

EXPLORING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL IDENTITY, HEALTH, AND
SOCIAL SUPPORT WITH AN ABORIGINAL WOMEN'S HAND DRUM GROUP

by

Sara Swasson

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ABSTRACT

Aboriginal women's hand drumming on reserve and the relationship with cultural identity, health and social support were explored using an Indigenous approach. Seven Mi'gmaq women from the Pugwales hand drum group shared their experience of being in the group through a sharing circle and one-on-one story telling sessions. This study extends Goudreau's (2008) work on urban Aboriginal women's hand drumming. My findings demonstrated that the main themes, sisterhood, culture, overall well-being, and spirituality did not stand alone but in fact were very much interconnected with one another and built off each other. Being in a women's hand drum group and revitalizing a cultural tradition such as hand drumming positively affected group members' cultural identity, health and feelings of social support.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

AGS	Alaq'sitew Gitpu School
APTN	Aboriginal People's Network Television
CBC	Canada Broadcast Corporation
OCAP	Ownership Control Access & Possession
MEW	Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch
TCPS	Tri-Council Policy Statement
RCMP	Royal Canadian Mounted Police
WHO	World Health Organization
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People

CHAPTER I – INTRODUCTION

Colonization in Canada continues to have a negative impact on the cultural identity, health, and social support systems of Aboriginal people. White (2010) defines colonization as the invasion, occupation and control of Aboriginal people's lands, resources and goods. When European settlers arrived over five hundred years ago, a restructuring of all aspects of Aboriginal life occurred: physical, social, spiritual, cultural and political (Paul, 2000). In 1895, the Canadian government established policies that outlawed Aboriginal music such as drumming, making them punishable by law. Those who continued to use the drum, did so in hiding. Despite attempts by the Canadian Government to assimilate Aboriginal cultural and traditional ways, this study demonstrates how Aboriginal women revitalized a cultural tradition such as Aboriginal women's hand drumming and how women practice, share with the community and pass drumming down from generation to generation.

The intent of this research was to explore the benefits of being in an Aboriginal women's hand drum group. The Pugwales women's hand drum group was formed in 2010. The name Pugwales is the Mi'gmaq¹ word for the bird commonly known as a swallow. Traditionally, the swallow advised when the salmon was running in the Restigouche River, an important staple in the Listuguj Mi'gmaq diet and economy. Listuguj First Nation is located in the southwestern part of the Gaspé Peninsula (Québec). The Appalachian Mountains surround the community with the Restigouche River running along the southern border. The province of New Brunswick is across the river. The Pugwales group consists of seven to twelve women from the community who

¹ Mi'gmaq and Mi'kmaq: Not all Mi'gmaq communities in the Atlantic Provinces use the same spelling system. As my study involved women who identified as Mi'gmaq women, I chose to use that spelling.

practice together bi-weekly. They sing songs in mostly Mi'gmaq. This research captured a holistic picture of how being a part of Pugwales women's hand drum group affected its members in terms of cultural identity, perceptions of health and levels of social support.

Hand Drumming: Health-Promoting Experiences of Aboriginal Women from a Northern Ontario Urban Community by Goudreau (2008) explored the connection between hand drumming practices and health promotion. This thesis followed Goudreau's lead to show how women's Aboriginal hand drumming participation affected their perceptions of health using the four aspects of the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel. Goudreau's study demonstrated how hand drumming among Aboriginal women supported their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional well-being. Goudreau (2008) demonstrated that by using the traditional drum the women strengthened their cultural ties to traditional ways. The women also benefited by getting together which assisted the women in forming social support networks. This study is important as I will use some of the same methods for information collection and the same framework when discussing the results. However, my study differs in that it explores these relationships with an on-reserve Mi'gmaq women hand drum group. I chose to use sharing circles and one-on-one storytelling sessions because these two methods fit well within the Indigenous approach of ways of knowing, gathering and sharing knowledge. Mi'gmaq people practiced oral traditional ways where their teachings for their children came from talking and working alongside them (Friesen, 1997). This is a tradition kept alive by the Pugwales hand drum group.

Goudreau, Weber-Pillwax, Cote-Meek, Madill and Wilson (2008) developed the "Circle of Life Framework" to illustrate key findings from their study in a culturally relevant way. The "Circle of Life" framework (Figure 2) incorporates the Aboriginal medicine wheel. However, it was expanded to incorporate culture at the centre and social support on the outer rim of the

circle. For my study some of the results were interpreted using Goudreau’s framework. The Pugwales women’s perception of health was explored and compared to the Aboriginal medicine wheel and I examined how culture and social support were affected by being in the drum group.



Figure 1. Aboriginal Medicine Wheel

Figure 1. Aboriginal Women's Hand Drumming (AWHD) Circle of Life Framework

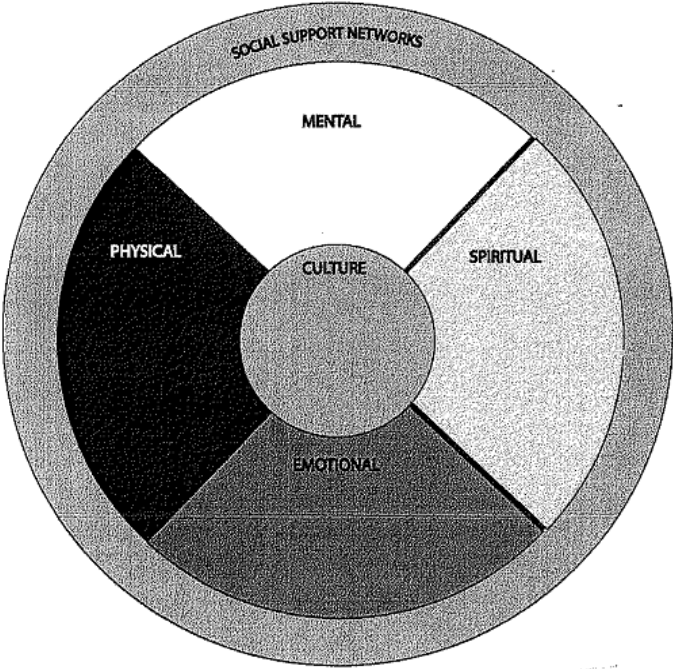


Figure 2. Circle of Life

Aboriginal people's beliefs and ways of being were forcibly changed to fit the lifestyles of the settlers. This resulted in Aboriginal people surrendering their own power and knowledge to the colonizers (White, 2010). Over the years, more suffering occurred as Aboriginal people faced cultural oppression and social marginalization through the economic, political and religious institutions set in place by the European settlers (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). Early missionaries focused on changing Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and converting them to Christianity. The structure of families and survival depended upon Aboriginal beliefs (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009).

Colonialism occurred across the globe with forced assimilation occurring in Australia, New Zealand and Canada all approximately around the same time in accordance with European policies and with similar results; it reshaped the lives of Aboriginal people and opened the door for legacies of oppression and assimilation (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). Faced with devastation and threatened with the loss of their culture, Aboriginal people were resilient and kept their traditions alive, even in secret. Resilience is an important part of mental health, as it is a critical resource for individuals facing adversity (Powley, 2009). Without this resilience Aboriginal women's hand drumming may have disappeared. Despite policies passed in 1885 that threatened criminal fines or imprisonment, it was difficult for a handful of police and "Indian" agents to enforce it, because of the large number of people who continued to drum.

In 2016, Aboriginal people are emphasizing the importance of revitalizing their culture. Aboriginal people are beginning to regain their language, ceremonial activities, and traditional ways. A way to maintain Aboriginal cultural identity is through rebuilding many of the traditional practices that faded in part due to Canada's attempt to assimilate the culture (Getty,

2010). Many ceremonial activities such as the pow wow have only returned in the last twenty years, here on the east coast. The community of Listuguj which all the Pugwales members call home, held their first pow wow in 1992. A sacred instrument such as the women's hand drum is a way to demonstrate the benefits of cultural revitalization for Aboriginal people. The beat of the drum signifies for Aboriginal people the heartbeat of Mother Earth. The drums have been culturally important since time immemorial (Vennum, 1982). The revitalization of these practices such as hand drumming occurred in the 1960's and 1970' and stemmed from the American Indian Movement and in 2012 onward with the help of the "Idle No More" movement. Aboriginal hand drumming is being heard, respected and recognized across Canada. Aboriginal women's hand drumming is a part of their culture that many women never let fade completely away. The use of the hand drum is something that is positive and culturally meaningful to many in the Aboriginal community (Goudreau, 2008). The use of the hand drum connects Aboriginal people to their culture in a positive way.

Drumming was one of the cultural practices that European settlers tried to eradicate (Goudreau, 2008). There are several reasons why drumming declined under colonial rule. A main reason was that it (drumming) became against the law. Another reason was that missionaries or early settlers during this time were able to convince many people including Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals that the drum represented evil spirits thus discouraging many Aboriginal people from practicing traditional drumming (Goudreau, 2008). Early missionaries also saw drumming as barbaric and a potential tool that could lead to war. Because history during that time was written by European settlers who did not favour drumming there is limited research available on historical Aboriginal drumming. There is even less documentation of

women's drumming, as historically drumming was predominately the role of men because of cultural protocols and teachings surrounding the drum (Goudreau, 2008).

Statement of Research Purpose and Research Question

The Aboriginal Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) is depicted as a circle with four quadrants representing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of one's life and the importance of these all being in balance. The "Circle of Life" created by Goudreau, Weber-Pillax, Cote-Meek, Madill, & Wilson (2008) framework (Figure 2) illustrated the medicine wheel, however, it was expanded to incorporate culture at the centre and social support on the outer rim of the circle.

Since colonization began the European settlers, then the Canadian government, have made several attempts through policy and law to assimilate Aboriginal culture and practices in Canada. Despite these attempts by the Canadian Government, cultural traditions such as Aboriginal women's hand drumming and the Mi'gmaq language have been revitalized, practiced and shared with the community. The traditions are being passed down from one generation to the next. The Pugwales women's hand drum group actively pass down drumming and songs to the next generation. Aboriginal women's hand drumming is way of decolonizing for these women because it is a way to take back a cultural tradition such as drumming and a way to regain their Mi'gmaq language.

The Pugwales hand drum group is a group of women who during most of their lives had little to no connection to traditional practices due to colonization. It was only the last twenty two years that cultural practices such as hand drumming have become the norm to see during community events and is also, now being taught in the school system on reserve. The Pugwales women recognized this gap in their cultural identity of who they were as Mi'gmaq women and

decided that they would be a part of the revitalization of a cultural tradition such as hand drumming and the Mi'gmaq language.

The research question was how does hand drumming and being in the Pugwales women's hand drum group relate to their cultural identity, perceptions of health and feelings of social support?

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between being a member of an 7 hand drum group, Mi'gmaq cultural identity, health and social support. In addition I aimed to explore both how their perception of their own health fit within the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel concept and how my overall findings fit with Goudreau's (2008) "Circle of Life" framework.

Statement of Research Approach

A qualitative approach facilitated a holistic understanding of how being part of the Pugwales women's hand drum group can contribute to cultural identity, health and social support systems. My qualitative methodology borrowed elements from the Indigenous approach and used a Decolonizing methodology in order to understand the effects colonialism has on Aboriginal people and on research. A thematic analysis was used to analyze the knowledge gathered.

Significance of Study

The findings from this research project created an awareness of not only the importance of cultural revitalization for Aboriginal people, but also of the potential benefits of practicing a specific cultural tradition for reviving one's cultural identity. The hand drum is an excellent tool to understand potential positive effects on individual group members' cultural identity, health and feelings of social support. A more holistic understanding of the positive impact of cultural revitalization would support culturally appropriate policies, programs, and services to be developed and implemented with the goal of increasing the well-being of Aboriginal people.

There are however, instances where being part of the group can negatively affect the women's well-being. Some of the women may have felt obligated to attend all practices and performances which can sometimes cause stress. Another possible negative effect is that the group can be viewed as exclusive because, when practicing and performing with the group, sobriety for four days is required; some women may want to join the group but are unable because they are not able to stay sober for the four days.

This thesis is organized into five chapters. The second chapter; the literature review describes the concepts of cultural identity, Aboriginal health, and social support. The third chapter is the methodology section, which justifies the research approaches taken for this study. This section will also discuss my paradigmatic stance taken for this research endeavour, methods used in my research design and any ethical considerations. Chapter four is the results section, in the results section I discuss the findings of this research. Chapters five and six are concluding chapters that discuss the implications my results have for the participants, their community and the health promotion field, and present some conclusions. I identify ways to expand the research findings to ensure the continuation of revitalizing cultural practices.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Identity

Cultural identity is an aspect of an individual's self-concept and refers to his or her sense of belonging to a certain group or culture and contributes to the emotional significance of that membership (Usborne & Taylor, 2010), (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005). My cultural identity plays a significant role in who I am and my sense of belonging; I identify myself as a Mi'gmaq woman from the community of Listuguj, Quebec, and now a Mi'gmaq woman who resides in an urban setting.

Exposure to a mainstream culture can cause one's own culture to be fluid and change positively or negatively (Kent & Bhui, 2003). A sense of cultural identity provides individuals with a way to apply meaning to themselves, and to interpret and understand themselves in relation to other cultures; it also guides their behaviour according to normed values (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005). Research shows that children between the ages of three and nine are able to identify themselves as belonging to a group and categorize others as belonging to other groups by using observable characteristics. With this recognition many tend to make social comparisons regarding the value of their group over another group (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005). Cultural identity is a dynamic construct that reacts to developmental, contextual and social conditions (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005).

Two important constructs of cultural identity are enculturation and acculturation. Enculturation happens when an individual strongly identifies with his or her own ethnic minority. Enculturation can happen on varying levels and this depends on the extent that an individual engages in practicing their own cultural traditions. The opposite is true for acculturation as it happens when an ethnic minority assimilates into the norms, values and

behaviours of the dominant or mainstream culture (Vennum, 1982). Acculturation can be bi-directional and bi-dimensional, meaning that individuals can absorb some of the new culture while retaining their own; they can also share some of their own culture with the mainstream.

The process of acculturation has been linked to people feeling depressed, anxious, and dissocialized, targeted by racism and marginalized (Kent & Bhui, 2003). Although adapting to the dominant culture often leads to higher socioeconomic status, at the same time it leads to higher levels of depression, in which one's socioeconomic status may or may not matter. A study of Navajo youth suggests that there is a relationship between cultural identity and depression in Navajo youth (Rieckmann, Wadsworth, & Deyhle, 2005). The study identified that increased control, predictability and limited duration of stressful events were all correlated to a decrease in depression symptoms. Higher levels of cultural identity among the Navajo youth had only a modest effect on symptoms of depression. Other factors important to study were discussed. These include: perceived discrimination, and urban or reservation living arrangements. These factors would need to be looked at in order to provide a more accurate understanding of depression among Navajo youth. Another study done by Sawrikar and Hunt (2006) showed that high Australian pride was associated with lower levels of depression and lower levels of stress in Australian Aboriginals (Sawrikar & Hunt, 2005). Somewhere between enculturation and acculturation is integration and this happens when the ethnic minority retains much of their cultural identity in spite of influences from mainstream cultures (Vennum, 1982).

Cultural and cross cultural psychologists have demonstrated that cultural identity affects one's self-construal and an array of social processes (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Usborne and Taylor (2002), suggest that, in order for cultural identity to be clear-cut, it does not have to be accurate, unchanging or simple. One study hypothesized that an individual's perception of his or

her cultural identity is important for personal identity clarity, self-esteem and well-being (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). When an individual is constructing a clear personal identity the individual with a clear cultural identity would intuitively know the values, norms and behaviours approved by his or her cultural group (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Without a clear cultural identity individuals have no comparative mechanism by which they can construct a sense of personal identity. This may have a negative effect on their self-esteem and well-being (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). The link between cultural identity and personal identity has been examined in some Aboriginal populations but in comparison to many other cultures there is still limited literature available.

Over time there has been an increasing interest in the role that culture and ethnicity play in identity development and how it contributes to psychosocial functioning. Unfortunately most of the research done in this area has been focused on minorities in mainstream society and has not considered the unique circumstances and history surrounding Aboriginal people (Hundleby, Gfellner, & Racine, 2007). This left many Aboriginal people in a place where they had to rebuild a personal identity amongst a confusing and conflicting set of new cultural principles (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Identity development has also been difficult for some Aboriginal people due to the fact that they are consistently faced with discrimination and a lack of cultural acceptance in mainstream society (Hundleby et al., 2007). This confusion of identity has led to negative well-being, academic underachievement, low self-esteem, addictive behaviours, and suicide among Aboriginal people (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). The lack of positive Aboriginal role models does not help one find a positive cultural identity.

There were many reasons why during the time of ongoing colonization and racism, traditions were not passed down, generating no pride in the culture (Lawrence & Anderson,

2003). That is why the role of elders is important in Aboriginal communities as they are able to teach the traditional ways and knowledge which can provide a basis for a healthy identity (King et al., 2009). As stated earlier there is now a movement towards cultural revitalization (Lawrence & Anderson, 2003).

An awareness of the complexity involved in Aboriginal identity and how it influences adaptive development is needed if we want future Aboriginal generations to reach their full potential (Hundleby et al., 2007). Aboriginal people in Canada have a unique history that is not shared with other minorities. In a study done by Hundleby et al. (2007) ten Aboriginal females who previously had dysfunctional backgrounds and lifestyles were able to turn their lives' around. This was done through developing a sense of their cultural background and aspects of their own Aboriginal heritage (Hundleby, Gfellner, & Racine, 2007).

A study done by Wolsko et al. (2009) for example found that Yup'ik, Alaskan Aboriginal people, who described themselves as having a more Yup'ik lifestyle rather than a white one, consumed more smokeless tobacco also known as chewing tobacco. Identifying more with the Yup'ik lifestyle meant that they spoke the traditional language more frequently, consumed traditional foods and used Yupi'k traditional medicines (Vennum, 1982). This study demonstrated a relationship between a stronger perception and practice of Yup'ik cultural identity and an increased level of poor health choices.

Many studies have, however, confirmed that cultural identity plays an important role in the well-being of Aboriginal people. Another study, by Taylor and Osborne (2002), looked at the association between cultural identity, clarity and personal identity, among seventy six members of the Dene First Nation. Their findings suggest that a clear cultural identity is likely associated with having a clear sense of whom one is, which can be associated with more positivity in one's

life. Unfortunately the reliability of the scale used in this research was low. This was because the scale only had three simplified questions on it. The participants might not have fully understood what was meant by cultural identity clarity, and there was a cultural mismatch of western style testing and Dene forms of self-expression (Usborne & Taylor, 2010). Although there are potential negative effects of cultural identity overall the positive effects have been shown to be more profound.

What does cultural identity mean to Aboriginal people?

In order for us to have a holistic picture of what cultural identity means to Aboriginal people today, we must look at past injustices that Aboriginal people have suffered. Attempts to annihilate their culture and ways of being were brutal and uncivilized. But Aboriginal people have proven to be resilient; and a revitalization of their traditional ways is becoming stronger and stronger.

When Europeans first arrived in the late 15th century, in what is now known as Canada they described the South and North Americas as empty land and called it *terra nullias* (RCAP, 1996). The relationship between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Canada has evolved through four different stages (RCAP, 1996). The first stage occurred before 1500 when Europeans and Aboriginal people knew nothing of each other and lived on separate continents. The range of languages, cultures and traditions on each continent were vast and very different from one another. The Aboriginal people did have their own evolving systems of government before the arrival of the Europeans. In fact, the Cherokee people in the southeast of North America had organized into a confederacy of about thirty cities, nearly as large as imperial London (RCAP, 1996).

The Mi'gmaq were the first to come into contact with the Europeans and may have suffered the most from diseases that were brought, the loss of their lands and the loss of much of their culture and lifestyle. Although it is difficult to say with accuracy the number of Mi'gmaq people who died or were killed during this time, Paul's (2000) estimate is that 200,000 Mi'gmaq people were lost.

Following the years after first contact, the second stage of the relationship between the Aboriginals and non-Aboriginals was one of fragile peace, friendship, mutual curiosity and apprehension, with exchanges of goods, military and trade alliances. If the Aboriginal people had not been willing to help the early settlers, the settlers would never have been able to survive the extreme climate, nor succeed in fishing, hunting, fur trading or in any wars against other explorers (RCAP, 1996). An important event that happened during this time was the signing of the Royal Proclamation of 1763 by the King. A complex document, the King's central message was that Aboriginal people were not to be "molested or disturbed" on their own lands. Transactions involving land were to be negotiated properly between the Crown and "assemblies of Indians". The proclamation portrayed Aboriginal nations as being autonomous political entities, under the protection of the Crown (RCAP, 1996).

The third stage of the relationship saw a rise in the population of settlers, as well as a rise in the power they exercised over the Aboriginal people. By 1812, immigrants outnumbered Aboriginal people ten to one in Upper Canada (RCAP, 1996). The fur trade was dying and the Europeans felt that instead of assisting them, Aboriginal people were hindering their progress. The Aboriginal people were no longer seen as valued partners, as they were not needed in the fur trade nor as military allies because the British had defeated all competitors. An ideology that Europeans were superior to all other races on earth began to emerge. These ideas provided the

fuel for policies of domination and assimilation (RCAP, 1996). The Canadian Government outlawed Potlatch ceremonies and Sundance ceremonies in 1894 and 1895. Participation in any of these was deemed a criminal offence (RCAP, 1996). Laws against Indian festivals, ceremonies honouring the hunt, Sundance ceremonies and any dancing outside their own reserve in Aboriginal costume were liable to varying penalties as defined by the “*Dances and Festivals*” section of the *Indian Act* of 1876, Section 140, as cited in Daniel Paul’s book (Paul, 2000).

140. (1) *Every Indian or other person who engages in, or assists in celebrating or encourages, either directly, or indirectly another to celebrate any Indian Festival, dance, or other ceremony of which the given away or paying or giving back of money, good or articles of any sort forms apart, or is a feature, whether such gift of money, goods or articles take place before, at, or after the celebration of the same or who engages or assist in any celebration or dance of which the wounding or mutilation of the dead or living body of any human being or animal forms apart or is a feature, is guilty of an offence and is liable on summary conviction to imprisonment for a term not exceeding six months and not less than two months.*

(2) Nothing in this section shall be construed to prevent the holding of any agricultural show or exhibition or giving away of prizes for exhibits thereat.

(3) Any Indian in the provinces of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta or British Columbia or in the territories who participate in *any Indian dance outside the bounds of his own reserve, or who participates in any show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant in Aboriginal costume without the consent of the Superintendent General or his authorized agent*, and any person who introduces or employs any Indian to take part in such dance, show, exhibition, performance, stampede or pageant, or introduces any Indian to leave his reserve or employs any Indian for such a purpose, whether the dance, show, exhibition, stampede or pageant has taken place or not, *shall on summary conviction be liable to a penalty not exceeding twenty five dollars, or to imprisonment for one month, or to both penalty and imprisonment.*

The Canadian government, with or without treaty agreements, imposed reserve systems, reservations where lands were of inadequate size and limited resources that were set aside for Aboriginal people. These lands were said to protect Aboriginal people and preserve their ways but instead they isolated and impoverished them (RCAP, 1996).

It was a sad day in 1849 when the first residential school opened in Alderville, Ontario. The last residential school to close was in 1996. The church and the government had the idea that the way to solve this “problem of Aboriginal independence and savagery” was to take Aboriginal children out of their homes from their families at an early age, staying in residential schools usually for eight or nine years. Here the teachers and missionaries would start instilling

the ways of the dominant European society. In these schools Aboriginal languages, customs and habits were suppressed and punished when used (RCAP, 1996). Traditional practices such as hand drumming had no place in residential schools therefore generations of Aboriginal children lost touch with that part of who they were as Aboriginal people. Not only did not being a part of their cultural traditions such as drumming affect them but it affected generations to come as they were not able to pass down the teachings of the drum. Cultural identity begins to form in children between the ages of three to nine. Aboriginal cultural identity would not be able to develop in many Aboriginal families and we are still discovering today the inter-generational effects of residential schools.

Some intergenerational effects from residential school affected women in particular. They speak of not feeling loved and not learning the necessary parenting skills needed to take care of children. Many turned to drugs and alcohol and lost their children (Irving, Christensen & Wolochatiuk, 2012). A form of healing for Aboriginal people is to reclaim their cultural ways and one way for women to do that is through the use of a hand drum which brings along with it prayer, ceremony and spirituality. “Religion is for people who are afraid of going to hell. Spirituality is for those who have already been there” (Vine Deloria, Sioux.) This can be why many men and women returned to their traditional ways after being in the residential school system; it helped to heal some of the spiritual damage done in these schools (Irving, Christensen & Wolochatiuk, 2012).

In 1857 the government passed an *Act to Encourage the Gradual Civilization of Indian Tribes*. This meant that Indians of “good character” as judged by a board of non-Aboriginals could be declared non-Indians. As non-Indians they were allowed to join Canadian society, bringing a portion of tribal land with them. Only one man was documented from all the Indian

nations to have accepted this invitation. The man was a Mohawk from Six Nations named Elias Hill (RCAP, 1996). This speaks of the strong cultural identity and pride that existed even in those times when the Federal Government's viewed Aboriginal cultures as inferior to the dominant culture (RCAP, 1996).

The Confederation of Canadian provinces in 1867 via the Constitution Act was declared without reference to Aboriginal nations even though the Aboriginal people were the first partners of both the English and the French. According to the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996) the first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, announced that it would be his government's goal "to do away with the tribal system, and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the inhabitants of the Dominion" (p.14). The Canadian Government replaced Aboriginal governments with Band Councils who were not able to exercise any significant powers; the Canadian settlers took control over valuable resources located on reserves, took charge of Band Council finances on reserve and began applying non-Aboriginal concepts of marriage and parenting to the Aboriginal people.

The fourth stage of the relationship is one of promise and hope for the future of Aboriginal people. What has happened in the past has hurt many Aboriginal people and continues to cause great pain today. Aboriginal people had to not only struggle for their own survival but for the survival of their nation. Resistance to assimilation and oppression grew weak at times but thankfully it never died. This fourth stage of the relationship also saw political movements developing.

The first evidence of this political action occurred when Aboriginal people stood together in 1969 and stood up against the passing of the "White Paper". The goal of the White Paper was to abolish the Indian Act and what remained of the special relationship between Aboriginal

people and the Canadian government, offering instead “equality”. The White Paper called for full scale assimilation policies of Aboriginal people. The government stated that existing Indian Act policies were discriminatory and the removing of Indian status would end this discrimination (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009).

Unfortunately the White Paper failed in many ways because it did not consider the legacy of colonialism and institutions such as residential schools that forced assimilation and created a consistent pattern of inequalities and marginalization (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). It refused to recognize Aboriginals’ Treaty rights as unique from other minority groups in Canada. The Liberal Government developed the White Paper without input from the Aboriginal people, in spite of the fact that their lands, power and autonomy were taken away with the initial formation of the Canadian state (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009).

Aboriginal leaders unanimously rejected the White Paper. Together they began to realize how important their survival was and how almost all was lost during the Canadian government’s efforts to assimilate Aboriginal people. Aboriginal people recognized that they had rights that could not be taken away; these rights were written in the Royal Proclamation of 1763 and in their treaties. They began to rebuild their communities and nations with a newfound purpose. In 1982, “Existing Aboriginal and treaty rights” were recognized in the *Constitution Act of 1982* (RCAP, 1996). In the years since the rejection of the 1969 White Paper, Aboriginal people have been involved in decision making processes that affect them. They have also been given various degrees of administrative authority in their communities.

This new relationship between Canadian European settlers and Aboriginal people should be built on four principles; the first being the recognition that Aboriginal people were the original inhabitants and caretakers of this land while at the same time accepting that non-

Aboriginal people are also of this land now. The second principle is to respect each other's cultures, for example, Europeans respect the culture of the Aboriginal people and Aboriginal people respect the cultures of the European settlers. The third principle is the concept of sharing. This principle is central to the treaties and central to the possibility of true equality among all peoples of Canada. Fourth is responsibility, where both partners must be accountable for the promises made, and accountable for behaving honourably. This fourth stage in the relationship solidifies the idea that we will all live on this land together and the need to act with responsibility, honesty and good faith toward one another (RCAP, 1996).

Despite efforts to assimilate the Mi'gmaq were able to survive the atrocities of these times and developed resilience in the face of them, much different from other Aboriginal people in Canada. This different form of resilience can be attributed to the fact that Mi'gmaq were the first to encounter the European settlers and word had spread across the land that the settlers were coming and western Aboriginals were prepared for their arrival.

In the second half of this century a sort of renaissance has taken place, the strength of the Mi'gmaq people was greatly underrated by the European settlers. Campaigns to bring back the Aboriginal culture to the communities are in full swing. The residential schools failed in being able to abolish the Mi'gmaq language as it is healthy and alive in many of the Maritime Provinces today (Friesen, 1997). Language composes a crucial component to cultural identity. In the Aboriginal context, language acts as a link to spirituality, a component of the medicine wheel, and to tribal consciousness. All around the world Indigenous languages face extinction. With the loss of language, Aboriginal people lose an essential factor in their Aboriginal identity. However, there is still hope as language revitalization continues to be recognized as essential in Aboriginal communities. For example, it is happening in my own community. The Alag'sitew

Gitpu School on reserve offers a Mi'gmaq Immersion program up to grade two and daily drop in language classes on reserve are available. These programs have been featured on Aboriginal People's Network Television (APTN).

In Vancouver, British Columbia efforts are being made to support Aboriginal language revitalization programs. The revitalization of language represents a chance for reclamation of pride in Aboriginal cultural identity, decolonization, and an assertion of sovereignty (Baloy, 2011). Aboriginal language programs support Aboriginal people in reconnecting with their homeland through access to cultural traditions and language (Baloy, 2011). Deeply ingrained are the attitudes and governmental policies that view English as a powerful international language and Aboriginal language as out-dated (Baloy, 2011). Aboriginal languages are unfortunately often unrecognized, unknown and unappreciated by the non-Aboriginal society (Baloy, 2011). The three challenges that both the teachers and the learners of the languages face are; firstly, to work against the idea that Aboriginal identity and living an urban lifestyle are mutually exclusive; secondly, the fact that different dialects present themselves in an urban setting and how to be able to teach them all or more than a couple; and thirdly, the teachers and learners must be able to identify ties between their land, language and identity in an urban setting (Baloy, 2011). Language can be considered part of revitalization.

Revitalization can be understood as a choice to adopt certain historical cultural practices, while being able to incorporate them with contemporary western society (Kulhankova, 2011). Revitalization can be expressed by many terms such as reconstructing, rediscovering, reclaiming, rebuilding, reinforcing, rejuvenating, and revisiting, resilience and taking back control (Kulhankova, 2011). Cultural revitalization efforts are predominately located on reserves, despite the fact that many Aboriginal people are choosing to move to urban settings (Baloy, 2011). As

this movement is happening, researchers are beginning to focus on exploring cultural practices and their effects in an urban environment. The following examples of cultural revitalization occurred in both the urban and rural settings.

Revitalization occurred during the Idle No More movement in 2012 which ignited a deep passion, respect and recognition of the Aboriginal hand drum across the country since it was a vital part in the marches and protest that happened during that time. Idle No More was a grassroots social movement across Canada that started in October 2012. Four women: Nina Wilson, Sylvia McAdam, Jessica Gordon and Sheelah McLean saw the injustices of legislation that directly attacked Aboriginal people and the lands and waters across Canada (Idle No More, 2012, para.1). The vision of Idle No More is to help rebuild sovereignty and resurgence of nationhood, continued pressure to government and industry to protect the environment and to continue to foster ally relationships (Idle No More, 2012, para.1).

Idle No more focused on Bill C-45 which was an omnibus bill that many Aboriginal people saw as an attack on Aboriginal lands and on bodies of water that all Canadians share across the country (Idle No More, 2012, para.6).

Idle No more held peaceful demonstrations and walks across Canada in 2012. Hand drumming played a very important role in these rallies. In a report by Tiar Wilson on Canada Broadcast Corporation (CBC), she talked to an Elder who has been a drum keeper for thirty years, as well as some Aboriginal youth, about their thoughts of the hand drum (Wilson, 2013). Tiar Wilson speaks of a group of youth that now attend weekly drum practices at Winnipeg's Thunderbird House after being inspired by the power of the drum when used in rallies and other events. The elder Chickady Richard explained that the beat of the drum represents the heartbeat of a baby in a mother's womb and it has a certain energy that touches people. An Aboriginal

youth talked about the power of the drum to unite different nations to come together to drum as one. She also talked about the healing powers that the drum had for her as she was able to connect to her culture (Tiar,2013).

Aboriginal Health

Aboriginal people are significantly less healthy than the general Canadian population in many ways. Although improving, there is still a significant gap between the health and well-being of Aboriginal people compared to the general Canadian population. According to the 2006 census, there were 1.7 million people who self-identified as Aboriginal, making them 3.8 % of the general population (Statistics Canada, 2006). The non-urban population consists of 615 First Nation bands, with 2,284 reserves and fifty two Inuit communities (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). Life expectancy among Aboriginal men is 70.4 years compared to 77.1 for the general male population. This pattern is also apparent with Aboriginal women whose life expectancy is 75.2 years versus 82.2 (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). The census determined that the mean age for Aboriginal people is considerably lower than that of the general population; the mean age for Aboriginal people is twenty seven, while the mean age for non-Aboriginals is forty (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). This mean age difference could potentially be a contributing factor to the reason why Aboriginal people have a 1.5 increased chance of mortality and are 6.5 times more likely to die by injuries and poisons than the general population in Canada (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009).

Statistics of diseases currently facing Aboriginal people are disheartening. They have a six to seven times increased chance of contracting tuberculosis. The diabetes rates are high and Aboriginal people are four to five times more likely to contract diabetes. (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). Heart disease and hypertension are also apparent in the Aboriginal population

with the likelihood being three times higher than the general population. Aboriginal people are two times more likely to report a long term disability (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009). Suicide rates for the Aboriginal youth are three to six times that of the general population. Some potential contributing factors to these suicide rates are self-reported rates of family violence in their communities, increased reports of sexual abuse and rape (Kirmayer & Valaskakis, 2009).

The Medicine Wheel Perspective of Health

The medicine wheel fosters awareness that any particular event or phenomenon functions as part of a larger whole (Castellano, 2004). The medicine wheel concept of Aboriginal well-being is esteemed very highly by Aboriginal people and it encompasses all four elements of life: the physical, the emotional, the mental and the spiritual (King et al., 2009). All the different aspects are interwoven and interact with each other in order to support a strong healthy person. This balance is not only important for individuals but extends beyond themselves; good health and healing require an individual to live in harmony with others, their community and the spirit world (King et al., 2009) Aboriginal people view their health with an emphasis on holistic health. Some non-Aboriginals' focus is on the disease and treatment model while Aboriginal peoples focus is broader health. Well-being for Aboriginal people not only means the absence of disease but the importance of balance. Aboriginals conceptualize health as it is shaped by the larger context which includes family, community, nature and the Creator. If someone in the community is sick there is an imbalance in the medicine wheel. An important component to an Aboriginal's well-being is the connection and relations to immediate family, extended family such as aunts, uncles, cousins and the people in the community (King et al., 2009). An Aboriginal's health and well-being is dependent on the wellness of those surrounding him or her (Richmond & Ross, 2008), and can also be affected by cultural identity and social support.

Social Support

Three leading perspectives on social support have emerged from the literature. These are the sociological, psychological and communication perspectives (Vangelisti, 2009). The sociological perspective focuses on the level to which an individual is integrated into a social group. This is measured by the number of interconnectedness of their social relationships (Vangelisti, 2009). The psychological perspective focuses on the individual's perceived availability of support. This is measured by individual self-assessment of whether support was received in the past and whether it is perceived to be accessible again (Vangelisti, 2009). The last social support perspective is one of communication, which focuses on the interaction that occurs between the provider and receiver of support. This is measured by observing verbal and non-verbal cues that are used when individuals engage in social support (Vangelisti, 2009).

The study of social support can be traced back to many scholars who published their work in the 1970's (Vangelisti, 2009). Researchers have developed different definitions for social support and different measures to assess support (Vangelisti, 2009). Social support has multiple dimensions that can be approached at multiple levels (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). A common theme in all definitions of social support is that in order for social support to occur, people must rely on one another to meet certain needs. These needs can arise when one is in a crisis situation or just knowing that they have people they can rely on. Social support also includes information from others that you are loved, cared for, esteemed and part of a network of communications and mutual obligations (Badr, Acitelli, Duck, & Carl, 2001, Kim, Sherman, & Taylor, 2008).

An individual may receive two types of support which can be categorized as emotional and instrumental. Emotional support includes behaviours that communicate that a person is cared

for and loved, while instrumental support involves assistance in task directed coping efforts (Badr et al., 2001). An individual seeking support may do so in two ways: implicitly and explicitly. Explicit social support, according to Kim et al (2008), occurs when a person intentionally recruits and uses their social networks in response to a specific stressful event, about which they need advice, aid or emotional comfort. Implicit social support is the emotional comfort one feels, although no disclosing of the problem occurred. Feeling emotional comfort can come from ideas of 'close others' or being in company of 'close others', all the while not disclosing the problem (Kim et al., 2008). Whether implicit or explicit, social support helps a person to reduce the negative impact of stress (Taylor, Welch, Kim, & Sherman, 2007).

Social support is bidirectional. It includes not only what people bring to the situation but also what the situation does to them (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). Each bidirectional process focuses on a match between the giver and receiver of social support. For example psychologists, counsellors, and therapists make efforts to match the cognitive and behavioural styles of those involved so they that may progress along with the healing process (Sarason & Sarason, 2009).

There has been extensive research published on the health enhancing characteristics of good social support. Good social support systems facilitate positive adjustment to coronary heart disease, diabetes, lung disease, cardiac disease, arthritis and cancer (Kim et al., 2008). People with high levels of social support get sick less often, are able to heal quicker, and have reduced psychological distress in their everyday lives and seem to have a sort of buffer system against stress. In particular social relationships can alleviate some of the effects of stress on an individual's health and well-being (Vangelisti, 2009).

Although the benefits of good social support are widely acknowledged, researchers have begun to acknowledge that there are several moderating factors and social support is not always

positive (Vangelisti, 2009). We know that not all types of support are necessarily perceived as good and the greater quantity of social support is also not always beneficial to the relationship (Badr et al., 2001). Some factors include: the perceived meanings attached to the social support received; questioning one's self-esteem; heightened awareness of a negative situation; distress as to whether a situation is publicly visible; unwanted indebtedness to the support giver; and dependence on support providers (Vangelisti, 2009). These factors can be present at different levels in each social support interaction and can influence whether the social support was helpful to the individual.

Attention must also be paid to people who lack social support and studies have found that that this can also lead to many negative unwanted risk factors (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). It is vital the support seeker perceives that social support is available to them. When in a crisis situation and they do not perceive any support the crisis tends to escalate. Thus, the interpretation of social support by one partner and whether it is enacted depends on how the other communicates that support (Badr et al., 2001).

Social ties and support systems change over time. There are both strong and weak social ties that shape who we are. A strong social tie would be a family member while a weak social tie may be the clerk at the store. Each of them may play a role in social support and how we perceive it to be around us (Sarason & Sarason, 2009). These everyday relationships and transactions provide a backdrop against which social support is delivered in a crisis situation (Badr et al., 2001).

Social Support in an Aboriginal Community

Many Aboriginal children and adolescents live in conditions that involve significant stress (Rieckmann et al., 2005). These Aboriginals also encounter continuing daily stressors such as poverty, discrimination and involuntary acculturation (Rieckmann et al., 2005). In the face of all these stressors it should be obvious that social support in an Aboriginal community would contribute to the well-being of the group.

During colonization, Aboriginal people were placed on reservations that were inadequate in size and lacked needed resources. This led to the tight-knit social structures we see today on many reservations (Richmond & Ross, 2008). This idea is similar to social capital, which can be defined as the set of resources that may exist in families and in community social organization, which have proven to be useful for cognitive or social development of a child (Kritsotakis & Gamarnikow, 2004). Social capital in Aboriginal communities may be different from social capital in an urban setting, as most people in a reserve community are related, know each other or know someone in the individual's family.

Aboriginal people believe that good health and well-being are shaped by the larger social networks that one belongs to, for example extended family and the community (Richmond & Ross, 2008). Social support behaviours operate at both the individual and community level. When an individual has an increased interconnectedness at the community level this can lead to a larger social network. This network allows some Aboriginal people to share information and receive social feedback that can effortlessly correct individuals if they deviate from the right path (Richmond & Ross, 2008).

These networks can also exert pressure to conform to certain behaviours which may not always be positive. Such ties can affect one's health in a negative way by exerting conformity

pressures that encourage and even normalize health damaging behaviours such as smoking, risky sexual behaviour, alcohol abuse and more (Richmond & Ross, 2008).

A sense of belonging is connected to what social support is and this can be through the connections of family, friends and the community as a whole. In a study by Richmond and Ross (2008), for example, community health representatives looked at what social support meant in twenty six First Nation and Inuit communities by examining the relationship between health and social support. Findings from this study suggest that there are both health enhancing and health damaging effects of social support in these communities. Richmond and Ross (2008) showed that not all forms of belonging are health enhancing at the psychological level. For example this study explained how domestic violence can cause ill health to a woman who may want to leave her husband because of the violence but may stay because leaving may result in the loss of or disruption of many of her social ties, which then can lead to inter-generational effects of domestic violence (C. A. Richmond & Ross, 2008). Health-damaging behaviours such as smoking or alcohol abuse may also be difficult to get away from because of conformity pressures and the loyalty one feels towards family, and friends. Therefore, although they may want to seek positive change in their lives, change can be restricted by the social connectedness which can create high levels of social pressure to conform to expected behaviours and cultural norms (C. A. Richmond & Ross, 2008). So, although there are reported high levels of social support in these communities, they continue to endure broad social problems (Richmond & Ross, 2008). Unfortunately in this study the negatives outweighed the positive effects that social support has on the community.

However, in this thesis we will examine whether social support through cultural activities such as hand drumming can improve one's healthy social support networks thus improving overall feelings of well-being.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Research Approach

Using an Indigenous approach to research when conducting my study incorporated a holistic approach which respects Indigenous ways by honouring culture, traditions and knowledge. A component of an Indigenous approach is research done by Aboriginal people and for Aboriginal people while using the techniques and methods from the traditions of the tribe (Evans M., Hole R., Sookraj D., Berg L.D., & Hutchinson P., 2009). When working with Aboriginal people, a deep respect for the research participants involved is essential. With this respect, the researcher must demonstrate how the research gives back to the participants and community. A critical aspect of Indigenous research is the ethical responsibility not to exploit Aboriginal knowledge or people (Kovach, 2009). An understanding of Aboriginal ways of knowing, sharing and cultural practices and protocols is needed to achieve these ethical objectives (Kovach, 2009). These objectives include respect for the participants, aiming to provide research that gives back to the participants and the community, and being mindful of what is shared by participants so as to not exploit any of their cultural teachings that are shared.

Decolonizing research methodologies is a type of resistance to Western approaches to research. Western approaches did not fit with Indigenous ways of gathering knowledge. And a number of scholars felt that Western approaches just did not work in colonized populations (Chilisa, 2012). A process of decolonization in research then occurred that centered on the concerns and worldviews of those who have been colonized as the Aboriginal people have been here in Canada. It is a process of conducting research that respects and gives voice to the worldviews of those who have suffered a long history of oppression and marginalization. Historically non-Indigenous scholars would enter reservations, conduct their observations, leave and then write books about what they observed. This is how knowledge was gathered and

inputted into bodies of literature that informed other scholars (Chilisa, 2012). Knowledge gathered at this time did not adhere to Indigenous ways of knowing nor did it give back to the community. In fact, damage was done to these communities by outside researchers, which may have led to the stigmatization of communities. The researchers did not holistically capture what they might have been looking for while overlooking the important unique history of the colonized population. Earlier research done by Western academics used a colonial perspective that did not recognize or respect Indigenous worldviews (Getty, 2010).

Epistemologies of Indigenous knowledge tend to fit well within the narrative aspect of a constructivist paradigm (Kovach, 2009). When researchers use a qualitative approach they must be aware and acknowledge that multiple realities exist for each participant, and also for themselves as the researcher (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). The goal of constructivism is to rely on each participant to get a holistic picture of their experiences. These views are formed through interactions with others and through historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). While using a constructivist paradigm, a focus on the specific contexts in which people live, work and their cultural backgrounds is important. Researchers, too, must position themselves in the research and acknowledge how their interpretation may flow from their own personal, cultural and historical experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). Questions are often broad in order for the participant to construct meaning of a situation. Using open-ended questions allows participants to express themselves more freely. The researcher must pay special attention to what participants say or do in their life settings (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). Due to the fact that qualitative research and, it is suggested, all research, is interpretive, stories from both the research and the participants are reflected in the themes (Kovach, 2009).

When it comes to analyzing data collected using the Indigenous approach, I chose to use thematic analysis. This method is used across many different approaches and has the advantage of being flexible while being able to provide a rich and detailed account of knowledge gathered (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Paradigmatic Stance

A qualitative researcher must take a particular position when he/she chooses to do qualitative research. According to Guba and Lincoln (2007) a paradigm or worldview is a basic set of beliefs that guide action (Creswell & Creswell, 2007). For this research project I chose to position myself within the western constructivist paradigm, along with an Indigenous approach. In the constructivist paradigm, reality is considered to be a product of multiple human constructions that come from peoples' context, perceptions and actions (Loppie, 2007). Every interaction characterizes a new negotiation that in turn changes an individual's reality.

The main assumptions of the ontological, epistemological and methodological frameworks must be addressed when using the constructivist paradigm. The ontological assumption communicates the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell, 2007). It is concerned with understanding what is considered real and what can be known about reality (Creswell, 2007). While studying participants, researchers must keep in mind that each participant has multiple realities (Creswell, 2007). For my study, I was aware that the Pugnawales women may interpret their experiences of being in the drum group differently. I also recognized the multiple realities that they may perceive.

The epistemological assumption aims to get the researcher as close to the truth as feasibly possible (Creswell, 2007). It is concerned with how we know what we know and the relationship between the researcher and the research participants. According to the constructivist paradigm,

the researcher must try to minimize the distance between herself/himself and the research participants. Knowledge is co-created through interactions between the research and participants (Creswell, 2007).

The methodological assumption is the process used when doing research. Some characteristics of the methodological assumptions in the constructivist paradigm are that the researcher uses inductive logic, studies the topic within its contexts and uses an emerging design (Creswell, 2007). Research must be conducted through the dialectical interchange between researcher and participant. The researcher must provide a chance for participants to share their subjective experience of the phenomena of the study.

The findings of the study do not serve as a final truth that represents all Aboriginal women's hand drumming experience. This research will allow me to gain more understanding of how a part of cultural revitalization, in this case the women's hand drum, can contribute to Aboriginal women's cultural identity, social support systems and health.

Indigenous Approach

Research is the purposeful gathering of knowledge and the thoughtful extraction of meaning from it (Castellano, 2004). Qualitative research practices allow and guide this process to occur. Indigenous knowledge is fluid and is demonstrated in the unique structures of each tribal language (Kovach, 2009). The fluidity that is apparent in the unique tribal languages cannot be overlooked as it can be in Western ways of research, where English is the dominant language used to gather data (Kovach, 2009). Aboriginal people have been gathering, interpreting and sharing knowledge long before colonization began. Indigenous methodologies come from tribal and individual knowledge. Unfortunately, Indigenous knowledge has been

demoted or side-lined by Western research processes and is not always accessible at the buffet table of approaches to use (Kovach, 2009).

The Indigenous approach can and should be used when working with Aboriginal people (Kovach, 2009). An important Indigenous principle is the interconnectedness between all living things. An Indigenous approach does not follow a linear process, with each step followed by the next. Its focus is more on related elements that flow together to facilitate the goals of the research project. Some main goals of this approach are that the relationship between myself and the participants is one built on trust, and that it benefits the participants and the community (Loppie, 2007). As an Aboriginal researcher it is my responsibility to assist others in understanding our worldview in a respectful and responsible manner (Kovach, 2009).

Indigenous approaches differ from western ways of gathering and interpreting data although some of the Indigenous methodologies align with what qualitative research aims to do. (Kovach, 2009). Other differences of Indigenous approaches from Western approaches are that tribal knowledge stems from their own epistemologies and it is not acultural or apolitical (Kovach, 2009). My own beliefs about knowledge, the world and Mi'gmaq ways of knowing must be considered during each decision made during the research process (Kovach, 2009). The standardization of Indigenous knowledges can never happen as they are dependent on place and person (Kovach, 2009). When using tribal epistemologies, also known as the Indigenous methods approach, they provide a holistic picture and include words in the research and analysis such as interactional and interrelational, broad-based, whole, inclusive, animate, cyclical, fluid, and spiritual (Kovach, 2009). Indigenous methods are holistic and can create a sort of rift between the beliefs held by the Western approaches. Language matters, as it holds an Aboriginal

person's worldview (Kovach, 2009). Language is very important as it reminds us of who we are and is intertwined in our personal and cultural identity (Kovach, 2009).

A few important aspects to consider when using Indigenous methodologies are: story as a method, cultural protocols, ethical responsibility, the ways of knowing of Aboriginal people, meaning-making and self-location (Kovach, 2009).

Story is compatible with Indigenous methodologies as it honours Aboriginals' rich ancestry (Kovach, 2009). When using story as a method, trust between the researcher and participant is vital in order for the story to emerge. Stories can never be decontextualized from the teller (Kovach, 2009). From the stories of the women a holistic picture of their experiences with the hand drum group will materialize as narratives. These narratives are not only inseparable from Indigenous methodologies but have been used since time immemorial as a way of passing down knowledge within Aboriginal groups (Kovach, 2009). Narratives suit the fluidity and interpretive nature of ancestral ways of knowing. A deep respect and responsibility comes with hearing one's story as it deserves acknowledgement (Kovach, 2009).

Cultural protocols in the Listuguj Mi'gmaq community will include: commencing the sharing circle and drumming practice with a ceremonial smudge, prayer and an offering of tobacco (Sheila Swasson, personal communication, November 18, 2011).

The ethical responsibility the researcher has to participants cannot be ignored when one is using an Indigenous approach. Over the last twenty years Indigenous research protocols have been developed to protect Aboriginal people from any misconduct or unethical behaviour on the part of the researcher. There must initially be a collective agreement between the participants and the researcher that the community knowledge can be shared (Kovach, 2009). This knowledge must be held in high regard by the researcher as Indigenous people hold their cultural knowledge

as sacred. An important aspect of the ethical responsibility of the researcher is to accept and use decolonizing methodologies. Consent, ownership and use are different in the Indigenous approach from Western ways of collecting and keeping data. Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP) principles address these issues and will be discussed in more detail later in the proposal (OCAP, 2007).

A trusting relationship between the researcher and participants does not happen without effort from the researcher. Although I am an Aboriginal researcher I still must create a trusting relationship between myself and the Pugwales women. I must follow their cultural protocols, show guardianship over sacred knowledge, stand by cultural validity of knowledge and ensure that the research gives back to the community (Kovach, 2009).

Qualitative research assumes that the process is not only interpretive but that subjectivity within the research is continual (Kovach, 2009). During the meaning making process, reflexivity becomes integral to the research. Reflexivity can be described as my own self-reflection during the meaning making process. An awareness of oneself when reporting the knowledge gathered is required. An acknowledgement of my own subjectivity must be recognized and known that it can potentially influence my research findings (Kovach, 2009).

The Indigenous approach has limited literature available on how to analyze knowledge gathered through this method. Therefore when analyzing the knowledge gathered I will perform a thematic analysis. A reason I chose to use thematic analysis is that as a beginner researcher, it will provide me with the core skills needed for conducting other forms of qualitative analysis in the future (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It can be considered a tool that can be used across different analyzing methods (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis begins with open coding which breaks down data into themes, patterns, and concepts to create a meaningful story from all the

knowledge gathered. The themes, patterns and concepts then become codes which are identified across all gathered knowledge (Chilisa, 2012).

Decolonizing Methodologies

I chose to employ a decolonizing lens throughout my research instead of a post-colonial lens. The “post” in post colonialism has been criticized as describing colonialism as no longer a concern while freeing one from historical scrutiny (Kovach, 2009). It conveys that colonialism and its effects on Aboriginal people are done and over with, which is not the truth (Kovach, 2009). It is imperative when using a decolonizing methodology that we recognize the colonial interruptions of Indigenous culture that affect Aboriginals to this day.

Decolonization is a process that assists the colonized “other”, in this case Aboriginal people, understand themselves through their own assumptions, perspectives and worldviews (Chilisa, 2012). A goal of using a decolonizing lens is to create strategies that allow Aboriginal peoples’ voices to be heard and to escape the oppressive conditions that continue to silence and marginalize Aboriginal people (Chilisa, 2012). Another important goal of using a decolonizing lens is to restore cultural practices, thinking patterns, beliefs and values that may have been suppressed during colonization (Chilisa, 2012).

Linda Smith (1999) identified strategies that Aboriginal researchers can follow when incorporating a decolonization lens during research. The first is the deconstruction and reconstruction of what has been wrongly written, for instance negative labeling and culturally deficient models that made the colonized ‘other’ appear inferior. Retelling these stories of the past is a way to reconstruct and facilitate recovery and discovery (Chilisa, 2012).

The second is self-determination and social justice. This is for scholars, academics and the over researched ‘other’ (Chilisa, 2012). The Aboriginals were disempowered by past research

and assisting Aboriginals with their road to self-determination will allow people to hear the voice of this group. Social justice allows the colonized ‘other’ a chance to get away from the Western research paradigm and allows a place for them to recognize knowledge systems, values and methodologies that give meaning to their life experiences (Chilisa, 2012).

The third is ethics; Aboriginal knowledge must be held in high regard and given back to the community (Chilisa, 2012). The ethics board for Mi’gmaq research is The Mi’gmaq Ethics Watch which is set in place to ensure that we adhere to all the proper protocol when it comes to researching Aboriginal people, specifically Mi’gmaq, while adhering to the Ownership Control Access and Possession principles (OCAP, 2007).

Researcher Identity

Self-locating in qualitative research is common and important. Self-location when doing the Indigenous approach signifies cultural identification (Kovach, 2009). Self-locating is significant as I am only able to interpret the world from my own experiences. Self-location not only attaches knowledge within experience as it inevitably influences interpretations, but also questions perspectives about the objectivity challenge in research. Indigenous methodologies do not demand an analysis of the subjectivity factor in knowledge production as it is a given using this method (Kovach, 2009).

While using a qualitative approach, it is always important that the researcher understands how his or her own personal background and biases influence the entire research process. I will offer identity markers to situate myself during this process. I am a 33 year old, daughter, sister, partner, aunt, friend and most importantly a proud Mi’gmaq mother of two from Listuguj Mi’gmaq First Nation. I grew up on a reserve until I graduated high school and moved to Halifax in 2000. This experience has shaped who I am today and will continue to be a part of

who I am throughout the research process. I previously completed a Bachelor's Degree in 2005 and completed my honours thesis using participants from my reserve.

During my 15 years in Halifax, I have worked in several different jobs that were always connected to working with Aboriginal people. I am passionate about my people and their health. Growing up on a reservation and moving into an urban centre, I have had the opportunity to meet other Aboriginal people who have moved from their own reservation into the city. I began to realize that, although we come from many different reserves, we all share commonalities that are not shared with those of Euro-descent. There is a common thread that is shared between Aboriginal people and although it is difficult to explain you immediately feel more comfortable. In the urban setting, finding this sense of belonging could make or break you. Luckily for myself I was able to work at the Mi'kmaq Native Friendship Centre for years and made many connections and Aboriginal friends my first few years living in Halifax. Growing up on a reservation can make you feel marginalized from mainstream Canada but it also has the power to unite Aboriginal people from all over. My interest in Aboriginal health has always been inherent in who I am.

For my research project I was an insider and there are certain things I had to consider. There are benefits that come with being an insider such as: gaining access to this population, having in-depth knowledge of the Mi'gmaq culture which allows me to gather rich and focused data, being able to do research without changing the flow of social interaction, exploring the process rather just the outcome and already having a relationship with the participants on some level (Bonner A & Tolhurst G, 2002).

Although I am from the community and am known by many in the community there are still limitations in what I found. Participants may have been prone to tell me more because I am

who I am or they may have told me less because of who I am. Participants may have also told me things in a different way because of who I am. Many times when people move away from the reservation others unknowingly begin to hold ideas that these people think they are better than those who have stayed on reserve. Living on or off reserve has both advantages and disadvantages. This is important for my research because I needed to be aware of this going in. I have realized though that all the women were extremely open with me and many of us talked about everyday occurrences and some even shared very detailed personal stories after the interviews, when the recording stopped and we just continued to talk. Relationships were formed during my time collecting data from the Pugwales women.

Research Design

Population, Sample Size and Recruitment Procedure

Participants were adult Aboriginal women (First Nations) living on the Listuguj Mi'gmaq First Nation reserve who are part of an Aboriginal Women's hand drum group called Pugwales. I chose to use this group because: I am familiar with the participants in the group, am from that community, and they fit the selection criteria for my research purpose (Tuckett AG, 2004). There are seven to twelve women in the group. There are no strict rules on number of participants when doing qualitative research, with small numbers being used most often when the purpose of the research is to obtain in-depth and detailed information (Tuckett AG, 2004). I am studying the entire population of the Pugwales group, not only a sample of the group.

When speaking with the founder of the group she informed me that, as it is a drop in group, there can be as many as twelve women drumming at one session. A sharing circle and one-on-one story telling sessions were used until saturation was reached. Saturation occurred when analysis demonstrated that interpretations were easily detectable and clear, when

information from participants revealed no new findings or meanings, and all previous narratives became repetitive (Crist & Tanner, 2003). When saturation was achieved it was clear that no new information was forthcoming (Tuckett AG, 2004). Based on this approach, I believe saturation was achieved.

The Pugwales group is located on the Listuguj Mi'gmaq reserve and practices are held bi-weekly at a set location, determined by the group members. Contact was made with the originator of the group and she agreed to share her story of the group and also expressed that there was an interest from other women in the group to also share. Recruitment was carried out through purposeful sampling. Purposeful selection was used to identify participants according to criteria determined by the research process (Tuckett AG, 2004). I began with this criteria selection and then some snowball sampling. The latter occurred when a participant spoke of a member who is no longer in the Pugwales group or of one that she knew was not there that particular day but would be an asset to the study. At this point I got into contact with these women. All women in the group can speak, write and understand English. I initially held a sharing circle with seven of the Pugwales women. Upon completion of the sharing circle I set up one-on-one story telling sessions or interviews with each member who was interested in sharing more and with those that derived from the snowball sampling procedure.

Data Collection

A sharing circle followed by one-on-one story-telling sessions were used to investigate the relationships between being in the Pugwales hand drum group, their cultural identity, health and social support. These two methods were chosen because they lend themselves well to the Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing. In the results section of this thesis, there will be some quotations that will be introduced as simply a Pugwales member stated or described with no

indication of which Pugwales member that may be. These were quotations that were shared during the sharing circle and there is no way to be completely sure which Pugwales member said it. In other parts of the results section, there will be members of the group who were assigned a number, such as P5. I was able to do this because these were participants with whom I did the one-on-one story telling sessions and, therefore, knew for sure which Pugwales member had spoken.

A sharing circle is different from a Western-based focus group because many times in a focus group, members do not have an equal chance to be heard. Some individuals may talk more or loudly while others may be intimidated or too shy to speak. Sharing circles are based on respect for one another. A sharing circle ideally consists of six to twelve people so participation by all is possible and the group is not so small that issues are not covered (Chilisa, 2012). The circle symbolizes that everyone in the circle is equal, the sharing of and respect for others' ideas are encouraged. The sharing circle began with an offering of tobacco to one of the Pugwales members to thank them for their stories and knowledge they would be sharing. These sharing circles are not a normal part of the drumming group but were set up by myself and Sheila, the originator of the group. The sharing circle lasted a little over an hour. They can sometimes go longer or shorter depending on the flow of conversation. During the sharing circle, all women sat in a circle outside at one of the Pugwales member's home overlooking the Restigouche River. All that is discussed during the sharing circle is confidential and all women leaving the circle were not to discuss with anyone what was shared during this circle time.

Before setting up the sharing circle I contacted a friend to be a potential translator if one of the women only spoke Mi'gmaq and not English. Confidentiality forms were prepared for the

translator however, a translator was not needed as all the women were comfortable speaking in English.

When the sharing circle was completed I set up a time and a place to meet with the women who provided consent to conduct one-on-one storytelling sessions with myself. The interview location was chosen to promote confidentiality of their spoken words and the valuable information they possessed by decreasing the risk of being identified by others. When deciding on a meeting time and place for interviews, we discussed a place with the least possible interruptions in order to complete the entire interview. If meeting alone was not possible then a discussion about confidentiality would have taken place. I conducted four one-on-one storytelling sessions. I chose to do the one-on-one storytelling sessions after the sharing circle as many times there are participants who may have wanted to say more but did not for various reasons such as: ran out of time, nervousness and/or timidity of participant, and perhaps new topics arose during the circle that required a more in depth look.

Interview style

An interview guide was used, which consisted of eight to ten open ended questions that guided further extended discussion of the phenomena which I am studying. Physical expressions, vocal intonations and gestures that are not heard via the recording devices were included in my field notes and then later transcribed in the narrative text (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Probes were used to keep conversation flowing and on track. Using the semi-structured interview guide allowed me to ask each participant the same questions. The discussions that came from these questions lead us into many directions all of which were useful when analyzing the data. The flexible process of qualitative research allow us to take new information not initially forecasted but still valuable so that all important issues are covered in the data collection process.

Data Management & Analysis

The sharing circle and one-on-one story telling sessions were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Audio recording allows me as the researcher to be fully present during both the sharing circle and the interviews. During the entire research process I carried and wrote in a personal journal. This journal documented logistics and personal reflections. The reflections helped to inform my analysis. The writing occurred shortly after the sharing circle and after the one-on-one story telling sessions.

Following informed consent, the interviews, observations and the interpretation process began (Crist & Tanner, 2003). Coding commenced as soon as the sharing circle recording was transcribed and continued after each and every interview. Transcripts were analyzed by hand by myself. I went through each transcription line by line and described what each line was conveying to me. After going through half of the sharing circle transcriptions I began to see common themes or subjects that participants continuously brought up. From that point I loosely wrote and described eleven main ideas or thoughts that were emerging. I then read through all the transcripts and nearly every line fit within one of these concepts and many times fitting under more than one. After that was complete I began to see the story that was being told by the women which could be captured in four themes.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze data; as it is a method that identifies, analyzes and unveils themes in data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method is used widely in qualitative research. Its flexibility and explicit assumptions and reflexive dialogue fit well with the Indigenous approach I chose to use. It is recommended that those using thematic analysis for the first time look at other literature that has employed this type of analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This type of analysis allowed me to provide a rich and detailed description of the knowledge

gathered from the women in Pugwales women's hand drum group (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As I was only beginning to conduct research, the thematic analysis approach allowed me to develop an understanding of the theoretical and technological aspects of it (Braun & Clarke, 2006). There are two primary ways that the data can be categorized, either an inductive method also known as 'bottom up' or a deductive method or 'top down' method to analyzing data. I chose to use an inductive method for my analysis; this allowed me to unveil themes that were strongly linked to the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Using a bottom up approach I as the researcher can be faced with identified themes that bear little relation to the questions asked to the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Inductive analysis is a process of coding the data without trying to fit it into a predetermined coding frame or my own preconceptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Most qualitative research uses the inductive approach. The top down or deductive approach tends to be driven by the researcher's own theoretical or analytic interest in the area (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is unable to provide a rich description of the data.

The steps used in thematic analysis are very similar to other qualitative analysis procedures. The first step began when I as the researcher started to either notice or look for patterns of meaning and issues of potential interest in the data. This can also be done when collecting the data. Since I have collected the data myself, when it was time to analyze it, I used prior knowledge of the data and some initial analytic interests (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is important to note that writing of the analysis did not only happen at the end but began at step one (Braun & Clarke, 2006). In this first step of the process I began taking notes for ideas I may have had for coding.

In step two of the analysis I read and became familiar with the data, and had an idea about what was in the data and what parts would be useful for my research question (Braun &

Clarke, 2006). I began producing initial codes from the data. These codes are ones that were emerging to me and were the most basic element of the raw data. This coded data will differ from my themes which will be broader (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

In step three I began with all the data that was previously coded, which consisted of eleven different codes that I had identified during the first two phases. This phase was meant to look at the broader level of themes, instead of codes. I began to sort all the codes collected to see how they fit into potential themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Tables, mind-maps, or naming each code with a brief description allowed me to begin to see overarching themes and sub-themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Step four was reviewing the themes I discovered in the third step and, and included the enhancement of these themes. If there was not enough data to support a theme then it was removed as a theme. However, it could be included in the combination of two themes; while other themes may be broken down more (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This stage involved reviewing and refining themes. I looked at all coded data then reviewed whether the themes appeared to form an obvious pattern (Braun & Clarke, 2006). When I was comfortable that my thematic map worked then it was time to move onto the next phase.

Step five involved defining and refining the 'essence' of what each theme was about (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I ensured that I did not paraphrase the content of the data extracts but I did identify what is of interest in it for my research question and why (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Each theme must fit well into the broader overall 'story'. Each theme must be considered in relation to other themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). At the end of this phase I was able to clearly define what my themes were and what they were not (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Another

consideration in this phase is the proper naming of themes, using the ones that I would want in the final analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The last step, six, is producing the report. At this point I had a set of fully worked-out themes which were incorporated into the write up of the report (Braun & Clarke, 2006). My goal was to tell the story of the data I collected in a way that demonstrated the merit and validity of my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). It is concise, coherent, logical, non-repetitive and an interesting account of the stories told. When choosing to describe a theme, I used vivid examples or extracts from the data to capture the essence of the point I am trying to make (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although I broke down the analysis into several steps it must be understood that the process is not linear and I moved from one step back to the other.

The first mistake that can be made is the lack of analysis of the data. This mistake can be made by simply collecting extracts of data and stringing them together with no analytic narrative (Braun & Clarke, 2006). What is needed from the data is an illustrative view of what the data is, which should tell the reader what it does or does not mean (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

A second problem that may arise when using thematic analysis is using the same questions asked of participants as themes during analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This will produce an analysis with no analytic work done to identify themes across the entire data set or recognize the patterning of responses (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The third potential problem is a weak or unconvincing analysis. This happens when there is too much overlap between themes or the themes are not internally consistent. All themes should be able to connect with a central idea or concept (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fourth potential pitfall is a mismatch between what was discovered through analysis and the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), where themes are identified but cannot be supported by the

data. In order to avoid this type of problem it is important that researchers ensure that interpretations and analysis are consistent with the data extracts (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The fifth and final potential mistake is the mismatch between theory and analytic claims, or between the research questions and the form of thematic analysis used (Braun & Clarke, 2006). An analysis should demonstrate how interpretations on the data are consistent with the theoretical framework chosen (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

With all these potential pitfalls, what can make a good thematic analysis? I had to first realize that qualitative research cannot be understood the same way that quantitative approaches are (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Although thematic analysis is fluid and flexible as in the Indigenous approach, the researcher still must be clear and explicit about what he or she is doing, which must match up to what is actually done (Braun & Clarke, 2006). A thorough thematic will yield an insightful analysis that can answer particular research questions (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Knowledge Transfer/Translation

Research is knowledge creation for benefit (Castellano, 2004). At this time there is limited literature on the benefits of Aboriginal women's hand drum groups and its effects on their cultural identity, health and social support. With this research project I hoped to add to this important area of literature for Aboriginal well-being. I will disseminate my findings in various ways. First, research findings will be disseminated to all women involved in the research process via oral presentations and reports. Second, the findings will be disseminated through the community newsletter and website for all community members interested in learning about the research project. If there is an interest in an oral presentations to Chief and Council, I will also do that. Third, findings will be disseminated to the academic audience through conferences and

scholarly journals. Dalhousie University will also possess a permanent record in the form of a electronic thesis file upon completion.

Ethical Considerations

During the sharing circle I used a voice recorder so that I could be fully present at all times during the circle. A transcriptionist was used to transcribe the sharing circle and one-on-one story telling sessions. This individual reviewed and signed a confidentiality agreement. The transcripts, recordings and journals were always kept in a secure area. Upon data completion, all data and descriptions were wiped of all identifying features. Dalhousie's ethical protocol regarding storage of research data states that all data is kept for a minimum of five years and then destroyed. My supervisor Dr. Lynne Robinson and I were the only individuals who had access to this locked research data. Abiding by the Owner Control Access Possession would have permitted the community to possess or access the research then they were able to, but a member of the Pugwales group declined an invitation to store the research.

Ethics of Aboriginal Research

It must be understood when doing research with Aboriginal people that their perceptions of reality and correct behaviour are very different from the norms that exist in Western research practices (Castellano, 2004). It was not long ago that many Aboriginal people refused or unwillingly took part in research because of the negative effects research had on them and their communities in the past. Past research from outsiders has contributed to the colonist perspective of Aboriginal incapacity and the need for paternalistic control. Past research was many times disrespectful, damaging and left many Aboriginal people and their communities forever stigmatized (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). Research done on Aboriginal people in the past left a legacy of distrust, negative experiences and a reluctance of Aboriginal

people to participate in future research (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). It excluded Aboriginal people from the process of research. Ownership Control Access Possession (OCAP) principles and the Mi'gmaq Ethics Watch model were developed as a political response to the poor past research relationships between Aboriginal people and research community (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007) There are ethical codes and standards that are used when researching Aboriginal people or their community, more specifically, for this research project, the Ownership Control Access and Possession (OCAP) and the Mi'gmaq Ethics Watch Model.

In 1992, at a workshop in Alberta a common theme emerged from the Aboriginal people. It was “We’ve been researched to death” (Castellano, 2004, p.98). Many people felt that there was too much research done on them without them seeing any positive results. There needs to be an agreement that there will be some benefit from the research to the community. According to Castellano (2004) at this workshop an Elder spoke out and said that “...maybe it’s time we started researching ourselves back to life” (p.98). This too may have been the turning point; research did not have to be a bad thing if done the right way.

Aboriginal people have been doing their own research since time immemorial. Research was conducted in their own communities in order to update and adapt knowledge so they could survive in a changing environment. They had ethical codes that were passed down orally and non-verbally through family and community relationships (Castellano, 2004). Traditional teachings were passed down through observations, storytelling, songs, ceremonies and engagement with the natural world. Many traditions and protocols still exist today for gathering information, for example an offering of tobacco or gift to symbolize that you are accepting the ethical obligation that goes with receiving the knowledge from the participants (Castellano,

2004). Scientific research emphasizes objectivity by creating a distance between the researcher and the participants; this breaks an Aboriginal Ethics code with respect to the reciprocal relationship and collective validation (Castellano, 2004).

The second edition of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS) includes chapter 9 which discusses any research involving First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples in Canada. When doing research in an Aboriginal community, the researcher must abide by these guidelines. Any research practices already established in the community also must be followed (Tri Council, 2010). TCPS emphasizes the necessity to create research that has equitable partnerships and provide a safeguard for First Nations, Inuit and Metis people (Tri Council, 2010).

Research involving Aboriginal peoples is built on respectful relationships. In my study respectful relationships were created with each of the participants. As a researcher in the community I was informed of respected customs of research practice that applied with this group of Mi'gmaq women (Tri Council, 2010). For my data collection, my plan was to do a talking circle until I was informed differently by one of the women who is traditionalist or a woman with special gifts. She was a fluent Mi'gmaq speaker and had varied roles. She was a transmitter of traditional knowledge and had the responsibility of conserving and transmitting traditional knowledge and expressions of culture. She conducted ceremonies, passed on oral history, and offered guidance (Tri Council, 2010). With her traditional knowledge and guidance the group decided that we would not do a talking circle but instead a sharing circle. She informed us that there are certain protocols that need to be adhered to if we were to perform a proper talking circle and we were not prepared at the time. Because customs are predominately orally passed down, it

was not written that this was part of their code of research or procedure when collecting the data. My research design changed to suit their specific codes of research and procedure.

According to the TCPS, the research should be relevant to community needs and priorities and have potential to produce valued outcomes from the perspectives of the community and members (Tri Council, 2010). My research study has the potential to create positive opportunities to promote well-being in the community.

In the TCPS (2010) it was mentioned that many First Nation communities across Canada use ethics codes that were developed to oversee the research done for the First Nations Regional Longitudinal Health Survey. The code asserts ownership, control, access and possession (OCAP) of the research done in Aboriginal communities (Tri Council, 2010).

OCAP Principles

Ownership control access and possession (OCAP) was originally articulated in 1998 as OCA but with a heightened interest in the issue of Aboriginal ownership of the information , the name was changed to add possession during the inception of the Regional Health Survey (RHS) (National Aboriginal Health Organization. First Nations Centre, 2007). The OCAP principles apply to all research that involve Aboriginal people in Canada. OCAP is a vehicle to ensure that research is beneficial to communities and if it is not found to be beneficial then it can be stopped. The core principles allow for self-determination over all research concerning Aboriginal people (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). A good research project can do four things; create new knowledge, add to knowledge, foster positive change and confirm things that are working well.

Ownership of the data means that the community or group collectively owns the cultural knowledge, data and information. It can be compared to the same way an individual owns their

personal information (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). Control affirms that Aboriginal people, their communities and representative bodies have rights to seek full control of all aspects of the research process. They may choose to have control from conception to completion of the project (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). Access means that the Aboriginal people are able to access the information and data about either themselves or their community regardless where it is held (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). Possession is more literal than ownership. I will have copies of my thesis available to them when it is completed. It is not a condition of ownership but ownership is an instrument by which ownership can be asserted and protected. For example when data is owned by one party yet in the possession of another, there is a risk of breach of confidentiality. **OCAP is about doing research the Aboriginal way for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people (National Aboriginal Health Organization. First Nations Centre, 2007).**

Mi'kmaq Ethics Watch

Along with approval from the Dalhousie Ethics Review Board, approval from the Mi'gmaq Ethics Watch Model was attained. The Mi'gmaq Ethics Watch Model was adopted by the Grand Council of Mi'gmaq to emphasize that the Mi'gmaq people are not only the guardians but the interpreters of their own culture and knowledge systems (<http://www.cbu.ca/aboriginal-affairs/unamaki-college/mikmaq-ethics-watch/>, 2016) (Castellano, 2004). Principles and guidelines were developed to ensure that any research with or among Mi'gmaq people followed certain protocols, which include a formal review process, a process that ensures outside organizations adhere to the highest standards of research, all the while carrying a special sensitivity and respect to the Mi'gmaq people and their communities (National Aboriginal Health Organization. First Nations Centre. 2007). These guidelines also safeguard the right of

ownership of the Mi'gmaq knowledge and heritage which stays in the appropriate Mi'gmaq community (National Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007). Aboriginal Health Organization, 2007).

Informed Consent

At the beginning of the research project, informed consent of the women participating was given. Consent forms were written at a grade six level to ensure that all women participating fully understood the research project. A complete description of the study, issues of confidentiality, risk and benefits of the study, and how information will be collected, stored and disseminated was in the consent form that was signed by each participant. Each participant was made well aware that participation was purely voluntarily and a participant could have withdrawn at any point during the research study without consequences. Before the sharing circle and one-on-one story telling sessions began, I went over the consent forms and answered any questions the participants may have had. Upon completing the signed consent forms, one copy was stored in a secure location while the other was given to the participant. Each form had all my contact information if needed.

Confidentiality

Anonymity of participants and what is shared in the circle is impossible to uphold. As the circle is considered very sacred I strongly believe that the women would not share any of the stories with those who were not present during the circle. When transcribing the sharing circle all names and identifiers were removed. For the one-on-one story telling sessions confidentiality was easier to maintain. Allowing the participants to choose the location of the interview allowed them the option of where they would feel most comfortable sharing. I did not foresee any issues of wanting to share knowledge because their stories will give many of them great pride.

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

In this study seven women shared their experiences and feelings about being in the Pugwales women's hand drum group. Data was gathered via a sharing circle which lasted approximately one and a half hours where four of the Pugwales members participated. I later interviewed four women from the group for the one-on-one story telling sessions. The story telling sessions lasted between 45 minutes to one and a half hours. One Pugwales member participated in both. The women's ages ranged from 40 to 59 years old.

As I read through the transcripts from the sharing circle and the one-on-one story telling sessions, themes and sub themes began to emerge. The main themes organically tell a story of how the Pugwales members felt that the drum group provided safety and comfort. This comfort and being able to support one another during good times and bad created a "sisterhood". This sisterhood allowed the women to gain confidence and strength in their ability to overcome loss, to sing and grow personally. What brought these women together was their cultural traditions, specifically Aboriginal women's hand drumming. It was an opportunity for these women to take back some of what was lost through colonization, it gave them a chance to be a part of rebuilding and revitalizing not only hand drumming but the Mi'gmaq language. One way to rebuild cultural traditions is by sharing and teaching others. Being in the drum group and a part of their cultural traditions had a positive impact on their overall well-being. The women felt good when they listened, drummed for themselves and/or drummed for others. The women shared their music with the community during times of loss, times of celebration and solidarity marches such as the Idle No More movement. It was during these performances that the women described overwhelming feelings as though something larger than themselves was present. This is also when they felt the most spiritually connected. This feeling of connectedness stems from the

Pugwales members feeling a sense of sisterhood and taking part in a culturally relevant activity such as hand drumming.

Sisterhood

Group Provides Feelings of Comfort and Safety

A sub-theme that emerged was the idea or feeling that the Pugwales hand drum group provided safety. The group provided a safe space for the women to share stories in a supportive environment, giving the women a sense of belonging and friendship. “It’s learning and it’s a safe environment”, said a Pugwales member when referring to being in the group. They also felt accepted in the group and enjoyed the flexible schedule.

The women who joined the group described feeling included, safe, and comfortable, from the first day of joining. Pugwales members shared that these feelings developed from: being accepted into the group, having a flexible practice and performance schedule, and having members being able to rejoin the group, all of which assisted in the women forming friendships within the group. A Pugwales member recounted her first time seeing the Pugwales drum group perform. She described how she went up to a member afterwards and asked how she could be a part of the group *“so I approached [a current member] right away and she said yes definitely come, they were very encouraging for me to be there, the others were very welcoming to me.”* The response demonstrates how the Pugwales group is open and inclusive to all. The group promotes inclusiveness making it easier for women to join the group or just join in when Pugwales members are drumming.

The women mentioned that the group had a flexible rehearsal and performance schedule allowing them to not feel obligated or guilty if they were not available for a practice or performance. One woman described this flexible schedule as having *“an open-door policy,*

nobody is like, you've got to be here three times or you can't stay you know. And I think, you have that flexibility so there's no expectations." As the pressure to be present at each practice and/or each event is not there it fosters a relationship where women can feel safe and comfortable knowing that even if they missed some practices or performances they are always still welcome in the group. This flexibility and feelings of safety and support aided in creating long lasting friendships and a sense of belonging among the Pugwales members. Since the women are always welcomed in or back into the group, a core group of women formed supportive relationships over the years.

Supporting Each Other

These supportive relationships within the group emerged as a sub theme. All the women described being able to form friendships, "a sisterhood" as one woman said. Support for one another developed through: long lasting friendships, comforting one another during difficult times, sharing stories and being a part of the group.

Drum practice for the women in the Pugwales drum group was not only about learning how to play the drum. P6 described the difference in learning hand drumming compared to learning another instrument: *"Whenever we got together to drum, we would drum and we would talk and we would share so it wasn't just drumming or just learning a song as if you would go to say a guitar lesson or a piano lesson, that's the only objective, is to learn a certain thing. But in our group it was more holistic."* A holistic approach was taken during practice, where sharing and supporting each other was important and this was articulated by the Pugwales members throughout the collection of my data.

Friendship and support from the group was communicated when a Pugwales member said, *"We've all known one another and through good times, bad times, I mean we're still here*

for one another.” The women, because of the safety and comfort level they felt in the group not only shared stories of everyday occurrences with each other but also sought, received and gave advice and guidance to others in the group when needed. Feeling comfortable in the group allows the women to feel they can talk to other members when they themselves are going through a difficult time. One of the Pugwales member describes how this would normally transpire during one of their practices: *“You know it just comes out, it comes out freely and naturally and then you have your other, your sisters sitting there that are giving you advice.”* Sharing stories is an important part of the practices. Pugwales drum practices were described by a member as, *“Our practices aren’t just about singing, cause we come together, we’ll sing a couple of songs, a song and then we sit back and we start talking about different things that are going on in our lives, and sharing.”* P5 depicted the practices as, *“Well, when I go, it’s always positive experiences, it’s always good energy, they’re always laughing and it’s, there’s never, I never feel uncomfortable when I’m there”.*

While the Pugwales drum group talked about events in their own lives during practices, they shared that many conversations would lead to discussions about the community as a whole. A Pugwales member explains,

“Cause we come from a community and as Native people we’re very collective, so whenever there’s something going on in our community at times we would say a prayer cause it affected us. It doesn’t just affect that person, it affects all of us, so we would say a prayer and pray for the family and that’s how we would start off the evening by always acknowledging again of where we are at in the community.”

By supporting each other through sharing stories, offering and receiving support, the Pugwales women found themselves growing as individuals.

Personal Growth

Some of the women described their personal growth through the inclusion in the Pugwales drum group. Elders and traditional Mi'gmaq orally pass down Aboriginal cultural teachings. These teachings allowed them to reflect on themselves, which fostered awareness into other parts of their lives. Creating "*awareness into other things*" in her life was described by P7 as one of the benefits of being in the group. The group, while remaining supportive, also "*pushes me on a personal level to do things that I normally, I wouldn't do.*" P6 expressed that a part of her personal growth was because she felt that she was participating in an activity that she had not previously done, so she was not sure how it would make her feel. She described how the group never knows how they will be received when they perform. However, what was important was that they forged ahead and faced the unknown. "*That's part of learning and growing to go ahead and to face those things.*" This personal growth arose as a result of being part of the group and experiencing the positive effects of being the Pugwales drum group.

Strength and Confidence

The women felt a sense of support and encouragement from others in the group. The Pugwales members experienced support during difficult times and encouragement leading to an increased confidence in their ability to sing as well as a sense of increased confidence and strength in the women in general. Two of the women described dealing with the loss of a loved one and how the group supported them through the grieving process. The strength, support and

understanding the group provided to one member was instrumental in her healing journey after losing a parent

I stayed with the group and I think more than any other time in my life, I needed the group, to be part of it, to feel that life is going to go on and it's going to be normal and I rattled and nobody gave it a second thought. I was just, I was in with their arms around me, I just and it helped me, it kept me going.

Another Pugwales member talked not only about the loss of a loved one, but falling into a depression not long after. Even leaving the house became an arduous task. With a little encouragement, she joined the group. Although she is one of the oldest members, she described herself as the “newbie” of the group. She talked about how little by little she began to go out more, and how participating in the group gave her strength to do so.

It was giving me strength and I was going out again and doing little things at a time... And that's how I go through a lot of my days, but they're getting stronger, they're really getting stronger, and I like getting together so I like playing, or drumming we call it, but I like being together too. It makes me feel stronger and I feel so like wow when I go home. That's how I feel.

As well as speaking of overcoming tragedies in their lives, they spoke of gaining confidence in themselves and their own ability to sing after joining the group. A few of the women spoke of a new found confidence they found in themselves to sing. P6 described remembering being told that she could not sing all her life, so she believed it. When she first started singing with the group this lack of confidence in her own ability to sing was something that was always in the back of her mind. She reported that she would sing lower than the others so that her voice would not stand out. Others in the group during the sharing circle spoke of the

day that P6 overcame this lack of confidence in her own singing. During the sharing circle, I heard and saw the pride that the other members of the group had for this woman in her overcoming her lack of confidence when it came to singing: *“She believed it (not having a good singing voice) because that’s what she was told and then she started singing with us and then I see her belting it out and giving her.”*

From singing so low as to not be heard, to singing loud and proud for all to hear can be considered a significant step in P6 overcoming her lack of confidence when it came to singing. P6 attributed increased confidence to the support she felt from the group. With the group’s support, P6 felt a level of comfort: *“When I do expose myself I’m not doing it by myself, I’m with another group of women that I know will support me and encourage me.”* Feelings of strength, increased confidence and support from the Pugwales drum group positively affected their emotional well-being. Another factor that increased their emotional well-being was the knowledge that by practicing their cultural traditions, hand drumming, they were assisting in rebuilding cultural traditions in the community.

Culture

Culture was not taught or around us

The women described growing up in an era where traditional practices were not carried out or celebrated in the community nor were they taught in the school system. A Pugwales member explained that *“when I grew up I never saw that, I didn’t have any of that [drumming], I never heard it, it wasn’t part of our events...”* The loss of language and cultural practices during their generation was described by P5 *“our language and our culture was stolen from us.”* During these years because of the loss of so many cultural practices and the decreased importance placed on the Mi’gmaq language, their own cultural identity or sense of who they were as Mi’gmaq

people was almost lost. One woman describes feeling that “*I didn’t know why we were Indians*”. During this era all school aged children including me went to school in Campbellton, New Brunswick. We, as Mi’gmaq students, unknowingly sacrificed social studies, a class that was part of the core curriculum, in order to learn about our Mi’gmaq culture. Mi’gmaq students had one time slot set aside for Mi’gmaq class we learned the Mi’gmaq language and made crafts while the non-natives were taught social studies. It is my belief that instead of singling out the Aboriginal students and taking them to another classroom, the whole class, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, should have learned about the Mi’gmaq, the history, the language and the customs. Slowly it is being recognized that the history being taught in the school system is taught using a western perspective, and is not a true reflection of the history of Aboriginal people in Canada. Thankfully the Listuguj Mi’gmaq community rose against this way of teaching the children and instead saw the importance of not only learning the province’s curriculum but the importance of learning their own culture. It was time that our community members learned “*...why we are Indians*”.

Rebuilding Cultural Traditions

The importance of rebuilding cultural traditions was articulated by a few of the Pugwales members. The women spoke of growing up in an era where cultural practices such as drumming were not widely practiced in the community. When the Pugwales drum group formed, many of the women saw this as an opportunity to be a part of their own cultural traditions. By being a part of the group, and by sharing their music with the community the group promoted the cultural revitalization of Aboriginal women’s hand drumming. This cultural revitalization for the Pugwales women is achieved through investing time in learning and teaching cultural protocols surrounding the drum, the Mi’gmaq language and sacred cultural teachings.

All of the women expressed the importance of being respectful of certain protocols that surround the drum. Following cultural protocols while partaking in cultural activities such as hand drumming gives strength to the cultural revitalization of traditional ways.

Being a part of the group was not just about learning to drum as an emphasis was placed on teaching and sharing your traditional knowledge with others. Sharing and teaching requires the Pugwales drum group to invest time in themselves and also invest time in others. Through the group they learn and they share; they learn and share the songs, they learn and share the language and they learn and share knowledge of sacred teachings. Learning and sharing the songs, the language and the cultural traditions is instrumental in rebuilding cultural traditions and supporting cultural revitalization. Rebuilding cultural traditions is crucial as many traditional practices were lost since colonization began, resulting in years of cultural oppression and attempted assimilation of the Mi'gmaq nation and its rich culture. An intergenerational effect of colonization was still felt for many of the Pugwales drum group members as they recalled not seeing or experiencing cultural traditions being practiced in the community.

Being a part of their cultural traditions

Aboriginal women's hand drumming allows the Pugwales women to take part in their cultural traditions, an important aspect of their cultural identity as Mi'gmaq women. P6, expressed that *"I wanted to be part of a group of women that was doing something culturally relevant."* Practicing and sharing music with the community, the women are honouring traditional ways of their ancestors. The Pugwales drum group serves as a medium in which a traditional practice (drumming) can be passed down to future generations. A sense of responsibility to the past and to the future was described by a Pugwales member as *"Being part of the group makes me feel like I have a, like a sense of responsibility to my people. You know the*

generation before, our ancestors, the generation now and the future generations.” Another Pugwales member stated *“I feel it’s a responsibility and we’re teachers.”* Oral transmission of cultural knowledge, practices and protocols is vital for preserving and rebuilding and revitalizing cultural Mi’gmaq traditions.

Revitalization

The revitalization of several traditional cultural practices began to be more visible and practiced here on the East coast about twenty years ago. These are the same traditional ceremonies and practices that Aboriginal people were once punished for by the Canadian government. These ceremonies and traditional practices are now being respected, honoured and celebrated. An example of this celebration of Aboriginal traditional ways was during the opening ceremonies of the 2010 Olympics in Vancouver, British Columbia. The opening ceremony had over 500 Aboriginal people dressed in traditional attire, dancing to the beat of the drum. Canada took this opportunity to showcase the rich culture that Aboriginal people possess.

In 2007, the Alaqsite’w Gitpu School (AGS) was opened on the Listuguj Mi’gmaq First Nation, accommodating nursery up to grade eight. Students from the community who attended this school were exposed to Mi’gmaq traditional ways. AGS hosts events such as: culture days, mini pow wows and ceremonies to celebrate the changing of the seasons and a day to celebrate their grandparents (Elders). The Mi’gmaq language is viewed as an important language that could be forever lost without the efforts behind the cultural revitalization of the language. At AGS, parents have a choice to enroll their child into Mi’gmaq immersion, which is from nursery until grade three. The recognition and importance of our Mi’gmaq traditional ways is being received and respected by not only the Mi’gmaq people but many others. The AGS on reserve allows students to experience both non-indigenous and indigenous ways of learning and

knowing. The students still learn all that is required by the province of Quebec and are also able to learn about their own cultural identity. This is done through strongly promoting the Mi'gmaq language, introducing students to traditional ceremonies and showing students Mi'gmaq ways of hunting, fishing and gathering. Students who attend or attended the school on reserve are fortunate because who they are as Listuguj Mi'gmaq people is on the forefront and what is reflected in the curriculum. A Pugwales member puts things in perspective when she explains *“that kids that are under the age of 22 think that’s how we’ve lived all our lives. That wasn’t the first half of our lives, there was no drum, there was no powwow, there was no singing, there was no ceremony or celebration, but it’s a brand new chapter now and we’re part of that, sharing the revitalization.”*

An important part of cultural revitalization is passing down the teachings to the younger generation. To keep the cultural practices alive there is a need to not only learn them but share that knowledge with others. A lot of the cultural revitalization occurs on reserve and an important component contributing to this revitalization of “our” ways is the incorporation of them in the school system on reserve. A Pugwales member describes how *“it’s important to share and often there’s children around... So I think wow, I hope I’m making a difference with these little ones, and then you see them come up with their own drums.”* All cultural practices and ceremonies are accompanied by cultural protocol. These protocols are based on the concept of respect and are passed down orally with the teachings of cultural practices.

Cultural Protocols

The Pugwales women treat the drum with respect as they consider it a sacred object. It is an unwritten rule that when using the hand drum that *“you have to be alcohol and drug free for four days before.”* The power of the drum was discussed. During the sharing circle a Pugwales

member described that after the passing of another group member's mother, that group member did not use her drum: *"when her mom passed she couldn't touch her drum for a year, so she used a rattle for a whole year."*

Cultural protocols frame and guide all Aboriginal traditional practices. These protocols are not written down in a book. They are passed down orally or are learned when participating in a certain traditional practice or ceremony. P7 explained the ceremony that she took part in when she completed her first drum.

we did a ceremony in school with an [elder], to connect ourselves with our drum, he used bear grease and red ochre... you have to take the ochre and rub it on your drum yourself, and your stick, and then he makes you recite something, and then after that process is done, he instructs you to go outside and to face the sun with your drum for about five, ten minutes and say a prayer and talk to your drum and then you've made that connection. So my drum and myself are one now.

The women shared a few of the unwritten protocols that go along with Aboriginal women's drumming. The Pugwales members discussed the importance of caring for their drum. The drum is to be kept in a cloth bag, never to get wet and always warmed before using the drum. P1 speaks of how her grandson recognizes the importance of caring for the drum: *"when he puts it [the drum] away he puts it in the bag and everything like that...cause he knows that he has to treat it special."* Another example of how the women demonstrated the importance of caring for their drums was when a Pugwales member was flying somewhere and decided that the drum would accompany her on the plane. Her reasoning behind that was fear that her drum would not be treated with the same respect she valued and practiced if she had simply checked it with her luggage.

When women are on their menstrual cycle, it has been said that is when they are most powerful and should not use the drum. Menstruating is seen as a form of cleansing for Aboriginal women; therefore, they do not need to take part in other ceremonies that are meant to cleanse the mind, body and spirit. (e.g., sweat lodge and smudging). One Pugwales member describes that you can still take part “...*some of us that are on our time, ones that still have it but, and you can't use the drum but we'll, being outside or join in, but they don't use the drum.*” The topic of wearing a skirt was brought up by the women “*when you do a ceremony you wear a skirt.*” In regards to drumming the women said that the type of event influenced whether they were to wear a skirt or not. One such occasion that a skirt would be required was when the women were asked to drum at a dead feast, “*a dead feast is the family will put on a dead feast a year after a loved one's death.*”

Ceremonies come with cultural protocols. Traditional ceremonies have cultural protocols that have been passed down from generation to generation. In a traditional ceremony, there are Mi'gmaq traditionalists who lead the ceremony and teach/share the cultural protocol teachings surrounding that ceremony. One of the Pugwales members in the sharing circle is someone who is seen as the more traditional one in the group. She has for many years facilitated and taken part in traditional ceremonies, and she has “lived the red road” for many years (i.e. is alcohol and drug free). One of the main points she wanted to express was that “*ceremonies are done and the proper protocol that we follow and that respect, it's that respect that's there and it's not written anywhere but it's followed because of that respect.*” P5 also touches on respect in regards to the male drum group. There may be differences between the two groups but a common thread is the respect that is given to protocols “*I have to respect that they have their own protocol just like us or in doing powwow protocol or sweat lodge, you have to respect that protocol.*”

A key component to cultural protocol is respect, this is attained through respecting: sobriety guidelines, the care of the drum, the power of the drum (no drumming during menstrual cycle), proper ceremony when beginning to drum, and recommendations for proper attire (skirt). Cultural protocols surrounding the drum must be taught. This is done by the women first learning the cultural protocols then teaching or sharing with others.

Learning and teaching

Sitting with the Pugwales women it was clearly articulated that teaching and/or sharing what they had learned was an essential part of being in the group. One member described when the group first formed “*we just went all in, and started sharing the words and teaching right away, and this is 2010.*” When learning a new song P6 said, “*we help each other learn the songs and to, the correct way to say them [Mi’gmaq words].*” Because almost all of the songs are in Mi’gmaq and only two Pugwales members are fluent speakers, being able to pronounce the words correctly was learned and shared amongst the Pugwales group. P6 described the process in which she learned a song and how she shared that with the group “*I took this song and I taught myself it, the gathering song. So then I taught the girls, we listened to it and I gave them the words, and we went through it and we practiced it.*” The women in the Pugwales group not only share what they have learned within the group they also share with their family members “*it’s something that I’m trying to pass down to my family.*” Fundamental to revitalizing Mi’gmaq traditional ways is to pass down the language and the teachings received from Elders and traditional Mi’gmaq people. All of the women expressed the importance of investing time in learning and teaching the language and cultural teachings.

Investing Time

The Pugwales women discussed the importance of scheduling time to get together as a group to practice, “*we need to give time to this, it needs nurturing and as a group we need to practice.*” Being a part of their cultural traditions was important to them and this was reflected in how the women spoke of the importance of investing their time into it. Two of the Pugwales members discussed the difficulty in finding a time that best meets the needs of all the group members. All the Pugwales members live busy lives with almost all of them working full time jobs. It was apparent that all the women enjoyed being in the group and that it had positively affected their lives. The only recommendation Pugwales group members expressed was the need to get together more often, “*we’re going to meet again and we should be doing sooner and not so far.*” P5 said how time constraints affected her participation in the group “*the main reason that I’m not in the drum group right now is because I don’t have time.*” Investing time is critical when learning and teaching Aboriginal women’s drumming as practice is needed to prepare members for when they share music with the community. Learning any language requires an investment of time however, their passion and desire to learn Mi’gmaq allowed the women to view this investment as an opportunity and not a challenge.

Language

The Mi’gmaq language is an important component of Pugwales members’ cultural identity. The language is intrinsically woven into who they are as Listuguj Mi’gmaq women. A couple of the Pugwales women explained that they “*... understand about 85% of what I [they] hear*” of the Mi’gmaq language, but were not fluent. Two members shared that they were fluent speakers. A few of the women shared that, although they were not fluent Mi’gmaq speakers, they were always trying to learn: “*I shared with you that I’d been learning the language.*” The desire

to be fluent in the Mi'gmaq language was shared by all the women, *"It makes me wish that I could speak fluently, I could have a conversation all in Mi'kmaq you know. And there's the loss, I feel a loss within because I don't have that"*. As one Pugwales member, explained, when asked if all the songs were in the Mi'gmaq language *"Most of them are in Mi'gmaq and we try to stick to that."* This gives the Pugwales women another opportunity to learn and practice the language. When drumming and singing the songs in Mi'gmaq, one member shared that *"I know the words, I'm confident when I say the words, what they mean and how to say them"*. Regardless of whether they were fluent speakers, being in the group supported the women in their passion to understand and speak the language fluently. The words had a different emotional effect when the women were able to correctly pronounce each word and understand their meaning. P5 explained how she is not a fluent speaker, but how being able to sing the songs in Mi'gmaq affected her:

I can sing a song and know the words and understand it just as well as anybody else, so it really gives you a different perspective as a non-speaker where you feel excluded in any other situation in the community. You're finally in the same boat as everybody else. I'm saying the words, I'm saying them properly, I'm singing them, I understand them so you feel something that you don't ever feel as a non-speaker every day, so that, it's really, really good.

The emphasis placed on the importance of practicing the Mi'gmaq language is instrumental in the revitalization of it: *"even though there are women that can't speak or understand, you can still learn the song and sing it. So I think in that way we're still helping to promote the language."* One member shared the importance of keeping the language alive and how in her own life she had ways to ensure this happened, *"we [family and friends] always*

promised that no matter what when we get together we would do the language, speak the language and if you forget it you ask somebody who knows.”

Fluent Mi’gmaq speakers described a different emotional experience when they heard something sung or said in the Mi’gmaq language. One Pugwales member proudly gives detail: *“When it’s done a prayer or even a spoken in our language, it’s very strong, it’s more strong than, you could tell me something[in English] and then if somebody else comes and says it in Mi’gmaq that will be more stronger for me. That’s stronger, it’s like, it’s said in, like your heart, it’s like oh it’s just, to me the language.”* Mi’gmaq is her first language. While singing the songs in Mi’gmaq she describes how *“One word can mean a lot of words, and so sometimes they say that and when a song comes out or when we’re doing it, I can feel, I know that word is coming up or the phrase and I’m singing and I could just feel that word, will be the strongest one sometimes.”* Another member spoke of the loss of her father, a Mi’gmaq speaker, describing how she was proud that she was able to drum and sing in Mi’gmaq to him before he passed and how he responded when she did. *“I remember when I would sing, cause my dad was still alive when I was first joining and I would sing to him and he would be like oh my god, those words, like it was so emotional for him and I didn’t feel the same way.”* Strong positive feelings were connected with being a fluent speaker and hearing the traditional language. Similar to how Pugwales members are acquiring the Mi’gmaq language through learning and teaching, members in the group learn and share cultural teachings.

Teachings

Traditional Mi’gmaq teachings are passed down orally from generation to generation. The Pugwales women shared with me some of the teachings they felt they had gained after being in the group. An important teaching that a few of the Pugwales women shared was that being

able to drum and sing was regarded as “*a gift*”. One Pugwales member described the personal growth she experienced because of the teachings she gained being in the Pugwales group. One teaching was “...*that there is a woman’s place and there’s a man’s place and this is a woman’s drum and that’s the man’s drum.*” The Pugwales women discussed the traditional big drum and the hand drum. They explained how the men traditionally sit at the big drum and the women stand behind them and sing if they wanted to. A Pugwales member spoke of a time when this divide angered her; she did not feel that it was fair that because she was a woman she could not use the big drum. Learning and respecting this teaching allowed her to find peace within herself for this protocol. She also shared another teaching she received, “*it’s going to flow like it’s going to flow. You can’t script anything, you can’t plan it, just go with it.*” This was an important teaching as Pugwales members performed at many different functions and events in the community. It was important to not focus too much on how their performance would sound or be received. One scenario where there was no script was when the Pugwales women went into the church to sing for a funeral. They did not have a scripted plan on how things would unfold in the Catholic Church but they would push forward nonetheless. It was during one of these times that Pugwales members felt the most spiritually connected. Good feelings came from many different aspects of participating in traditional hand drumming.

Well-Being

Good Feelings

Whether the women drummed, sang or just listened to drumming, they described feeling good. Positive feelings were experienced and described as stemming from just being together with the group. Feeling good could be associated with positive feelings such as feeling content, proud, happy, and excited, amongst others. Reading through the transcripts many of the women

described “feeling good”, I interpreted this to describe positive feelings they felt and was meant to represent a number of different feelings that they considered positive. The Pugwales women spoke of themselves feeling good when drumming and good feelings when they were just listening to drumming such as at the pow wow. The drum provided healing medicine for themselves, but when shared it provided healing medicine for those in need.

Good feelings from drumming

The Pugwales members spoke of how they felt when they drummed. They described drumming as clearing the mind and how after a practice or performance they felt energetic, motivated and inspired, *“it’s euphoric”*. The energetic good feelings after a practice were described by a Pugwales member as *“it’s such a nice feeling. I’m so peppy.”*

A Pugwales member spoke of her mental state before and after a practice *“I can go in with a cloudy mind or anything but once I start, there’s nothing there but us and after I do feel really good.”* Another member shared that *“going in, if I have something on my mind going in, the minute I beat that drum it’s gone. And it’s just me, the song, and the drum”*.

Another Pugwales member explained that you do not necessarily have to have had a bad day to experience the healing benefits of the drum, *“Even if I have a good day and I’m going to practice, after we’re done I feel even that much better”*. The women not only drummed at a practice or performance, many would drum when they were home *“There’s times where there’s no practice and I’ll just sit there and I’ll warm my drum up at home and I’ll sing, and I’ll sing, and I’ll sing cause it just feels good.”* The women described drumming as providing medicine and healing to themselves. A few of the women shared that on days when they were feeling sad, they would take the drum out and the medicine that drumming provided always lifted their spirits. If they were just at home and not feeling the best they could rely on the medicine from

the drum. *“One time I felt really bad about something, and sad about something, so I took my drum out and I just started playing it and it felt so good after, I said oh that’s what I needed, that’s what my spirit needed was to just drum.”* One Pugwales member said that drumming with the Pugwales drum group gave her a feeling of strength and added to her cultural pride, *“Well most of the time when I do the drumming with the girls, I feel that I’m a stronger Mi’kmaq woman.”* I interpreted this statement as an increased awareness into her own cultural identity. This led to a sense of empowerment for herself as a Mi’gmaq woman.

The cultural connectedness felt through the language was explained by a Pugwales member; when songs are in Mi’gmaq *“I feel proud to do that you know it gives me a sense of pride to stand there and you know I know my language, I can sing it, I can understand it, and to be part of something that’s like it’s positive for sure, incredibly positive and it’s empowering.”* The benefits of the drum can be extended to those who listen to drumming.

Good feelings from listening

Several Pugwales members expressed the effects they felt when listening to drumming. Although at times Pugwales members were not drumming they expressed the importance of hearing the drumming and how it positively impacted them, emotionally and spiritually. All of the Pugwales members shared that they attended the Listuguj Mi’gmaq pow wow the previous weekend.

The pow wow is a traditional gathering where drumming and dancing happen during the summer in different First Nation communities. The pow wows are weekend long events. On Saturday, the days begin with a grand entry starting usually at one. The host drum drums and the procession begins with the sacred staff carriers, who are respected Elders and/or respected traditional members of the Aboriginal community followed by Aboriginal veterans carrying the

Canadian, American, Mi'gmaq and at times other flags. Next is Chief and Council of the community followed by the head dancers for the pow wow, one male and one female dancer. Following the head dancers all dancers are grouped according to their style of dance, the grass dancers, jingle dress, and fancy shawl followed by women's and men's traditional. It is important to note that before the procession begins that the grass dancers are first asked to dance on the grounds; dancing is a form of prayer and they are asked to bless the grounds before the pow wow begins. Dancing and drumming will usually go on until around 4 in the afternoon and, similar to the grand entry, there is a grand exit for that day. A sacred fire is lit the day before the pow wow begins and is kept lit the entire length of the pow wow.

A Pugwales member described attending the pow wow, sitting and listening and that she left feeling good and with a sense of accomplishment, "*I walked away and I'm like wow that was good for my soul.*" Another member shared "*the whole powwow and hearing the drums and you know at the end of the day I was like it felt really good*". Listening to drumming had a positive effect on the women, this not only occurred at pow wows but other functions where drumming was present. "*And even to hear it, like even if I'm not in it, just sitting there listening to it, it's like, it's great.*" Drumming and listening to drumming provided healing and maintained well-being for the Pugwales women.

Healing/Medicine for themselves

Most women described good feelings, increased confidence, and personal growth in themselves through the medicine that drumming and being in the group provided. Medicine was described by these Mi'gmaq women as something that brought holistic healing and maintained overall well-being. The medicine that the drum provided positively affected these women in many areas of their lives; emotionally, mentally and spiritually. Contrary to western beliefs about

medicine, Aboriginal medicine cannot be found in pill form; it is with the cultural and spiritual connection to the drum that the medicine is able to manifest itself into something that brings the women joy, peace and healing. P7 compared western medicine to Aboriginal medicine stating, *“It’s medicine, it’s better than anything that you can get from the doctor to make yourself feel better, anything, it’s amazing”*.

The healing role that drumming offered was discussed several times, *“I’ve come a long way in my healing and it’s still a healing, it’s still medicine for me. It’s I don’t think I’ll ever put the drum down, it’s just healing, and medicine and I need that in my life.”* Feeling spiritually connected through drumming was described as a big part of P7’s healing journey. The healing ability of the drum not only helped the Pugwales members with their own healing but also community members.

Healing/Medicine for others after death

The medicine was not only for those drumming but also was considered medicine for those who listened *“I feel like if it’s medicine for me, then every time I hit that drum it will be medicine for somebody else.”* The Pugwales group members value their role as Mi’gmaq hand drummers and the community of Listuguj values their role as one that can offer healing after death. The drum group is being called on increasingly more to drum for families in the community who suffered the loss of a loved one. The Pugwales drum group have been asked to attend wakes at a home, wakes at the funeral home and sometimes funerals at the St. Anne’s Catholic Church, located on the Listuguj First Nation. A Pugwales member shared *“A lot of the times people are requesting, especially you know at funerals, people are, they’re grieving and the drum is all about healing.”* Being requested to drum was valued by the women *“to be part of a drum group that’s asked to come and sing for the family is very special.”* The group will

always say yes to a request for them to drum, as they believe the medicine from the drum can support those grieving. A Pugwales member tells how *“it’s just another teaching that this is a gift (drumming and singing) and you’ve been asked something and you need to give, and I hope that we do bring that measure of comfort”* for those mourning a loss. Their sense of obligation and passion to share this medicine is demonstrated in their commitment that *“no matter how busy I am, I need to try and commit.”* After being asked to drum at a wake or funeral, a Pugwales member shared that it was never questioned whether the family was traditional or not, it did not matter whether the family mourning ever practiced traditional ways such as drumming, if the family asked Pugwales to drum at the wake and/or the funeral, the group never hesitated and would always be there [to drum] for their fellow community members.

The healing power of the drum is apparent when the women discuss their drumming and the positive impact that has had on their lives. However, as P7 said, *“it’s not even about us at all, if I could put it another way, you know it’s what we do, it’s for everybody else you know.”* The women shared that drumming not only benefited themselves but when they drummed in the community it helped others in some way.

Sharing the medicine of the drum occurred not only within the Mi’gmaq community of Listuguj but is also shared with the neighboring town during a time of tragedy. In August 2013, a tragic event happened in Campbellton, New Brunswick. Two young boys aged six and four were killed when an African Rock python snake escaped from its enclosure while the boys were sleeping at a friend’s place where the snake was kept. The Pugwales drum group decided that they wanted to show their support during this difficult time for the family and friends of the boys. One Pugwales member described how she called some other Pugwales group members and said *“you know what let’s go drum, let’s go show them some of our solidarity that we’re*

mourning with you, our whole community is mourning with you.” It was during a memorial in Campbellton that the women showed up not knowing how they would be received nor did they have any kind of plan of where and what they would sing. They just knew they wanted to be there to show support. The women met up with the Mayor of the town and he escorted them to the top of a hill behind the Restigouche Salmon monument. The women drummed and felt they were well received by all. Another Pugwales member describes the day as *“very emotional, but they were very respectful of us and that was our way to say, we’re with you”*.

The women talked about the acceptance and respect non-natives showed the Pugwales drum group. The women described the funeral director in the town of Campbellton *“he respects the drum, he knows there’s four courses, he knows when we’re going to start, he knows when we’re going to finish, like we’re all in sync”*. The women felt that historically drumming was not part of a wake or funeral but over the last few years that has changed and the funeral director has given them the opportunity to be a *“part of the funeral procession.”*

A couple of the women spoke of the possibility that when they shared their music that it would allow others to spiritually open up and affect them in a positive way. P7 talks of how she hopes that people who listen are able to *“open something up towards healing”*. P7 *“when they hear us sing, somehow it will touch them, somehow, spiritually and it will open something up.”* The positive effect drumming had in their own lives assisted the women to envision the positive effect it could have on others.

Sharing Music with the Community

Pugwales members shared their drumming and singing with the community of Listuguj. The power of the drum allowed the women to offer healing and comfort during times of sadness, and joy and pride during times of celebration. Times of celebration or unity include the

inauguration of the Chief, Mi'gwittem, Wellness Fair, Idle No More march and other events in the community. The Pugwales drum group performs at the Mi'gwittem each year. The 2014 Mi'gwittem was special, as one member shared, *"It turned out it was the first time that we all drummed together, the kids, the women and the men's, and it was powerful."* Mi'gwittem, loosely translated to English as "I will remember", is when the community of Listuguj hosts events that focus on not forgetting and moving forward from the police raid that transpired in 1981. On June 11 and 20, 1981, the Quebec Provincial Police and fisheries officers conducted controversial raids in the community of Listuguj. Quebec police officers were described as using unnecessary force, which instilled fear in many community members. They arrested residents without due process, seized community members' boats, seized salmon and destroyed nets in an effort to stop the Listuguj Mi'gmaq from commercially fishing salmon and from asserting control over their own fishery. Salmon has traditionally been a source of food and income for the Listuguj Mi'gmaq people. The salmon-fishing rights of the Mi'gmaq people were at stake. The Listuguj Mi'gmaq people did push back against the Quebec government and received support from other First Nations communities across the country. The Listuguj Mi'gmaq eventually won all the court cases, but the injustice served by the Quebec government and the police force was something that cannot be easily forgotten. Every year, on June 11th, the community of Listuguj hosts Mi'gwittem events in the community to remind people of the events that happened in June 1981. Drumming is an integral part of the event because it allows community members to reclaim and celebrate a part of their cultural identity that has been threatened in the past.

Spirituality

Powerful/Spiritual

It is when the Pugwales women share their music with the community at a funeral, an Idle No More march, or the swearing in ceremony of a Chief, that they feel the most spiritually connected. It is during these functions that the Pugwales women spoke of overwhelming positive feelings of something greater than themselves being present while drumming. These positive feelings are different than when they described feeling good, when the women explained experiencing this powerful spiritual connection they spoke of feeling chills not only during the event but even to this day when they simply spoke of these times. There was also a strong connection to their own culture (the eagle flying overhead) and to who they were as Mi'gmaq women. Getting together as a group and drumming, the women experience positive feelings of power, strength and pride. P6 explains *“For me when we get together as women and beating that drum there’s nothing more powerful, and it’s not like a bad kind of powerful, I’m talking about a spiritual power.”*

Honour is an important part of being in the Pugwales drum group. Being asked to drum at different functions in the community was considered by one member as *“...really an honour for me”* and by another *“it’s an honour to be asked.”* The women felt honoured when they were asked to drum, and when drumming they were also honouring the environment, their own spirits, animal spirits and their ancestors. One Pugwales member explains, *“We sing the songs for the children, we sing songs for the spirits, we sing songs for the women, we sing song for the water, so we’re always honoring our environment, the water and whether it’s the animal spirits or the land in itself.”* She also goes on to tell us that *“singing is a way of honoring our spirits. Our spirits, our ancestors that are out there are very honored when we sing.”*

One event that many of the Pugwales women discussed was the inauguration ceremony for the new Chief and council. They were asked to drum, and they did; however, they did not anticipate how well they would be received or the overwhelming feelings they would experience. They sang the Honour song and *“all these people [community members] starting singing the Honour song, and I just like got chills and like wow this is really powerful.”* One member shares her experience the day of the inauguration:

and I’m telling you I felt something there that there was so much energy, there was just so much spirit there and everybody was singing, the whole bingo hall, people were singing. And I recognized that and I remember telling [another Pugwales member] that, I said did you feel that? And when that happens they say that’s when the grandmothers and grandfathers come and join you and that’s what happened that day, it was just so high, there was just so much energy, the people singing and so much pride, there was just so much pride.

Being asked to drum at funerals was discussed many times, and the women always spoke of how their drumming could help those mourning; *“We’ve sang at a few funerals, and it’s such a powerful thing that I’m even getting chills even just talking about it because it’s so, it’s medicine, it’s something that is to hear women’s voices like that, it’s very, very powerful.”*

At one funeral where the women were asked to drum, the Pugwales women went in the church and stood at the back as they have many times before. A divide between Catholic ways and traditional ways has been present since time immemorial, so having the two in the same place has sometimes caused tension in the past. One member recounted how *“the balance between the Catholic church and your[our] traditional ways, it’s a really empowering thing and it almost like, you have a frog in your throat, almost like it brings you near to tears.”* Another member

spoke of how, as the casket was brought to the front of the church a family member asked the Pugwales members to join them. One of the teachings is not script your plan and go with the flow and that is what the Pugwales women did that day. Furthermore, another teaching is that their drumming is a gift that must be shared to assist with healing. The Pugwales did not hesitate and went to the front of the church. It was there that one member explained, *“We went right down to the casket in the front and that feeling came. Like I was just 10 feet tall or something like that, and the last song was just bang, and I was whoof.”* These overwhelming positive feelings do not occur every time the Pugwales members drum together: *“That feeling that comes it’s not every time I get it. But when it’s there you recognize it and it’s powerful and it’s like a wave and you know it’s something larger than you.”*

P6 shared a story of when she was on the other side, when a family member of hers passed away and how the Pugwales drum group drummed. She tells how *“being on the other side of it, being the family member, and listening to the drum group, it was really, really, it was so special like it’s really hard to describe how that feels in just hearing that and hearing the women singing all together and it’s powerful. It’s, I think on both sides it’s powerful”*.

During Idle No More in 2012, community members from Listuguj organized a march across the Van Horne Bridge, the bridge that connects Listuguj, Quebec and Campbellton, New Brunswick. The Pugwales women talked about how cold it was and how they stayed close to each other and began to drum and walk to the other side of the bridge. The women shared how an eagle came and that they *“never seen an eagle fly that low.”* Another member said, *“This huge eagle just kind of glided by and went in the tree and kept an eye on us.”* The eagle is held very highly in Aboriginal spirituality and the fact that the area rarely sees any eagles reinforced their cultural spirituality and the importance of them continuing their hand drumming.

CHAPTER V- DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the relationship between being a member of an on- reserve Mi'gmaq women's hand drum group, cultural identity, health and social support. In addition I aimed to explore both how their perception of their own health fit within the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel concept and how my overall findings fit with Goudreau's (2008) "Circle of Life" framework.

The Aboriginal Medicine Wheel (Figure 1) is depicted as a circle with four quadrants representing physical, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of one's life and the importance of these all being in balance. The "Circle of Life" framework (Figure 2), Goudreau (2008) illustrated the medicine wheel however, it was expanded to incorporate culture at the centre and social support on the outer rim of the circle.



Figure 2. Aboriginal Medicine Wheel

Figure 1. Aboriginal Women's Hand Drumming (AWHD) Circle of Life Framework

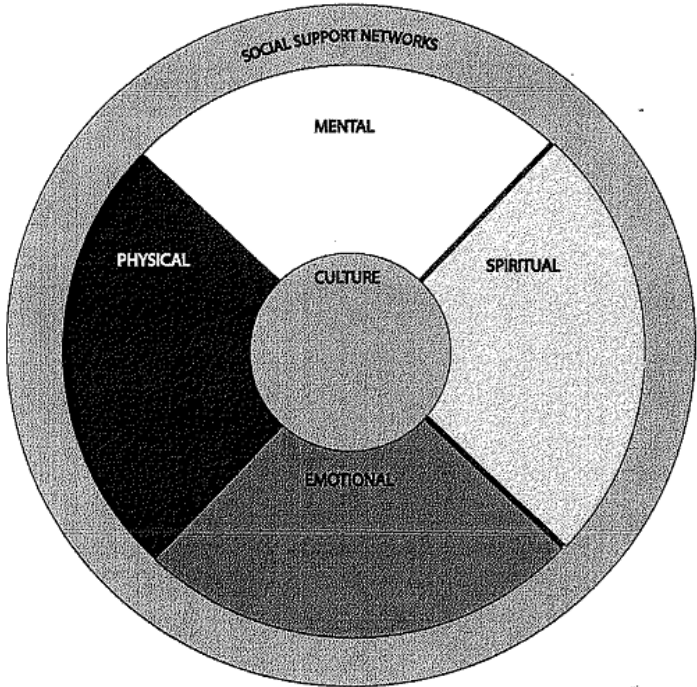


Figure 2. Circle of Life

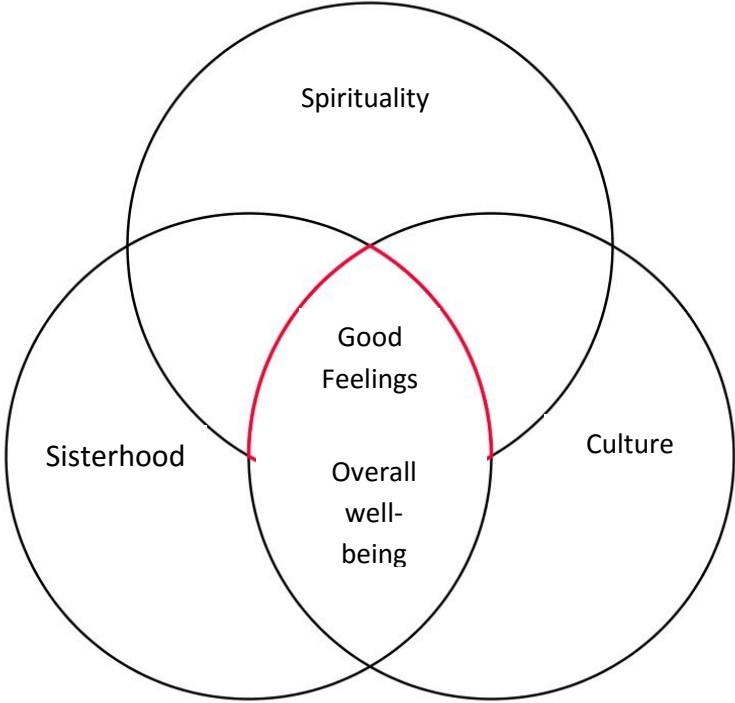


Figure 3. Interconnectedness of Sisterhood and Culture

Major Findings

In the beginning of my research project, while doing the literature review, I took an academic understanding of the concepts I had hoped to explore, for example, social support. As I gathered the data, the evolution of my thinking allowed me to embrace the concepts in a more grounded way. Staying true to what the women shared I began to understand social support in the way that they felt it and explained it, as a sisterhood. Spirituality was not a part of my literature review as I did not anticipate hearing the women share so much about spirituality and how being in the Pugwales hand drum group allowed them to feel a sense of spiritual connectedness. They felt a strong sense of spiritual awareness when they were able to connect to their culture in a meaningful way. In this study, this spiritual connection happened when the women listened or hand drummed themselves.

My findings demonstrated that the main themes: sisterhood, culture, overall well-being and spirituality did not stand alone but in fact were very much interconnected with one another and built off each other. When the two themes, sisterhood and culture, interconnected it created good feelings and a sense of overall well-being for the women. As the two main themes (sisterhood and culture) interconnected they produced not only overall well-being but in certain situations a profound feeling of “spirituality”, the third main theme (Figure 3). Under the right circumstances the women spoke of having profound spiritual experiences. This occurred when the Pugwales women experienced feelings of sisterhood and overall well-being while participating in their cultural tradition, drumming. The women also reported that it was during these times that they felt spiritually connected to their ancestors.

The Pugwales women knew each other all their lives with many of them being related; distant cousins. They were all from the community of Listuguj and were able to form strong

relationships where they felt the group was more than just a group of women or friends but a “sisterhood”, a main theme. Sisterhood and taking part in a cultural practice such as hand drumming were interwoven themes when it came to the Pugwales hand drum group and one did not happen without the other. The Pugwales women all shared a passion for their culture, a second main theme, culture for them was drumming, community, the Mi’gmaq language, cultural teachings and protocols. As these two themes, sisterhood and culture, joined it produced good feelings and overall well-being for the Pugwales women. It allowed the women to personally heal, grow and feel content. When the sisterhood took part in their culture they gained overall well-being and it was at this time that profound spiritual experiences sometimes occurred.

My study first inductively explored cultural identity, health and social support of the Pugwales hand drum group. Then I examined how well my findings fit within the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel and the “Circle of Life” framework. My study linked examples to the emotional, the spiritual, and the mental components of the medicine wheel. My findings demonstrated similarities with Goudreau’s work (2008) in the importance of culture and social support for the women in an Aboriginal hand drum group. Goudreau and fellow researchers placed culture at the centre of the wheel of their framework as they viewed it as vital for promoting the four aspects of the Medicine Wheel. In Goudreau’s study culture was viewed as the women getting together to use the Aboriginal hand drum while in my study culture included not only drumming but other factors such as the Mi’gmaq language, cultural teachings and protocols, close family relations to other members, and a strong connection to the community as a whole. Social support in Goudreau’s study formed the outer rim of the circle keeping all four aspects of the circle intact see Figure 2. My study found culture was not central but a main theme that interconnected with the other main themes. Much of my research aligned with

Goudreau's results. Both studies essentially conclude that women's Aboriginal hand drumming positively affects their lives.

In addition, I explored how perceived health for these women fit within the Aboriginal medicine wheel concept. Interpretation of my transcripts demonstrated that the women showed increased mental, spiritual and emotional well-being, however, none of the women spoke of increased physical well-being. In Goudreau's (2008) work an increase in physical well-being was described as eating healthy traditional foods available at practices and some members gaining physical energy from drumming. In my study, learning the songs, the language, the teaching and the protocols increased their mental well-being. Being a part of their cultural traditions helped them to feel spiritually connected and increased spiritual well-being. The sense of sisterhood, or a strong support system and overall well-being increased their emotional well-being.

In the following sections I will discuss how the Pugwales hand drum group affected the women's cultural identity, social support and health. I will discuss the commonalities and differences that I found between my findings and the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel as well as Goudreau's (2008) findings throughout my discussion. I will also discuss what my study has added to the literature, implications from this research, what I would like to do with this research, questions that arose and limitations of the study.

Cultural identity

Being in a women's hand drum group positively affected group members' cultural identity, specifically, for this study, being in the Pugwales hand drum group increased their cultural identity as Listuguj Mi'gmaq women. The cultural identity of Mi'gmaq women is in part formed through cultural practices such as hand drumming. There are also other factors that may

have played a role in increasing their sense of cultural identity. It was not only drumming as in Goudreau's study that helped to build their cultural identity but other factors such as learning their Mi'gmaq language, being around other Listuguj Mi'gmaq women, learning and being a part of the cultural protocols for ceremony and having a strong connection to the community.

Through drumming the women expressed feelings of cultural pride, they were proud to be able to be a part of their cultural traditions, something that they were not able to do growing up on reserve. One Pugwales member described how she knew she was native but did not know why; one reason she felt this way was because cultural traditional practices such as hand drumming were not around nor practiced when she grew up. This absence of cultural practices may have had an effect on her cultural identity. The women also felt a sense of responsibility not only to their ancestors but to future generations. The drum was something to be honoured, seen as a gift and passed down to future generations in order to keep the cultural tradition alive. Being a member of the Pugwales hand drum group enabled the women to see the importance of the cultural revitalization of traditional ways such as hand drumming and the Mi'gmaq language. Even though not all the women in the community participated in the drum group, this does not mean that they did not take part in revitalizing other cultural activities that could potentially increase their cultural identity and overall well-being. Some women in the community may find that they achieve balance within the Aboriginal medicine wheel by participating in events such as pow wows, or participating in different forms of traditional dance, partaking in ceremonies and some Mi'gmaq crafting such as beading and basket making. Many of these activities are done with or around others and can create opportunities for the women to form relationships.

Social Support

The Pugwales group was not just a group of women who got together to drum. It was a “sisterhood” that they felt they were a part of. The women felt they were able to talk to one another about anything and were also there as a support system for each other. Similar to Goudreau’s (2008) study the women felt as though they belonged, they felt they were in a safe space to share life experiences and also referred to the women in their group as “sisters” (Goudreau, 2008). It was apparent when analyzing the data that the women felt that belonging in the group increased their levels of social support.

Health

As described in the Aboriginal medicine wheel and Goudreau’s framework, well-being for Aboriginal people is achieved through the balance of the emotional, the mental, the spiritual and the physical aspects of one’s life. Within this perspective it is understood that the mental is the intellect, the physical is the body, the emotional is feelings and the spiritual is the spirit, where each component is regarded as equal in significance (Struthers et al., 2003). Aboriginal women’s hand drumming can be a tool used to achieve this balance in one’s life.

The ancient approach of drum therapy has been used in many different cultures to promote healing and self-expression (Small, 2015). Small (2015) gathered information pertaining to drumming from different countries and cultures around the world; for example, she studied the shamans of Mongolia and the Minianka healers of West Africa. The populations she discussed were varied and included: Alzheimer patients, autistic children, emotionally disturbed teens, recovering addicts, trauma patients, and prison and homeless populations. Another pilot study incorporated drumming into an addict’s recovery plan. “Drumming out Drugs” demonstrated that drumming played an important role in addressing and treating addiction (Wink Elman, 2003).

Increased emotional well-being of the Pugwales women was identified as feeling safe and supported in the group, having a sense of healing and feelings of personal growth. Furthermore, the women felt emotionally well, they experienced good feelings from listening, drumming for themselves and drumming for others in the community. Many of the women described finding something healing when they drummed, this healing allowed many of them to emotionally heal from loss. The women felt comfortable in the group where they shared stories, laughed and when needed received emotional support from others. These relationships as described by the women as a “sisterhood” assisted in increasing and maintaining their emotional well-being. Being around other women who were supportive and were taking part in their own cultural traditions strengthened ties amongst each other and strengthened ties to who they are as Mi’gmaq women. A result of this is constant flow between themes: all the Pugwales women shared that drumming had an effect on increasing their emotional well-being. Many of the Pugwales women discussed feeling either under stress, or having something on their mind, sometimes described as a “*cloudy mind*” going into a drum practice then leaving the practice with a sense of relief or calmness.

Learning is connected with the mental aspect of the Aboriginal medicine wheel concept. In 2014 a pilot study published in the Journal of Huntington’s Disease observed that drumming and rhythm exercises were used as an early intervention for Huntington’s disease. After two month, results showed cognitive enhancement and improvements in callosal white matter microstructure (Metzler-Bradley et al., 2014). For the Pugwales women drumming assisted to alleviate some mental pressures. Studies demonstrate that drumming can be helpful for stress, fatigue, anxiety, mental illness and a wide range of other disabilities (Small, 2015).

Increased mental well-being occurred for the Pugwales women through learning the language, the songs and cultural teachings. The women gained a better understanding and became more knowledgeable of their cultural traditions. The Pugwales women spoke of the importance of respecting the teachings they received from Elders and traditionalist. The Pugwales members learned to beat their drums in sync and the lyrics of the songs allowed them to learn and practice Mi'gmaq words. Learning the cultural protocols, the cultural teachings, how to drum and the Mi'gmaq language are linked to increased mental health well-being.

The women's spiritual well-being increased as they participated in drumming, a component of the Aboriginal medicine wheel. In a study done by McLennan and Khavarpour (2004) Aboriginal identity was found to be a result of spirituality and spiritual development, both of which the Pugwales women shared as an outcome of being in the group. They felt connected to their Mi'gmaq culture and the drum. When drumming they felt a spiritual connection to their ancestors and during some events they felt a profound spiritual connection to a higher power. In order for the women to experience this spiritual connectedness they must first be a part of their cultural traditions specifically in this study hand drumming.

While the Pugwales women spoke of examples of how the drum group increased their emotional, mental and spiritual well-being they did not share any examples of how being in the drum group directly affected their physical well-being. This does not mean that their physical well-being did not increase as a part of being in the Pugwales group. Physical well-being is important and it may have been that the women derived other benefits from drumming that assisted in the balance of the emotional, the mental and the spiritual with the physical.

Limitations

One possible limitation is what the participants felt comfortable sharing in the sharing circle as the anonymity of participants and what is shared in the circle is difficult to uphold. However, as the circle is considered very sacred I strongly believe that the women would not share any of the stories with those who were not present during the circle. Another limitation is the amount of time I spent with the women collecting the data. The data was collected in a sharing circle that lasted an hour and a half and the one-on-one story telling sessions lasted on average an hour. I think that if I had the chance to revisit each of the women several more times that they might have shared something that they did not have a chance to share with me the first time. This could be in part due to the limited time spent together. After the sharing circle and storytelling sessions it is possible that the Pugwales women thought of something more they would have liked to share with me.

All participants had to be Aboriginal women who participated in the Pugwales hand drum group located in Listuguj, Quebec. Also, no men were included in the study, as no men belong to the drum group. This can make it difficult to generalize to any other Aboriginal people as each reservation and, nation has different cultural values, norms and behaviours. However, generalizing findings is not the goal of this project. The purpose is to contribute to the existing body of knowledge of Aboriginal women's hand drum groups as an example of cultural activities and their general contribution to Aboriginal well-being. There is no external measure of change in health and well-being. The participants say that drumming was beneficial but there is no other measure of this. Again, however, the paradigm used for this study does not require external verification of participants' experiences.

One possible limitation is that, as a member of the community, I am considered an insider and participants may have told me more or less, because of the status I hold in the community. This status is someone who has moved away from the reservation for many years, holds a university degree and works in the city. There is no way for me to know if either was the case. I believe that there was a level of comfort that the women had with me because of who I am and how I present myself. I knew all of the women most of my life and am related to some of them. All of my one-on-one story telling sessions ended with me and the participant with the recorder off just talking, showing that these relationships with these women were much deeper than just gathering data for my Master's. The women felt comfortable to share many different things that were not related to my study. I may also be an outsider in some respects, due to my status as someone who moved away from the reservation for many years, and holds a university degree and works in the city. This may also have affected how the women responded to me.

A second limitation could be my own subjectivity when it comes to analyzing the data although that is somewhat expected when doing qualitative research, even more so when using an Indigenous approach. These two limitations can also be strengths as I can be viewed as someone who can produce a body of work that will accurately represent what was shared and bring positive attention to the group. My own subjectivity could also be considered a strength as I enter the research as an Aboriginal Mi'gmaq woman from that community. I come in with my own preconceptions and biases that are made explicit at the beginning of the research project. There is little to no qualitative research that is not subjective.

CHAPTER VI- CONCLUSION

In this concluding chapter, I will discuss the value of my study, illustrating the unique value of my study while building on existing knowledge. The conclusion section will also draw out implications from my study and identify how it contributes to the field of health promotion. I will also discuss how my findings fit with and support the Truth and Reconciliation Report. Finally, I will discuss suggestions for future research.

The value of this research

This study is different from many studies as the population describe themselves with a specific identity, Listuguj Mi'gmaq women. Practicing Aboriginal women's hand drumming in an urban setting has been shown to increase one's cultural identity (Goudreau, 2008). Cultural identity for the Pugwales women who live on reserve is not only affected by drumming but also from listening and learning the Mi'gmaq language, cultural traditions and the importance of community. Language was a vital part of being in the group and a vital part of forming, maintaining and increasing Pugwales members' cultural identity. In Goudreau's study the women who participated in the drum group came from many different tribes and did not share the same tribal language therefore the language experience was not there.

Social support was observed in the urban Aboriginal women's hand drum group. For the Pugwales members this social support network they formed over the last five years was very strong, with many members calling it a "sisterhood". Pugwales members all grew up in the same community and had known each other for most or all their lives. The connection was not only with that person but connections through family members and friends were also present. Some members of the group were related to each other and many were related to member's families. There is a strong interconnectedness that can be found in First Nation communities and this was

seen in this study. There were solid emotional connections to each other in the group, connections with family members and a powerful connection to the community as a whole. This strong support system can be viewed as a product of colonization where Aboriginal people were placed on reserves. In the city, as in Goudreau's study, the population is fluid and changes quite a bit. Although the reservation has some fluidity, it is less and we have families on reserve that have lived in the same homes and same parts of the reserve for generations. The research and findings were different from Goudreau's study as her study was done in an urban setting and my study was done in a rural setting. The number of people that could be involved in an urban Aboriginal women's hand drum group could be higher as there are more urban Aboriginals than in a rural setting. There are also strong social ties present in the rural setting that are not always present in the urban setting.

The importance of drumming and sharing with the urban community was discussed in Goudreau's (2008) work. In my study sharing with the community was an integral part of what the Pugwales group represented. The Pugwales members spoke of drumming at funerals for many community members and that they were now a part of the funeral procession for those who requested their presence; this was something that one could not imagine would have happened twenty years ago, traditional ways and Catholic ways working together for the betterment of the community. Cultural revitalization allows traditional ways and practices such as hand drumming to be incorporated in current practices in and around the community. Pugwales women were aware that cultural revitalization was key to the continuance of the language and hand drumming. The Pugwales women discussed the importance of cultural revitalization and how they felt they were a part of it and how it helped them feel like stronger Mi'gmaq women.

The Commissioner of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) released a report in 2014 titled: Missing and Murdered Aboriginal Women: A National Operational Overview. At the time of this report it was calculated that there were 164 missing Aboriginal women and 1,017 Aboriginal women that were victims of homicide (<http://www.rcmp-grc.gc.ca/pubs/mmaw-faapd-eng.pdf>). This number indicates the Aboriginal women have an increased chance compared to non-Aboriginal women in Canada to be killed or to go missing. This is a serious issue happening in Canada that cannot be ignored. As Aboriginal women's hand drumming empowers the women to become stronger in who they are as Aboriginal women it also provides them with an outlet to release emotions in a positive way. For some women, participating in an Aboriginal women's hand drum group can deter them from potentially participating in high risk behaviour that could lead to an increased number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women. The drum is sacred and is medicine for the women when they decide they want it in their lives. The Pugwales hand drum group empowers women in the group but can also empower other women not in the group when they hear the beat of the drum and can identify with it which can increase their cultural identity as Aboriginal women. That is one of the reasons why the mobilization of this cultural activity is so important. The positive benefits of Aboriginal women's hand drum should be mobilized and spread across the country. For my study I would like to see the two surrounding Mi'gmaq communities join together and drum. If one of the communities near by does not have a drum group the Pugwales women can help these other communities create and build their own hand drum groups in their community.

In 2012, the Idle No More movement brought the hand drum and the round dance to the forefront of the protests and marches. The hand drum became what both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people were seeing as a main focal point of the movement. The hand drum was used

as a way to convey a message that we (Aboriginal people) were being treated unjustly. However, their weapon of choice was the drum and the medicine that the drum can provide to all those involved. During and after the Idle No More movement there was an increase in the number of Aboriginal men and women using the hand drum. This increase was seen on social media sites, pow wows and events in communities. Idle No More proved to be a crucial component in the revitalization of the Aboriginal hand drum.

Implications from this research

The benefits of being in the Pugwales hand drum group were apparent throughout my results. A Mi'gmaq hand drum group enhanced cultural revitalization in the community of Listuguj. There are programs in the community at this time that are designed to assist women in connecting to their culture. I could advocate for the application of my findings by having conversations with the Directors of these programs revolving around assisting in promoting these cultural activities such as drum making, beading, basket making and language in an effort to increase the number of women from the community who participate in cultural activities. Support for this type of initiative is crucial for its sustainability. Financial support is needed as the costs to make a hand drum can be a few hundred dollars, something not all women who are interested in hand drumming can afford. Financially supporting drum making workshops in the community would allow more Mi'gmaq women an opportunity to be a part of their cultural traditions. During my data collection many of the women discussed the importance of investing time into drumming. Therefore, support from employers, allowing employees to take some time away from work so that they can take part in practices and/or Pugwales group drumming for community events is crucial for the women to be able to invest the needed time into this cultural

practice. I would also like to assist in applying for funding from the government for programs and initiatives that rebuild a cultural tradition such as the Pugwales hand drum group.

The revitalization of many cultural practices is needed in the community. However, hand drumming can be relatively easily attainable because after a drum is made the time needed to invest is less than it would take to, for example, learn the language. Drumming with the Pugwales members, the women are able to still learn and practice some of the language. It also offers a more enjoyable way to learn and practice the language and culture in a supportive environment.

The importance of “our” traditional ways such as hand drumming and the Mi’gmaq language are now visible and practiced by many children, youth and adults. Drumming in the community has had and continues to have many benefits for the community. It allows community members of all ages a chance to be around and/or be a part of their cultural traditions which leads to the continued cultural revitalization of hand drumming. Drumming allowed community members to connect with their own culture when a loved one was lost, and this provided a sense of comfort for many. Drumming also inspired pride and increased cultural identity for the community as a whole.

The community of Listuguj was able to keep cultural traditions such as hand drumming and the Mi’gmaq language alive in a couple of different ways. First, since Aboriginal people were put on reserves as a part of colonization, communities could become tight knit. Despite attempts to stop the use of the language many community members continued to speak it and share it with the next generation. In the community of Listuguj, although there are some children who were taken to residential school, the number of children who were taken from the community of Listuguj to residential schools was not as high as other communities and I believe

that this was a factor in keeping the Mi'gmaq language alive. Although kept alive by a few traditionalists in the community and surrounding communities, many traditional ceremonies now can be traced back to people from the community or surrounding communities who went out west or to the United States of America where many of their traditions were kept alive.

Traditionalists learned cultural practices and brought their teachings back and shared with the community. It was more difficult to keep cultural traditions alive on the east coast because that is where European settlers first arrived and where they started trying to assimilate Aboriginal culture.

Health Promotion and Aboriginal women's hand drumming

The World Health Organization (WHO) describes health promotion as “the process of enabling people to increase control over, and to improve their health” (Epp, 1987). A challenge that continues to face health promotion is that disadvantaged groups such as Aboriginal people continue to have a lower life expectancy and poorer health in general (Epp, 1987). A goal of health promotion is to help people in the community move toward a state of optimal health or for Aboriginal people “well-being” (O'Donnell, 1986). Health promotion recognizes freedom of choice and places an emphasis on the role that individuals and communities have in defining what health is. For many Aboriginal people health is best described as “well-being” which is the balance of emotional, mental, physical and spiritual aspects of one's life (McLennan & Khavarpour, 2004). Health promotion encourages communities to become involved when planning their own services and to use the community's own definition of health. In my study, the women shared with me ways their own health was affected by their participation in the Pugwales hand drum group.

My study demonstrated that participating in an Aboriginal women's hand drum group empowered the women to be a part of their cultural traditions, which increased their spiritual, emotional and mental well-being. A sense of belonging has proven to be important to an individual, family and community, a study by Acton and Malathum (2000) reported that an increase in the sense of belonging was associated with increased health promoting behaviours (Acton & Malathum, 2000). Although participants in my study did not share concrete examples of improvement in their physical well-being I think that one can assume that improvements in all the other areas of the Aboriginal Medicine Wheel has an effect on their physical well-being. Some of the women, depending on the weather, may walk to a practice and although they might not explicitly view this as a benefit to their physical well-being it is exercise and it can improve physical well-being. An Aboriginal women's hand drum group has the ability to assist Aboriginal women obtain optimal health as they view and interpret health.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada released its report in the summer of 2015. This report was created to let the Aboriginal survivors of residential school tell their story and more than six thousand came and told their story (TRC, 2015). Aboriginal children were removed from their homes and placed in residential schools where many spent most of their childhood. The residential school's intentions were to sabotage links that the Aboriginal children had with their culture and identity. One way to do this was to dislocate families, disrupting the transmission of cultural values and identity from one generation to the next (TRC, 2015).

The TRC report was written to bring forward the truth of residential schools, often an untold part of Canada's history. The TRC report was also developed to lay the ground work for

reconciliation and what that may look like. Moving forward the TRC report had ninety four calls to action (TRC, 2015).

One important call to action is number fourteen, which discusses the importance of preserving, revitalizing and strengthening Aboriginal languages and cultures and the need for funding from the Government for these kinds of initiatives (TRC, 2015). In my study, the Pugwales women were a vital part of preserving, revitalizing and strengthening both the language and the culture through their drum group in the community of Listuguj. The positive benefits from being in the group should be mobilized and shared with other Aboriginal women. This initiative can only happen if financial support from the government is attained. With proper supports Aboriginal women's hand drumming can grow not only in the community of Listuguj but also to other Aboriginal communities.

Another call to action, number eighteen, focused on the three levels of government to acknowledge that the current state of Aboriginal health in Canada is a direct result of previous Canadian government policies (TRC, 2015). Although, it is important to recognize and acknowledge this injustice, I also think it is important to look forward and acknowledge practices that Aboriginal women in First Nation communities are doing to increase their current state of health. All the women in the Pugwales hand drum group discussed overall well-being from being in the group. If being a part of your cultural traditions could potentially increase your current state of health I think it is important that special attention be paid to what is working in some communities and initiate mobilization to other Aboriginal communities.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

On September 12, 2007, The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was adopted by the United Nations (UNDRIP, 2007). Support for initiatives

such as the Pugwales Aboriginal women's drum group's effort to revitalize cultural traditions can be found throughout.

The UNDRIP guarantees the rights of indigenous people to practice and revitalize their cultural tradition and customs. This document acknowledges that's indigenous people have the right to practice, develop, and teach their spiritual traditions (UNDRIP, 2007). Article 22 in the UNDRIP declares that special attention be paid to the rights of indigenous elders, women, youth, children and persons with disabilities (UNDRIP, 2007).

This document was prepared to address the rights of indigenous people all over the world. It is clear that many of the recommendations should be adapted to any indigenous community and this study provides support for following these recommendations so that Mi'gmaq language and traditions can be passed down from generation to generation.

Future Research Directions

Future research could explore what might inhibit or stop some women in the community from joining a hand drum group. There are currently approximately 2,074 members living on reserve (<http://www.listuguj.ca/about-listuguj/>) and about ten women in the drum group. Why does only a small percentage of Listuguj women take part in the Pugwales hand drum group? Would the results be similar if this type of hand drum group was in a different community? For example, if a hand drum group was formed in a different Mi'gmaq community or even a different tribe would they have the same results as in my study? Would the results be similar had it been an Aboriginal male hand drum group, as many Aboriginal men use the hand drum as well.

Future research could explore different cultural traditions being practiced today in communities and their effect on Aboriginal well-being. These cultural traditions could include participation in traditional ceremonies such as sweats, fasts, Sundance, pipe ceremonies, traditional dancing, drumming and learning the language. What role does gender play in the effects of participation in cultural traditions? If the hand drum group was made up of both men and women would they interpret their experiences in the group differently? Would future studies find that my model of interconnected themes fits better with their results or would Goudreau's findings fit their research?

In the sharing circle and all the one-on-one story telling sessions the women expressed pride in knowing their language, Mi'gmaq, and those who were not fluent speakers expressed a strong desire to learn the language. Future research could explore the importance of the Mi'gmaq language in this community and its' effect on cultural identity.

Summing up

I would like this research to inspire Aboriginal people to take part in their cultural traditional practices. This could take many forms such as learning their language, taking part in ceremonies, learning to drum or hand drum amongst other traditional practices. Specifically, I would like to encourage more women to take part in hand drumming. Join a group in the community if there is one or start a group if there is not one.

Appendix A- Interview Questions

Questions for Sharing Circle

- What does an Aboriginal's women's hand drum group mean to you?
- Why did you decide to join the Pugwales drum group?
- How do you feel that the drum group has affected your life?
- Do you feel a sense of belonging that you're in the Pugwales drum group?
- Do you feel comfortable sharing with your group if things are going good or bad in your life?
- Do you believe sharing and listening is a big part of being in the group?

Questions for one-on-one story telling session

- How do you feel before and after a practice of performance?

Physically- tired, sore, energetic, relaxed

Emotionally- down, happy, nervous, excited, emotional release

Mentally- cluttered mind, clear minded, positive or negative thoughts

Spiritually- cultural pride, connectedness to their culture, community, Mother Earth, or a disconnect with this, spiritually energetic

- Do you speak Mi'gmaq fluently and how or does this affect you using the hand drum?
-What effect does this have on you as an Aboriginal woman?

- If you do not speak Mi'gmaq fluently how does being part of the group make you feel?
- What effect does this have on you as an Aboriginal woman?
- Are there things you feel that you are not comfortable talking about in any way when in the group?

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