living and survival. Today, however, prevailing policies that encourage mass production to meet expanding consumer demands have yielded an unsustainable lifestyle (Orr, 1992; Robins and Webster, 1999). Orr (1992) observes that in dominant society, “The crisis of sustainability has occurred only when and where this union between knowledge, livelihood, and living has been broken and knowledge is used for the single purpose of increasing productivity” (p. 32). Langdon Winner (1986) equates our pursuit for technological prowess to “technological somnambulism, a willing sleepwalk – a passive acceptance of whatever technologies are thrust upon us by whomever for whatever purposes” (p. 5). In this neoliberal age, the “willing sleepwalkers” in dominant Western society perpetuate a consumer-oriented lifestyle and a growth economy. Is this sustainable in a world of finite limits? Because ecological modernization is the dominant, neoliberal approach adopted to address our current environmental challenges, we have put significant faith in technological fixes to the detriment of all other strategies (Hajer, 1996; Gibson and Hassan, 2005; Brennan, 2007; Davison, 2008; Seghezze, 2009; Warner, 2010). Orr (1992) speculates, “Whether [technology] can be controlled and harnessed to the long term benefit of humanity is *the* question of our civilization” (p. 39).

From an Indigenous perspective, trade and technologies have been central to Indigenous peoples' survival as well as their devastation. When the European settlers arrived, both peoples began to exchange technologies new to the other. For the European settlers, the canoe, "... especially its birchbark variety was, for at least five centuries, the most important Amerindian device of technology; it was an essential part of their knowledge which was bequeathed to the European newcomers" (McNab et al, 2001; p. 237). After contact, for better sometimes, usually for worse, the Indigenous peoples of North America had to adapt to the changes with which they were confronted, or perish. Technologies, such as the musket and later the rifle, certainly made hunting for food easier. Obviously these weapons are a double-edged sword, contributing to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of people and the decimation of entire species such as the buffalo and caribou (Taylor, 2011; Wicken, 2012).

Even with the concerted attempts by the Euro -Americans and -Canadians to obliterate the original peoples of this land, Indigenous peoples have persevered, owing to their strong traditions and adaptability. Briggs (2005) observes that Indigenous peoples are "... happy to appropriate those elements of knowledges, including formal science, that they see as being to their economic, social or political advantage" (p. 102). In other words, Indigenous knowledges are not static, but dynamic and resilient (Battiste and Henderson, 2009). Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous peoples continue to adapt to today's technologies, garnering what is useful for survival, dismissing that which is not, for the well-being and benefit of future generations.

Care with technology, however, is required. While technology has certainly made life more comfortable for much of the world, (with such inventions as electricity, central heating, air conditioning, and motorized vehicles, for example), for all the benefits, significant drawbacks challenge our comfort levels. Greenhouse gas and tailpipe emissions are negative consequences

(among many) to which we as a society are subjecting ourselves and our planet. In addition to air quality and health impacts from end-of-pipe emissions, water quality is subject to urban and agricultural runoff as well as municipal and industrial effluent. In Toronto, for example, combined sewers discharge untreated wastewater into Lake Ontario in extreme rainfall events (Marsalek & Rochfort, 2004). *E coli* bacteria and odorous algae blooms, when they occur, prevent people from swimming in the lake and enjoying its beaches.

These are a few of the prices we pay as a society dependent upon technology for our modern conveniences and gadgetry. Some communities, however, are bearing a greater share of the burdens accompanying dominant society's industrial pursuits. In Canada, as well as in the United States and around the world, environmental justice offences highlight disparities between rich and poor. The North-South divide is a reality not just across hemispheres, but present within our own borders.

In Canada, the North-South divide is actually reversed. Energy and resource demands in the densely populated south are affecting northern communities. For example, Grassy Narrows First Nation in northern Ontario is an Anishinaabe community, which has had to bear a host of problems at the hands of industry, modern technology, and consumer demand for natural resources (Willow, 2012). Hydroelectric dams have flooded parts of their traditional territory and, among other impacts, have affected wild rice harvests. Mercury in effluent from Dryden Chemical Company has polluted the English-Wabigoon River system. Water quality and fish health have deteriorated. The Anishinaabe of Grassy Narrows, dependent on fish for food and livelihood, have developed Minamata disease. Before formal detection of the mercury, the concerned community had noticed an increase in infant mortality, and children to adults had been experiencing "numbness of extremities, joint pain and cramps, tremors, tunnel vision, loss

of balance, and hearing and speech impairment, among other [symptoms of the disease]” (Willow, 2012; p. 74). Once dangerously high concentrations of mercury were detected, commercial fishing was banned and tourism declined. Fishing lodges closed down, and Grassy Narrows’ unemployment jumped from 20% to 80% (Willow, 2012). Grassy Narrows citizens “struggle to reconcile their desire to retain their land-based way of life with the risks inherent in eating the products of their labor” (Willow, 2012; p. 78).

The latest blow to Grassy Narrows by the hand of technology is clearcutting by the forest industry (Willow, 2012). Since the 1990s clearcutting has accelerated, penetrating into the First Nation’s traditional territory and infringing on traplines. Rather than surrendering to all of these forces threatening their way of life and alienating them from their land, the Grassy Narrows First Nation has remained strong *because* of their relationship with the land. They have become well-versed advocates for environmental protection. Unfortunately, logging operations still threaten their territory, especially after the Supreme Court of Canada decision in May 2014.¹⁴⁸

The many environmental injustices which Grassy Narrows has had to bear highlight the dark side of industrial technology. Many other at-risk communities, including poorer urban neighbourhoods, have experienced health and environmental impacts from industrial pollution. Aamjiwnaang First Nation near Sarnia’s chemical valley¹⁴⁹ and New York City’s South Bronx¹⁵⁰ are just two of the many communities too numerous to recount here.

As already mentioned, many of us in dominant Western society are subject to “technological somnambulism” (Winner, 1986), and we remain oblivious to these awful

¹⁴⁸ Retrieved February 8, 2014 from: <http://freegrassy.net/2014/01/13/grassy-narrows-blockade-to-resume-if-logging-operation-starts/>. For the Supreme Court of Canada decision, see: <https://scc-csc.lexum.com/scc-csc/scc-csc/en/item/14274/index.do> and <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grassy-narrows-loses-supreme-court-logging-rights-decision-1.2703123>.

¹⁴⁹ For more information, please view the 2007 National Film Board documentary “*Toxic Trespass*.”

¹⁵⁰ Retrieved February 9, 2014 from: <http://neweconomy.net/publications/lectures/carter/majora/sustainable-south-bronx-a-model-for-environmental-justice>.

predicaments in our “sleepwalking” state. The technologies we enjoy buffer us in comfort and distraction, blinding us to the hardships of others.

As well, our dependence on technologies impacts healthy human-nature relationships. That is, modernity’s penchant for more and more technology, rather than freeing up more time for ourselves, actually has had quite the opposite effect for the vast majority in dominant society. With more gadgets in our homes, in our hands, our time is spent using and exploring technology, distracting us from ourselves, our families, and from the places where we live (De Graaf et al, 2005; Louv, 2008; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Rifkin, 1987; Robins and Webster, 1999; Urry, 1994). Serious issues for the health and well-being of our children, for example, are becoming apparent in what has been called “nature deficit disorder” (Louv, 2008). Shepard (1982) labels this humanity’s “arrested development.” Louv (2008) warns of disturbing trends, such as obesity, attention disorders, and depression with today’s “wired generation.”¹⁵¹ He shares research that highlights the importance of time spent in nature as essential for healthy childhood development and for the physical and emotional health of both children and adults. Decades earlier, Shepard (1982) comes to a similar conclusion in his book, *Nature and Madness*, asserting that time in nature is central to the maturing of the whole person.

Does this mean we should unplug ourselves and return to life ‘in the bush,’ restoring our connection to the land to live once again in respectful harmony with Creation? As attractive as this may be for some, the unrealistic and impractical nature of this proposal is clear (Brennan, 2007; Battiste and Henderson, 2009; Sveiby, 2009). Battiste and Henderson (2009) admit:

Neither IK nor the Indigenous perspectives is invoking a return to the past; rather they are a challenge to sustain knowledges, renew our understanding of our relationship with the natural world, reconnect to the spiritual dimension of being,

¹⁵¹ Retrieved April 22, 2014 from: <http://richardlouv.com/books/last-child/>.

and reshape the institutions and processes that shape our lives with our renewed understandings” (p. 9).

The Western “institutions and processes that shape our lives,” for the most part, have focused knowledge production on advancing technologies in the pursuit of being faster and achieving greater efficiencies, rather than fully considering implications for our survival and well-being. From an Indigenous perspective, this approach is unbalanced. Care with technology is required. Being care-full (i.e., full of care rather than care-less) in our use of technology, using it in a balanced way for the benefit of all Creation (rather than solely for one segment of humanity), is necessary in the search for a return to a respectful, sustainable relationship with nature.

The Medicine Circle has numerous learnings about being care-full and care-less. With respect to adapting to and adopting new technologies, Mooshum has emphasized in numerous discussions the importance of change in Indigenous knowledge.¹⁵² The Medicine Circle itself is a framework for facilitating change, helping one to clarify issues, reasoning through an analysis that includes thoughts and feelings, and developing plans for modifying behaviours. If Indigenous peoples had not adapted with the times, they and their ways of knowing would have died long ago.

Allen (1992) echoes this beneficial advantage of IK’s inherent adaptability when she speaks of the importance of oral tradition:

. . . oral tradition is vital; it heals itself and the tribal web by adapting to the flow of the present while never relinquishing its connection to the past. Its adaptability has always been required, as many generations have experienced (p. 45).

¹⁵² Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 2012.

Hunn (1993) concurs with Allen:

. . . traditions are enduring adaptations to specific places . . . Traditions are the products of generations of intelligent reflection tested in the rigorous laboratory of survival. That they have endured is proof of their power (p. 13).

While tradition and change may, on the surface, appear contradictory, the need to be constantly adapting to changes in the surrounding environment (including natural, social, political, and economic changes) is of central importance to anyone's survival. For Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing, as Berkes (1999) observes, “. . . traditional does not mean an inflexible adherence to the past; it simply means time-tested and wise” (p. 4). Indigenous peoples have, through time and space, survived across the millennia specifically because their ways of knowing and being dictate the central necessity of adaptability. When new technologies are developed or introduced that propose to make life and survival easier, Indigenous ways of knowing welcome the new information. Through a care-full analysis (i.e., taking time and applying the methodology of the Medicine Circle), how best to adopt the new technology and integrate it into their lives while maintaining their balance within Creation is assessed. Because it is a circle, the Medicine Circle may be applied iteratively to review a technology's impacts and benefits, eliciting adjustments as necessary.

John Mohawk (Barreiro, 2010) proposes a similar Indigenous methodology which is care-full – “a technology of social critique – that weighs things in terms of ‘biomass costs’” (p. 102). By applying a “regional analysis of [a technology's] cost in biomass terms, we may find that we are rapidly eroding something that may be termed the Life Supportive Index (LSI) of that area” (p. 102).¹⁵³ A new “purpose of technology” (p. 102), therefore, rather than to service the

¹⁵³ John Mohawk first proposed the LSI in a 1979 article published in *Akwesasne Notes*, significantly earlier than the concept of ecological footprinting which is popular in today's sustainability discourse. The term “ecological footprint” first appeared in the literature in: Rees, W. (1992). Ecological footprints and appropriated carrying capacity: What urban economics leaves out. *Environment & Urbanization*, 4(2), 121-130.

status quo and sustain an ecologically destructive way of life, becomes one that ensures and strengthens a healthy LSI. In other words, technology is applied to sustain all Creation, not just the economy.

Part of this technological redirection is a reconnection of human beings with nature. A problem facing modern Western society is that human beings have become desensitized and acculturated into an alienated relationship with our environment. Mohawk (Barreiro, 2010) observes:

The culture we were born into nurtured each and every one of us to a belief in certain premises, and our socialization in that respect is surprisingly complete. We are each of us “prejudiced” to certain beliefs, certain ways of seeing the world, and certain ways of being in the world (p. 92).

Has this “socialization” not been the goal of colonialism? Dominant society’s seemingly unshakable adherence to neoliberal, economic growth-oriented forces is testament to the impact of the world’s colonizing forces on our collective mentality. In this alienated existence in which we currently find ourselves, this “prejudice” has produced our “technological somnambulism” where we are perpetuating technologies which, as earlier illustrated, have had devastating impacts on our environment and threaten our very survival.

Returning the discussion to the concept of sustainability, how can we justify pursuing the dominant Western construct of sustainability when it is predicated upon such an acculturated and prejudiced foundation? Simply pursuing ecological modernization strategies, for example, favouring behavioural and technological reforms over more transformative change, is self-defeating if those adjustments serve only to perpetuate our dysfunctionality and alienation.

Summary

In summary, Chapter Six has explored how Western and Indigenous knowledges have come to view nature, time, and technology. Also discussed is modern Western society’s

dominance over other peoples and their knowledges. This power imbalance has led to myopic perspectives of nature, time, and technology (dismissive of other worldviews) which, according to Orr (1992), has alienated modern Western society “from the natural world . . . Healing this division is a large part of the difference between survival and extinction” (p. 17).

While Western views are not invalid, I contend that they are out of balance with the full range of views available to humanity. Scientific and technological contributions have certainly advanced society, but with significant socio-ecological costs. Given the challenges we are likely to face as a species and as a planet, should we not be exploring all our options? “Healing this division” includes acknowledging contributions by other worldviews and rebalancing dominant society’s relationship with time, place, and technology. Redclift (1987) urges, “We need to embrace the epistemologies of indigenous people, including their ways of organizing their knowledge of their environment” (p. 151). Orr (1992) concurs: “ecological sustainability is rooted as much in past practices, folkways, and traditions as in the creation of new knowledge” (p. 31). As Orr (1992) concludes:

. . . there is something to be learned from older notions of virtue found in antiquity. I am referring to the sense that one’s self is inseparable and inexplicable from that of a larger community which is part of an understandable cosmos . . . The modern world has destroyed the sense of belonging to a larger order which must be restored as the foundation of a postmodern world (p. 182).

The remainder of this dissertation explores an Indigenous approach to restoring this “sense of belonging” as part of one whole, rebalancing our relationships with each other as well as with time, technology, and all Creation.

Chapter 7 – WEST: Connecting with Creation– The Story of My Fast

Each night during spring fasting ceremonies, we sit in the tepee and, among other protocols, we drum and sing in gratitude and in support of the fasters. We hope they can hear us in their distant lodges, comforting them with the drumbeat and bolstering them with our prayers. In 1987, Mooshum Michael, who had been Mooshum Peter's wascapeos for many years already, had come east to help Mooshum Peter at our ceremonies in Ontario's Haliburton Highlands. This had been my second year attending ceremonies. One of the songs Mooshum Michael introduced to us that year was a Cree song, one that we sing to this day. The translation of the song into English, less the refrain, is as follows:

Our grandfather the sun is a small child of Creation

Introduction

Of course at that time, I really did not fully comprehend the depth of the song's meaning. I was having a hard enough time picking up the Cree words within the cadence of the melody! It is a beautiful song sung at sunrise and at other times. As I have contemplated its many meanings regarding relationship, I have been able to connect the song to my dissertation. I will share my thoughts and insights later in this chapter. Also, I have decided to share the story of my fast as some of my learnings from this experience, I have determined, shed light on the nature of our relationship within the cosmos and our time here on earth. I feel what I have learned is pertinent to this dissertation's discussion of sustainability.

I have placed the story of my fast in the second visit to the western direction of the Medicine Circle for two reasons. First, Chapters Five and Six have shared an outward look at the literature to explore the concept of Western sustainability and underlying attitudes and philosophies. Continuing from this discussion, Chapters Seven and Eight together provide balance as they are from an Indigenous perspective. Chapter Seven relates my learnings from my fast primarily to one of the topics in Chapter Six – time. Second, as the western direction is the direction of the Medicine Circle relating to feelings and reason, this chapter is replete with

many feelings I experienced while on my fast. I reason through them and share what I have learned so far through inward reflection and contemplative analysis.

The Story of My Fast

I began preparing for my fast in the winter. Actually, it was the previous winter when I had presented tobacco to Mooshum, asking him to please guide me on my first fast. He said, "What took you so long?" Then he proceeded to suggest that I not fast the coming spring, but in the spring the next year. Okay. While I began thinking about my fast during ceremonies in 2006, I focused intently on what the other fasters were doing and how they had prepared themselves. I began my preparations in earnest in the winter of 2007. I had obtained some tanned hide at a pow-wow the previous fall. My auntie had given me some sinew and a special needle for piercing hide. I began gathering and making gifts for my giveaway. I also began watching what I ate to prepare my body for a four-day fast.

The point here is to consider how long it takes one to prepare for a fast. While I was initially disappointed about not fasting in 2006 (after all, I had waited seventeen years already!), in the midst of all my preparations during the ensuing year, I came to understand the reason why Mooshum had asked me to wait. The "getting ready" is in large part just as important as the actual fast and is a ceremony in and of itself. Preparing physically is just one part of the process. Preparing mentally is another. Why was I fasting? What was I seeking? While I do not need to go into those details, Mooshum had directed me to work with the Medicine Circle, with the four coloured prints I had for the four directions, so I could be clear on the purpose of my fast.

I prepared as best I could. Over the winter and early spring, my family and I pulled together our camping gear and ceremonial articles, including whatever I needed for my fast. In mid-April, we packed everything up and headed to the site for spring ceremonies, which that year was located in the Petroglyphs Provincial Park in the Kawarthas. The name of this place in Ojibwe is "Kinomagewapkong" or "Teaching Rocks," which speaks to the importance of this land for the Anishnaabe as a place of learning their history and about their relationship with Creation.

Ceremonies commenced, and I began my very first fast, the purpose of which was one of personal growth and learning. I understood that my time with Creation these four days was a gift to myself for focused concentration to sort through some personal questions. My intent was solely to look inward to seek clarity and understanding and to figure out a way forward once ceremonies had ended. This was very hard work. Going without food and water actually paled in comparison to my mental and emotional journey.

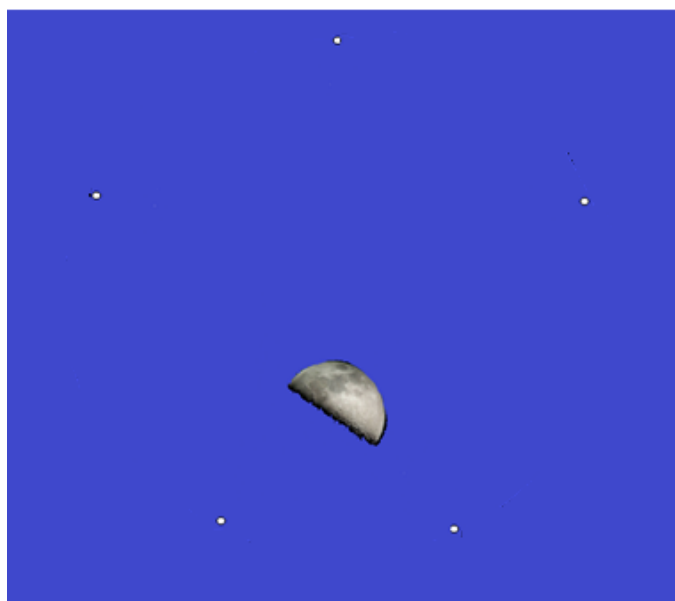
I worked with the Medicine Circle, clarifying, delving deeper, and reflecting on various thoughts and feelings that began rising to the surface. My work unlocked secrets that apparently had remained well-hidden for many years. I began to understand what I needed to let go in order to create space for something new. But I found it was hard to actually do the 'letting go.' These things had been a part of me for so long, to finally decide to get rid of them was proving difficult. Then I remembered Mooshum mentioning in past ceremonies about "throwing sticks into the fire" as a way to release. Burning sticks

that symbolized all the things I wanted to discard, watching them turn to smoke and giving them up to Creation, made sense as a way to shed the weight that I realized had been burdening me. So I built a small fire and gathered some sticks and started tossing them into the fire one by one as I listed off all the things I didn't want to hold onto any longer.

I was a bit skeptical at first, but the task was actually quite healing. As I progressed, the energy with which I threw those sticks into the fire became more and more forceful as the feelings started pouring out. I threw away feelings that I realized existed yet had served no healthy purpose. I don't know how long I worked at 'letting go,' but after, I was surprised to feel a bit lighter and clearer. There was still more work to do; Mooshum confirmed that when he came to check on me and found me tossing those sticks with such vigour. I had to admit that he was right as I sensed, more than knew, that other layers were waiting to be uncovered. But for the moment, at least, after two nights and two days of fasting, I was feeling a small sense of accomplishment at what I had figured out about myself.

While I did not know what to expect when I looked inward or if I would actually be able to find anything, I had focused on seeking answers to my questions from within, and I had been willing to do the hard work necessary. I certainly was not looking for anything else to happen. So what happened that third night was unrelated to why I was fasting – and totally unexpected! What I saw in the night sky astounded me! My heart raced - my spirit awakened at its centre - my mind could not sit still! I could not sleep if I tried. This is what I saw:

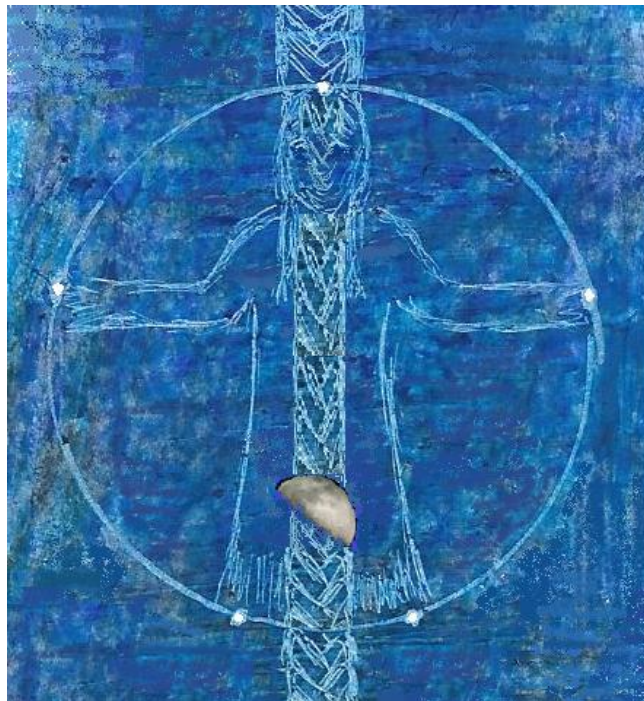
I was sitting on a ground mat looking up at the darkening sky. The sun had set awhile ago, but the stars had yet to appear. The half moon was right in front of me in the southern sky, bright and commanding attention. Stars began to appear as the night fell. Venus was way off in the west where the horizon was still slightly orange and pink. Around the moon, five stars began to shine. One by one, they appeared and what was astounding to me was that they formed a perfect circle around the half moon. No stars were inside this circle – just five stars and the half moon. It looked something like this (not to scale):



I stood up immediately. I was mesmerized by the perfect symmetry and mathematical precision of this circle. I began to draw imaginary lines from a star to the one opposite through the half moon. It was a pentagram inside the circle! I thought, "How cool is this?! Geometry in space!!" I reveled in its beauty and simplicity and its very presence. I peered to see if stars glimmered inside the circle but could not see any. We were far away from city lights so the night sky was filling fast with more and more stars. Light pollution was not a factor. No other stars disrupted the circle. I turned around and found the big dipper and little dipper. I identified the north star. I turned around again and stood there marveling at this phenomenon with the moon and the five stars. Does this occur every year in the spring? How often does this happen? The timing of my fast and my decision to stay outside to watch the night sky this particular night seemed amazing to me.

My neck was getting stiff from standing and looking up. I turned around and stretched my neck downward, finding my shadow on the mat where I had been sitting. My shadow outlined my body with my hands on my hips. I looked at my shadow. I spun around and looked at the moon. I looked at my shadow again and then I swung around to look up

That was me! That was Grandmother Moon! That was all women! There in the night sky looking down upon me! No, it was not a man – because the moon is our grandmother. And the half moon was situated where our wombs are. Certainly that was Grandmother Moon! The northern most star is the top of her head. The two stars in the east and west are her two hands with outstretched arms. The two stars below are her legs.



This was no longer a math lesson. This was really happening. What does this mean? Why does she show up like this? I wondered where is she in relation to the north star? So I turned around, identified the north star again, and found that an imaginary line began there, traversing the sky through the top of Grandmother Moon's head, through her womb, out the southern end between her legs. Was there an endpoint? Could I see a star that was on this line in the southern sky? No, I could not. The line was never-ending.

My heart was racing. My thoughts were coming fast now. I had learned about the Sweetgrass Road, which in the Medicine Circle, is the north-south line. I am actually seeing the Sweetgrass Road in the night sky; it is real! Yes, there is a beginning to it. It begins all the way back at Creation (the north star). Grandmother Moon, in this amazing display, is showing how generation upon generation lives according to the Sweetgrass Road. Each new generation is born to women who, since the beginning of life on earth, have possessed this gift of creation, growing and giving birth to new life, to our future. Is there an end to the Sweetgrass Road? Not according to what I was seeing, because there is no star at which this path ends. As a side observation, sweetgrass itself is a perennial plant, never-ending!

I stood there I do not know how long, soaking it all in, trying to understand as much as possible, reveling in this experience. My spirit, my very soul, was connected with Creation in that moment, to the universe –Grandmother Moon was there shining down on me, teaching me this. Long before my fast, when I was a young girl, I realized my infinitesimal smallness in relation to the planet, the solar system, the universe. That night, I was humbled to realize this once again in a far more real way because of the vastness of the night sky and the living spirit of all Creation evident in what I was feeling inside and seeing with my own eyes. A double-understanding!

Needless to say, I could not go to sleep. I went into my lodge to try, but jumped up because I needed to present tobacco that very instant with the utmost gratitude for this experience, this realization, this connection to the spirit of Grandmother Moon and the entire cosmos. I was in total and utter awe.

Living according to natural law and the Sweetgrass Road, life could be sustained forever. Pre-contact, the First Nations people of Turtle Island knew this and lived according to natural law and the Sweetgrass Road, enabling them to survive through the millennia. Post-contact, they have suffered tremendously. Yet, their ways of knowing and being have survived . . . We are still able to learn these ways by seeing –really seeing – our connection with Creation and respecting, honouring this relationship.

I did not begin this doctoral journey knowing that I would be sharing this story. It is a personal experience, which has had profound meaning for me as an individual, as a woman. I was unsure if it would be appropriate to write down as it was about my fast during ceremonies. Is this something to be reserved for sharing in ceremonies only? My primary concern is that it will be misinterpreted; when read and made public, this story may be perceived mistakenly as a

“vision quest.” Popular culture has tended to romanticize and stereotype “vision quests,” and I do not wish my fast to be characterized this way, perpetuating this false conceptualization. This was not a dream; it really happened. It was not an event that may be characterized as divine, unworldly, mystical, psychic, paranormal, or supernatural – as popular culture has misapplied the phrase. On one level, it was, in fact, science.

That is, astronomically, these five stars and half moon do align in this configuration every once in awhile. Scientists are able to actually measure the movement of the stars and moon and predict when this will occur again. While gazing at this formation in the sky, I had so many more questions than answers, that is certain. How often does this happen? Who else has seen this? What woman, or man, long ago saw this in the night sky and understood its significance?

I did not go on my fast with an express purpose or hope of experiencing a "vision" in the way “vision quests” are often misunderstood by mainstream society. I had other, personal reasons for my fast, which I will refer to as "self-work" and which are unrelated to this dissertation. My focus was inward, to gain *inner* vision and clarity, not on what might be experienced with the world *outside* of myself. While I was able to gain clarity on certain things, this experience with the night sky was unexpected, unsought and, yes, miraculous in the sense that it occurred that cloudless night, in that place, at that time - the night I chose to sit outside during my fast and watch the stars come out. The very next night was overcast so I could not see if the stars and moon were aligned that way again. Another question unanswered.

What I do know is that it really happened, and I was able to draw the connections I have described. Upon reflection, I do recall seeing this star and half moon formation once before. We were in spring ceremonies several years prior. We were taking a tepee break (or "tea-pee" break, as we often joke, because we had been drinking tea and the night's ceremonies had been going on

for awhile). It was another cloudless night and Mooshum and I were standing outside the tepee gazing at the star-filled sky. We were marveling at this same formation and Mooshum asked me, "What do you think that is? Think about it for awhile - three above, two below." At that time, I had no clue what he was asking me to see. Yet, several years later, I happen to see it again - and this time, I do see!

Learnings with Grandmother Moon – time, place, and place in time

Mooshum has spoken to me about Peter showing him and his fellow wascapeos this half-moon and star formation when in Alberta. While they talked about the Sweetgrass Road travelling through the formation from a male perspective, my experience is obviously from a woman's perspective. I know, however, that what I have learned from the experience relates equally to men and women. While no name exists for this star-and-half moon formation to our knowledge, for the purposes of this dissertation, I will call it a Night Sky Teaching,¹⁵⁴ because I saw it in the night sky. I refer to this as a "teaching" rather than a "learning" because what it teaches is up to each individual to learn based on their own experiences. So what have I learned from this teaching? I did not fully understand *all* that was to be learned right at that very instant of realization. The learnings have unfolded for me over time . . . and I am sure they still are.

I have spoken with Mooshum about sharing this experience in my dissertation. He supports my doing so, seeing as what I have learned from it directly relates to my dissertation topic in various dimensions. Three dimensions I will share here relate to time, place, and place in time. I will reflect upon my own learnings in this section, and in the next section I will engage with the literature, revisiting what I share here.

¹⁵⁴ No doubt many "Night Sky Teachings" exist. For example, please see: <http://www.storiesofthenightsky.ca/>.

An initial learning respects future time. Mainstream society has defined sustainability with a temporal reference that asks humanity to consider the needs of future generations. This forward-looking vision is essential. Indigenous peoples of North America refer to this as seven generations thinking. That is, in whatever actions are being contemplated, people are to consider implications for our children and our children's children seven generations hence. By considering this extended timeframe, way beyond our own lifespans, we are being asked to act with extreme care. Seven generations thinking, as McNab (2001) writes, is framed accordingly:

For Aboriginal people, circles of time are part of the natural world and nature, of life and living. Every living thing has a relationship to every other and the events that occur in one's lifetime have an immediate impact on one's children and grandchildren. The Seventh Generation is immediate and close (p. 185).

In this Night Sky Teaching, the future is manifested by the Sweetgrass Road extending indefinitely southward in the night sky, showing us that what we do today affects future generations and that the Sweetgrass Road, the *miyopimatisiwin*, is never-ending, revealing the way forward.

Yet, this Night Sky Teaching advises the importance of not only looking forward, but also looking back and respecting history. The specific history is two-fold, the first being that of all people's connection with place long ago, about which I have already written. This Night Sky Teaching reminds me of my connections with nature – both physically and metaphysically. Just the grandness of the sight in the night sky, together with the instant of comprehension in what I was physically experiencing and metaphysically realizing, rekindles mind, body and spirit connections not only with nature, but with *all* Creation, with the universe. To this day, each time I recall the experience in my mind's eye, these connections are enlivened and strengthened.

The second historical aspect of which this Night Sky Teaching reminds me is our place in time, our roles and responsibilities – human beings' original instructions according to Indigenous

ways of knowing. Through close observation of nature (the earth and sky, night and day, the seen and unseen) and deep, inward contemplation to understand their relationship with Creation, Indigenous peoples see the Sweetgrass Road as a holistic way of being to fulfill their original instructions, aiding in their survival.¹⁵⁵ Over the millennia they have learned how to sustain themselves through time and have passed their accruing knowledge onto each generation through oral tradition. They have not forgotten their history because they know it to be the key to their very survival.

In the night sky, Grandmother Moon is standing there along the Sweetgrass Road. When she has appeared in the past and someone has seen her as I have, I imagine that person also recognizing her as representing that particular present generation, the *now* in the passage of time. I believe that someone seeing her long ago *saw* their people's place along the time-continuum and realized their responsibility to pass on their people's knowledge and teach their children about the Sweetgrass Road. In vernacular terms, one may appreciate this concept as "paying it forward," connecting the past with the future as represented in the night sky by the long continuous braid extending from the north star, the beginning of time, through the present and to the south into the future. This may seem linear, as the Sweetgrass Road is a straight braid, a straight road. Yet it is circular as well, because Grandmother Moon has reappeared with these five stars in the night sky continuously through the ages and will do so into the future, affirming for the present generation its original instructions and place in time.

As well, reflecting on my fast and seeing this Night Sky Teaching affirms for me that a spiritual plane exists to reality and is inherent within Creation. Was its appearance on my fast a coincidence or was more at work here? I am inclined to think the latter, but I do not know the

¹⁵⁵ While I use the general term "Indigenous" at the sentence's beginning, I recognize that all Indigenous peoples do not necessarily use the term "Sweetgrass Road" for that which they refer to as "the way of the good life," "the way of an exemplary life," or some other wording to describe living in respectful balance with Creation.

answer to this question because it is a mystery. Modern Western science, determined that everything is knowable through scientific method and rational thought, dismisses this mystery as far-fetched, illusory and allegorical. I feel because of dominant society's educational system's emphasis on objectivity and reductionism, what is difficult for many people to acknowledge is that a great mystery exists throughout Creation. Unknowns abound, one of which is the idea that a spirit world intertwines with the known and seen world.¹⁵⁶

One may question that this Indigenous knowledge is just that – Indigenous knowledge of and for Indigenous peoples. Yet, the song at the beginning of this chapter indicates otherwise: “Our grandfather the sun is a small child of Creation.” This song talks about *our* sun – the earth's sun – the one sun we all rely upon for life. The sun shines for everyone equally, meaning that all peoples, and their knowledge systems, are equal to each other.¹⁵⁷ Indigenous ways of knowing learned over the millennia are commensurate to all other knowledges in value and wisdom, available for all to appreciate and grasp their significance for all life.

The second part of this song teaches how the sun is a small child of Creation. If our sun is so small, how small are we in this universe? We human beings are truly insignificant in comparison to the vastness of the universe. With this realization, are we to live carelessly as if our lives do not matter because we are so small? Or are we to live with a raised consciousness of the gifts we have been given? This song teaches me that, yes, we are to be humbled by our

¹⁵⁶ This is not unique to North American Indigenous peoples. Globally, the concept of a spirit plane is well-established for many peoples. For example, three of the world's main religions – Judaism, Christianity and Islam – define a heaven and hell, limiting the scope of the spirit world for many to specific places other than the earthly plane.

¹⁵⁷ The sun is not selective for whom it shines. This teaching is local to place. Two people standing adjacent to one another are bathed in the same sunlight. While the heat of the sun in the desert versus the heat of the sun in the Arctic are different, the sun continues to rise and set for everyone (although place and time of year determine the duration of daylight).

smallness. Yet, we have been given this gift of life and a capacity for sentient thought, aware of the mystery of life and our uniqueness because of this awareness.

In my opinion, great responsibility accompanies this awareness and awe, this radical amazement. How I understand the Night Sky Teaching echoes this thought. How long has the Sweetgrass Road been here? Since the beginning of time. When did the first Indigenous peoples learn about it? A very long time ago. What a great responsibility we have *now* to care for it and carry it forward for future generations – both human and non-human.

Engaging with the Literature – Decontextualization and Metaphysics

In academic terms, my experience on my fast has strengthened for me the contextual holism that many authors emphasize as central to all that Indigenous knowledge is (Allen, 1992; Mohawk in Barreiro, 2010; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Sheridan & Longboat, 2013; Wenzel, 2004; Wilson, 2008). The decontextualization that has occurred may be summarized as having three facets: 1) how dominant Western society has de-coupled the metaphysical from the physical aspects of IK;¹⁵⁸ 2) how a people's specific knowledge of their territory has been subject to decontextualization, taking the knowledge, misapplying it to a different territory, and/or homogenizing it in broad brushstrokes to represent all Indigenous knowledges; and 3) how people have been decontextualized and disconnected from place.

¹⁵⁸ Advancement of “pure science” has led to dominant Western society's prerogative dismissing metaphysics and spirituality as inconsequential in matters pertaining to human development. For more, please see Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cajete, 1994; Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; Knudtson & Suzuki, 1992. Mooshum Michael has commented that, “Some scientists profess also to hold religious beliefs in a God; however, academia has kept them as separate issues. This is perhaps a leftover of the [American] founding fathers' attempts to separate church from state. Examples of historical separation of science and the church are legion in all faiths and in most ways in the current sense this [decontextualization of IK] is just a continuation of that [trajectory]. What both sides miss is that there is no difference!” (That is, there is really no difference between science and spirituality – both are part of one whole, one context, which cannot, in both our opinions, be separated without losing important knowledge). Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 16, 2013).

Leduc (2010) touches upon all three examples of decontextualization in his book, *Climate, Culture, Change*. He explores *Inuit Qaujimatuaqangit* (IQ; the Inuit term for IK) and how the spirit in air is inseparable from human beings. *Sila*, (translated as wind, weather and air altogether as one) is both within us and outside us. He quotes eco-philosopher David Abram (1996) who describes the Navajo view of air: “the ‘Winds within us’ are thoroughly continuous with the Wind at large” (2010; pp. 30-31). Where does the air we breathe end as “air” and become “breath?” Are they not the same? Leduc (2010) also quotes Jaypetee Arnakak, an Inuit philosopher with whom he worked closely to learn about IQ perspectives on shifts in the north due to climate change. Arnakak explains that, in IQ, *Sila* is viewed as *Silarjuaq*, “a sentient spiritual consciousness,” which “challenges basic Western assumptions ‘in a systemic way because it forces one to think of responsibility to self and the other,’ while also contextualizing ‘the self into its environment’” (p. 31).

When one contemplates where air begins and ends inside oneself, the context of self-in-environment is indivisible. Air and breath are one and the same and as Arnakak explains, with the “sentient spiritual consciousness” of *Silarjuaq*, “in IQ, the mind can affect the world and the world can affect the mind” (p. 31). Reading Leduc (2010), I am reminded of various commentaries on ancient Western metaphysics in Glacken (1967), Oelschlaeger (1991) and Nash (1982). Leduc (2010) writes that “in the West’s past, the air was understood to be ‘the invisible wellspring of the present,’ and was experienced as mediator ‘between *seen* and the *unseen*’” (Leduc, 2010; p. 31; quoting Abram, 1996; p. 254), affirming a spiritual aspect interconnecting human beings and their world. Explaining further, Leduc (2010) references Robert Torrance (1994) who examines the Latin root of the word *spiritus*, equating “the breath with an animating force that spiritually united inner and outer” (p. 31). Long ago human beings, including

ancestors of Western peoples, acknowledged “our thorough interdependence with the other animals, the plants, and the living land that sustains us” (Abram, 1996; p. 254), both in a physical and metaphysical interrelationship. Arnakak describes a “mature mind” as “one that can reflect on its contextual immersion” (Leduc, 2010; pp. 31-32), the context being the existence of a spirit world integral with the natural world, inclusive of human beings. Our spirit world is “a potentized field of intelligence in which our actions participate” (Abram, 1996; p. 254).

I accept that skeptics will read this chapter and be somewhat doubtful, if not dismissive. While I may not convince the reader of the existence of a spirit world and of its relevance for modern Western society, I hope to awaken readers to Other ways of knowing that are not limited in scope to what is objectively observable and measurable according to “rationalized Western culture” (Leduc, 2010; p. 34).

Alsop and Fawcett (2010) discuss rebalancing Western dominance in science education to include Other knowledges that have been subjugated by the hegemony of modern Western science, abbreviated as “Science” with a capital “S.” The two authors raise the question whether “our ways of doing things within the world,” which are grounded in Science, “are in danger of becoming undone and in danger of becoming our undoing. A way of life that could in the future collapse” (p. 1028). Alsop and Fawcett (2010) pose the question “what are we missing” (p. 1034) when we ignore Others’ knowledge systems? They question the “certainty” upon which Science is predicated, that all truth is knowable and discernible. What about that which is unseen and still unknown? Rather than insisting on conclusive results beyond a shadow of a doubt before any action (or inaction) is decided, Alsop and Fawcett (2010) propose embracing the unknowable mysteries of Creation as facts of life.

The Ojibway scholar Basil Johnston (1995) describes this mystery as “the unseen realities of individual beings and places and events that are beyond human understanding but are still clearly real” (pp. xxi-xxii). On one level, Johnston is acknowledging our metaphysical reality. Another interpretation reveals that environmental “mysteries,” with their multi-dimensional complexities and our incomplete knowledge of them, “are still clearly real” (Johnston, 1995; p. xxii). In their realness, “mysteries” may be viewed as motivators for action, not reasons for inertia.

In sustainability discourse, from an Indigenous perspective, omission of the unseen and exclusion of mystery yield an incomplete picture of the whole. Uncertainty (i.e., the persistence of mystery) has been used as an excuse to choose inaction over action. As well, mystery in the form of “the unseen realities of individual beings and places and events” is dismissed as spirituality interfering with science. Could it be conceivable that uncertainties remain in part because the presence of spirit has been removed from the discourse? Instead of uncertainty as a rationale for more study and research, embracing mystery as a given part of the equation may free us from the restrictions of positivist thought. Is it really possible to know everything about everything through diligent application of the scientific method? Assuming this is even possible (an unrealistic assumption in my mind), do we even have enough time to achieve Scientific “certainty” with this approach, given the sustainability challenges we face?

Timmerman (n.d.) suggests that reliance on positivism for all the answers is unrealistic in today’s complex world when he discusses “mysteries” in relation to “problems.”¹⁵⁹ He distinguishes environmental “problems” as having a known source and “with political will, money, and engineering, they could often be quickly solved and the impacts reversed” (p. 2).

¹⁵⁹ From Timmerman lecture notes entitled “Where do we stand with the Earth?” Timmerman’s discussion of “problems” and “mysteries” is predicated on Gabriel Marcel’s discussion of problems and mysteries. See Marcel, G. (1964). Some reflections on existentialism. *Philosophy Today*, 8(4), 248-257.

For “mysteries,” on the other hand, the source is less clear, because with study it becomes apparent that the “finger points at everyone – entire dynamic processes of modern society, lifestyles, and perhaps the very burden of the human presence on the earth” (Timmerman, n.d.; p. 2). Climate change and the loss of species are two examples Timmerman identifies as mysteries. Treating them only as problems with technological solutions avoids deeper discussions regarding accountability and “responsibilities to ourselves and other members of the planet” (Timmerman, n.d.; p. 2).

Finally, why does modern Western society rely so heavily on the call for more study due to incomplete knowledge? Is it possible that perhaps we have incomplete knowledge because of the very rigidity of positivist and secular thought foundational to modern Western science? Deloria & Wildcat (2001) characterize this rigidity as the “fallacy of misplaced concreteness,”¹⁶⁰ which is “the desire to absolutize what are but tenuous conclusions” (p. 6). Any attention to IK has, to date, de-coupled spiritual knowledge from TEK because, as has been discussed here, scientists have been indoctrinated to adhere to objective and secular rules and so do not even consider our metaphysical reality as a factual part of science or of existence. Mooshum concurs, believing that this conditioning has deterred scientists from “even entertaining the thought”¹⁶¹ of our metaphysical reality. He also calls into question “. . . those who claim to have the true reading of natural law”¹⁶² and the influence they have wielded through the diffusionism and universalism of colonization (Battiste and Henderson, 2000).

¹⁶⁰ As articulated by mathematician and philosopher Alfred North Whitehead. For more on this fallacy, please see Whitehead (1978) *Process and Reality* and Whitehead (1978) *Science and the Modern World*.

¹⁶¹ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 24, 2014. Please refer back to the feather in Figure 2.1 and the holistic integration of both skill and human development needs. Mooshum’s point redirects the discussion toward power and balance issues and the influence of the Christian religion in shaping modern Western science, which is a topic for another dissertation and so is not explored here.

¹⁶² Michael Thrasher, personal communication, February 24, 2014.

By sharing the story from my fast and contemplating the multidimensional wholeness of the “mysteries” of life, I am hoping it becomes apparent that another way of seeing and knowing exists that is alternative to the dominant worldview. Knowledges of *all* peoples are important contributors to the whole of global knowledge. Admitting this opens a pathway to accept that which has been deemed “incomplete” as an unknowable and “still clearly real” mystery (Johnston, 1995; p. xxii), not precluding action but establishing respect for mystery as part of living in accordance with natural law.

Alsop and Fawcett (2010) concur with this perspective. Balancing the rigour of Science with the holism of Indigenous ways of knowing broadens science education – and sustainability discourse – beyond a sole search for certainty and conclusiveness. Indeed, Indigenous ways of knowing are exacting and rigorous in their own protocols and processes. As well, as Deloria & Wildcat (2001) observe, Indigenous ways of knowing “are oriented toward a far greater understanding of reality than is scientific knowledge” (p. 4). If modern Western Science has not “saved us” (Alsop & Fawcett, 2010; p. 1034) from a possible “collapse” (p. 1028), as Alsop and Fawcett (2010) suggest may be in our future, perhaps expanding our worldview and learning from Others may provide new insights and potentialities. Mazzocchi (2008) concurs:

. . . [W]e gain the insight that a shift of perspective can create the conditions for a new unknown to be unveiled; that is, for an expansion of our own horizon to take place. . . learning to *look elsewhere*, opening ourselves to co-participate in the experience of the other . . . (p. 52).

Leduc (2010) and Arnakak comment on the fasting experience which, along with all the years I have learned through ceremonies and the oral tradition, has certainly expanded my horizons. Arnakak notes that fasting does not seek “to remedy but to help rebalance, to massage the individual to its natural equilibrium with the environment” (Leduc, 2010; p. 34). One may imagine that “rebalancing” Indigenous ways of knowing with mainstream Western thought,

people may be reminded that at one time we were all indigenous to and connected with the land both metaphysically and physically. Perhaps reawakening to this connection and “rebalancing” ourselves individually is a first step toward discerning together how to “massage” sustainability discourse away from ecological modernization strategies toward more holistic and integrated approaches as we work to restore our collective “natural equilibrium with the environment” (Leduc, 2010; p. 34).

Regarding Alternative Western Views

Leduc (2010) extends his and Arnakak’s observations to “environmental and climate management regimes [which] have tended to marginalize both Western ethical and Indigenous cultural views that could provide an alternative way of understanding environmental issues” (p. 50; see also Sachs, 1992; p. 27 and Hallman, 2000). The Western ethical views to which Leduc (2010) refers in this quote are those of Gaia, ecofeminism, and other ecocentric and biocentric philosophies (Fawcett, 2013). He quotes Anne Primavesi (2009) who, given all the uncertainties associated with climate change, proposes that “these uncertainties are calling us to move our sense of the earth toward an increasingly wise recognition ‘of our place within it’” (Leduc, 2010; p. 51; Primavesi, 2009; p. 10). I interpret the “wise recognition” to which Leduc and Primavesi refer as acknowledging the living spirit resident within the earth and “our place” as *part of* this spirit, not dominant over or separate from it.

Plumwood (2002) emphasizes a similar stance in ecofeminist thought regarding our “ecological embeddedness” (p. 27). She notes the rationality dominating Western society and draws attention to the “rationalist failure to situate the human in ecologically embodied and socially embedded ways” (Plumwood, 2002; p. 27). Rather than “denying or backgrounding the contributions of subordinated others” (Plumwood, 2002; p. 27), Plumwood upholds other

worldviews, such as Indigenous ways of knowing, as avenues for learning – or re-learning – our “ecological embeddedness” (p. 27).

Agreeing with Plumwood (2002), Leduc (2010) concludes that “interdisciplinary climate research can be of significant help . . . if [scientific knowledge] is understood to be simply one powerful globalizing knowledge system that is in need of cultural and regional contextualization” (p. 227). The “cultural and regional contextualization” to which Leduc (2010) refers is the inclusion of Indigenous ways of knowing as another “powerful globalizing knowledge system.” Rebalancing Western scientific thought with knowledge gained from *contextualized* Indigenous ways of knowing is likely to facilitate more complete understanding of the world in which we live and of the environmental and sustainability challenges we are facing in the twenty-first century.

Summary – the Temporality of Sustainability

To summarize the discussion of learnings from my fast as they relate to the Sweetgrass Road and Western sustainability, I return to a discussion of time. Rifkin (1987) provides a synopsis of humanity’s changing temporality through the ages:

Our early ancestors coveted the circle, perceiving time as eternal return, a ceaseless repetition of an endless cycle of birth, life, death, and rebirth. Later, as ritual consciousness gave way to religious consciousness, the vertical line of spiritual ascent replaced the circle in the Western portion of the globe as men and women looked skyward for their temporal inspiration. During the short reign of historical consciousness, the horizontal line of progress ruled as the undisputed signature of the period. Now, still in the early decades of psychological consciousness, it is the spiral that commands our attention. It is the new symbol of creation captured in both the double helix and in the cybernetic vision where feedback loops simulate new worlds pulsing in the crevices of millions of silicon chips. With each new time-reckoning and time-ordering system, humanity has distanced itself farther and farther from the rhythms of nature (pp. 221-222).

To illustrate this last point Elder Eddie Bellerose, Michael Thrasher’s business partner at Four Skies Training and Development in the 1970s, shared an observation one summer’s day.

Bellerose noted all the recreational vehicles leaving town on weekends to “enjoy the outdoors.” He saw people leaving in their “campers,” loaded down with television sets and radios along with their other belongings. At the campgrounds, he saw people sitting outside in the evenings with a campfire for awhile. And then he saw them lock themselves inside their campers to watch television or listen to the radio. This saddened Eddie, because he saw people distancing themselves from nature right before his eyes. He sensed their “fear of it” – their fear of being outdoors and their disconnection from nature.¹⁶³ Today, “camping” with televisions and radios is being supplemented with laptop computers, tablets, and smartphones.

This abstract and increasingly “cybernetic” or “nanosecond” time to which humanity has grown accustomed, arguably, has contributed to humanity’s disconnection from nature (Rifkin, 1987; Macnaghten & Urry, 1998; Peters, 1992; also see Louv, 2008, 2011). As discussed in Chapters Five and Six, Western sustainability’s temporal lens is focused toward the future with the promise of technological advancements enhancing efficiencies and reversing environmental ills for the benefit of future generations. This dominant worldview emphasizes a linear progression toward an ideal proclaimed to be “sustainability.” Looking forward and anticipating what may be “down the road” is an essential practice. I posit that this dominant view is able to benefit from incorporating balance as proffered by an Indigenous view of time. That is, the priority given to the unfolding of time needs to be balanced with due respect for one’s history.

The history of which I speak is not recent history, but humanity’s ancient history hailing back to a deeper connection with place. While Indigenous peoples have adapted to linear and abstract time, they remain connected to the cyclical rhythms of nature. As well, dominant Western society appreciates the cycles of seasonal variations as daily lives are influenced by changes throughout each year. Yet, as Rifkin (1987) points out:

¹⁶³ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 18, 2013.

. . . the distance we set between ourselves and the rest of creation has left us far removed from the rhythms of intimate temporal participation. We gained perspective, and in the process we lost touch with the ground of our temporal being. Our knowledge has been our alienation (pp. 222-223).

Reflecting on the four stages of learning I introduced in the Pre/Amble, if nothing else, seeing Grandmother Moon in the night sky on my fast has returned me to *understanding* and *knowledge of* our relationship with Creation and of “the ground of our temporal being.” My connection with the earth and the cosmos has been reinforced, illuminating the wonder of it all and deepening my respect for all those who have come before who *knew* this relationship closely and with deep *wisdom*. If nothing else, I will be satisfied if my dissertation raises among readers renewed *awareness* as to what has been forgotten, hopefully rekindling a curiosity to learn more about what we have been missing (recalling Alsop’s and Fawcett’s question; 2010) that Indigenous knowledges have to offer.

I would like to end this chapter with three reflections on time from an Indigenous perspective. First, one Ojibwe author has likened time to a “moving fish that never stops” and “all of us are living on the rib of its fin” (Erdrich, 2001; p 223). Likening time to a fish also recalls for me the life cycle of Pacific salmon. They begin life in a stream, find their way to the ocean, and then years later, return to the very place of their birth, in that same stream. The salmon travels hundreds, if not thousands, of miles. Two to three years hence, it wends its way back to its source to establish a nest for the next generation. Once the roe are laid and fertilized, both adult male and female die, providing food for bears, eagles and other predators. Is this not a circle? As we move perpetually through time (on the rib of a fish’s fin), does this circle not teach us to remember our beginnings and to return to them for the benefit of our future generations?

The second reflection is the notion of time as a tree. Speaking with Mooshum on one occasion, he and I got to talking about trees and time. When examining a cross-section of a tree, one sees all the rings dating back to its very beginning. The history of the tree is written there, showing the cyclical repetition of growing seasons and dormant seasons. The tree grows more in wetter, warmer years and less in dryer, cooler years, and each dormant season shows up as a thin ring of its own. So the rings can be read to understand the tree's history and the climate of the region during its lifetime. The new growth is only a thin cambium layer at the outer edge underneath the bark. The fact that none of a tree's history is lost is a lesson in and of itself, which may serve as a teaching of the importance of remembering one's history, because *all* one's history forms and shapes the individual. Is there not a lesson to be learned here?

Finally, reflecting upon my own experience orienteering in the Upper Peninsula of Michigan one spring, one of the first lessons I learned about hiking in the woods was to mark one's trail to be able to find the way out. We must remember the trail taken so we do not get lost in the forest's interior. Metaphorically speaking, if we are unable to find our way out of the woods, if we lose the path we have traveled, how will we find our way to where we want to be?

These reflections and this entire chapter serve to highlight, in different ways, the importance of relationship with place, of renewing ancient connections with time, and of accepting our roles and responsibilities – our place in time – if we hope to sustain ourselves and support the lands where we live. Building upon this understanding of time and relationships, the next chapter returns to the northern direction of the Medicine Circle and the Sweetgrass Road, the miyopimatisiwin, to explore a way forward toward a more sustainable way of existing with and within Creation.

Chapter 8 – NORTH: Moving toward a Sustainable Process

In ceremonies, Mooshum guides fasters on their journeys with the help of the Medicine Circle. One aim of a fast is to determine what, if any, changes need to be made in one's everyday living. The northern direction is the direction of movement, which by its very nature, represents change. As shared at the end of the last chapter, time is in continuous motion. With time, things cannot help but change. Mooshum observes that Grandfather Wind, sitting in the north, is in charge of all movement, all change.¹⁶⁴ He relates how the sun, the biggest influence on life on earth, is constantly generating solar winds. Galactic winds course through the universe. Here on earth, winds constantly move the air, mix with moisture, create weather. Our bodies are in constant motion with wind, our breath. If everything is constantly moving because of Grandfather Wind, the only constant is change. The Medicine Circle is a circle for facilitating change. The four directions provide a process to guide human beings through change.

Introduction

Chapter Eight builds on the Indigenous perspectives of temporality in sustainability discussed in Chapter Seven and is a presentation of my understanding of the Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle as it relates to human beings' relationship with natural law – that is, our place in time and within Creation (i.e., our roles, relationships, responsibilities). As this chapter is situated in the north, which is the direction for movement and behaviour, I explore how Indigenous knowledge may inform sustainability discourse and move human beings toward a more holistic approach to sustainable living. The basis for the ensuing discussion is the illustration introduced in Figure 4.3, appearing with more detail in Figures 8.1 and 8.2.

Contemplating the opening passage and Mooshum's observations about Grandfather Wind, I reflect on the pervasiveness of wind and the oft-used phrase (said in many ways), "the only universal constant is change." During the year, we are of course accustomed to seasonal changes. Yet climate change and more extreme weather events are disturbing our comfortable routines. Various impacts range from beneficially longer growing seasons to worrisome rising sea levels, vanishing shorelines, and droughts. We are seeing extended ranges of welcomed and

¹⁶⁴ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, November 17, 2013.

unwelcomed species and are experiencing catastrophic events that are destroying communities and people's lives around the world.

An assertion of this dissertation has been that Indigenous ways of knowing have underpinned the survival of Indigenous peoples around the world over millennia, including the last 500 years through extreme changes and hardships imposed by colonization. The Medicine Circle is, and always has been, a model to help respond to these and other changes. I contend that Indigenous ways of knowing have important contributions to make in contemporary society, given the challenges we are currently facing. Taking 1987 as a "start date" with the publication of the WCED Brundtland Report and looking at the larger picture, the dominant Western approach to sustainability, in my opinion, has been less than effective in moving global society toward a more sustainable future over the ensuing twenty-seven years.

I assert that Indigenous ways of knowing, as an opportunity to learn a different way of approaching the challenges we face, can no longer be ignored. Dominant society needs to relax its tightly-clenched grip on the narrow-minded certainty of only one Western, neoliberal truth in this world, expand its horizons, and balance its views with those offered by Other perspectives. Specifically, respecting the place where we live and the original peoples of this land, I maintain that sustainability's focus on the future needs to be balanced with looking to the past and learning from Indigenous wisdom, which is, in my view, substantively insightful, spatially and temporally relevant, holistically scientific, and dynamically adaptable to our present times and future needs.

Throughout this dissertation, I have striven to provide for the reader an *awareness* of Indigenous knowledge according to how I have come to understand it primarily through ceremonies. The Indigenous knowledge I have introduced is grounded in the Cree-Nishnaabe

Medicine Circle, which I have learned over the last twenty-eight years, with Mooshum Michael as guide and mentor; I am fortunate also to be able to call him relative. I have limited this discussion to what I have come to know, acknowledging that the diversity of Indigenous peoples' knowledges have commonalities and differences, all of which undoubtedly provide additional, valuable insights to issues concerning sustainability. What I present here is *my* perspective, which may differ from others' views and understandings. Others may arrive at their own conclusions through their own processes of learning. As well, what I present here is subject to further change, as the Medicine Circle itself facilitates change.

Reflections on Process¹⁶⁵

Through much contemplation, meditation, and consultation with Mooshum, I have studied the Medicine Circle to understand how it may be applied to modern-day sustainability. In other words, how may the miyopimatisiwin, the Sweetgrass Road, be understood using the written word and contemporary concepts to augment Western sustainability discourse, making it more inclusive of, and balanced with, an Indigenous way of knowing?

The process followed has been one of intensive reflection. I have spent numerous hours contemplating the task, meditating on each of the four directions, consulting with Mooshum with hours-long discussions, in person and over the telephone, and reflecting upon our conversations through more meditation and deliberation. Mooshum has enriched our discussions with important insights into each of the directions and the words we are contemplating, sharing stories to illustrate various points, guiding me to look deeper, and joking together along the way about our respective brain cramps. I had to visualize our conversations so I created the illustration in

¹⁶⁵ From here on, the reader may wish to have Figures 8.1 and 8.2 readily available for visual reference. The circular discussion reflects the cyclical nature of the Medicine Circle. When in doubt, travel clockwise around the Medicine Circle in Figure 8.1, beginning in the east where the sun rises.

Figure 8.1, which has undergone numerous iterations to arrive at the version appearing here. No doubt, more changes will ensue; but we both feel this is a “start” ready for sharing.

Yet, Mooshum is wary about sharing this information. Recalling the questions asked in Chapter Two (How much is to be shared? What is to be written?) and the responsibility he holds carrying the knowledge passed down to him from all those who came before, Mooshum cites a number of reasons why the oral tradition is meant to be learned through experience rather than reading about it. As has been emphasized before, through doing, one may arrive at a place of understanding, and then knowing, which is different than mentally digesting something after reading about it. Through doing, as both Mooshum Michael and Mooshum Peter have taught, one is able to arrive at “double-understanding” (this learning was introduced in Chapter Two). That is, only reading this chapter (and this dissertation) runs the risk of “missed-understanding” and “misunderstanding” because the context provided by the actual experience is missing. Hence, Mooshum emphasizes and I repeatedly have underscored that reading this dissertation, and especially the material presented in this chapter, is able to provide the reader with a new awareness only. To “double-understand” what is read, one is encouraged to spend time learning by doing.¹⁶⁶ Having done so, one may come to the same understanding as I have or a different one. Both are equally valid, according to Indigenous knowledge, as each point of view contributes to a better understanding of the whole.

¹⁶⁶ One may “learn by doing” via numerous avenues. I have been fortunate to have learned primarily through attending ceremonies; however, gaining entrance to ceremonies is dependent on certain protocols and is not to be pursued through New Age venues, which are a form of cultural appropriation (Johnson, 1995). One way anyone can begin learning is by spending time alone with oneself, preferably outdoors. Mooshum explains that every child “is born with perfect balance” (Thrasher, M. 1987. *Blue Book*, unpublished workshop material). This being so, then we all have knowledge inside ourselves. All we have to do is spend the time reconnecting with nature and with our inner self. Finding an acceptable avenue to seek an Elder’s guidance, spending time with Elders, and learning from them by helping them are other ways to begin a learning journey (Wheeler, 2005).

Also, Mooshum is concerned that what is written here will be taken not just as the only truth, but as the final word. With an oral tradition, nothing could be further from the truth. Indigenous knowledge has survived through the millennia because it has adapted with the ever-changing times. As such, I am introducing the diagram and table as a “start” in quotation marks because it is exactly that. Undoubtedly, the information will continue to evolve and be further refined. Indeed, new perspectives come to light as each person arrives at one’s own understandings through individual experiences. The whole is certainly greater than the sum of the parts when all perspectives are brought together to contribute to the overall discourse, which in and of itself is a compilation of numerous insights and collaborative sharing.

A final concern relates to the challenge of translating an oral tradition and learnings from ceremonies into a Western, two-dimensional framework. Standing in the centre of the Medicine Circle (also referred to as a sphere; see Allen, 1992), one’s perspective shifts according to the direction and point on the sphere one is facing. How is it possible to translate what I am visualizing three-dimensionally (or more accurately, multi-dimensionally) onto a two-dimensional surface, a piece of paper? This logistical challenge has been a difficult one, especially when both Mooshum and I wish to be care-full in our work with Indigenous wisdom handed down across generations. Somehow, what I am seeing has to be translated into a two-dimensional representation. Reading further, the reader will see how my thought process has been circular. At one point, however, I chose to lay out my thinking into a tabular form, not that my thinking became linear, but because the ultimate representation was going to be placed within a two-dimensional, written product.

Underlying this entire discussion is the care with which Mooshum and I have taken in this endeavour. I have striven to ensure that the words chosen and visualizations are both right

and correct according to the Medicine Circle and natural law. The words “right” and “correct” appear synonymous; however, they serve as a double check in this process. That is, we have worked to ensure word choices are factual according to the laws of nature as well as ethical according to the Medicine Circle. In other words, we have worked with deep care to ensure our work is “clean” (Warren, 2008).

With respect to the process followed, I began by articulating the four phrases that appear in bold in Figure 8.1, some of which came easily to mind, others changed several times before arriving at this latest version. Then, Mooshum requested that I consider the four phrases in bold in terms of another group of four: humans in relationship with other human beings, humans in relationship with fauna, humans in relationship with flora, and humans in relationship with spirit – all in the context of the miyopimatisiwin (the Sweetgrass Road) and Western sustainability. After working with these eight for awhile, Mooshum added another layer to the four directions, asking me to consider humans, fauna, flora, and spirit respectively with air, earth, water, and fire, the four elements required for life.

I began to work in circles, both literally and figuratively, beginning in the east to describe what “raised consciousness” means in terms of *humans in relationship with other human beings*. I moved to the south and contemplated what “shared responsibility” means for *humans in relationship with other human beings*. Likewise, I did the same in the western and northern directions for “universal equity” and “braided movement,” respectively. I repeated the process for humans in relationship with fauna, then flora, and then spirit. Again, this was iterative. I circled the Medicine Circle many times to evolve ideas. I shared my thoughts with Mooshum and he provided feedback and insights into the directions, asking me to think some more, or

agreeing with certain ideas that fit well. Sometimes, we talked for hours at a time. Reflecting on our conversations, I worked to further refine and articulate the ideas.

When Mooshum added the layer of air, earth, water and fire, the circles began to overlap and blur, increasing the challenge to communicate effectively how each concept relates to everything within a multi-dimensional sphere. So I set out to develop a new visual, resulting in Figure 8.2, aimed at accomplishing five main objectives: 1) to provide an illustration of how the concepts relate to the four directions, 2) to provide an illustration of how the concepts relate to human beings' relationships with each other, other animals, flora, and spirit, 3) to provide an illustration of how the concepts relate to the four elements of earth, fire, water, and air, 4) to clearly convey the interconnectedness, overlap, fluidity and holistic nature of all the ideas presented, and 5) to translate a multi-dimensional image based in the oral tradition onto a two-dimensional page.

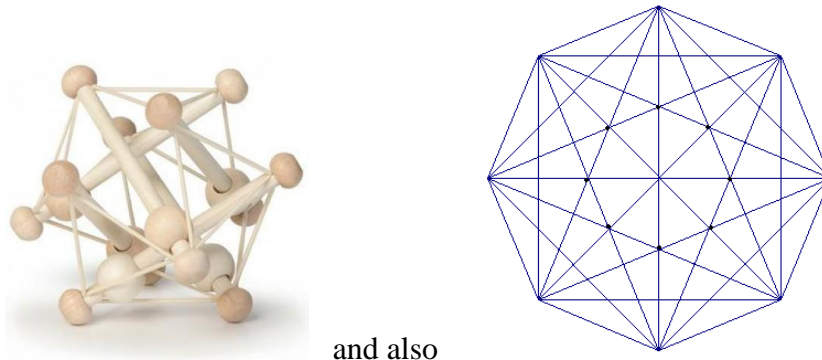
Mooshum and I talked at length about how to approach the task in both a “right” and “correct” manner, given the sacrifices so many have made over the millennia for their peoples and cultures. In essence, and with Mooshum’s guidance, I have unfolded a layer to the Medicine Circle as presented in Figure 8.1. I have done so for a particular purpose as specified, and the words give the Medicine Circle the focus I need for this purpose.¹⁶⁷ I have worked through the process of “talk about it, pray about it, and get organized” to arrive at a way forward (“get mobile”) as represented by the four main phrases in bold font in Figure 8.1.

Figure 8.2 explores these four introductory phrases for each direction of the Medicine Circle. Translating what is based in an oral tradition into a written form, the two-dimensional table aims to assist those not familiar with a Medicine Circle in interpreting Figure 8.1. My

¹⁶⁷ Mooshum cautions others against using the Medicine Circle, imagining different interpretations without knowledge or wisdom about it.

intention was to represent and convey visually the Indigenous principles of holism, equity, and interconnectedness. As such, the two-dimensional template does *not* represent a human-dominated hierarchy. After all, human beings were created last and have a great deal to learn from other beings. If this were a hierarchical representation, the row for human beings would probably be located last rather than first. As well, even though the diagram looks linear, its foundation is the Medicine Circle and reflects a holistic, cyclical process that is both integrative and relational.

In other words, even though my format evolved into a tabular shape, the image prevailing in my mind has always been a three-dimensional, multi-faceted object, which – for lack of a better image – resembles a toy with which my children played when they were small. The geometric shape is an icosahedron as pictured below:



and also

The shapes illustrate the essential characteristics of both Figures 8.1 and 8.2. That is, all ideas and concepts are related and, therefore, connected to, balanced with, and dependent upon each other. No part may be separated from the whole without consequences.

As I began to fill in Figure 8.2, I had to ensure that columns and rows exhibited connectivity. That is, for each row, the information in each box had to relate to humans, animals, plants or spirit, respectively. As well, moving down each column, the information in each box had to relate to not only the phrase at the top, but also the original gift of that direction (e.g., gift

of vision, time, feeling, movement). The dotted lines between the boxes indicate that overlap exists, which is inherent in the Medicine Circle due to its holistic nature. This emphasizes that nothing can be taken by itself, as all parts are related to each other (i.e., as in “all my relations”).

When Mooshum asked me to create the additional column for air, earth, water, and fire, I sought clarity about why they are each associated with human beings, fauna, flora, and spirit, respectively – as all are interrelated and delineations may seem confusing. The wavy lines represent the inherent overlap I see existing among these eight categories. When I first showed Mooshum the template I created, he looked at these wavy lines and saw a feather, which is apropos because the feather represents balance, one of the underlying themes of this dissertation and central to Figures 8.1 and 8.2.

In a sphere (Figure 8.1), these pairings are non-existent because everything is related (such as in an icosahedron). With a two-dimensional representation (Figure 8.2), I felt I needed to clarify the rationale for the pairings Mooshum identified. I have already mentioned that the four elements – earth, fire, water, air – are the necessities for all life (revisit Figure 1.6). For the pairing of humans with air, human beings cannot live without air for more than a few minutes, but we can live without water for a few days. Similarly, for the flora-water pairing, flora in general cannot live without water for more than a few days as they clearly begin wilting within a short period of time (except those acclimated to arid environments, such as cacti and other succulents); yet plants are able to survive for a number of days without air (Barclay & Crawford, 1982; Schlüter & Crawford, 2001). For spirit and fire, spirit permeates all Creation as it is an energy force, just like fire. For earth and animals, the earth is home to all animal life, including humans. Human beings are an animal species, yet they have been placed in a separate row because of our distinctness in our introspective ability to reason and how we exercise free will.

To be clear, I am not saying that non-human animals lack consciousness. A great deal of study has shown the presence of one in many species (Bekoff, 2006; Balcombe, 2010; de Waal, 2006, 2010; Goodall, 1990). Bekoff (2006) articulates that “the degree of self-cognizance of individuals in any species can be represented as a point on a continuum of complexity and conscious development” (p. 66). This continuum, Bekoff suggests, ranges from “self-referencing to self-awareness to self-consciousness” (2006; p. 65), and he discusses how “many animals have a sense of mineness or bodyness but not a sense of ‘I-ness’ (an ‘I-self’)” (p. 33).

In discussing “free will and consciousness” with Mooshum, we talked about attitude.¹⁶⁸ When he was younger, he went “hunting” for food for his relatives; but he was not hunting prey, per se. He knew if his attitude was merely to hunt and kill, that the animals would hide. If, however, his attitude was one of seeking food to feed his family, choosing to prepare for and carry out the task with due respect for the animal, an animal would sense that attitude and invariably present itself to him. This example illustrates the consciousness of the animal as well as the exercise of free will on Mooshum’s part, as a human being choosing how he was going to behave.

In examining “free will and consciousness” with the Medicine Circle, all beings are created with the four gifts of movement, vision, time, and feeling. Looking at the north-south axis with respect to animals (including human beings), we all behave in relationship with Creation. Looking at the east-west axis, animals’ abilities to see and reason vary. Bekoff’s spectrum of self-cognizance is applicable here (2006). Non-human animals have diverse reasoning abilities based on what they see and sense outwardly around them. Do they have inner vision? Are they able to meditate or examine themselves and their moral choices introspectively to the degree humans can, reflecting upon relationships and past actions to see if and how

¹⁶⁸ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, April 23, 2014.

behaviours may (or may not) need to change? The degree of introspection required to even ask and then investigate questions such as these is something unique to human beings.

From a Western perspective, one may view Figure 8.2 as presenting a hierarchy, an order to the animal kingdom. Scientists acknowledge, however, that uniqueness does not equal superiority, and humans have much to learn from other-than-human-beings' intelligence and empathy (Bekoff, 2006; Balcombe, 2010; de Waal, 2006, 2010; Goodall, 1990).¹⁶⁹

From the Indigenous perspective taken in this dissertation, no hierarchy exists in a Medicine Circle. We are all in relationship with Creation. The wavy lines in Figure 8.2 indicate crossover in and between these first two columns. That is, flora are rooted in the earth and are also found in water; humans are animals; animals live on land and in water; everyone and everything has spirit. The wavy lines emphasize the qualities of holism and interconnectedness permeating throughout Creation. Recalling that Figure 8.2 is merely a two-dimensional representation of the sphere in Figure 8.1, the lines disappear and any order one might have imagined is replaced by the fluid, relational movement inherent in the Medicine Circle.

Common Threads

Consulting Mooshum, I worked to refine, edit, and sharpen the articulation of each idea so that, upon completion, this “starting” (as opposed to finished) picture in Figures 8.1 and 8.2 represents my interpretation, based upon my understanding of the Medicine Circle, of an Indigenous perspective of human beings in relationship with Creation.

A number of themes kept resurfacing throughout the process. These common threads provide a lens to view and contemplate Figures 8.1 and 8.2. As it turns out, they are the fundamental principles that I have revisited throughout this dissertation: balance, holism,

¹⁶⁹ To learn more, in addition to reading the authors mentioned, please see *The Nature of Things*, “Mysteries of the Animal Mind” at <http://www.cbc.ca/natureofthings/episodes/mysteries-of-the-animal-mind>.

relationship, time. Unplanned as this finding is, a certain symmetry exists and feelings of wholeness and correctness arise when initial observations are reconfirmed time and again through the care-full work I have pursued during this doctoral journey. Because these topics have been explored throughout the dissertation, they are briefly reviewed here.

Balance: Figures 8.1 and 8.2 strive to balance both Western and Indigenous knowledges together. As I introduced in Figure 3.1, four peoples originally occupied this earth each with their cultural strengths and knowledge systems. I have attempted throughout the dissertation to emphasize the importance of respecting all knowledges, and in this case Indigenous ways of knowing, as equally valid to the dominant Western knowledge system.¹⁷⁰ If one overpowers or dismisses another, imbalances occur, negatively affecting relationships. Favouring one over another denies all peoples the benefits of learning another way to comprehend the world and universe. In Figures 8.1 and 8.2, therefore, both Western and Indigenous knowledges are balanced together to contribute to one whole. That is, Western society has made great contributions to science, technology and other fields. These have to be balanced with Indigenous peoples' contributions, which are equally as significant in various ways, such as with TEK, the canoe and kayak, the snowshoe and dogsled, as well as other technologies developed for North American living (Bohr, 2005; Del Valle, 2009; McNab et al, 2001; Miller, 2008; Raudzens, 2001; Wickman, 2012). What the reader will see in Figures 8.1 and 8.2 is a balance of concepts that are both old and current. Contemporary language is used to relay Indigenous and Western ideas so as to highlight their complementary potential.

Holism: Figures 8.1 and 8.2 are to be taken as one whole. Separating any part of the table renders the fraction and the remainder incorrect. No "box" is to be considered separate

¹⁷⁰ The particular Indigenous way of knowing I am employing, as noted, is according to Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle learnings.

from or less important than any other. As has been discussed, one problem Indigenous knowledge has experienced is that of decontextualization. This principle of holism aims to prevent isolating spirit from science. As well, Figures 8.1 and 8.2 do not reflect a hierarchy; human beings are wholly integrated as part of rather than dominant over nature.

Relationship and Time: Similarly, Figures 8.1 and 8.2 are predicated on acknowledging “all my relatives” – *kahkiyaw niwahkamakanak*. By “all my relatives” I include our animal and plant relatives as well as the spirit beings within all Creation – from the rocks below to the air and water to the moon and stars above and beyond. With respect to time, both figures strive to balance sustainability’s focus on the future with equal regard for the past, honouring ways of knowing that have sustained Indigenous peoples over millennia. I have elaborated a great deal on both time and relationship throughout these two journeys around the Medicine Circle. The learnings associated with the southern direction all have relevance for the ensuing discussion.

Re/Spect and Gratitude

A final note regarding Figures 8.1 and 8.2: I present what follows with a certain approach emphasizing how I understand the Medicine Circle as it relates to the work at hand. Worth repeating is the point that what is presented here may differ from the reader’s understanding or someone else’s with knowledge of Indigenous ways of knowing and the Medicine Circle. In actuality and with re/spect, other Medicine Circles of other Indigenous peoples may have altogether different words, interpretations and orderings. I am only able to speak to what I have come to know, expressing gratitude to Mooshum for his life of dedicated learning and sharing the knowledge, and for his guidance, care, and patience. As hard as I have worked on this project, I acknowledge that its source is the long line of Elders who have spent

their lifetimes learning through initial awareness to a place of wisdom, caring for the knowledge and passing it on to future generations.

Figures 8.1 and 8.2 are care-full presentations articulating how to understand the Medicine Circle with respect to *human beings in relationship with Creation and the laws of nature*. With Mooshum's care-full eye, I have worked so that the chapter's process and content feel both "right" and "correct," acknowledging that changes are likely still and wary of the reader misunderstanding something or accepting this as the final word or truth, which it is not. Again, the Medicine Circle is a circle for facilitating change to deal with the one constant – that change is inevitable. As they stand in their present form, however, Figures 8.1 and 8.2 offer a "starting" point for consideration and further discussion, bringing to the reader an *awareness* of how Indigenous knowledge may inform Western sustainability discourse.

A final note for interpreting Figures 8.1 and 8.2 and their explanatory paragraphs concerns the apparent dichotomy regarding the scale and scope of sustainability ideals and the individual nature of the Medicine Circle. At the centre point of this particular Medicine Circle is the individual, stressing individual outlooks and opinions, individual responsibilities and behaviours. Yet, striving toward sustainability is no small task, one requiring collaborative change and shared efforts as a society. Mooshum explains it this way: "It is irresponsible to act individually without a sense of community. One must *be* a community member. In other words, it is not enough to be part of a community and not take part in the community."¹⁷¹

Yet, how can one person make a difference? Nisbet, Zelenski & Murphy (2007) list several reasons negatively affecting one's attitude toward change, ranging from, but not limited to, feeling "overwhelmed" and "low self-efficacy" to perceiving "environmental problems are often not observable to our senses . . . so the threat may not seem personal or imminent" (p. 203).

¹⁷¹ Michael Thrasher, personal communication, December 11, 2013.

Still, change can begin with individual acknowledgement of a problem, assessing it, and determining a proper course of action, harkening back to “talk about it, pray about it, get organized, and get mobile.” The Medicine Circle offers a process for facilitating change, and change begins at the centre – with self, with the individual taking responsibility for one’s own attitudes and behaviours. That is, Mooshum teaches another facet of the Medicine Circle with four concentric circles.¹⁷² At the centre is the self. The Medicine Circle, as a facilitator of change, assists individual growth and well-being (i.e., as shown in Figure 1.2, the Medicine Circle as preacher, teacher, counsellor, and doctor). When one’s self is healthy, then one is better able to take care of the next circle in one’s life, the family. When family is taken care of, then one may assist one’s community, and then one’s nation. Pre-contact, these different scales were self, family, clan, and nation. Today, they may be interpreted as self; family; band, town or city; province and country. With globalization, a fifth circle may be added to represent the world.

Balancing individual responsibility with the scale of the sustainability challenge in the ensuing discussion is difficult to interpret in a practical way. The only advice I can offer is for the reader to balance his/her intrinsic and extrinsic vision, keeping both self and the larger picture in mind. Again, what is offered is an *awareness* of an Indigenous perspective on the subject; it is not a magical remedy. However, the Medicine Circle is a means of “right inward measure” (Bohm, 1980; p. 26) to gain a holistic perspective on the larger picture – human beings in relationship with Creation.

¹⁷² Thrasher, M. (1987). Blue Book, unpublished workshop material.

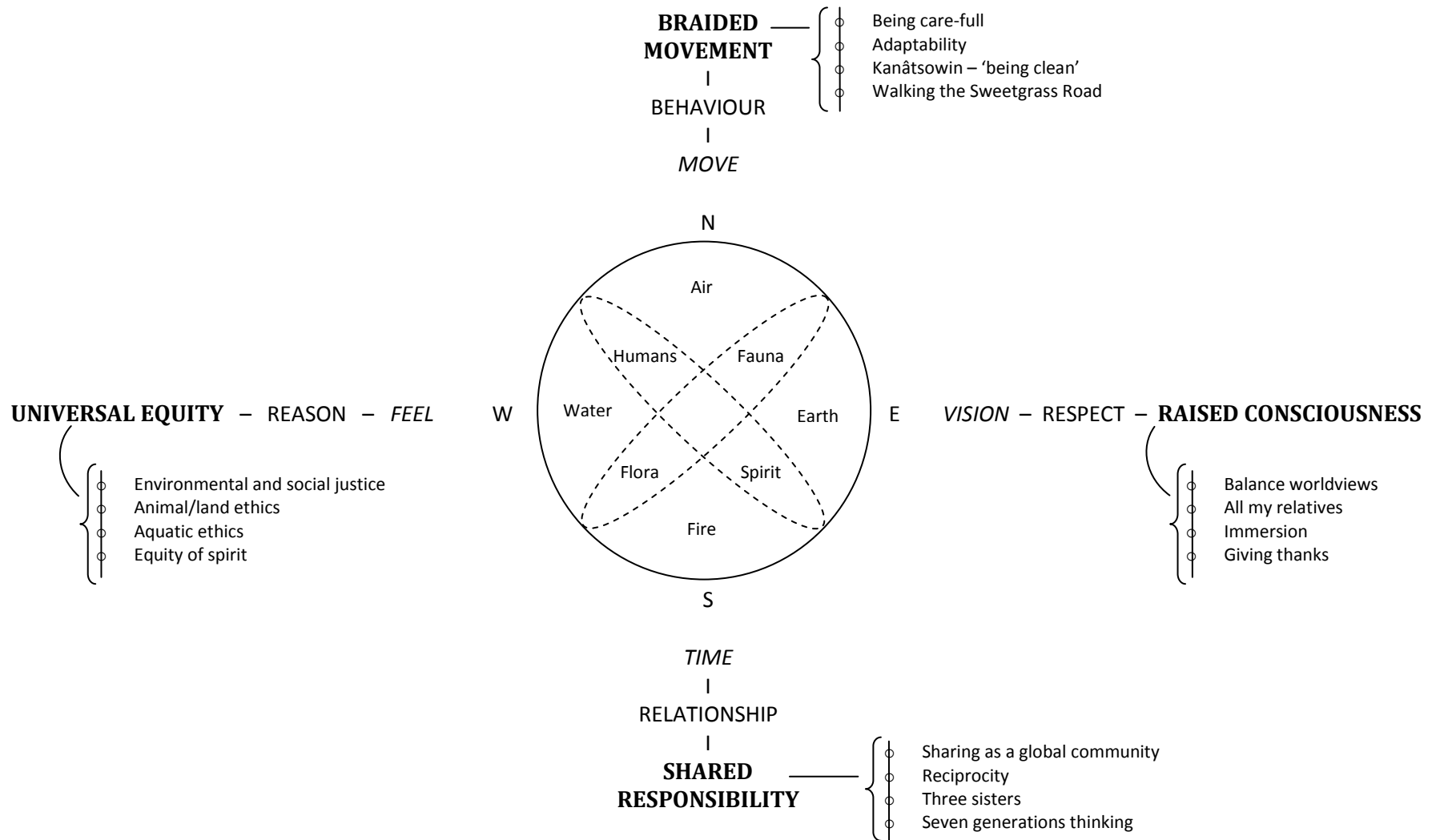
Toward Practicing a Sustainable Lifestyle from an Indigenous Perspective

Beginning in the east with Figure 8.1, I journey around the Medicine Circle a total of five times. In the first circle around, I introduce the four major themes in Figure 8.1 (which appear as the capitalized column headings in Figure 8.2). These are the four attributes I have unfolded that relate directly to the original gift of each direction (vision, time, feeling, movement). All attributes, appreciated together, are the overarching learnings toward living more sustainably with Creation from an Indigenous point of view. Details for each are provided in the next four times around the Medicine Circle, which explore how they may be manifested in our thinking and in our actions in all our relationships with all Creation. I have shared Mooshum's stories and points of emphasis where possible. Due to space limitations, only brief introductions to concepts are presented as each idea has the potential to be a chapter all its own.

A final note regards the oral tradition. Reading the remainder of the chapter, one will note that a number of concepts and ideas have been discussed previously. Repetition is a key part of learning in an oral tradition. Stories are perpetually retold. Protocols are repeated each night in the tepee and throughout ceremonies year after year. Experiences appear, on the surface, repetitive. But with each experience, with each telling of a story, with each practice of a protocol, more learning is possible as a new teaching may be heard and a new insight gained. Such is how double-understanding is achieved. So, just as in an oral tradition, the repetition in this chapter exists for a purpose. Perhaps the reader will realize something new after reading a familiar piece another time and reflecting on it from a different vantage point – in the context of Figure 8.1, moving toward living sustainably with Creation.

Figure 8.1: An Indigenous Perspective toward Practicing a Sustainable Lifestyle

When exploring Figures 8.1 and 8.2 and reading the accompanying section which follows, please honour the principles of balance, holism, relationship and time as explored throughout this dissertation. Figures 8.1 and 8.2 are care-full presentations articulating how to understand the Medicine Circle with respect to human beings' relationship with Creation and the laws of nature. With Mooshum's care-full eye, we have collaborated together until both are satisfied that the work feels both right and correct, acknowledging that changes are likely still and wary of the reader misunderstanding something or accepting this as the final word or truth, which it is not. The Medicine Circle is a circle for facilitating change to deal with the one constant – that change is inevitable. As they stand in their present form, however, Figures 8.1 and 8.2 offer a "starting" point for consideration and further discussion, bringing to the reader a new awareness of how Indigenous knowledge may inform Western sustainability discourse.



**Figure 8.2: An Indigenous Perspective toward Practicing a Sustainable Lifestyle:
Exploring the Four Directions in Figure 8.1**

This is a two-dimensional representation of the multi-dimensional sphere shown in Figure 8.1. As such, the dotted and wavy lines reflect the fluid, relational traits of the sphere/Medicine Circle. All that is contained in Figure 8.2 is interrelated, nothing is to be taken in isolation of the whole, and no hierarchy exists. A phrase's appearance in one line does not mean that it is mutually exclusive to that line. Each concept is applicable throughout the sphere/diagram but has been situated in a place for a particular reason. While a phrase may appear in one column (i.e., one of the directions of the Medicine Circle), it is dependent upon and integral to the entire Medicine Circle's holistic process as a facilitator of change.

Earth Elements	Self-in-relationship with Creation/laws of nature:	EAST Vision-Respect RAISED CONSCIOUSNESS ¹⁷³ (sun shines equally for everyone)	SOUTH Time-Relationship SHARED RESPONSIBILITY (accountability and trustworthiness)	WEST Feel-Reason UNIVERSAL EQUITY (equality and justice in stewardship practices)	NORTH Move-Behaviour BRAIDED MOVEMENT ¹⁷⁴ (mind-body-spirit)
		Air Humans	<i>Balance worldviews</i>	<i>Sharing as a global community</i>	<i>Environmental and social justice</i>
Earth Fauna	<i>All my relatives</i>	<i>Reciprocity</i>	<i>Animal/Land ethics</i>	<i>Adaptability</i>	
Water Flora	<i>Immersion</i>	<i>Three Sisters</i>	<i>Aquatic ethics</i>	<i>Kanatan-“It is clean” Kanâtsowin – “being clean”</i>	
Fire Spirit	<i>Giving thanks</i>	<i>Seven generations thinking</i>	<i>Equity of spirit</i>	<i>Walking the Sweetgrass Road</i>	

¹⁷³ Akwesasne Notes (2005), *Basic Call to Consciousness*; Also, Allen (1992), *The Sacred Hoop*.

¹⁷⁴ Barreiro (2010), *Thinking in Indian: A John Mohawk Reader*.

First Visit to the East: RAISED CONSCIOUSNESS

Paula Gunn Allen (1992) writes:

The purpose of a ceremony is to integrate: to fuse the individual with his or her fellows, the community of people with that of the other kingdoms, and this larger communal group with the worlds beyond this one. A raising or expansion of individual consciousness naturally accompanies this process. The person sheds the isolated, individual personality and is restored to conscious harmony with the universe (p. 62).

This “purpose of a ceremony” is what I experience each spring with my family and ceremonial family. As I have recounted earlier in this dissertation, what is learned in ceremonies is intended for everyday living. Hence, this “raised consciousness” that we practice at ceremonies transfers to life outside of ceremonies. Each day I awake, I am aware of my interconnectedness with the world around me, that I am part of a community. Every day becomes a ceremony for me, acknowledging through my actions “all my relatives,” that I am part of one whole. The action may be simply conserving water or composting organic waste, or it may be helping at a shelter or volunteering to protect a neighbouring Environmentally Sensitive Area from urban sprawl.

Gunn (1992) highlights how dominant Western society has a different awareness:

The notion that nature is somewhere over there while humanity is over here or that a great hierarchical ladder of being exists on which ground and trees occupy a very low rung, animals a slightly higher one, and man (never woman) – especially ‘civilized’ man – a very high one indeed is antithetical to tribal thought. The [North] American Indian sees all creatures as relatives . . . and as necessary parts of an ordered, balanced, and living whole (p. 59).

Gunn’s description of what is “antithetical to tribal thought” is the present paradigm currently dominating Western society. Through colonization and Eurocentric education, peoples around the world have become socialized to think in accordance with detached, linear reasoning and hierarchical interpretations devoid of spirit (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). I have written at length about humanity’s domestication, arrested development, and technological somnambulism

(Livingston, 1994; Shepard, 1982; Winner, 1986). With the degree of free will and consciousness human beings possess, I suggest that many of us are displaying a lack of will and *unconsciousness*. Many people live every day seemingly senseless to the predicament we have created for ourselves, and Indigenous and alternative Western voices remain suppressed by the chokehold of neoliberalism. Because we are so inured, we continue riding the momentum behind ecological modernization when EM sustainability strategies represent only a fraction of the change necessary. “Raising consciousness” is a first step to awaken ourselves from this sleepwalk.

In thinking about learnings associated with a “raised consciousness,” I recall the song I shared earlier: “*Our grandfather the sun is a small child of Creation,*” teaching me about *all* our relatives, seen and unseen, and that the sun shines equally for everyone. These themes of equality and “all my relatives” pervade every direction in Figures 8.1 and 8.2. In the east, they are connected with the gifts of vision and respect that frame the ensuing four visits in the east to explore more fully the learning of “raised consciousness.”

First Visit to the South: SHARED RESPONSIBILITY

As the south relates directly to time and relationships, sharing is a fundamental tenet of this direction. The focus is on personal sharing - owning up to one’s individual responsibility in all relationships (with self, family, community, nation, inclusive of all Creation). A fundamental learning of the southern direction teaches human beings about the requisite responsibilities associated with being in a relationship, such as not taking others for granted and taking time to care for others. The dictionary defines “responsibility” with such words as “accountability,” “reliability,” and “trustworthiness.” The Latin and French roots of the word are connected to the idea of “answering” for one’s actions, which is from the Old French word

respondre, and “to pledge” (i.e., to give) from the Latin word *respondere*. The Latin word *responsum* means “something offered in return.” Mooshum explains “shared responsibility” in this manner: “We rely on Creation for our survival and Creation relies on us to care.”¹⁷⁵ All of these ideas reflect a quality of reciprocity for healthy relationships. The various learnings of the southern direction and “shared responsibility” inform the ensuing discussion during the next four visits to the south.

First Visit to the West: UNIVERSAL EQUITY

As the west is the direction from which the rains come, Mooshum shares a learning with respect to water and equity. He asks me to visualize a pail of water and a pebble dropping in the exact centre of the pail. “What happens?” he asks. The ripples travel out to all parts of the pail evenly. “This is equity,” he says.

As defined in the Oxford dictionary, equity encompasses the ideas of justice and fairness. A look at the Latin root of the word, *aequitas*, relates to equality. All of these practices – justice, fairness, equality – bring harmony.

The word “universal” refers to everything in Creation. That is, everyone and everything is deserving of justice, from the earth below our feet, to the animals and plants, to the air and water, to all peoples, to the universe and the spirit world surrounding us – in other words, all things seen and unseen, all our relatives.

These principles of “universal equity” – justice and equality – guide the ensuing four visits to the western direction as they provide the ethical foundation for how we care for all our relatives, striving for harmony and balance in our roles as caregivers and stewards.

¹⁷⁵ All definitions are retrieved December 6, 2013 from: <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> and <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/>. All stories and learnings in this chapter are shared by Michael Thrasher, personal communication, October 28, 2013 through December 22, 2013.

First Visit to the North: BRAIDED MOVEMENT

José Barreiro (2010) uses the phrase “braid movement” in describing Haudenosaunee John Mohawk in his endeavours to “always carry forward ancient traditional principle into contemporary quests for direction” (p. xxi). Barreiro’s use of the phrase resonated with me, and I thought it a meaningful theme for the northern direction, which shares learnings about movement and behaviour for everyday living and how we care for Creation.

As I shared in Chapter Four, the sweetgrass braid represents one’s relationship with self - the intertwining of mind, body, and spirit. Walking the Sweetgrass Road requires a strong mind, healthy body, and nurtured and nurturing spirit. Mooshum talks about how each person born to this world arrives already “braided” – full of spirit, with a thirsty mind and an active, growing body. With respect to humans in relationship with Creation, this “braided movement” translates into our behaviour with our environment and all our relatives. With a healthy mind, body and spirit, one strives for “braided movement,” intentional living in balance with Creation. As such, the four visits to this direction will explore various practices contributing to “braided movement” with Creation.

Going around a Second Time: Humans in Relationship with Human Beings

Now that the overarching themes have been introduced for each direction, I begin a second journey around the Medicine Circle. This second journey is guided by questions from an Indigenous perspective, “How are human beings in relationship with other human beings when in balance with the laws of nature?” and “How may these learnings contribute to living more sustainably with all Creation, in accordance with the laws of nature?”

Beginning in the east, a “raised consciousness” is one that *balances worldviews* in both vision and respect. Looking inward at my personal perspective, I recognize that the Western,

neoliberal way of seeing is not the only way. Looking outward, I expand my horizons (Mazzocchi, 2008) to respect other perspectives as equally valid. As introduced in Chapter Five, the word “respect” means both recognition and appreciation as well as “to look again,” that in order to appreciate something fully, one must examine it from different viewpoints. Not to do so yields an incomplete understanding of the whole. “To look again,” therefore, includes both intrinsic and extrinsic vision, the latter being respect for perspectives gained from Other’s worldviews.

James Dumont (1992) discusses vision in this manner: “Quite simply, if we are not willing to consider another way of ‘seeing the world,’ and take it seriously, we limit ourselves . . .” (p. 75). Dumont shares an account given by an Elder to describe the two worldviews. The Elder talks about the “White Man’s” 180-degree vision – a “linear” road that offers “knowledge and growth through accumulation and mounting of all that could be seen ahead” (p. 75). The “Red Man’s” 360-degree vision, while “less attractive materially and quantitatively,” is a circular vision that seeks to “perceive and understand the whole nature of an object or event – its physical reality as well as its soul” (p. 75). Dumont (1992) concludes by noting “it is the one who chose the straight-ahead-vision who must recognize the ultimate value in the all-around-vision, and, must see the necessity of returning to this . . . total way of ‘seeing the world’” (pp. 75-76).

Balancing worldviews, in my opinion, is a matter of accepting both and learning from both, balancing their strengths to offset any weaknesses resulting from dominant society’s heretofore tunnel vision.

When these two worldviews are in balance, the rest of this row in Figure 8.2 describing “*humans in relationship with other human beings*” follows. For example, 360-degree vision is a holistic “way of seeing” the global community as one community. *Sharing as a global*

community, therefore, is accepted as part of one's responsibility. Mooshum shares the story of when he was first learning about sharing, which relates to several aspects in Figure 8.2. His godmother took him out to gather berries one day and she instructed him to take just one-third, leaving two-thirds alone. The reason she gave was one-third is "enough" and that we take only what we need. She said that another one-third is for the animals so they have enough to eat and the other third is for Creation to give thanks and so that it may replenish itself.

Mooshum also shares stories about hunting for elder relatives as they could no longer hunt for themselves; their eyesight and their steady aim with a rifle were failing. Because he was "good with a rifle," he helped them kill enough moose for the winter for their small group.

For "*humans in relationship with other human beings*," the learnings in the southern direction of the Medicine Circle, as they pertain to *sharing as a global community*, relate to the fair distribution of our world's resources. With respect to food, for example, studies report that plenty of food exists to feed everyone in the world.¹⁷⁶ Yet malnutrition and starvation are problems in several regions, including right here in Canada – in urban centres as well as remote reserves. This principle holds that we have a *shared responsibility* to ensure all peoples have enough food to eat. All human beings are in relationship with one another by the very fact that we live – and die – on this earth together. As such, we are accountable to each other to ensure enough food reaches everyone. While an exploration of *sharing as a global community* has not been a primary focus of the dissertation, the learnings associated with this principle have been discussed at length. Their particular application here illustrates the holistic approach of the Medicine Circle to care for and live in balance with "*all our relations*."

¹⁷⁶ Retrieved December 8, 2013 from:
<http://www.worldhunger.org/articles/Learn/world%20hunger%20facts%202002.htm>

The same holds true for *environmental and social justice*. I have shared a few examples of both, including mercury poisoning in Grassy Narrows, displacement of Indigenous peoples with hydro-electric dam projects, climate change impacts in the north, as well as income disparities between the wealthy and poor and socio-economic hardships among many Aboriginal peoples.¹⁷⁷ While *environmental and social justice* have not been a primary focus of the dissertation, learnings associated with respectful and caring behaviour in relationships have been discussed at length. The principle is included here to reflect the holistic approach of the Medicine Circle in that it is one of many learnings necessary for living in balance with “*all our relations*.”

That is, both justice and fairness are principles of *universal equity* (in the western direction of the Medicine Circle). *Environmental and social justice* initiatives are predicated on the ideal that all peoples deserve to live with dignity, in good health, and in a clean environment (Agyeman, 2005). “Just sustainability . . . brings together the key dimensions of both environmental justice and sustainable development” (Agyeman and Evans, 2004; p. 155) and encourages inclusivity of, by, and for all peoples in pursuing social and environmental well-being and long-term sustainability. The principle of *environmental and social justice* as it relates to living in balance with Creation may be summarized with a quote from Graveline (1998):

Acting in the best interest of others, and in the interest of the world in general, becomes consistent with self-interest. Rather than a concern with ‘power over,’ there is a need to balance and harmonize the multiple ongoing relationships between self and other (pp. 56-57).

In other words, by helping others toward environmentally and/or socially just living conditions, we are moving toward living in balance with all Creation, which is in everyone’s self-interest.

¹⁷⁷ Exploring in more detail social justice issues related to racism, classism, sexism, genderism, ageism, ability, and other ‘isms’ is not within the scope of the dissertation. Similarly, discussion of environmental justice has been limited to the examples shared illustrating specific points in the dissertation.

Being care-full (in the northern direction of the Medicine Circle) refers to the important roles both Western and Indigenous technologies play in modern society. Chapter Six investigates the current imbalance between Western and Indigenous attitudes toward technology. *Being care-full* aims to rebalance this relationship. In the following quote, Deloria & Wildcat (2001) summarize sentiments on the subject advocated by many authors, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (Colorado, 1988; Livingston, 1994; Shepard, 1982; Bartlett, 2006, 2012; Orr, 1992; Winner, 1986):

Humankind may indeed have a gift for thinking things up, creativity, imagination, and inventiveness, but human societies and the earth's ecosystems seem threatened by a human creativity and imagination that has literally and figuratively lost touch with the earth (p. 55).

A few examples have already been mentioned, including impacts from hydro-electric dam projects and industrial pollution impacts in the Grassy Narrows community, among others. Even largely positive technological and scientific advances in health care and quality of life improvements have become suspect, as Bartlett (2012) observes:

Can it be that scientists, engineers and technologists are impeding the movement of our society toward sustainability? Science, engineering and technology have made it possible for populations to grow so large that by our largeness we are threatening the global ecosphere (p. 11).

Being care-full means acting with a raised consciousness, a trustworthy sense of responsibility, and just and ethical care when developing and using new technologies. "Establishing relationships with the larger cosmic rhythms and following those cycles" (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; p. 58) may also be considered a facet of *being care-full*, re-grounding technologies in nature. Deloria (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001) explains how traditional technologies were developed based on detailed study because "[a]lmost everything in nature gave lessons on how the human should most profitably live" (p. 59). Examples include observing birds and

animals to learn when to harvest herbs for medicines so that they are the proper potency, and learning when to harvest wood for bows because different kinds of wood produced different effects. Deloria & Wildcat claim that many modern technologies have lost their connection with nature, but they do not discard them outright. They recognize that, “As science progresses, so do the ceremonies, and as we look ahead there is considerably more to be gained by combining insights than by ignoring them” (p. 65).

Mooshum explains that science and technology, in and of themselves, are not necessarily the root of the problem; *how* we use them is the issue. Human beings have developed numerous, helpful technologies over the ages.¹⁷⁸ At some point technological advances began to address more consumptive, material *wants* than survival *needs* (Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992; Orr, 1992; Barreiro, 2010). Returning to the four stages of learning introduced in the Pre/Amble, Western scientists and technologists have focused a great deal of time answering the question “why?” as opposed to “how?” As a result, shortcuts have been taken when developing new technologies without fully understanding all the implications. By integrating 360-degree vision and assessing how all our relatives may be impacted, deep care is practiced *before* distribution and implementation of a new technology. Acknowledging, however, that mysteries and uncertainties exist, where complete knowledge is impossible (at least for the time-being), the decision not to adopt a new technology, or to refine it further, is likely the “care-full” course of action, thus respecting the mystery.

Life cycle assessment, the precautionary principle, and green chemistry, among other Western strategies, are positive scientific developments aimed at *being care-full*. The challenge

¹⁷⁸ A list of Western and Indigenous technologies aiding human survival is too long to include, but some are the canoe, the axe, the rifle, the wheel and power generation (for more information, see Bohr, 2005; Del Valle, 2009; McNab et al, 2001; Miller, 2008; Raudzens, 2001; Wickman, 2012). Of course, some technologies are both helpful and risky. *How* they are used and *how* they are developed (i.e., what sort of evaluative research was conducted leading to modifications to ensure no environmental or human health impacts) are the questions of concern.

is practicing deep care, which takes time, with the need for speed in addressing the increasingly pressing problems we face as one global community. Pressures favouring economic growth pose another challenge where 360-degree vision and being care-full require time. These and other tensions warrant further exploration, which, due to space limitations, are outside the scope of this dissertation.

Aside from how we use technology, a fundamental point about *being care-full* is the individual responsibility each human being has to exercise deep care in daily living. Being accountable and trustworthy, as already discussed, are important traits in any relationship. Abiding by these principles in how we live each day in relationship with Creation, living up to our responsibilities as members of a community (from local to global), each individual may live *consciously* with a sense of care that transfers to behaviour. From not littering to reducing a home's ecological footprint to a host of other actions, one is striving to *be care-full*.

Going around a Third Time: Humans in Relationship with Fauna

The third passage around the Medicine Circle is framed by the questions, “How are human beings in relationship with other animals (and, by extension, all our relatives) when in balance with the laws of nature?” and “How may these learnings contribute to living more sustainably with all Creation, in accordance with the laws of nature?” While the examples shared primarily are about fauna, because of our interconnectedness with all Creation, the learnings in this section are, of course, applicable to how we relate to “all our relatives.”

Beginning in the east again, acknowledging *all our relations, kahkiyaw niwahkomâkanak*, is a daily practice in everyday life, as it is in ceremonies. This raised consciousness reinforces the multidimensional *web of life* of which we are a part. Graveline (1998) observes that, “The idea of kinship is based upon the concrete observation that each of us

is totally dependent upon the same things. All of nature is in us, all of us is in nature” (p. 56).

Sioui (1999) concurs:

. . . other entities are ‘peoples,’ as are humans. The animal and vegetable kingdoms, stones, mountains, and spirits are made of the same vital substance that we are. They are family and friends who support and succour us, and they have the right to our respect and consideration (p. 175).

John Mohawk (Barreiro, 2010) explains further:

A human body is composed of matter that was once part of soil, rocks, ocean, plants, and other animals, and all of those beings have spirit. A human being also has spirit, for a body without spirit is a corpse. A human being must be aware that his or her existence results from a combination of flesh and spirit in order that he or she develops an awareness of spirit. With such awareness, one may then come to understand the elementary truth of existence – that the human being has a spiritual relationship to the entire universe . . . (p. 4).

In Wall and Arden (1990), Onondaga clan mother Audrey Shenandoah summarizes this well: “How can one be superior to that upon which one depends for life?” (p. 26). Deloria & Wildcat (2001) emphasize our dependency and relatedness by referring to Creation stories:

The primary focus of creation stories . . . placed human beings as among the last creatures who were created and as the youngest of the living families. We were given the ability to do many things, but not specific wisdom about the world. So our job was to learn from other, older beings and to pattern ourselves after their behaviour” (p. 60).

This understanding of human beings as part of and dependent on the web of life is different from the dominant Western perspective, which acknowledges that even though human beings were created last, they are “isolated from the rest of creation by standing alone at the top of the pyramid” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; p. 60), exercising dominion over Creation. Some alternative Western views, such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and Gaia, are more in concert with the Indigenous perspective; and some religions have initiated a more participatory paradigm in which faith communities are acknowledging humanity’s place within nature and are beginning

to explore what eco-spirituality means for them.¹⁷⁹ However, modern Western science remains secularized and separate from the spirit world with which we are connected. While modern ecology focuses on relationships, much of Science remains embedded in reductionist thinking, fragmenting bits to study and believing that close analysis of the parts will yield an understanding of the whole (Alsop and Fawcett, 2010; Knudtson and Suzuki, 1992).

Mooshum shares a story¹⁸⁰ that illustrates the risks associated with a disconnection from “all our relatives” and the imbalance associated with a preference for 180-degree vision over 360-degree vision. He said that not too long ago gray whales, which had once migrated annually through the Inside Passage of British Columbia, had seemingly disappeared. Scientists set out to ascertain why they no longer travelled through there. They found that the whales fed on a herring whose populations appeared to have diminished to an undetectable level. Why? Scientists determined that the seagrass meadows in which the herrings lived had diminished significantly in area and quantity. Why? Again, scientists investigated and found that a particular mussel, which lived in the seabed beneath the seagrass, was food for the sea otter, which kept the mussel population in check so that seagrass could grow. The sea otter had been hunted to near extinction for their valuable fur. So an animal that is not a food for human beings or even gray whales has a close relationship with the feeding habits of the gray whales. The sea otters’ decline has influenced the migration of an entire species.

¹⁷⁹ For more information, please see Faith and the Common Good and Greening Sacred Spaces at: <http://www.greeningsacredspaces.net/>.

¹⁸⁰ Mooshum shares this story from memory, having heard it on a news report or documentary. In researching sources, I have found various references pertaining to the story. For more information, please see: <http://www.vancouversun.com/travel/Marine+mammals+coming+back+Salish/6456476/story.htm>, http://marineecologylab.disl.org/1Kens_papers/2001_Williams_Heck_SeagrassCommunity.pdf, http://www.oregon.gov/dsl/SSNERR/tides/tidesA13_eelgrassfacts.pdf, <http://news.ucsc.edu/2013/08/sea-otters-seagrass.html>.

This story illustrates how in fact human beings are in relationship with all species – plants and animals alike, even in inconspicuous ways. Recognizing and respecting our relatedness throughout the web of life is part of having a *raised consciousness*. Balancing this Indigenous way of being *in relationship* with *care-full* Western science strengthens 360-degree vision.

Recognizing “*all our relatives*” and our interconnected dependencies informs the other concepts in the row of Figure 8.2. *Reciprocity* (in the southern direction) has been discussed earlier in this dissertation and again is best summarized using Mooshum Peter O’Chiese’s words, “Take care of the land and it will take care of you.” This responsibility in our relationship holds that we are accountable to “*all our relatives*.” If we do not exercise proper care, such as Mooshum’s godmother’s instructions to harvest only one-third of the berries, our relatives will no longer be there to provide for us. Mooshum recalls something that Eddie Bellerose once said, which simplifies this relationship: “If there are no more animals, there are no more human beings.”¹⁸¹ After all, we are animals, too.

Animal and Land ethics (in the western direction), according to Indigenous knowledge, incorporate these notions of *reciprocity* and *shared responsibility* into how we steward our resources. We rely on “*all our relations*” for our near and long-term survival in that we must eat, drink, and breathe. Deloria & Wildcat (2001) note, “all [our] relationships have a moral content” (p. 23). Alfred (1999) summarizes these “moral” responsibilities as being trusted “. . . to sustain the earth and to ensure the health and well-being of the people” and committing “to using the land in ways that respect the spiritual and cultural connections [I]ndigenous peoples have with it” (p. 62).

¹⁸¹ Michael recalls Eddie Bellerose saying he heard Peter O’Chiese talk about this as well.

Biodiversity strategies, resource management and conservation strategies based upon ecosystem thinking, and ecological restoration strategies are steps toward fulfilling our responsibilities in our relationships to exercise ethical care. Yet, Mooshum, stresses the need for an equitable perspective. He notes that human beings are animals so a pure ‘animal rights’ stance is at odds with Indigenous ways of knowing. Husbanding our resources well so all animals may live and thrive, including human beings, is in accordance with natural law.

Mooshum shares a couple examples from British Columbia to illustrate an Indigenous point of view on *animal ethics*. He notes that authorizing a spring bear hunt, as British Columbia does, is illogical because of all the new cubs who need their mothers. He also regards as unethical moose hunting licenses for bull moose only (current British Columbia practice), leaving too many cows with too few bulls. Allowing older cows to live indefinitely to breed with fewer and fewer bulls weakens the gene pool over time. Finding moose when he was younger, Mooshum would watch the animals and learn about them first before deciding carefully which ones to take for food. Natural law, if supported by human activities, encourages the long-term survival and viability of all animals – both non-human and human.

Finally, the practice of *adaptability* (in the northern direction) is intertwined in all facets of the Medicine Circle, which has *change* built directly into its framework, reflecting the constant natural law of ongoing change. Part of fulfilling our shared responsibilities, honouring the reciprocal nature of all our relationships, and practicing ethical and equitable care in these relationships is being prepared to adapt to changing circumstances. Mooshum points to nature for examples of adaptability; anyone who has been close to a high altitude tree line observes that the coniferous trees are stunted compared to their relatives at lower altitudes. Resilience thinking and biomimicry are two Western strategies that promote *adaptability*. Indigenous

science, also known as TEK, which is inclusive of spirit, has a great deal to contribute to modern discourse.

Going around a Fourth Time: Humans in Relationship with Flora

The earlier story about the gray whale illustrates how *we are all related*. The story exhibits how the rows in Figure 8.2 overlap, with both fauna and flora calling earth home. This obvious fact reminds one to focus on Figure 8.1 to visualize *all our relatives* and our interconnectedness. Similarly, beginning the fourth time around the Medicine Circle regarding “humans in relationship with flora,” one may note that overlap exists as all plant and animal life depend on water. In fact, human beings are two-thirds water. Not coincidentally, two-thirds of the earth is covered with water. We are dependent upon water for our very existence; we are relatives. The questions guiding the fourth passage around the Medicine Circle are, “How are human beings in relationship with flora (and, by extension, all our relatives) when in balance with the laws of nature?” and “How may these learnings contribute to living more sustainably with all Creation, in accordance with the laws of nature?”

The first concept in this row (in the eastern direction), *immersion*, is reawakening human beings to their relationship with nature, spending time reconnecting with “all our relatives.” A great deal of space in this dissertation has been dedicated to discussing our “decontextualization” and the disconnection that has occurred between human beings and nature as we have become more industrialized and preoccupied with technology. This disconnection involves our physical as well as our metaphysical relationship with Creation. Deloria & Wildcat (2001) articulate the difference between Western and Indigenous metaphysics in this way:

In the Western context metaphysics became a study for philosophers; in indigenous communities metaphysics would be understood as the basis for living well – attentively, respectfully, and responsibly – in this world” (p. 52).

Worth repeating is Orr's (1992) observation: "Our alienation from the natural world is unprecedented. Healing this division is a large part of the difference between survival and extinction" (p. 17). Earlier in this dissertation, I mentioned Mooshum's story that Eddie Bellerose shared about modern-day camping with televisions and radios. Today smart phones and tablets are being packed for camping trips. Eddie had sensed the "fear" people had for nature. The idea of *immersion* aims to overcome this fear and reconnect with nature. Mooshum reiterates the four stages of learning to do so. First, one becomes *aware* of one's relationship with nature; then spending time in nature, one begins to *understand* this relationship and quell one's fear. Gain *knowledge* of one's spiritual connection with nature by spending more time, leading to *wisdom*.

The story of the *Three Sisters* was shared at the beginning of Chapter Five. In addition to lessons about the benefits of collaboration, the *Three Sisters* (in the southern direction) also teach about one's *shared responsibility* in relationships. The corn, beans, and squash rely on each other for their overall strength and well-being. By honouring the relationship and contributing to it, each individual plant fulfills its responsibilities to the whole. Human beings can learn from the *Three Sisters* and other flora by spending time in nature, respecting relationships, being accountable to them and fulfilling responsibilities to care for them.

Aquatic ethics (in the western direction) is similar to *Animal and Land ethics* but in terms of caring for earth's waters. Mooshum asks, "If we do not take care of [the earth's] waters, how are human beings to survive, seeing as our bodies are mostly water?" Understanding that our bodies are two-thirds water, practicing ethical care for our water resources takes on deeper meaning. This close relationship necessitates good stewardship practices and application of the

best available technologies to protect water's health, not only for our sakes, but for all living beings – both human and non-human.

Moving to the northern direction once again, “*kanâtsowin*” – “*being clean*” (in Cree) underscores the importance of keeping the place where we live clean – our earth, our waters, our air – all the necessities for life to grow and thrive. Mooshum says that in traditional times, the Cree had been regarded by other Indigenous peoples as being a “clean people” both in the literal and metaphorical sense. That is, they kept their place, their land clean. As well, their behaviour was “clean” in ethical terms, taking care and acting responsibly in *all* their relationships with Creation. In this way, Mooshum notes, “cleanliness and sustainability are the same.” Canada’s name comes from the Cree word “*kanatan*” – “it is clean.”¹⁸² Honouring this name requires each Canadian, individually, to live in ethical relationship as part of one national community, to keep Canada clean and be a “clean person.” Mooshum emphasizes that if we do not keep the land (i.e., the earth, water, and air) clean, how will we human beings remain “clean of mind, clean of body, and clean of spirit?” “*Take care of the land and it will take care of you.*”

Going around a Fifth Time: Humans in Relationship with Spirit

The questions guiding the final passage around the Medicine Circle are, “How are human beings in relationship with spirit (and, by extension, all our relatives) when in balance with the laws of nature?” and “How may these learnings contribute to living more sustainably with all Creation, in accordance with the laws of nature?”

We begin ceremonies by *giving thanks*, and throughout ceremonies we continue to express our gratitude. Every day is a ceremony in which I express gratitude for Creation, the

¹⁸² Retrieved November 25, 2013 from: www.creedictionary.com. Other Indigenous peoples of North America may have similar sounding words with different (or the same) meanings. For example, “*kaná:ta*” in the Mohawk language means “village.”

gifts of Creation, for my life and being sustained by these gifts. John Mohawk (Barreiro, 2010) poetically expresses this central practice for everyday life:

Throughout the Natural World, the beings are responsible actors. They do not strive to respect the Natural World only in their minds and hearts (although they do this), but, rather, they try to make their lives a celebration of life. . . . The act of being . . . is the active participation in the daily celebration of the Life-supportive processes (p. 10).

Giving thanks is a daily ritual where speaking words alone is insufficient. How we live every day, our routine and not-so-routine tasks are expressions of our gratitude. This *raised consciousness* (in the eastern direction) guides our behaviour in all our relationships – with “all our relatives” – both human and non-human. Everyday living, through “the act of being,” is a ceremony (Mohawk, 2010; p. 10).

Accordingly, our *shared responsibility* with this *raised consciousness* includes our accountability to those yet to be born. As Deloria & Wildcat (2001) point out:

The spiritual aspect of knowledge about the world taught the people that relationships must not be left incomplete Completing the relationship focuses the individual’s attention on the results of his or her actions. Thus, the Indian people were concerned about the products of what they did, and they sought to anticipate and consider all possible effects of their actions (p. 23).

Seven generations thinking, therefore, (in the southern direction) is the “complete” consideration of all possible “results” and “products” of one’s decisions and actions for seven generations into the future.

Equity of spirit (in the western direction) is the acknowledgement of the vital presence of spirit, caring for it and *giving thanks*. Eurocentric thought and modern Western science have secularized the world and desensitized it to our metaphysical reality (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Mooshum echoes what has already been said, that the separation of spirituality from science is a nonsensical division, preventing us from caring for the environment. Deloria &

Wildcat, in their book *Power and Place* (2001) advocate “big-picture worldviews containing metaphysical systems that, most significantly, integrate the physical and spiritual dimensions Western civilization presents as opposed to each other” (p. 16). *Equity of spirit* is the equitable recognition of this “integration” and of the multi-dimensional relationships inherent in all Creation.

Finally, *walking the Sweetgrass Road* (in the northern direction) is, in essence, the daily practice of all of these ideas and ideals as presented in Figures 8.1 and 8.2. How human beings live their everyday lives in relationship with Creation is based upon free will and the choices one makes. The Sweetgrass Road originates with and is perpetuated by a *raised consciousness* to live in balance with all Creation in accordance with natural law, *sharing responsibility* and respecting *universal equity* through daily *braided movement*.

Summary

The framework visualized in Figures 8.1 and 8.2 presents a guide that is based upon Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle learnings. Mooshum has accompanied me on this journey, providing important insights and instruction along the way. Rather than a focus on the word “sustainability,” which is a Western concept, the framework is presented in terms of “practicing a sustainable lifestyle” because dominant Western and Indigenous understandings of how to live sustainably differ, as has been discussed throughout this dissertation. Yet, this Indigenous framework is inclusive of Western contributions and attempts to balance the two worldviews and “combine insights” (Deloria & Wildcat, 2001; p. 65), highlighting their potential complementary relationship.

Following the circle around five times, while seemingly repetitive, is intentionally so in order for the reader to see how different points on the circle correlate with one another and recall

earlier discussions, how everything is interconnected and dependent upon each other, and how all points combined contribute to a whole that aims to be greater than the sum of its parts.

One reflection I would like to note is the apparent dichotomy of the grandness of the subject matter – that of living in balance with Creation – and the focus of this framework, which involves individual responsibilities and individual attitudes (i.e., self work). An intention of this chapter is to raise *awareness* of a different way of seeing the world and being in the world, broadening people’s viewpoints on a global issue – that of sustainability – yet, emphasizing the requirement for individual action and individual change.

A final observation Mooshum has made respects “*braided movement*,” which he notes encompasses the balancing and integration of the other three directions into individual lives – braiding the practices of *raised consciousness*, *shared responsibility*, and *universal equity*. Braiding all three together, he says, individuals may begin *walking the Sweetgrass Road*. Mooshum recalls what he – and Mooshum Peter O’Chiese – have said at each ceremony: their aim has been to **widen** *the Sweetgrass Road* so that more people may walk on it. Perhaps this is a step in that direction.

Re/Spect and Double Understanding

This story of Mooshum's illustrates the idea of 'braided movement' with a focus on kanâtsowin – 'being clean.'

As a teenager, Mooshum set out with his father on numerous fishing and hunting trips. Sometimes they would go and visit an Old Man and an Old Woman who lived on the shore of a lake. The Old Woman had special abilities. She had studied the wisdom and ceremonies of her Elders and was always willing to help people who were in need. She would know that a visitor was approaching long before the boat came into view. And she would know exactly how many people were in the boat.

The Old Woman would prepare for her company's arrival. If two people were coming, she would shoot exactly two geese sitting on a sandbar far off in the distance. Two bullets were all she needed; that is how sharp she was with a rifle. She would have the birds already de-feathered, gutted, and wrapped as gifts by the time her visitors pulled their boat to shore.

The Old Man's and Old Woman's hospitality, ceremonial abilities, generosity and kindness were appreciated by all their guests who would come to call. They visited together and enjoyed the pleasure of their warm and witty company. Before leaving, Mooshum and his father checked to see if the Old Man and Old Woman needed anything, chopped wood for them, and helped in anyway asked. All visitors did the same.

After they passed away, anyone who had known them felt the loss. To honour their memories, their cabin remained just as they had left it – fully stocked with wood, rifles on the wall, bullets, food in the larder. People came to stay at the cabin on their fishing or hunting trips, and the memory of these Old Folks lived on in the way the visitors cared for the place. They would leave the cabin just as they had found it. If something was used up, they would be sure to replace it. If more wood needed to be chopped, they would chop it before leaving so the next visitors who came to stay had a ready supply. If the rifles were low on bullets, someone would replenish the box.

Mooshum remembers these Old Folks fondly and proudly reflects on how this community of people, who had no locks on any of their doors, took care of the place long after the Old Folks passed away. He said, "It speaks to community cleanliness" and how 'clean' this group of people was in honouring the memory of the Old Folks. Even though they were spread out across a large territory, they all shared a special bond with the Old Man and Old Woman. They were 'clean' in their care of the place in that they left it just as the Old Folks had left it – tidy and well-stocked. Maintaining the place in this way was an active demonstration of the community's respect for the Old Folks, keeping their memories alive – another example of 'being clean' in mind, body and spirit. It was a tacit agreement that everyone kept. No one had openly discussed it and no enforcement was necessary. Everyone just knew.

One day, white hunters came and found the cabin. They ransacked the place, stealing the antique rifles off the wall, taking other items that were of any monetary value, and helping themselves to the food. They did not know the Old Folks and they did not care that this place held communal significance. "The place was violated," Mooshum said, "and the Old Folks' memories along with it."

Re/Spect and Re/View

The story illustrates the imbalance existing between two ways of knowing – Indigenous and Western – as well as their differing views of time and space. My dissertation has consisted of two journeys around the Medicine Circle to explore this imbalance. The two journeys have pursued individual yet connected aims: 1) to provide an introductory awareness of a Cree-Nishnaabe Medicine Circle and respect for Indigenous knowledges as important ways of comprehending the world (and cosmos); and 2) to introduce how Indigenous ways of knowing may be balanced with Western knowledge systems to inform how human beings, individually and together, may approach living more sustainably with Creation.

The Second Journey ‘Round has encouraged the practice of re/spect not only in the conventional meaning of appreciation, but also in accordance with Mooshum’s exploration of the word’s other meaning, “to look again.” In the context of this dissertation, “re/spect” encourages balancing Western with Indigenous perspectives regarding the pursuit of sustainability. Taking the time necessary to learn about an Other way of knowing (i.e., “looking again” from a different vantage point), one is able to appreciate (i.e., “respect”) the gifts and opportunities an Other way presents.

I set out on this exploration with the underlying purpose of using an Indigenous approach to my work and to demonstrating that Indigenous ways of knowing are essential contributors to the whole of global knowledge, ways which no longer may be ignored and dismissed as inferior. With deep gratitude for all those who have cared for their oral traditions and for all the sacrifices they have endured over the millennia, I am so very thankful to have been able to learn in ceremonies with Mooshum Peter and Mooshum Michael. I am also thankful for being able to

share what I have come to understand and for the permission to do so with Mooshum's guidance and wisdom.

The world is facing challenging times with more extreme weather events as a result of climate change. Inequities and disparities, which have worsened with time, are advancing global unrest and dis-ease.¹⁸³

The admirable ideals of the modern sustainability movement have been met with disappointing progress toward those ideals. The dissertation has explored what I consider to be elemental reasons for these disconcerting results, given all the time, effort and resources invested in sustainability initiatives since the publication of the Brundtland Report in 1987. The dominant Western approach to sustainability, ecological modernization, has emphasized rational strategies and developing new technologies toward eliminating inefficiencies and minimizing ecological footprints. These strategies are all well and good, but in my mind only part of the solution as Western science remains highly secularized.

The primary emphasis of my dissertation has been to explore living sustainably on this planet from an Indigenous perspective, which is inclusive of spirit as well as Western contributions. In fact Mooshum, always interested in wordplay, places elemental emphasis on "environment and human beings" rather than "human beings and environment" as a reminder that, according to many Indigenous Creation stories, human beings were the last beings created on this planet and, therefore, wholly dependent on all Creation for survival. This fact has been somewhat lost amidst all the technological gadgets invented for play rather than for living.

Technology is essential, as has been endorsed throughout the dissertation. "Care-full" application of technology is imperative. New technologies are being developed every day (such

¹⁸³ I have heard Mooshum use this play on the word "disease" a number of times at Elders Gatherings, workshops, and ceremonies over the years.

as in green chemistry, renewable energy, and permaculture, to name a few), which are promising areas of advancement in Western science. Yet, technologies such as hydraulic fracturing and oil sands development, it can be argued, are producing environmental impacts that threaten any reductions in ecological footprints and carbon emissions realized by advancements in sustainable strategies (Charpentier et al, 2009; Howarth et al, 2011; Kelly et al, 2010; Osborn et al, 2011; Woynillowicz et al, 2005).

My dissertation has endeavoured to present a balanced appreciation for Indigenous ways of knowing so that, moving forward, Indigenous knowledges may participate more fully in the modern discourse for “our common future” and sustainable living.

A Note about Stereotypes

Much has been written in the literature about the “Ecological Indian” and “Noble Savage” (Deloria, 1997; 2000; Hames, 2007; Harkin and Lewis, 2007; Krech, 1999; Nadasdy, 2005; Smith, 2001; and many others) so I feel I must address this topic. I would first like to point out that these are stereotypes created by Western academics and imposed upon North American Indigenous peoples without provocation or invitation. Some Western academics continue to debate these stereotypes, and my opinion is that this is a waste of precious time. Through selective reading of Western ethnologies and Western accounts of history, favouring certain studies over others, of course one is able to draw and support any conclusion one chooses. While the debate continues, time passes and the real work that needs to be done is ignored. Is this procrastination or adolescent bickering or selective myopia – or all of the above?

What I do know is that the laws of nature are universal and constant and the Medicine Circle is fixed according to these laws.¹⁸⁴ The focus of the dissertation has been on these laws and the Medicine Circle rather than on these stereotypes that critics claim are false, pointing to ongoing problems facing Indigenous peoples today. I have chosen not to spend time recounting the already well-known, awful conditions on reserves where homes are unliveable and overcrowded, and where communities are suffering from youth suicide and drug and alcohol addiction, and many front yards are junkyards. Those holding fast to stereotypes often ignore the fact that increasing numbers of Indigenous peoples are educated and working in universities and schools, governments, and private enterprises and are making important contributions to society and their communities.

While the hardships are not to be diminished, I acknowledge that the reader may be questioning the contradiction one sees in some First Nations communities today, given the traditional teachings of the Medicine Circle with respect to living in balance with Creation. These problems exist, in my opinion, because of how Indigenous peoples' original ways of knowing were forced underground when the Indian Act was implemented and Indian agents, church missionaries, and residential schools tore children away from their parents. Due to no fault of their own, many Indigenous peoples today have lost a great deal of their knowledge, disconnected from their original ways as a result of government policy and church dogma. The poverty and piled-up junk one sees on reserves may raise question marks about the truth in this dissertation. The truth is that these hard realities are a result of government policy and their living in these conditions is not by choice.

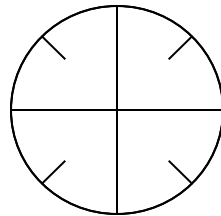
¹⁸⁴ A description of "laws of nature" was first provided in the Pre/Amble. They have been discussed throughout the dissertation, primarily as learnings of the Medicine Circle, which revolve around the four elements necessary for life: food, fire, water, and air. The basic laws of nature speak to the need to take care of these elements, because if we do not have food or air or water (or warmth), we will die.

While Indigenous communities struggle to change the course that has been forced upon them, the Indigenous knowledges which had been coerced underground are resurfacing. The Age of the Seventh Fire is here, and Indigenous peoples are once again seeking Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders to re-learn their ways as they strive to light the Eighth Fire. Benton-Banai (1988) describes this “Final Fire” as “an eternal Fire of peace, love, brotherhood and sisterhood” (p. 93), a time when people of all origins come together in an age of cooperation. Indigenous peoples’ return to awareness and understanding about their traditional responsibilities to take care of “all our relations” is evident with the Idle No More movement, Sacred Water Walks, and recent, concerted efforts to protect traditional territories from hydraulic fracturing, oil pipelines and oil sands impacts. Indigenous voices are growing louder and are inviting non-Indigenous peoples to learn about their ways of knowing and of all peoples’ responsibilities to care for the life-sustaining gifts of Creation.

For all the First Nations experiencing extreme hardships, a growing number of communities are re-creating themselves with encouraging results. Oujé-Bougoumou (Quebec), Lax Kw’alaams (northern British Columbia), Osoyoos (British Columbia’s interior), and Membertou (Cape Breton, Nova Scotia) are four of the numerous communities that have envisioned a more hopeful future and have seen their dreams come to fruition. I have already shared a bit about Oujé-Bougoumou. The other communities have achieved prosperity and a degree of self-sufficiency by pursuing economic development projects independent of government funding. Realizing that dependency on the federal government would only perpetuate the failures of the Indian Act, they have overcome bureaucratic challenges and taken long, difficult steps toward success. Lax Kw’alaams hired an economic development expert from outside the community. Membertou encouraged their university graduates to return and

work on projects to reduce reliance on government. Osoyoos pursued a similar path.¹⁸⁵ As the Medicine Circle is a circle for facilitating change, these and other communities are striving to balance Western and Indigenous ways, adapting to the changes in their world.

With this context, rather than wasting time arguing about stereotypes, which in the grand scheme of things are irrelevant, the focus of my dissertation has been to present an opportunity for learning a different way of seeing and comprehending the world. Indigenous knowledge as learned with the Medicine Circle is based on the irrefutable laws of nature, teaching human beings how to live in balance, in relationship, and equitably with all Creation. As Mooshum Peter O'Chiese said to Mooshum Michael when he first showed him a Medicine Circle, "Everything you have and will ever want to know about the past, the present, and the future is written right here. All you have to do is learn how to read it."



Possible Applications

As the Medicine Circle has been introduced, the individual self is at the centre of the circle. Following from this point of reference, the Medicine Circle is intended for individual use. Hence, in theory at least, each individual is able to examine Figures 8.1 and 8.2 and, with Chapter Eight as an interpretive guide, apply the Medicine Circle to one's own life and evaluate one's personal relationship with Creation. Throughout the dissertation, emphasis has been

¹⁸⁵ For more information, please read:

http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2013/12/14/bc_indian_band_breaking_all_stereotypes.html;
<http://www.nationalpost.com/news/story.html?id=311978>; <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/report-on-business/clarence-louie-lifted-his-community-out-of-poverty/article544152/>.

placed on the individual's responsibilities as a member of a community. Even if a person does not feel part of a community, we are all part of several. Considering scale, one's community is the local neighbourhood, apartment complex, school or worship centre, town, First Nation, or city. As well, each person is a member of the global community. The Medicine Circle shows that we are each part of and contributors to a whole. With 360-degree vision, being aware of all of our relationships guides how we may live consciously each day. In this way, the Medicine Circle – and Indigenous knowledges in general – provide a way of seeing, relating, thinking, and being, different from how we are accustomed to perceiving the world according to Western ways, but no less valid.

Learnings shared in the dissertation may inform current events. For example, the Idle No More movement is born of a deep concern for the environment and the undermining of environmental protections in place since the 1970's and 1980's. Ken Coates and Brian Lee Crowley, in a Globe and Mail commentary (October 28, 2013; p. A11), write about resource development in Canada, and more specifically the October 2013 standoff between Elsipogtog M'ikmaw First Nation in New Brunswick and government and shale gas corporations. Coates and Crowley write, "They [the Elsipogtog First Nation as well as Indigenous peoples across the continent] worry about the local environment, far more so than people who live far away from the mines and sites."

The standoff is just one example where worldviews collide. On the one hand, Western corporations are pursuing resource development with the government relaxing its environmental regulations, both valuing economic return on investment more than environmental quality. On the other hand are a people who are not "automatically against resource development, but in many cases, they have no formal stakes in the game" (Coates & Crowley, October 28, 2013; p.

A11). They wish to ensure that opportunities for economic and social benefits do not pass them by, such as employment and revenues to assist in education, training, and other social services for their communities.

The Elsipogtog First Nation is displeased that, at the time the column was published, neither the government nor the corporation had reached out to initiate a dialogue. The community launched the protest when requests for appropriate and meaningful consultation were unanswered. Again, Coates and Crowley observe, “They want to participate in planning, oversight, extraction and remediation” not just because they want to have their voices heard, but because they have invaluable perspectives to be shared and important connections with the land which must be respected. Ignoring the First Nation likely will lead to more protests and more delays. Dismissing the people and their knowledge and being remiss in our responsibilities to protect the land, water, and air from the ills associated with hydraulic fracturing, the federal and provincial governments, as well as the energy companies, jeopardize the health of the environment and of the people. If this occurs, everyone, all Creation, suffers the consequences.

One possible application of my doctoral work, therefore, respects the call for better relations between Aboriginal communities, corporations, and governments. To reiterate, Indigenous ways of knowing are essential informational sources to be balanced with Western knowledge. Chapter Eight and Figures 8.1 and 8.2 illustrate how the two worldviews may come together in a more balanced, respectful approach than experienced in current events with the Elsipogtog M’ikmaw First Nation. Similar examples may be found across the continent and throughout the world.

Many authors (Mazzocchi, 2008; Orr, 1992; Redclift, 1987, and others) concur that Western society needs to “expand its horizons” (Mazzocchi, 2008), and begin learning from

Indigenous peoples and their ways of knowing. Orr (1992) observes, “The present crisis of sustainability is qualitatively different, without any historical precedent. It is the first truly global crisis. It is also unprecedented in its sheer complexity” (p. 19). Redclift (1987) notes,

. . . if we want to know how ecological practices can be designed which are more compatible with social systems, we need to embrace the epistemologies of indigenous people, including their ways of organizing their knowledge of their environment (p. 151).

So, why not avail oneself of all possible sources of wisdom as we face the global sustainability challenge together on our local fronts? Instances such as Elsipogtog provide an opportunity for balanced and meaningful collaboration to better address risks associated with “planning, oversight, extraction, and remediation”¹⁸⁶ proposals, working together to exercise truly deep care for “all our relatives.” While I am not professing that the work presented in this dissertation is the answer to all problems, I am saying dominant Western society cannot claim to hold all the answers by itself, especially knowing that other sources of knowledge exist. As our modern times may be approaching a critical threshold with climate change, there is no time like the present to “expand our horizons” and begin learning from other ways of knowing.

Continuing from here

Several issues for further exploration in balancing the two worldviews exist. For example, while Redclift (1987), in the quote above, supports the imperative to learn from Indigenous peoples, he goes on to recognize the challenges of doing so given two distinct epistemologies and learning approaches. The Medicine Circle and Indigenous ways of knowing are best understood through experiential learning, which takes time. Mooshum talks about “learning time” (i.e., the amount of time necessary for learning according to Indigenous ways,

¹⁸⁶ Coates, K. & Crowley, B.L. (October 28, 2013). *First Nations aren't swayed by vague promises*. The Globe and Mail, p. A11.

for example, seeing *how* to understand *why*) and the importance of the learning process to be both “right” and “correct.” Learning according to Indigenous ways takes longer than in Western approaches. Both process and content matter and both influence how one travels through the various learning stages. Depending on the aim – awareness, understanding, knowledge, or wisdom – different approaches will require different amounts of time. So continuing from here, an area for further study is to explore pedagogy and experiential opportunities for learning IK.

Related to this is the development of meaningful and effective educational experiences addressing the concept of *immersion* as shared in Chapter Eight. Numerous studies have been published about nature-deficit disorder (Louv, 2008, 2011; Sandry, 2013; Young et al, 2011). Both children and adults are affected from insufficient or lack of time spent outdoors, which has been shown to contribute to mental and physical health issues (Nizbet et al, 2007). I have shared Mooshum and Eddie Bellerose’s conversation about how people fear spending quality time in nature. Without spending the time, realizing the metaphysical, spiritual aspects of being in nature is only an intellectual exercise without the physical connection. *Braided movement* is the integration of mind, body, and spirit with Creation. Exploring accessibility obstacles to finding time as well as outdoor spaces due to socio-economic considerations is another area for further contemplation.

A related area shared here, which I am proposing for continued work and thought, relates to the slow-fast dilemma. As noted, learning Indigenous knowledge takes time, time which may be in short supply. Likewise, *being care-full* in developing, evaluating and modifying new technologies to prevent negative environmental and human health impacts takes significant time. In all, becoming sustainable takes time, so time is of the essence. Addressing the many challenges associated with time, therefore, is an important issue of concern. One approach to

doing so may reside in re/viewing the orientation of the Medicine Circle as a facilitator of change, beginning with the self. Change can happen as fast or as slow as an individual chooses. As well, instituting change using Medicine Circle learnings does not require one to achieve a place of wisdom with Indigenous ways of knowing, which will take a great deal of time. The Medicine Circle is available for everyone, just as the sun shines equally for everyone. Beginning in the east and seeking ways to “*raise consciousness*,” whether merely reading this dissertation or other written works, and/or taking time alone with nature, or spending time with Elders, one may become sufficiently *aware* of how one may begin making changes in one’s everyday living relatively quickly. If more and more individuals start their own learning journeys, making changes for themselves, change on a larger scale, although not a certainty, is likely.

Another area for further investigation concerns the many Aboriginal communities across Canada that are finding ways to overcome the devastating impacts of colonization, adapting to modern times, and adopting the Western notion of sustainability in their social and economic development endeavours (e.g., Ouje-Bougemou, Lax Kw’alaams, Osoyoos, Membertou, to name a few). Are they able to integrate their traditional knowledge with Western knowledge? Exploring this question may yield important insights and strategies that may prove useful to other communities.

An additional sphere of work is to develop Figures 8.1 and 8.2 further. Each attribute on its own may be expanded into a full chapter. Mooshum and I spoke at length about each one. Over the course of my doctoral journey we have recorded stories from his life, many of which provide excellent illustrations of various concepts put forth in the diagram. Also, as noted at the beginning of Chapter Eight, the content may evolve further as ideas ebb and flow. Sharing the work with other Elders and Traditional Knowledge Holders, spending time with them, will

undoubtedly uncover new insights to be explored. As I have emphasized, Chapter Eight is presented as a “starting point” for additional dialogue and refinement.

Kahkiyaw niwahkomâkanak – Connecting with “all our relations”

One day Mooshum and I were talking, as we often do. I had been listening to our video-recordings, trying to envision a conclusion for my dissertation. When he phoned and I saw his telephone number on the display, I had to laugh – because I was just listening to him! I told him what I had been doing and how strange it was to hear me laugh simultaneously in two places – on the recording and live, laughing with Mooshum as he shares his stories and we banter together. Then our conversation took on a more serious tone as we addressed the topic at hand, my conclusion. Upon reflection, Mooshum summed up the human relationship with Creation this way:

We live within natural law; we don't live under it; we live within it.¹⁸⁷ Therefore, it seems both the conscious and unconscious thing to do would be to follow natural law. It's not like we have a huge option when one really thinks about it. Not to do so is counterproductive. Granted, as humans it is easy for us to be counterproductive because by nature we are consumers. In fact, all life is consuming of nature in one form or another. So we are not different from others. But we need to be conscious of it [our consumption]. We are one large, interdependent set of relationships and it would pay to know what the rules are and how to follow them.

His words recall the earlier discussion about our current unconscious state (i.e., our “arrested development,” Shepard, 1982; and neoliberal “technological somnambulism,” Winner, 1986) and, as a result, how we are not awake to exercise our free will in a way that *wholly* respects our interdependent relationships. Mooshum also said, “The critical element with humans in any endeavour - not just sustainability – is the metaphysical connection between the laws of nature and the individual human being.”

¹⁸⁷ Please note that Mooshum did not mention “over it” as human law is not above natural law.

After further conversation, we ended the phone call as we both had appointments. I spent the rest of the day and night thinking about Mooshum's words. At 5:30 in the morning, I woke up and realized when Mooshum was talking about the "metaphysical connection between the laws of nature and the individual human being" as "the critical element with humans in any endeavour," he had been referring to my fast!

*Alone at night outside my fasting lodge, gazing at the tall silhouettes of the ancient White pines in the distance, feeling the cool night air on my face, breathing it in, watching the cloudless sky as the stars appeared one by one, seeing the circle around the half moon . . . **seeing** Grandmother Moon – the feeling was all at once electrifying! My whole self – mind, body, and spirit – became energized as if a charge had coursed suddenly through the core of my being. All the thoughts pouring into my mind flooded me with excitement. In that moment, I can say I was fully connected with Creation, no longer only **aware** of the notion of spirit energy, but **understanding** the extent of spirit in this world, this universe! **Knowing** it and feeling it in every cell of my being.*

Since then every time I think about this fast, these same feelings surge over and within me; and the learnings keep coming. Lying in bed at 5:30 in the morning, I realize something new (old?). Grandmother Moon, in all her brilliance that night, was sitting in the southern sky. As the reader is aware, in the south is the gift of time. This direction teaches human beings the importance of spending time to care for "all our relations." Thinking back to that moment on my fast when all my senses were heightened, I once again realize how this Night Sky teaching brings my relationship with the past, the present, and the future into focus. The Sweetgrass Road, beginning at the north star (the moment of creation) and extending to the infinite expanse of the southern sky beyond Grandmother Moon (our future), is the course that was set by the Old Ones long ago according to the laws of nature. The map for following this course is the Medicine Circle. We have the rules about which Mooshum speaks. Will we learn how to read them and live in balance with Creation?

Reflecting upon these sensations in the pre-dawn hours as I lay awake, relating them to my dissertation, how can I share my experience so that others may appreciate the spirit world

and *their* connection within it? What words can I write so people see the metaphysical reality of which we are a part? I then realize that there are no more words to be written. This learning is not one that may be read and understood through intellectualization and rational thought. If only it were so easy. Experiencing firsthand the multi-dimensionality of all our relationships not just in space but also through time, one gains an appreciation for the breadth and depth of the learnings that accompany these feelings of interconnectedness. With the connection, one's responsibilities become self-evident.

I have spoken about “re/spect” in terms of “looking again” to broaden our horizons and respectfully learn about and appreciate Other ways of knowing. “Re/spect” also refers to “double understanding,” which I have already introduced as a principle both Mooshum Peter and Mooshum Michael have shared numerous times in ceremonies. To review briefly, “double understanding” is understanding on two levels (through at least two looks). The first level (or look) is the intellectual acknowledgement and appreciation for a concept, which may be grasped through listening in an oral tradition or reading. The second level is the deeper comprehension and internalization, which are only possible from learning personally about a concept through the experience of doing or practicing it (i.e., where the practice is another “look”). Only through actual experience may one achieve “double understanding.”

In the end, this conclusion is in essence a beginning – an opportunity for each individual to embark on their own learning journey to “double understand” and return to a balanced relationship with Creation, overcoming one's fear of nature, immersing oneself to regain an appreciation for “all our relations.”

Kahkiyaw niwahkomâkanak – All my relations

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