

kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk:

**Inter-generational Effects on Professional First
Nations Women Whose Mothers are Residential
School Survivors**

Roberta Stout and Sheryl Peters

August 2011

Project # 236



centres of excellence
for WOMEN'S HEALTH

centres d'excellence
pour LA SANTÉ DES FEMMES

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Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) is one of the Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, funded by the Women's Health Contribution Program of Health Canada. PWHCE supports new knowledge and research on women's health issues; and provides policy advice, analysis and information to governments, health organizations and non-governmental organizations. Production of this document has been made possible through a financial contribution from Health Canada. The views expressed herein do not necessarily represent the views of PWHCE or Health Canada.

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Acknowledgements

This project is dedicated to all survivors of residential schools, including the boys and girls who attended them; the parents, grandparents and communities whose children were taken from them; and the children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren who are experiencing the inter-generational effects of these schools. It is also dedicated to all the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of children who died while in residential school.

Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) extends our heartfelt appreciation to the participation of the six First Nations women who agreed to come forward and share their stories as daughters of mothers who went to residential school. Their frank and candid exploration of the inter-generational effects demonstrated both individual courage and collective respect. We thank them deeply for their creative and artful storytelling and commend their resilience.

PWHCE must also thank the support of the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program who sent two support workers to the sharing circle component of the project.

There are also a number people who provided much needed technical assistance in the development of the digital stories. They include Rick Harp, Caroline Monnet and Willis Petti. A special thanks to Addison Sandy and JustTV for hosting our workshops to develop the digital stories.

kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk:

The title of this project, *kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk*¹, is a Cree phrase that means ‘school bus’, but has various other nuanced meanings when looking at each of the root words individually. The root word “*kisk*” means ‘to learn’, “*mâtow*” is a verb that, on its own, means ‘to cry’, and “*otapanâsk*” is the word for ‘wagon’. Through this particular morphological interpretation, crying is part of the school bus experience.

¹ Cree words are not capitalized.

Executive Summary

Over 2010/2011, Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence (PWHCE) set out to understand the inter-generational legacy of residential schools on First Nations women. The following report *kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk: Inter-generational Effects on Professional First Nations Women Whose Mothers are Residential School Survivors* provides the findings of this exploratory project.

This research involved a process of documenting, in six First Nations women's own words and "digital stories", their unique understandings of how they have been individually and collectively affected by their mothers' attendance at residential schools. It set out with the following three key purposes:

- To generate new knowledge on the ways in which professional First Nations women have experienced inter-generational effects of residential school;
- To enable First Nations women who have experienced inter-generational effects of residential schools to express their ideas and experiences through video storytelling;
- To provide a safe, comfortable forum for professional First Nations women to discuss these effects with each other.

With these key purposes in mind, the study involved two pieces. The first was to hold a focus group discussion in which the women recalled memories and experiences of being mothered by a residential school survivor. These narratives form the spine of this report. A second piece of the project saw the creation of digital stories by each of the women. These are available for viewing on the PWHCE website http://www.pwhce.ca/program_aboriginal_digitalStories.htm

By listening to the stories of women, it is clear that the residential school system has produced ongoing effects for subsequent generations of survivors' families. The stories the women shared defy the myth that the effects of the residential school system begin and end with the survivors. Where this myth is found, it needs to be roundly refuted with the knowledge of those who continue to live the residential school legacy and embody the resiliency of multiple generations.

To preserve the integrity of the stories that were shared by the six women, long quotes are presented in this report. Their memories wove back and forth through time, but common themes arose between the generations, confirming the inter-generational nature of residential school effects. Narratives are organized by theme and section as indicated below.

Section 1

The Residential School Experience provides a brief historical overview of the schools and broadly defines inter-generational effects.

Section 2

Remembrance tells women's stories about their mothers' experiences in residential school.

Section 3

Being Mothered by a Residential School Survivor provides narratives of the effects on daughters when they were children, and focuses especially on how their mothers parented after having been interned in residential school.

Section 4

Daughters' Experiences with the Inter-generational Effects discusses how the effects of residential school were passed on to daughters, shaping their behaviours and experiences as adults, including how they parent their own children.

Section 5

Inter-generational Effects on Daughters' Children touches on some of the effects passed onto the generation who are youth and young adults now.

Section 6

Resiliency and Healing discusses all the generations at once, with special emphasis on mothers and daughters.

Section 7

Discussion and Conclusion provides final thoughts on the multiple themes presented throughout the exploratory project.

Résumé

En 2010-2011, le Centre d'excellence pour la santé des femmes - région des Prairies (CESFP) a tenté de tirer au clair l'effet des pensionnats sur les femmes des Premières nations de génération en génération. Le rapport intitulé *kiskinohamâtôtâpânâsk: Inter-generational Effects on Professional First Nations Women Whose Mothers are Residential School Survivors* renferme les conclusions de ce projet préliminaire.

Ce projet de recherche a compris un processus de documentation en utilisant les paroles et les « témoignages numériques » de six femmes de Premières nations pour décrire leur propre interprétation des retombées individuelles et collectives de l'expérience de leur mère à titre d'élève de pensionnat. Le projet s'est fixé les trois objectifs clés suivants :

- de créer des nouvelles connaissances sur les moyens que les femmes de profession des Premières nations ont vécu les effets des pensionnats de génération en génération;
- de permettre aux femmes des Premières nations qui ont été touchées par les effets des pensionnats de génération en génération de s'exprimer et de faire valoir leurs expériences au moyen de témoignages enregistrés sur vidéo;
- d'offrir un forum aux femmes de profession des Premières nations qui leur permettrait de discuter de ces effets entre elles librement et sans crainte.

En tenant compte de ces objectifs clés, l'étude a compris deux étapes. La première étape fut la tenue de discussions d'un groupe de réflexion où les femmes se remémoraient les souvenirs et les expériences d'avoir eu une mère qui était survivante des pensionnats. Ces récits constituent la partie principale de ce rapport. La deuxième étape du projet fut la création des témoignages numériques de chacune des femmes. Vous pouvez les consulter (en anglais) en visitant le site Web du CESFP à l'adresse suivante : http://www.pwhce.ca/program_aboriginal_digitalStories.htm.

En écoutant les histoires des femmes, il est clair que le système des pensionnats a déclenché des effets soutenus qui ont touché les générations subséquentes des familles des survivants. Les histoires que les femmes ont partagées mettent fin au mythe que les effets du système des pensionnats ne s'en tiennent qu'aux survivants. Là où ce mythe existe, on se doit de le réfuter carrément en reconnaissant les personnes qui continuent à vivre les effets des pensionnats et qui revêtent le ressort psychologique de multiples générations.

Dans le but respecter l'intégrité des histoires relatées, le rapport contient de longues citations. Leurs souvenirs font la navette entre le passé et le présent, mais ils contiennent des thèmes communs entre les générations, thèmes qui confirment les effets des pensionnats au fil des générations. On a organisé les récits par thème et par section dont voici :

1^{re} section

The Residential School Experience (L'affaire des pensionnats) – Cette section fournit un bref aperçu de l'histoire des pensionnats et décrit de façon générale les effets de génération en génération.

2^e section

Remembrance (Les souvenirs) - Cette section contient les histoires des femmes sur l'expérience de leur mère au pensionnat.

3^e section

Being Mothered by a Residential School Survivor (Se faire élever par une survivante des pensionnats) – Cette section renferme les récits qui décrivent les effets sur les filles lorsqu'elles étaient jeunes et se penche surtout sur le rôle parental adopté par les mères après avoir été internées dans les pensionnats.

4^e section

Daughters' Experiences with the Inter-generational Effects (Les expériences des filles touchées par les effets de génération en génération) – Cette section porte sur les moyens par lesquels les effets ont été transmis aux filles, sur la modification de leur comportement et de leurs expériences de personnes adultes, y compris comment ces effets ont affecté leur rôle parental en élevant leurs propres enfants.

5^e section

Inter-generational Effects on Daughters' Children (Les effets de génération en génération sur les enfants des filles) – Cette section porte sur certains effets transmis à la génération des jeunes et des jeunes adultes d'aujourd'hui.

6^e section

Resiliency and Healing (Le ressort psychologique et la guérison) – Cette section porte sur toutes les générations en accordant une importance particulière aux mères et aux filles.

7^e section

Discussion and Conclusion (Discussion et conclusions) – Cette section contient les conclusions sur les divers thèmes qui se sont manifestés lors du projet préliminaire.

Put simply, the residential school system was an attempt by successive governments to determine the fate of Aboriginal people in Canada by appropriating and reshaping their future in the form of thousands of children who were removed from their homes and communities and placed in the care of strangers.

Tragically, the future that was created is now a lamentable heritage for those children and the generations that came after, for Aboriginal communities and, indeed, for all Canadians².

² Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, Volume 1 – Looking Forward Looking Back, Part Two, False Assumption and a Failed Relationship, Chapter 10 – Residential Schools, <http://caid.ca/RRCAP1.10.pdf> p.312.

Introduction

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a formal Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools³. Presented in the House of Commons and before Aboriginal leaders and survivors of residential schools, the Prime Minister recognized that the “policy of assimilation was wrong [and] has caused great harm.” In addition, the statement confirmed that the children were “inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities”. He also acknowledged that the, “Legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today”.

This project set out to understand the legacy explained above with particular emphasis on the inter-generational effects on the wellbeing of professional First Nations women whose mothers attended residential school. This exploratory project involved a process of documenting, in women’s own words and through their own created visual expressions, their understanding of how they have been affected by their mothers’ attendance at the schools. The project responds to the call for more empirical research into the roles and mechanisms of inter-generational effects and resiliency among First Nations people and provides a springboard for further research.

Our research builds upon PWHCE’s previous study, *kiskâyitamawin miyo-mamitonecikan: Knowing Mind Fullness – Urban Aboriginal Women & Mental Health*⁴, which demonstrated that Aboriginal women’s health needs are inadequately understood and inadequately provided for by current mental health services in Winnipeg and Saskatoon. One of the recommendations of the study included recognizing how social and inter-generational effects of residential schools transmit through families and communities to contribute to a cluster of health issues. The study suggested that placing Aboriginal women’s stories at the centre of research yields a wealth of ideas about how to perceive and understand the problems for Aboriginal women’s health and wellbeing, how these issues might be addressed, and what the factors are that increase resiliency.

³ Government of Canada, Indian and North Affairs Canada, see <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/sig-eng.pdf>, see Appendix.

⁴ Stout, R. Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence: Winnipeg, 2010.

The project set out with three key purposes:

- To generate new knowledge on the ways in which professional First Nations women have experienced inter-generational effects of residential school;
- To enable First Nations women who have experienced inter-generational effects of residential schools to express their ideas and experiences through video storytelling;
- To provide a safe, comfortable forum for professional First Nations women to discuss these effects with each other.

With these three key purposes in mind, the study responded to calls for gendered analysis of women's mental health issues and to previous research findings that colonization and ongoing colonial practices are at the root of many Aboriginal women's mental health issues⁵.

Why focus on professional First Nations women?

One of the groups of Aboriginal people seldom attended to in research is professional First Nations women. This gap in the research is important to address for several reasons. First, it focuses research on women's gendered experiences of inter-generational effects. Much of the research into mental health and inter-generational effects of residential schools has neglected to account for sex and gender differences⁶. Consequently, First Nations women's particular experiences, needs and concerns have long been under-recognized or ignored,

⁵ Dion Stout, M.; Kipling, G.; Stout, R. 2001. "Aboriginal Women's Health Research Synthesis Project: Final Report", Centres of Excellence for Women's Health, Winnipeg.
Kirmayer, L.J. & G.G. Valaskakis. *Healing Traditions : The Mental Health of Aboriginal Peoples in Canada*, Vancouver: UBC Press.
Lowery, C. 1999. "A Qualitative Model of Long-Term Recovery for American Indian Women", *Journal of Human Behaviour and the Social Environment*, 2(1): 35-50.
Smith, D.; C. Varcoe; and N. Edwards. 2005. "Turning Around the Inter-generational Impact of Residential Schools on Aboriginal People: Implications for Health Policy and Practice", *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 37(4): 38-60.
Stout, R. 2010. *kiskâyitamawin miyo-mamitonecikan: Urban Aboriginal Women and Mental Health*. Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence: Winnipeg.

⁶ Canadian Women's Health Network. 2007. "An Introduction to Women, Gender and Mental Health", *Canadian Women's Health Network*, 10(1): 5-6.
Canadian Women's Health Network. 2008. *Women, Mental Health and Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada: An Overview*.

criminalized, pathologized and over-medicated⁷. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, a leading researcher on inter-generational mental health effects of colonialism on Native Americans has found that there are significant gender differences in response to what she terms ‘historical trauma’ of Lakota Native Americans. She suggests that attending to gendered differences of inter-generational effects may provide a better understanding of psychological and psychosomatic health consequences for both men and women⁸. Recognition of gendered differences in inter-generational effects is the starting point for our gender-based approach.

Second, there are important connections between women’s experiences and inter-generational transmission. In their roles as mothers and leaders in communities, women shoulder a great deal of the work of conveying knowledge, experience and leadership to the next generations. They also perform a great deal of the inter-generational caring labour, looking after children, siblings, parents, grandparents and other relatives. Although there is an awareness in other research that inter-generational effects of residential schools affects childrearing⁹, the research tends to focus on children or on interventions, rather than the effects on women themselves as adult children of residential school survivors. These factors are another part of why we wanted to explore the question of how women understand the residential school experiences of their mothers to have influenced their own life experiences.

Third, professional First Nations women tend not to be included in research documenting inter-generational effects of residential school. Rather, research into social suffering tends to focus on ‘at-risk’ populations rather than resilient populations¹⁰. Professional First Nations women, because of their class position, are often not included in notions of who is ‘at risk’ of experiencing the same social problems as women with less access to financial and social resources in the dominant culture. Also, women who have fewer financial resources tend to be subject to more surveillance and research by the state, non-governmental organizations and university researchers. Much of the research into inter-generational effects of residential school tends to be focused around poverty issues. Nonetheless, inter-generational effects of

⁷ Dion Stout, M.; Kipling, G.; Stout, R. 2001. “Aboriginal Women’s Health Research Synthesis Project: Final Report”, Centres of Excellence for Women’s Health, Winnipeg.

Stout, R. 2010. *kiskâyitamawin miyo-mamitonecikan: Urban Aboriginal Women and Mental Health*. Prairie Women’s Health Centre of Excellence: Winnipeg.

⁸ Yellow Horse Brave Heart, M. 1999. “Gender Differences in the Historical Trauma Response Among the Lakota”, *Journal of Health and Social Policy*, 10(4): 1-21.

⁹ Smith, D.; C. Varcoe; and N. Edwards. 2005. “Turning Around the Inter-generational Impact of Residential Schools on Aboriginal People: Implications for Health Policy and Practice”, *Canadian Journal of Nursing Research*, 37(4): 38-60.

¹⁰ Flemming, J. and R. Ledogar. 2008. “Resilience, An Evolving Concept: A review of the literature relevant to Aboriginal research”, *Pimatisiwin*, 6(2): 7-23.

residential school are not strictly confined to women in poverty – they unfold for First Nations women irrespective of economic circumstance. By focusing on women who have become professionals, we recognize that First Nations women are diverse in their access to economic resources, educational experiences and occupational opportunities.

Given that professional First Nations women tend to be understudied, the alarmingly high statistics on mental health issues of Aboriginal women may under-represent them¹¹. Likewise, the qualitative research may not include or may misrepresent the dynamics of inter-generational effects among professional First Nations women¹². In addition, a focus on poverty-related issues directs research attention away from resilient populations, resulting in less understanding of the dynamics of resiliency. Developing adequate responses to Aboriginal women's health issues needs to be based on solid and culturally appropriate understandings of the issues that take into account the differences between First Nations women. More research is needed to provide a clearer understanding of how the diversity among Aboriginal women shapes the ways they are affected by the legacy of residential schools.

¹¹ *Women, Mental Health, Mental Illness and Addiction in Canada: Response to Out of the Shadows at Last*. Canadian Women's Health Network. [Internet]. Winnipeg, MB: Canadian Women's Health Network. c2008 [cited 2008 Aug 27]. Available from <http://www.cwhn.ca/resources/cwhn/mentalHealth.html>.

Donner L, Isfeld H, Haworth-Brockman M, Forsey C. 2008. *A Profile of Women's Health in Manitoba*. Winnipeg, MB: Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence. Available from <http://www.pwhce.ca>.

Gender differences. [Internet]. Ottawa, ON: Canadian Mental Health Association; c2008 [cited 2008 Sep 2]. Available from <http://www.ontario.cmha.ca/women.asp?cID=5619>.

¹² For an example of qualitative research that exemplifies this focus on poverty in the inter-generational effects literature, see Menzies, P. 2007. "Understanding Inter-generational Trauma From a Social Work Perspective", *The Canadian Journal of Native Studies*, 27(2): 367-392.

Methodology

This project used Indigenous, arts-based and participatory approaches in a gender-based framework. It aimed to provide a better understanding of the gendered effects on women and, by attending to an understudied demographic of professional First Nations women, it contributed to a nuanced understanding that recognizes the differences and similarities of effects among diverse First Nations women.

There were several phases to the project. After receiving approval through the PWHCE ethics process, a call for participants was distributed to community members who had already expressed an interest in the project. This group, along with other key contacts in Winnipeg, distributed the call to other First Nations women they knew fit the participant profile. Very quickly, a group of six First Nations women committed to the full project length. The time commitment was critical, as the project ran over three full workshop days in October and November 2010.

With the knowledge that oral storytelling has long been a respected means of knowledge transmission in many Indigenous cultures, the project started with a sharing circle/focus group. The day began with a Cree prayer, smudge and drumming. After the researchers explained the project, written and oral consent to participate was given by the women. Over the course of one full morning, the six women explored, explained and expressed their understanding of their mothers' experiences at residential school; the effects of the schools on their mothers' and their own behaviours; and how resiliency and healing form a part of their current journeys. Emotional support was provided by two workers from the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program. The discussion was audio recorded and transcribed. The transcription was sent to each of the women to ensure the accuracy of content.

Our project combined oral tradition with digital technology. One of the objectives of the sharing circle was for the women to begin to define the story that they wanted to share in the next phase of the project, which involved the creation of a short video, called a 'digital story'. This was based in their experiences of inter-generational effects of residential school. In order to assist the women to understand what a digital story looked like and how to craft a personal story, local filmmaker Caroline Monnet provided a two hour workshop on the subject. The women were then asked to craft and record their own first-person narratives over the next two workshop days. The women came equipped with their narratives, a

collection of still photographs, video, and music with which they wanted to illustrate their pieces. Over the course of two full days, they were guided through computer tutorials that enabled them, with support, to record and edit their own stories. The hands-on process of creating and recording the digital stories took place at the JustTV studios of the Broadway Neighbourhood Centre. When the workshops were complete, each woman had created a 2-4 minute digital story.

To produce this research report, the transcript from the focus group was coded using the constant comparative method to find common themes in the women's discussion¹³. This exploratory research begins the process of documentary description, in women's own words, of key themes and common effects on professional First Nations women whose mothers are residential school survivors. To preserve the integrity of the stories that were shared, long quotes from the women's stories are presented in this report, organized by theme. Women's stories wove back and forth through time, but common themes arose between the generations, confirming the inter-generational nature of residential school effects. Therefore, the analysis of the learning circle/focus group is structured by generation. *Section 1 – The Residential School Experience* provides a brief historical overview of the schools and broadly defines inter-generational effects. *Section 2 – Remembrance* tells women's stories about their mothers' experiences in residential school. *Section 3 – Being Mothered by a Residential School Survivor* provides narratives of the effects on daughters when they were children, and focuses especially on how their mothers parented after having been interned in residential school. *Section 4: Daughters' Experiences with the Inter-generational Effects* discusses how the effects of residential school were passed on to daughters, shaping their behaviours and experiences as adults, including how they parent their own children. *Section 5: Inter-generational Effects on Daughters' Children* touches on some of the effects passed onto the generation who are youth and young adults now. *Section 6: Resiliency and Healing* discusses all the generations at once, with special emphasis on mothers and daughters. *Section 7: Discussion and Conclusion* provides final thoughts on the multiple themes presented throughout the exploratory project.

All but one of the videos are available for viewing on the website of PWHCE (http://www.pwhce.ca/program_aboriginal_digitalStories.htm) and are being shown at local public screenings, events organized by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada

¹³ Glaser, B. 1965. "The Constant Comparative Method", *Social Problems*, 12(4): 436-445.

(TRC), events organized by Aboriginal community groups, educational institutes, at conferences and knowledge translation events.

Researchers and communities are increasingly recognizing the healing properties of visual and narrative approaches¹⁴. This project both generated information about the experiences of women whose mothers attended residential schools and served a therapeutic purpose. In addition, this research approach allowed for different channels of distribution with the potential to reach broader audiences than written research.

Situating the Researchers

For different reasons, this project was an emotional process for both researchers. One of the researchers, Roberta Stout, is the daughter of a residential school survivor. Embarking on this project meant that she too had to reflect upon her own family history and her relationship with her mother. In order to understand the process of talking through and documenting a personal narrative of this nature, she created her own digital story related to inter-generational effects prior to bringing the women together. Initially this was only to be used within the workshops as an “example” of a digital story. However the group wanted this to be included within the video series that came out of the project. So the lines between researcher and research participant blurred.

Sheryl Peters is a non-Aboriginal researcher and a daughter whose mother experienced family violence. Engaging in this research meant that she too had to reflect on her family history and relationships, enabling her to better understand the legacy of colonial violence transmitted through her own family. Indigenous, critical and anti-oppressive research methodologies and arts-based research are Sheryl’s research focuses. Her previous experience assisting with the digital storytelling process and creating her own digital story helped to sensitize her to the processes for the women in this project and the ways it may be both emotionally challenging and healing.

¹⁴ Gray, N.; C. Oré de Boehm; A. Farnsworth and D. Wolf. 2010. “Integration of Creative Expression Into Community-Based Participatory Research and Health Promotion With Native Americans”, *Family & Community Health*, 33(3): 186-192.

Acoose, S.; D. Blunderfield; C.A. Dell, V. Desjarlais. 2009. “Beginning With Our Voices: How the experiential stories of First Nations women contribute to a national research project”, *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, Vol. 4, No. 2, December 2009, pp. 35-43.

nDigiDreams. Accessed June 14, 2010. Available from <http://ndigidreams.com/ds.html>.

Section I: The Residential School Experience

We were incarcerated for no other reason than being Indian. We were deprived of the care, love, and guidance of our parents during our most critical years of childhood. The time we could have learned the critical parenting skills and values was lost to the generations that attended residential schools, the effects of which still haunt us and will continue to have impacts upon our people and communities. In many instances, our models were the same priests and nuns who were our sexual predators and perpetrators¹⁵.

The residential school system was a partnership between the federal government and churches¹⁶ and served as the “policy of choice to reshape the identity and consciousness of First Nations, Inuit and Métis children”, since “aggressive civilization to accomplish colonial goals was thought to be futile in the case of adults”¹⁷. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, one hundred and thirty two schools were in operation¹⁸. Of these, seventeen were located in Manitoba and approximately half of them were distributed across the Prairie Provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Alberta)¹⁹. The Mohawk Institute Residential School was the first school to open in 1831 and the last school closed in 1996²⁰.

Duncan Campbell Scott served as the Deputy Superintendent General of the Department of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932. His role in Aboriginal history is significant, if only because he was accountable to thousands of children who were in the residential school system. It was his role to ensure that they were well-cared for, well-fed and clothed.

Yet his vision was more akin to getting “rid of the Indian problem”²¹. This was enacted through a 1920 revision to the *Indian Act* which made it legally mandatory for all Aboriginal

¹⁵ Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Fred Kelly, “Confession of a Born Again Pagan”, in *From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential Schools*, Ottawa, 2008, p. 24.

¹⁶ These churches include the Roman Catholic, Anglican, United Churches of Canada and pre-1925 Presbyterian, Congregationalist and Methodist.

¹⁷ Aboriginal Healing Foundation, “From Truth to Reconciliation: Transforming the Legacy of Residential School”, Introduction- *Aboriginal Truths in the Narrative of Canada*, 2008, p.1-2.

¹⁸ These are the 132 schools formally recognized as federally-supported. (Legacy of Hope, 2010, The Legacy of Residential Schools). Other publications refer to upwards of 150 residential schools (see map in Section Two).

¹⁹ Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *Directory of Residential Schools in Canada*, Revised, 2007, Appendix B.

²⁰ John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*. The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1999.

²¹ Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, Volume 1 - *Looking Forward Looking Back* PART TWO False Assumptions and a Failed Relationship, Chapter 13 – Conclusions, p.577.

children, aged seven to fifteen, to attend residential schools²². This effectively transferred the role of Aboriginal parents over to the department, church and school officials.

Tragically, many of these “institutional parents” were consistently neglectful, and in many cases cruel and incompetent, in carrying out their “parental responsibilities”²³.

Like many of Scott’s contemporaries and non-Aboriginal Canadians at time, there was a general ignorance, if not denial, of the plight of the children housed within the schools. This happened despite numerous medical reports pointing to the dire and sub-standard conditions of many schools and the serious health implications for the children²⁴. One study gave evidence to the high rates of death due to tuberculosis (between 24% and 42% in some schools) and stated that this was no less than “criminal disregard for...the welfare of the Indian wards of the nation”²⁵. As government officials, such as Scott, took no action on these findings, the disregard for the children continued. Milloy states, “These reports, some gathered on Scott’s initiative, not only chart the persistence of all the conditions that were known to undermine the health of the children but reveal, in some cases, the neglect, the lack of love, for those suffering and dying in the careless arms of school authorities”²⁶.

This system was born to ‘civilize’, ‘assimilate’ and ‘obliterate’ the Indian in the child. While there are some positive stories from attendance at residential schools, many more children were exposed to indescribable pain and suffering. Sometimes as young as three or four, they were removed from their loving and protective familial environments and creature comforts for consecutive months or years at a time. They were forced to live, sleep, learn and play in unsafe, unsuitable, unsanitary and overcrowded conditions. They were denied basic and regular medical care and attention, which resulted in hundreds, if not thousands, of untimely and premature deaths²⁷. They suffered chronic hunger and/or were provided inadequate nourishment. They were emotionally neglected and survived loneliness, sadness and homesickness. They were commonly fatigued as a result of the long and regimented daily routines. Inappropriate, ill-fitting and deteriorated clothing was commonplace as were

²² Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *A Healing Journey: Final Report Summary Points*, 2006, p. 10.

²³ John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*. The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1999, p.106.

²⁴ Including Dr. P.H.Bryce (1907 and 1922), F.H. Paget (1908) and Dr. F.A. Corbett (1920 and 1922).

²⁵ Ibid p. 97.

²⁶ Ibid. p.97.

²⁷ John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*, The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1999.

repeated and excessive discipline and punishment. The continuum of language, culture and parenting were severely disrupted and temporarily or indefinitely disabled. Children witnessed and/or were the victims of repeated abuse – from verbal assaults to rape and other bodily indignities. They were not protected and fear was a part of the school culture²⁸.

The purpose of residential school was to assimilate children by disconnecting them from all their relationships, to family, community, culture, to their very selves – to take away their wellbeing as Indigenous people and nations – and to replace all the aspects of their being with those of the settler culture. The ripple effects of this are now being felt on the present generations.

Inter-generational Effects of Residential School

Inter-generational or multi-generational trauma happens when the effects of trauma are not resolved in one generation. When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with it, the trauma will be passed from one generation to the next. What we learn to see as “normal”, when we are children, we pass on to our own children. Children who learn that physical and sexual abuse is “normal”, and who have never dealt with the feelings that come from this, may inflict physical abuse and sexual abuse on their own children. The unhealthy ways of behaving that people use to protect themselves can be passed on to children, without them even knowing they are doing so.²⁹

It is estimated that 150,000 Aboriginal children were interned³⁰ and at least 80,000 to 86,000 of them are alive today³¹. According to the 1991 Aboriginal Peoples Survey (APS), there were approximately 373,350 Aboriginal survivors and those who had been inter-generationally affected by the legacy of residential schools³².

²⁸ John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System 1879 to 1986*, The University of Manitoba Press, Winnipeg, 1999.

²⁹ Aboriginal Healing Foundation (1999). *Aboriginal Healing Foundation Program Handbook*, 2nd Edition. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

³⁰ Legacy of Hope Foundation, *The Legacy of Residential Schools*, 2010.

³¹ Ibid and Aboriginal Healing Foundation, “A Healing Journey: Final Report Summary Points”, 2006, p. 27.

³² Aboriginal Healing Foundation, “A Healing Journey: Final Report Summary Points”, 2006, p. 27.

Inter-generational effects may be direct, as in loss of language fluency for example, or less evident but no less important in shaping women's lives, selves and relationships. Effects can also be expressed through physical health problems brought on by inter-generational psychosomatic responses to trauma. Examples of effects may include, but are not limited to:

- compromised mental health and emotional wellbeing, such as psychiatric disorders, alcohol or drug abuse, effects on interpersonal relationships, and comorbidity with physical health, social and financial issues³³;
- social, spiritual and cultural effects, such as cultural and community responses, effects on spirituality and religion, effects on cultural identity, changes to traditional parenting behaviours, financial issues, cultural fluency and language fluency, experiences of education, cycles of violence, class issues and experiences of racism and discrimination, and comorbidity with mental health, physical health and multiple social and financial issues³⁴;
- Coping responses, resiliency behaviours and healing³⁵

This research explored the intersection of gender with these and other effects. Rather than focus on one particular effect, we aimed to produce rich descriptions of the profound and wide-ranging effects and the relationships between effects experienced by this group of professional First Nations women.

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- ³³ Kirmayer, L.J. & G.G. Valaskakis. (2008). *Healing Traditions: The mental health of Aboriginal peoples in Canada*, Vancouver: UBC Press.
- Stout, R. (2010). *kiskâyitamawin miyo-mamitonecikan: Urban Aboriginal Women and Mental Health*. Prairie Women's Health Centre of Excellence: Winnipeg.
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- Duran, E. & Duran, B. (1995). *Native American Postcolonial Psychology*. State University of New York Press, Albany.
- ³⁴ Wesley-Esquimaux, C.C. and M. Smolewski. 2004. *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.
- Morrisette, P. (1994). "The Holocaust of First Nations People: Residual Effects on Parenting", *Contemporary Family Therapy*, Vol. 16, Issue 5, p. 381-392.
- ³⁵ Anderson, N., "Affirmative Challenges in Indigenous Resiliency Research", 2008, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 3-6.
- Fleming, J. & R. Ledogar, "Resilience, An Evolving Concept: A Review of the Research Relevant to Aboriginal Research", 2008, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 7-23.
- Denham, A. (2008). "Rethinking Historical Trauma: Narratives of resilience", *Transcultural Psychiatry*, Vol. 45, 391-414.
- Ing, Rosyln N. (2000). "Dealing with Shame and Unresolved Trauma: Residential School and its Impact on the 2nd and 3rd Generation Adults", Ph.D Dissertation, University of British Columbia.

The abuse and disconnection from the conditions necessary for health and wellbeing perpetrated through the residential school system has produced profound and wide-ranging effects for survivors, their families and communities over successive generations. In many First Nations traditions, health is understood in a broader context of well-being; a holistic balance between physical, spiritual, mental and emotional aspects of the person. The person is enmeshed in and inseparable from a network of relationships with family, community and the world, therefore wellbeing is also social, cultural and inter-generational³⁶.

The inter-generational effects resulting from abuse and disconnection, variously referred to in the literature as residential school syndrome, complex post traumatic stress, collective trauma, historical trauma and inter-generational trauma, are understood to be among the most significant factors at the root of present inter-generational social suffering among Aboriginal people³⁷.

It is possible to identify many effects of residential school, such as medical and psychosomatic conditions, mental health issues and post traumatic stress disorder, cultural effects such as changes to spiritual practices, diminishment of languages and traditional knowledge, social effects such as violence, suicide, and effects on gender roles, childrearing, and family relationships, to name only a few. However, these effects cannot be viewed individually, nor separated from the context of colonialism that produces and continues to maintain them. The effects of schools did not end when the last school door closed and are not confined to survivors. Inter-generational transmission is an important element to understanding the nature and dynamics of the effects, as are the roles of resistance, resilience and renewal. This research explored the constellation of effects embedded in complex relationships with other factors, rather than disconnecting one effect from another.

While it is one thing to look at inter-generational effects through an academic lens, it is quite another to understand them through people's life stories. This paper will now turn to hearing from the six First Nations women who participated in the focus group/sharing circle. The paper will flow back and forth between the multiple story threads that were discussed. With great depth, emotion and texture, the women wove together their lives and relationships shared with their mothers through spoken imagery and memories.

³⁶ The medicine wheel is used by many First Nations peoples to illustrate the interconnectedness and balance among all the aspects necessary to wellbeing.

³⁷ Wesley-Esquimaux, C.C. and M. Smolewski. (2004). *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Section 2: Remembrance

The stories of women and men who were interned as children within Canada's residential school system are ongoing and evolving narratives. While for some people, memories remain blocked, for others healing has transpired through remembering – both the positive and the negative experiences endured at these schools. How the residential school system affected the generations of children who were parented by survivors has been less explored. Yet, their stories point to similar effects, behaviours, resilience and the need for healing.

The sharing circle began with asking the women to remember the first time their mothers spoke about their experiences in residential school. This question was a stepping-stone to further questions, such as their perspectives on how they themselves had been affected through their mothers' childhood experiences.

The mothers had attended one or more of the following residential schools: Birtle, Blue Quills, Cowesses, Elk Horn, Lebret, Prince Albert, St. Alban's, St. Henry's Mission, Sturgeon Landing, Guy Hill, Marieval, and St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Residential School (see map on previous page).

Coping Mechanisms and their Aftermath: Emotional Distancing

When asked about how residential schools formed each woman's family story, without fail, they expressed how their mothers evaded the issue, were reluctant to share specific details, or had blocked their memories of the schools. All of them said that until recently there was silence around the subject. One of the women stated it like this, "For my mom, she never talked about anything that ever happened to her that I can recall at all. She never said anything at all." Another stated, "...for my mother, she kind of blocked her memories out".

The daughters were nevertheless well aware of how the schools had deeply affected their mothers. This is clearly articulated by one of the women who stated, "I can see how the residential school had affected her, but she never really talked about it."

For other mothers, there did not seem any reason to share the details of their childhoods. There were, in other words, clear boundaries to what was experienced and what could be shared in adulthood. To quote, "[my mother] said that, 'There's secrets I'll take to my grave

because I don't want to share them, I don't want to talk about them.' She was honest about that with us on that. It was something she did actually share with us."

Several of the women explained how any information about their mothers' experiences were shared indirectly, such as through stories exchanged between relatives or overhearing their mothers' conversations with someone else. One woman stated,

I'm trying just to remember how it ever came up. I can't remember that, but I do remember the only thing that's coming to my mind of anything of her of ever talking about it in any way... most of the things I know is not from her it's from other family members, and it still isn't much either.

Another woman spoke about how she became aware of her mother's residential school experiences through a public speaking engagement:

I found out about my mom's experience in the school when I was 23... I was sitting there by myself and...I just remembered her starting to talk about all these horrible things that happened to her. I just about fell off my chair because I thought, 'How come she hasn't talked to me about this?'... Afterwards, when the conference was over, we didn't talk about it. I just felt like there was a reason for the silence. There must have been some reason because it was so horrific what she had told this audience that there must've have been some reason why she didn't tell us.

She went on to say,

To this day, I don't think my mom's ever sat down and talked to me about it. I've always heard about things that she says to other people, or things that other people have acknowledged that have happened to her. But we talk about it indirectly. I feel like if we start communicating about some of the things that happened to her, that we'll somehow collide with these really bad feelings I guess, really bad feelings will be expressed. I think my intuition tells me that we both don't want to go there so we don't talk about it to each other.

When the women reflected on the times they directed specific questions to their mothers on the matter of residential schools, they received a variety of responses and made reference to how their mothers slowly shared their stories.

When I started asking her questions about it, she didn't have any memories that for her are devastating or traumatic but I seen like through my uncles that something did happen to them, to their spirits. To this day, my mom is slowly starting to talk about it, what she remembers I guess...things that come back to her, and humiliating things that happened to her. I remember one time she told me when she wet the bed, that the nuns, or whatever they were called, they made her wear her underwear on her head in front of all of the other kids. You know things like that, that just crushed her spirit.

Another woman spoke of the slow release of her mother's memories. She stated, "The first I heard about residential schools wasn't until I was like in my teens. Anything I heard, it would just come out in, like, everyday life, just a hint here and there. Like up until my teens, I don't even recall ever hearing anything about residential schools or even knowing what it was."

Remembering the positive and the negative

In some cases, the mothers' first remembrances of the schools were both positive and negative memories. This was a common thread to many of the stories shared in the circle. On the one hand, the mothers presented the schools as an opportunity for learning or as a way that they avoided starvation or violence at home. On the other hand, they recognized that they were emotionally, physically and sexually abused. Knowing that their mothers, along with thousands of other Aboriginal children, had experienced varying degrees of trauma made it difficult for the daughters to see anything good about residential schools. One stated, "Anyway, when we were younger, I remember her saying stuff like, 'If it wasn't for residential school, I would have starved.' Saying stuff like that and taking it too far." In a similar vein, another woman shared the following:

[My mother] would talk about [residential school] and she said that she was luckier than her sisters because she...was very beautiful and she could sing and she could act. So the nuns and the priests favoured her. She kept in touch with them, over the years, they would write to her. She remained in touch with a lot of the people that went or was there at the residential school time. She went to [...] college right after that. For her, I guess, she had a little bit more of a different experience to make her able to talk about it. So she would share with us, she said 'You know, I didn't have it as bad as others.'

She also recalled, "You know when kids would run away and then would come back and they'd get beaten." And she shared the emotional stress of being shuffled back and forth from her beloved grandparents and culture to the residential school:

'Imagine you are 7 years old,' ...she [my mother] was living with her grandparents, they had raised her, 'and they'd come and they'd take you. That everything about your family is wrong, your grandparents, your language is wrong, your culture is wrong and you'd be stuck there ten months in the year and you get to go home, for two the months you got to stay with your grandparents and sort of the stress you would feel of going back there and going back to residential school.'

The quote below again hints at the positive and negative perspectives of the schools:

But what I remember from my other family members was my great aunt would always say 'I don't know what everybody is complaining about. My kids went to residential school and they were fine. It was better to be at the residential school than to be here.' [M]y grandfather was abusive to the boys, very abusive, he'd beat them. [M]y one uncle says that he had a very positive experience being in residential school because he wasn't at home where they were seriously beaten and forced to work. And he said he had a positive experience there.

Witnessing Violence

Abuses sustained by the children in residential school were often cruel and intentional. Hints were dropped here and there by the mothers, such as remembered by one of the participants, "[My mother] was really upset and she's sitting at the table and she was crying. She just said, 'I'm really, I'm so glad I wasn't pretty like my sister because of the things that happened to her.'" In another narrative, one of the women recalled how her mother witnessed the sexual abuse of her family members by the school priest.

... there was this little hole that they would go and look in. There were a couple of girls that the priest would always call into this room. There were two of them that would always get chosen and at night they would come and take them out there. The other girls knew that little hole and they would go and look into that little hole. My mom told us that they would see what goes on...what those priests would be making my aunts and cousins do in that room. To hear that, it was really hard.

Two of the participants acknowledged other family members as survivors of the school system. The following quotes demonstrate how they have been affected by the other residential school survivors in their families:

And I feel as we are talking about our moms, I still feel as if I'm not talking about my mom. It's my dad. Because my mom was silent, she was silent. And I always blame my dad. So, when I talk about residential schools, and its impact on me, it's my dad and only because my mom was silent. The silence is awful. I still don't like silence.

I guess when I talk about my mother's experiences, I think I also have to acknowledge that my grandmother, my mother's mother, also went to a residential school. My father also went to a residential school as well as his mother...I know that their experiences have impacted me too in different ways. Their experiences will never be known because they're not around anymore.

Inter-generational Effect: Mental Health Issues

In several stories, the women shared how their mothers suffered mental illness, had attempted suicide or had experienced suicidal ideations. One woman told, for example, how both she and her mother have struggled with depression. Others shared the following stories:

Throughout my childhood she attempted suicide three times. I remember each time my father would come and get me to help him revive her or whatever. I don't think they ever pin-pointed it to the residential school, but in hindsight, I do know.

I think the other pivotal thing that happened to me, is that mom was, this is just right after she...was talking about her experiences in the school, she was suicidal all that year. She went through therapy and she was always saying all sorts of strange things and doing strange things.

In some ways, it seemed as if in each story the inter-generational effects were highly complex and were often met with counter effects, push back and resiliency. For example, while many of the mothers chose to remain silent on their childhood experiences, they did speak their narratives indirectly to their daughters. Or at the same time that they were emotionally distant from their daughters, they also demonstrated alternate displays of deep affection. Certainly what came out clearly through this sharing process was that all of the daughters spoke of their profound love, respect and admiration for their mothers.

How then did these effects pervade Aboriginal women's lives as they became mothers? What was it like to be parented by a mother who had survived residential schools? The next question that was asked in the sharing circle looked to understand this.

Section 3:

Being Mothered by a Residential School Survivor

As more stories are told by residential school survivors, it has become evident that their “surrogate” parents - be they priests, nuns or teachers - did not always have their best interests in mind. Nor did they suitably equip them with the skills and emotional knowledge for raising their own children. We will now look to the nuanced complexities of how survivors mothered and how this affected their daughters.

Coping Mechanisms and their Aftermath

Women described their mothers’ anger and unhealthy coping mechanisms in adulthood. They spoke about their mothers’ use of alcohol as a means to cope. To quote, “My mother was an alcoholic; she coped with alcohol to deal with stuff”. Another woman suggested, “I think that [my mother] handled her experiences through alcohol”.

In some cases, alcoholism was coupled with other methods of coping, such as religion. One of the women remembered:

We would go to the church. My mom remained very religious even when she got out of the residential schools and she maintained that almost fervent religious attitude towards things pretty much her whole life. She would go to the church in [the same place as the residential school], the church is still there. We would go to mass there. The school was there and so it was a constant reminder.

She continued:

I remember my childhood was spent going to church and prayer meetings, those kinds of things, the religious part was there for [my mother] so it helped her cope but the alcoholism was also there. When she would drink, that's when her hatefulness and hurtfulness would come out. ... But she also had this anger. She would hold on to it, hold on to it then explode, breaking things or hitting us. A lot of times with objects, not with her hands but the pulling of the hair would drive me crazy.

At times the mothers were simply absent from their families because of their alcoholism. As stated by one woman, "I always remember that she would go on binges and leave us and I remember [her being] a whole weekend away."

One of the women presented how despite their coping strategies, anger and violence were commonplace, albeit hidden from public view. She shared the following:

[My mother] sobered up years later but she was angry. She didn't have an outlet for that healing to happen for herself. She was very angry. It was the Catholic Church that supported her at that time. I remember having to go to church all the time, go to catechism classes. And us going home and she would still be very angry.

She went on to state:

I kind of got angry at the church at that time too because my mom, she would be so nice to all these people in church and then when we got home, it was like we were being hit by 2 x 4's, with cords from phones, with everything. She didn't hit us with her hand, she'd hit us with boards and everything like that. I have a sister, and her and I would used to take beatings and when we would try to run, she would go beat up the other one...all the time it was like that.

Coping Mechanisms and their Aftermath: Staying Busy and Workaholism

Some of the women explained how they only get to know their mothers through observing them in their public life. One of the women described her mother's coping mechanism was through staying busy and hard work. It was after her mother passed away that she got to know her and this was through her co-workers. To quote:

[My mom] worked incredibly hard - worked herself into sickness. That's where she was able to create relationships, not in a family, but she obviously had very positive relationships with the people that she worked with. For years after, they dedicated events and ceremonies and stuff like that that they'd invite us to. They had memorial events for my mom and that kind of stuff. And maybe we found out...about positive things about my mom. We found out from these people that she worked with that she was able to be loving in her working relationships.

Several of the women told how their mothers' absence, due to work or otherwise, required them take on parental responsibilities with siblings. This is exemplified in the following quote:

[My mother] was a very hard working woman. And she was always gone. And thinking back, not saying anything negative, like, she was just a rotten parent. I just think...it didn't connect in her mind that it's wrong to leave your doors locked and not come home forever and leave your kids. I remember coming home from school and having to wait outside because I couldn't get into the apartment or into our home...I don't know what she was doing or where she was, but things like that don't connect. [S]he used to work at night [and] I remember [her] saying to me, 'Remember at six o'clock, you get your brother and sister in the house.' Meanwhile, I'm young. I was still in elementary school. 'You get your brother and sister in the house or else [Child and Family Services] will come and take you guys away.' I was terrified. At six o'clock, I would actually wait. Even before six o'clock, I'd just wait. And then, I'd be on the street, just screaming, 'Get in the house!' Calling them in and making sure they stayed in the house.

Coping Mechanisms and their Aftermath: Regiment and Perfectionism

The women also talked extensively about the regimental parenting styles of their mothers. One woman expressed, "My brother just said that [mom] was like a military sergeant." Another said, "[my mom] never had energy to deal with us or parent us except to [use] physical discipline".

The women exchanged stories exemplifying common childhood experiences around household chores. One woman remembered how as a nine year-old she hated cleaning the floors as it was not a simple broom or vacuum chore. She said:

In [my mother's] mind though, it was not abuse, it was correcting us. If we did anything wrong, boy, look out. But that was her way of correcting us. And when you talk about how everything has to be done a certain way, boy your days were spent like...I remembered the floors like that's what I hated the most, we had to strip them and wax them. When you are 9 years old, it was good for us, I guess. It made us a lot tougher and stronger.

How discipline and parenting patterns are taught and then passed between generations is illustrated in the following story:

My mother had a certain way that you had to do things...I remember her grabbing this towel repeatedly and whipping me with it, telling me, "Fold it right. Fold it right." And "Fold it again." Because that's the way she was taught. And do you know, to this day, I still fold my towels exactly the way that she does. And it may be something little, but I even make my kids fold their towels the way she was taught to fold those towels.

Another woman related how her mother was highly structured and aimed for perfection, "I remember the behaviours. There's a structure of how to do things, it's almost to perfection, everything has to be perfect. And there's a certain way to do things. So I grew up with that with both my parents."

Coping Mechanisms and their Aftermath: Emotional Distancing

The women also reflected on the emotional bonds, or lack thereof, with their mothers. That love was not a part of the family culture left many of the women feeling an emotional distance from their mothers. As one of the women explained, “I know that [my mother] was never able to show any emotion...like we were never hugged as kids. I see that now...I have a [young] daughter and [my mother] can barely spend half an hour with her”. Another woman recalled her aunt expressing her anger at being unable to be affectionate with her children: “They can never give me back what they did to me. I can’t hug my kid. I couldn’t be a mother to my children. I blame all of that on residential school.”

Emotional distance was a painful topic for many of the women. It conjured up feelings of absence and silence, and as the following example shows, a profound sadness in not having emotional needs met as daughters, despite their mother’s physical presence. To quote,

...if I was experiencing pain...[my mother] wasn’t somebody who would say ‘come hug me’ and say that ‘it’s alright, it’s going to be alright’. And so when somebody says those words to me, ‘You know it’s going to be alright. You are not alone.’ I burst out crying because I never had that. I had my mom but I didn’t have her emotionally. I still to this day don’t.

As this same woman listened to the other women speak of their mothers, she was disturbed to come to terms with a lifelong disconnection from her mother. She said,

But I still don’t feel like I know her. As I’m sitting here, I feel disconnected from her. That makes me feel sad. We all have moms and when I hear other people talk about their moms, I think, ‘Oh I wish I had that’. There’s a part of me that says that.

In her own analysis, while her mother is an excellent “caregiver” she remains aloof and silent with “emotional caregiving”. This leaves her angry at not having her mother available on that deeper level. In her own words,

She’s a great caregiver in terms of, you know, ‘Do you need some water?’ So, she’s good in that sense, that she can be there. But in terms of emotions, like I could be on the phone, almost in tears and finally I have to just tell her how I am feeling and she would be like, ‘So, how’s the weather out there?’ So now I make a joke of it. I know where that’s coming from. But sometimes I really just want a mom. I’m never going to have that you know and she’s still here to this day, I haven’t lost her physically. So that makes me angry, like it makes me so angry that I didn’t have that.

Likewise, another woman could relate to the previous speaker in that while she may have had a loving relationship with her mother, there was an emotional gap between them. It was a shock for her, as an adult, to hear her mother say that she loved her. To quote,

You know how [we] mentioned that the love is always there, but not the emotion? My mother, I know that she loved us kids to death, but she would never show it. In fact, it wasn’t until I was probably in my 20’s, for the very first time, in my whole life, ever heard my mother ever say to me, ‘I love you.’ That took 20 something years. It was such a shock. I just said, ‘I love you too, mom.’ But it was really hard for me to say that...I really liked it when she said that she loved me. Now, when I’m on the phone with her and I hang up the phone, and she’s the same way, like, I’ll be on the phone with her and I’d be telling her, ‘Mom, I’m so, ah, about something.’ It could be work, or it could be that I’m sick of my husband and what he’s doing, and she’ll go, ‘Oh well, that’s nice dear.’ And I’m like, ‘Mom, are you even listening to me?’ But I know she’d be playing her game, Pogo or whatever she’s playing. Or I’d be talking to her, and all of a sudden, she’d go, ‘Oh darn, I shouldn’t have popped that balloon.’ You know what I mean? Because she’s playing her game, and she just doesn’t have that emotion there.

Intergenerational Effect: Cycle of Violence

For other women, it was not only the emotional chasm, but the abuse throughout childhood, that kept mother and daughter from connecting. This left them harbouring feelings of profound anger towards their mothers, but also with themselves. One of the women shared her feelings about a presentation she gave. She stated, “[The presentation] was for women who had been abused and just to talk about my experience being a second generation survivor and at that time I was pretty angry. I was pretty angry at my mom for things like [we] talked about - never having anyone show me kindness when I was a child.” Denied kindness through her childhood and growing up surrounded by violence, she eventually became violent in adulthood. This learned behavior ultimately landed her in jail. To quote, “I’ve been in Portage women’s jail. I had to go in there to see and experience and it was for being violent towards people, towards women. My sisters, I was fighting them because inside I was trying to fight myself, that’s what it was.”

Her violent upbringing and youth not only landed her in the justice system, but also re-created a similar pattern of parenting with her first child. With regretful insight, she spoke of how raising her first child, who is now in her mid-twenties, as being patterned after how she was raised by her mother. To quote,

[My] mother’s behaviour - she was very angry, always beating us, always yelling. I did that when I was young. I didn’t beat my kids, I don’t beat my kids, but the voice, the anger. I still find myself at times I have to remind myself that I don’t have to be angry like that. But at least I’m aware of it now. In the past, I wasn’t aware of it; I didn’t like myself very much for that.

Now firmly on a healing journey, she talked about forgiving her mother and ultimately herself. She recognized how behaviours are learned and inter-generational. She said, “Those were some of the things that I know were passed on to me - thinking that violence was normal, thinking that it was normal for men to treat me like that, thinking that it’s normal not to hug my kids”.

Counter Effect: Love Between Mothers and Children

For her there were pockets of love from which she could draw strength and comfort. To quote,

I know my mom, she loved us, even though she didn't know how to show it to us and she didn't, but I know she loved us. I know because I used to hear her crying all the time, I used to hear her crying in her bedroom because she didn't have anybody to talk to. All her anger that she showed us, she didn't like herself, I knew it. Even back then, I knew it because she would be crying all the time after she did something to us. But I'm getting there, my mom is getting there.

She could see, in retrospect, how this passed on to her, which was in turn passed on to her own daughter. To quote,

The anger and everything that I witnessed that [my mother] did to us, I forgave her for that because I love her. No matter what happened, I loved her. To me, she was always this very beautiful spirit even though she didn't know how to show it, she didn't know how to hug us and tell us that she loved us. It took me a lot of therapy myself to be able to start doing that for my own children. My [oldest] daughter, we still struggle all the time because she's not out of that blaming me yet, for me not being the very best parent to her when she was growing up. My mom was also a part of raising her, so she's seen that anger first hand. I see my daughter struggle today.

Counter Effect: Struggle and Change

Similarly another of the women related how on some levels, she is constantly pushing old patterns away for new ones. While she seems to have won this battle on many fronts, she is still aware of how she is ultimately the product of her parents. She takes care to explain this to her child. To quote,

And so the way I explain it to [my child] is that 'I have my mom and dad in me, your mooshum and kohkom (grandfather and grandmother), I am a part of them. So their behaviour, sometimes, I've picked up. That scary, yelling voice that I do – it's like I have moosum in me. And sometimes it comes out, moosum comes out and it scares me just like it scares you and I really, I want you to know that I'm working really hard to get that part of moosum out of me'.

Section 4:

Daughters' Experiences with the Inter-generational Effects

In some ways the women were very similar to their mothers. As daughters they lived with many of the same effects as their mothers and developed many of the same coping mechanisms. The effects were perpetuated as if the daughters had attended the schools themselves.

Coping Mechanisms: Staying Busy and Workaholism

Workaholism was a common coping mechanism the women talked about. Working hard tends to be valued in society, but some women explained that they used it as a coping mechanism. One woman said that the reason she worked so hard was to avoid thinking about or feeling the inter-generational legacy, "I can't be not doing anything, too much thinking, too much going on, so I'm grateful for her." Workaholism can be an obsession or an addiction, "I always say to people, 'I'm a worker, give me something to work on and I'll sit there and work on it until you have to pull me away from doing it, right?'" In the following quote, the woman likened workaholism to alcoholism.

For me...my unhealthy coping mechanism [workaholism] is highly socially acceptable. Working so hard to the point of...growing tumours in your body... working so hard and stressing yourself out so much...the by-product of [workaholism] is highly socially acceptable [and that you are] very, very, very successful in work. I wasn't smart and I wasn't interested in university, it was one of the hardest things I ever did because I hated being there. I finished it because I'm a dedicated, hard worker, that's why I did it. If my coping mechanism was to be a dedicated alcoholic, I would have wrecked my liver instead, but I didn't and so it ends up that what people call successful is doing well, getting a good education and getting a good job and stuff like that. So, it ends up that the by-product of my unhealthy coping mechanism is something that people consider to be very positive.

She continued,

...the biggest things that I do are because of the things that I learned from my mom and one of them is that I'm an absolutely outstanding worker. And I say it like that because if you hear me say that, I don't know if I sound like I'm bragging or that's a very positive thing, cause most people do think of that it's a very positive thing. But if I say to you, 'I'm an outstanding drinker!' You would just be like...(gestures like so what?) you know? So like for me, I'm an outstanding worker ... I learned to do things as a way of being good, I always thought was a way to avoid my mom's anger. Being a little kid, you would think that 'if the house is clean, then nobody would be mad and if I do good in school, no one's going to get mad at me, right?' So I'm really, really good at working. I'm very task oriented on everything that I do and goal oriented very getting things done.

Coping Mechanism: Pleasing Others

Several of the women learned workaholism as a coping mechanism in childhood, either copying it from their mothers, doing it in response to their mothers' absence or to avoid their mothers' anger by 'being good'. This tendency to overwork was often recalled by the women as having started in childhood, connected to the adult responsibilities they took on as children. As noted earlier, one woman developed an obsession with cleanliness and tidiness as a result of taking on an adult level of responsibility for chores as a child. As a result of things like, getting up extra early before school to clean up after her mothers' parties so her father would not see them or having to drive into town at age nine to do the laundry, she and her siblings are all still fastidious.

Another also expressed that the drive to work hard and succeed, sometimes to the point of perfectionism or workaholism, had roots in a strong need to please other people.

...I want everything to be good. And I want to make people happy. I want to be able to please people, including my co-workers or my employers. I want to make them happy. For clients, I put quality to the work I do. In school, I want to make myself happy because I don't want to quit anything. And I don't. I don't quit anything. And I'm done with it when I succeed and when it's completed on a positive note. That's the same with my kids. I make sure that I tell them as well, you know, you have to do this, you have to do that.

Inter-generational Effect: Perfectionism

The following account shows how perfectionism has become an obsession for one of the women:

But even the hard work is something that I think I got from my mother because, along with this, I always have to keep everything neat and clean and in it's place. I'm just [almost] obsessed with perfection. Even when I write things or do any kind of work, I just had to have it perfect. That, I wish I could get past because sometimes it becomes a little time consuming... Thinking back, it's just the building of this perfection and this hard drive to succeed that I have today. My mother, she worked labour jobs, but she, one thing that she taught me was that you have to work hard, and you always respect the people you work for. No matter what. I put up with some kind of garbage at work or whatever, but I know my place. I'm being paid to do this. And those are some of the things that she had taught me.

Inter-generational Effect: Mental Health Issues

Women also related how they have experienced a variety of mental illnesses including depression, eating disorders, workaholism, obsessive-compulsive disorders, self-hate and low self esteem. One woman related for example how she experienced sexual abuse by a family member over the course of several years. This was difficult not only because it was a violation against her body but because she was never protected. Again, this is not dissimilar to situations of children in residential school who could call upon no one when faced with physical and sexual indignities. Another difficult part of her story is that to this day, the family remains silent on the matter. In her words,

But because of that experience, my parents not being there, I've done some horrible things to my body. I went through eating disorders. I would go from being a hundred pounds then next year, close to two hundred pounds just from not eating, to eating lots and to throwing all the food up. I think all those things that I was doing is that I was trying to make myself not be here, to just try to be invisible.

Another woman related how both she and her mother experienced mental health issues:

... I was diagnosed with having depression and my mom had depression too. The only way that I ever actually accepted treatment and started to work on it was when I knew I wouldn't be able to work anymore, unless I dealt with it...

Coping Mechanism: Self-Protection and Protecting Others

The emotional and physical experiences of pain and anger left women with a strong need to protect themselves and others. In the quote where the woman recalled getting up before school to clean up after her mother's parties, she both recalled "I remember being so mad", and protecting her family from the aftermath. The need to protect was strongly voiced by all the women. Daughters felt a strong need to protect – to protect both their siblings and their mothers from experiencing further pain. One woman told, "I remember when I was 9 and my sister would've been 10, my older sister probably got the brunt of it because our two younger sisters, we protected them too." This protection of siblings resonates with mothers' experiences of trying to protect their own siblings in residential school.

Women experienced many ways of emotionally protecting themselves. Similar to their mother's blocked childhood memories, several women spoke about forgetting portions of their lives and fully acknowledged how this relates to how they experienced one type of trauma or another. Simply put by one woman, "... I don't remember [much] about my childhood. I think I disassociated a lot when I was younger and so there are huge gaps in my life that I don't remember." Another woman echoed this very same dissociation from her childhood memories, "I'm envious of people when they say, 'Oh I remember when I was this age...' and it's like, how do you remember that? I don't remember. So, I guess part of my life, my childhood, I don't remember."

One woman mentioned that preventing herself from experiencing feelings about her childhood experience was one way she has protected herself. She had to use silence to protect herself from her father, even when she wanted to protect her mother from her father by yelling. Her mother had used silence for protection in residential school and continues to do so. And now her daughter used the silence between them to protect her mother.

So this is really good, it's really made me think about how I guess that I've never talked about before in this way letting myself feel. Because I don't. It's part of that protection too because I grew up in violence and abuse, so I think it's a way it might be me protecting my mom still. Because I remember one night trying to yell out and I remember my mom and my dad and my dad hitting her and she was screaming. And I hate that scream that she has, it's like awful. And I remember yelling out because I wanted to protect her and my dad threatening me and from that day on I never tried to protect her again. And so maybe this is my way trying to protect her and acknowledging that even though she was silent, she still had an impact on my life. And I think that's her protection, that's how she protected herself in school. She just stayed silent. I think that worked for her and she continues to use that. Wow this is great, how that makes so much sense...I never thought of it that way. My way of protecting her and the way she protected herself.

Even today the women wanted to protect their mothers from scrutiny or people thinking ill of them. All of the women had deep admiration and respect for their mothers. They love their mothers and it was difficult for all of them to speak of the 'bad' aspects of their childhoods. Many of them were careful in the learning circle discussion to balance stories and comments about their mothers' faults and mistakes with comments and stories about the wonderful things about them.

I always knew the things that she did. She would try and take us here, and try and take us there when we were kids. I remember always driving out to the beaches and stuff like that. And always having fun. But never the hugs or anything like that.

Daughters wanted to protect their mothers from further trauma and pain. There was a strong sense shared among the women during the learning circle and the video-making process of not wanting to expose mothers to any further pain or embarrassment, rather to highlight their mothers' love and resiliency. As one of the videos begins, "I really admire my mother. She's the most resilient person I know. My mother is a residential school survivor." They also all discussed that their mothers tried their best, given the tools and skills they had. As one woman explained,

But [my mom] is the most loveliest, kindest person you'll ever meet. She's very caring and giving. So when I talk about her in that way, it sounds like I'm talking about somebody different because if you meet her, she's just really beautiful light...just a wonderful person to be around.

Inter-generational Effects on Parenting

For the women who are now mothers, they described their own parenting as a mix of reproducing old patterns and pushing old patterns away for new ones. Some women said they had no pattern to follow, since residential schools prevented them from learning parenting skills from their parents. The effect is that this produced strong emotions such as fear, anxiety and emotional dissociation between them and their children. One woman explained,

I remember looking at [my newborn] one night and I realized that I was absolutely terrified of her. The thought of being alone with her just absolutely terrified me and I couldn't figure out why...my own child I didn't want to be alone with. When she looked at me, I felt like that she can see right through me. It just scared the life out of me. I'd say for the first year, I was just terrified to be alone with her and I would act out. I would hold her,

and I would walk with her and I would sing to her but she absolutely terrified me and yet I really, really just loved her with everything inside me and I couldn't figure out why I was so scared of her. Then I realized one day it's because I had nothing to draw from. I didn't know what it was to be a mother. Because I had no memories of my mom mothering me. My mom just wasn't around. So I really tried hard to deal with that because I knew that I loved her, that I wanted to be a mother for her. I pretended for the first year. I looked at other moms and I'd try to be that way, I went to mothering groups. I would watch the other mothers play with their kids, so that's what I would do when I would get home. But the thing that would really bother me that I didn't feel connected to her. My partner was more connected with her than I was and I don't know how that changed over the years but I know now that I can hug her and I feel love for her and I can hug her all the time. She's a very loving child so I don't know when I crossed over to being present with her but I know that I am now. So I know that my mom's experience impacted me that way.

For the women who had become mothers at a young age and hadn't had time to do much healing, some said they ended up passing on the same parenting styles that had negatively affected them. According to one woman, "I was 16 and I got pregnant and still hadn't started dealing with my own stuff. My [child] experienced some of those - a lot of those same things because of my behaviour..." Several women expressed their youthful parenting as strict, "I was like my mom. I was a strict disciplinarian. Everything had to be a certain way with them, my three older ones, especially my older daughter." It was as if the abusive regimental experience of 'parenting' in the residential schools became normalized as the way to parent children, which then passed through the generations.

However, many of the women also talked about how they emotionally changed the parenting patterns that they had experienced. One woman explained that "from that lack of her having no parenting skills, I think I've developed and made it my own goal to be an excellent parent to my kids." For some women changing deeply ingrained parenting patterns takes an enormous amount of dedication to change over many years of parenting:

It wasn't until [my daughter] was about 5 I started to realize, look at myself...you are hitting this kid for things she can't even...I used to give her spankings and lickings. That's the way I was taught how to parent and then I made up my mind. I said I'm not going to be my mother, I'm not going to be my dad because, he had the belt. If you didn't do right, watch out. My husband had a hard time controlling himself and he used to always and he still does it now and I get so angry with him. I threaten him, if you ever touch them, that's it. That's my one rule, he had to learn to control his anger, to not hit them. So we did we smarten up...

I have a little guy, you know I love him, I hug him everyday. He tells me he loves me. But I wanted to hug him, cuddle with him. Some days I want to do that tell him to come and lay with me and hug and cuddle. But he can't come sit still when he's in bed with me. I don't know if it's because I never did too much of that when I was with him when he was a baby but I'm still working on it. I'm still going to try and tell him while he's little because this is probably my last baby, my last chance to make things right for my children, right for him. I can still do it with my daughters when we're in therapy with my daughters.

The women talked about wanting to protect their children in every way, including making them feel emotionally safe and spiritually whole. One woman explained,

Oh and my children, I just love them so much. I have such beautiful sons and daughters. I remember yelling at [my son] one time. I seen his face just drop. I could tell that I was damaging his spirit and I'm just like 'what did I just do?' What did I just do to this young man because he was [a young teen]. I said, 'I can't do that to him' ...holy smokes, I recognized that right away. If I do that to him that's going to do something in him, to that beautiful spirit that he has.

Sometimes the women made their children feel emotionally safe by talking with them about how the inter-generational legacy has passed down through the generations and have encouraged them to take part in acknowledging and changing it. They also talked about ensuring that their children received the physical affection and attention that they had not received. Many women talked about how the schools had seriously compromised their mothers' abilities to show physical affection towards them and their children. Receiving or giving hugs to siblings in residential school was commonly prevented or punished. The impact of this was that mothers were unable to hug their own children. This was passed on to the next generation. However, many of the women talked about their efforts to change this and to restore a legacy of physical affection to their children's generation:

...as bad as it [my childhood] was, I also want to be grateful for that because then would I be the mom that I am today? Because I don't want my son...I don't want him to feel alone. I don't want him to feel that he's not protected. So I talk about everything with him. If anything, as bad as it was and what I missed out, it's also made me a better mom, I believe.

Even through the act of hugging her kids daily and encouraging them to hug each other this woman demonstrates resistance to the residential school legacy, reinstating the affection Aboriginal families would have experienced before colonial disruption of family patterns.

How [residential school] impacted me is, I hug my kids daily. It was different because of [my childhood]. There was not that emotion there. It was awful for us to even say to my brother, "I love you," or give me a hug. That was unheard of, to even hug our siblings. But today, my little kids, they just love each other. And they even say, "I love you." And they even hug each other. I make sure. That's one thing I wanted for my kids. And I learned that from my mother. Another thing about that is, I want them to have that attention that I never had.

Inter-generational Effect: Anger

Women felt a strong need to protect, to embrace new parenting patterns and ways of being, even while they wrestled with a profound sense of anger below the surface.

I could be very violent, I could be very violent. Like this one day, I seen this one girl, beating her son in a shopping mall. Later that night, I happened to see her out in the town and I went and I attacked her and beat her up. I told her, 'You want to beat up little children?' I didn't know I had so much anger, so much rage.

Women talked about how anger was generated in survivors who had experienced mental, physical, spiritual, intellectual abuse in the schools and through the profound loss and dislocation of language, culture, community, family connection and identity. They talked about how that anger was passed on as an inter-generational effect of the schools.

...my mother's behaviour, she was very angry, always beating us, always yelling. I did that when I was young. I didn't beat my kids, I don't beat my kids, but the voice, the anger. But I'm so glad to have found...you know that loss of identity, not having the language, not having an identity...

Women expressed how this anger is very hard to address, very hard to unburden themselves from and unlearn in their bodies. One stated, "I haven't been able to do the coping skills with anger and that I need to do. I need to do that and I just haven't done it." Many of the women have worked very hard over many years to find ways to cope with and let go of the anger. Another said, "But that anger thing, that's what I been through therapy for the most, dealing with my anger, I let it build."

Self-medicating Away the Pain

While workaholism, which was discussed earlier, came to the forefront in the women's discussions as a coping mechanism for pain and anger produced by the residential school legacy, another one of the ways some women talked about coping was through self-medication with alcohol. One woman stated, "Alcoholism, to me, that was a way to not have to feel, not have to deal with things." In some cases, using alcohol to manage anger was also used by the women's parents. This coping and which passed to them. To quote,

She would let us drink when we were younger. I was probably an alcoholic by the time I was maybe 13 or 14 years old. I would say that it's fortunate that drugs didn't agree with me because I used to get really sick when I would take any kind of drugs. I tried experimenting with all of them...

Although many of the women spoke of their days of alcohol use in the past tense, some confided that they still use it to cope with the pain of issues that remain unresolved. In the following quote, a woman shared that drinking keeps her from having horrible nightmares. It is not uncommon for survivors of abusive internment and their children to experience terrifying post-traumatic nightmares³⁸. And it is not uncommon for people to use alcohol to mitigate the effects of these nightmares, even people who maintain successful, high-powered, professional careers.

³⁸ A great deal of literature, too much to cite here, exists on post-traumatic nightmares of Nazi holocaust survivors and their children. Indeed, nightmares are widely recognized as a hallmark of post-traumatic stress. Several authors and many more health and service providers attest to the link between residential schools and post-traumatic stress (Brave Heart, M. 2003; Menzies, P. 2007; Mitchell, T. & D. Maracle 2005).

And the alcoholism side of it, I still cope with that. I still haven't corrected that and fixed that in my life. It's open in my family, they know that I'm a functional alcoholic. I said to my daughters, 'I really have to be able to get a hold of this.' My younger daughter said, 'Why, what's wrong with you?' I said, 'I'm an alcoholic.' She said, 'No, you're not. Alcoholics are those people who are down and drunk, that's those people on the street.' I said, 'No, they're not.' I said 'I cope with alcohol still. I still do that.' And my husband says, 'You really got to fix this.' It's something I still cope with. I'm still there. I've done my therapy but I still haven't been able to get into my head to beat that piece of it in my life. I fixed it with everything else so, I exercise, I eat healthy and everything else. I figure maybe that will balance it off in the end. I have nightmares, I have really bad nightmares. If I don't have a couple of drinks to get me through, every time I quit drinking, the nightmares come back and my husband knows, they are just awful. When he's not home and when he's traveling, and I'm alone they are terrifying and I just hate being alone. And so I cope like that.

Inter-generational Effects on Women's Relationships with Others

Another way of coping with the pain and anger of the residential school legacy was by establishing or reestablishing supportive close relationships. Having to face painful experiences without emotional support from others echoed through many of the women's childhoods. Not having to face difficulties alone was clearly important to women coping with and addressing inter-generational effects. Many of them discussed struggling to come to terms with some of the relationships in their lives, particularly with the disconnection from their mothers. Several craved to know their mothers better and to have a closer relationship with them. Some were able to establish this to varying degrees and some were not.

... I feel like I don't know my mom either. I feel like I don't know her and I really do want to get to know her but there's that whole thing again where I still do that and I could go and say, 'Mom, I'd really like to get to know you.' But I won't.

Another woman talked about having difficulty, not with establishing or reestablishing relationships, but with maintaining relationships over an extended period of time. She explained that she was so used to dealing with short-term crisis, which she did very well, that she found long-term commitments quite difficult.

I help people, I listen to people in crisis and I try to bring it back to a balance when it's really bad... I always was going from thing to thing, fixing crises. And then getting completely burnt out and not knowing how to deal with it then just moving on, just leaving and or going somewhere. The hardest thing that I ever did was try to maintain relationships, and maintain a house and maintain jobs. I stayed in a job for [several] years and that was really hard for me to do because I've never done that. To stay in the same place, in the same job, in the same relationship all that stuff was the hardest thing I have ever done.

Some of the women discussed having different public and private lives, which was similar to some of their mothers. They talked about how their public career personas are quite different from the way they are in private. They shared how they struggled to balance private coping and public career success.

I think for me, my sisters and I had this conversation because we all went to university and we've all been, I guess in our professional careers successful. I don't think we feel as confident in the other part of me, at least my other sister and myself really struggled in our personal lives and in our choices and selections, it hasn't been great.

This woman went on to talk about how she has managed to find a balance and to bring the different parts of herself together.

So when you are talking about people seeing you as a certain person out in the world, I teach and I worked on different things in my life and people see me as one way but the way I really was at home is very different. I've constantly battled with those two sides of myself...I know that I'm not like that anymore. I'm sort of like, for whatever reason, I don't know whether if it's because of my daughter coming into my life or just the age that I'm at or all that therapy that I've gone through, I finally feel like I'm balanced inside again. That person that's out there working is the same person at home and the person that I am to my daughter outside is the really the way that I am with her at home the way that I really feel about her.

Section 5:

Inter-generational Effects on Daughters' Children

More and more stories of the grandchildren of residential school survivors point to the ongoing legacy of residential school. These stories also tell of the enduring resiliency of multiple generations and the work undertaken by Aboriginal people to turn around the residential school legacy. The women's stories wove between the generations, from their mothers to themselves and their children and back again. This section will focus on what the women told of the inter-generational legacy that has passed along to their own children and their children's children.

Inter-generational Effect: Embodied Pain

Women's stories demonstrated that emotional pain can become physical and can remain in the body as aches and pains. Their stories told of how painful memories can transmit through the body and can fold between generations. To quote:

...even though I don't do what my dad does in terms of the physical abuse or what he did, he has influenced the way that I'm completely aware of it now and I talk to my son about it but, it's the voice. That mean, deep, scary voice. It comes out of me and when I see the look on my son's face, I can't take that back. That's the tough part, you can't take it back because it's there now, it's a body memory, it's that damn body memory. He's sitting there in front of me and I'm using that dark, scary voice and I can see in that look on his face and the tears starting to come, it's that body memory that I've created.

When abuse of children resides in a family's past, subsequent generations can become keen observers of the bodily behaviours of others, for their own protection and for the protection of those they love.

It's funny because my kids correct their behaviour around me when they know when I'm starting to work to that explosion level. If I start correcting, my son would say, 'Stop. I'll take that off before your head starts spinning.' He'll move me to the side. If I'm cooking or doing something and I'm frustrated with it, and he knows I'm starting to build, he'll stop me. And even my daughter has this behaviour mechanism of just shutting down. She knows that there is just no point of responding to me because 'I know where you're going to go with this.' It's been a lot of work.

Not only does this preceding quote demonstrate self-protection of children confronted by their mother's behaviours, it also shows how children step up to protect their mothers. The following quote reveals how one of the women spoke of the guilt she felt about her heavy reliance on her child.

And [my husband and I] shared a lot with her, too much, because I depended on her a lot because we were such young parents. I would struggle and I would depend a lot on her, I put her through a lot. I still do it now and I feel bad about it and I apologize to her because I go up to the bar where she works. Because I know I had a few too many, she'd put me in a cab and send me home and say 'Kay mom, that's enough.' I feel so guilty still and I say to her 'I'm so sorry'. My daughter shouldn't be the one taking care of me and protecting me and making sure that I'm not messing up.

Wanting to protect their mothers was a common theme through the generations, as was young daughters looking after their mothers.

Inter-generational Effect: Anger

Many of the daughters and granddaughters struggled with similar effects as their grandmothers who went to residential school. The following quote speaks of how cycles of abuse can pass through the generations, from mother to daughter to grandchild to great-grandchild.

...we still struggle all the time because she's not out of that blaming me yet for me not being the very best parent to her when she was growing up. My mom was also a part of raising her, so she's seen that anger first hand. I see my daughter struggle today. The other night I had a phone call from her, she's abusive to her partner, her partner is abusive to her and the grandchildren see it. My little grandchild, I can see his little temper already. It's developing and I'm trying to explain to her how powerful she is as a woman and to think of those things. She's waiting to get into therapy. I told her many times that I'll be there to support her.

My [daughter], she experienced some of those - a lot of those same things because of my behavior, she's seen her dad, maybe she didn't exactly see it because it only happened twice, but I got out of there and took her out of there and then my mom helped me. She never really seen the beatings but she's seen the effects of the beatings the black eyes, the fat lip.

Counter Effect: Struggle and Change

Another woman shared how her grown children struggle with inter-generational effects. This quote also speaks of the healing that can be passed inter-generationally, when family members are able to undertake healing and to pass the healing on.

My oldest daughter, I feel a lot of guilt, because she really suffered a lot because I didn't parent appropriately, neither could my husband. We did the best we could but she really suffered. She still really resents us because she feels like...we have our baby, just this amazing beautiful girl but she is spoiled rotten because you know...she got everything and my older kids would always say to me, 'You parent her differently' and I used to say 'It's because I'm coping differently now. I wasn't the same person when with you guys.'

Another woman shared:

I still feel for my daughter, I see her sometimes and she struggles with life and making good choices and surviving and I feel that I let it go. I know I had a lot to do with it and now we talk about it, I've been to a lot of therapy and I encourage her to go to therapy and let go of her anger because I see it in her too. I said, 'You need to cope better, you need to understand that there's choices in life.'

Even though I was raised a certain way and certain things happened to me, I chose at different points in my life to make better choices and to work towards giving them...my husband and I both said too, we didn't want them to have our lives that we had when we were growing up. We wanted our kids

to have everything we didn't have growing up. Sometimes my daughters resented that too. Now they're good with it but there are times they say, 'You know there are times that you should've just separated and not stayed together because you guys weren't healthy and it didn't help us sometimes, when you weren't healthy together.'

And now we have grandchildren and we've made choices along the way to work really hard at being good parents and working hard at our marriage and going to counseling and stuff so that we can be there now for our grandchildren. Looking back, God, I wish I could take back all of that. The way we are grand parenting, I feel like that's the way we should have been as parents. I feel so guilty about that but at least I think I've made the corrections.

Several women talked about altering their parenting to disrupt the inter-generational legacy and to make positive change in their own lives and those of their children. They spoke about the need to acknowledge and to apologize for the effects that pass through them to their children and how they work hard to change past patterns.

I'm still working on the parenting side and I think we're doing a better job, at least the kids think, they say that too, they're honest, we're honest. I apologize to my kids, I tell them I'm sorry, I'm working so hard at being better at this.

Another woman spoke about how her child experienced a wonderful relationship with her grandmother. This was due in part to the grandmother's healing. It shows that healing the generations and bringing them together can interrupt the residential school legacy. Healing can go forward and back through the generations as they come together.

It's funny because [my mother] is a much better grandparent too. My oldest daughter was 7 when she passed away and she was able to be that real wonderful kohkom to her granddaughter. And my daughter gave us the one thing that really helped her and saved her when things get dark. She would think of my mom, she always had a picture of my mom hanging in her room and my mom's shawl.

Section 6: Resiliency and Healing

Many of the women talked about their mothers were resilient in residential school and its aftermath and how that has been passed on to them. They spoke of their mothers' determination to survive and thrive, how they have learned from it and been inspired by it.

And I think that my mom taught me that in her life - that she was really determined to be here because there are so many things in her life that told her that she shouldn't be here, all the abuse that she went through. So I think that's a really beautiful, beautiful gift that she gave me. I didn't learn that in therapy, I learned that from her.

Our mothers were resilient. In their own way, they were resilient, they did survive in their own dysfunctional way. So, it was like if they can do it after everything that they've been through, we can certainly do it.

Many of the women recalled stories of being resilient under very difficult circumstances, as early as childhood. Many discussed how they have taken their childhood experiences and positively transformed them in their parenting or work lives. For example:

I'm excellent in crisis situations. I think that's because of being a kid, I dealt with crisis and I was the older kid, so I was the one that got counted on, I was the one who dealt with things... When there was a crisis, I was the one who always made it better. I'm also the one who can always anticipate something, which is excellent for working skills too. I can tell when my mom was going to go off on something right? So you make sure everything is okay. So sort of anticipate, you make everything right.

Sometimes the knowledge of how to be resilient came from teachings passed down in the family and from mothers and other female relatives acting as role models. One woman remembered her mother's words, "Don't let being a First Nations woman hold you back. You have more strength because you already come with humility that most people don't have." Another recalled her mother being strong and resourceful out of a need to survive and protect her children.

...I've learned a lot from her. And that is, to be strong and to be independent, and not to have to depend on anyone. And even through all her experiences that she went through, I was just reminded of that. One time where we had to really survive, and she had to protect her children, was when we had a big snow storm. It was unreal. It was in the 80's... out in [a small town]. And my father was on the road ... for three weeks, so he wouldn't even have a clue. When he left, he left us with no wood for the fireplace. We didn't have any electricity because it went out. We were left with no food, no water, no nothing. But my mother, her skills just kinda clicked in.

She made this harness for our dog, because...after a day and a half, we were just freezing. So, she said, 'That's it!' She got us kids bundled up and she went into the bush in the snowstorm with us kids, all sticking together. We plowed through that snow with the toboggan and that dog. She chopped down a tree. All we had was an axe, and she chopped down that tree. We cut down this wood and had the dog hauled it back to the house and we got the fire going. In the meantime, she was melting snow in the house. I don't know how it melted though, but anyways, that snow melted in that freezing house, and we had water that way. It's stuff like that.

Even today, that's what she passed on to me. It's not only in terms of my relationships, but also in terms of the things I do. I can find a way, I'm not kidding, to fix anything. I really think that things are just broken; everything can be fixed. Well, most things. ...That's one thing, I have to fix things. I'm a fixer. And part of that resilience comes from things such as that, being stuck in [that small town]. We [could have] all die[d]. We were stuck in the middle of nowhere. No traffic running, nothing. And for a whole week. A couple of weeks go by, my father comes back, 'Oh, how was everything?' Oh my God, you don't want to ask. I see that, too, is where that comes from are those positive things that came from our childhood, and knowing that instinct to kick in for the sake of our children.

Other family members could sometimes be role models of determination, resiliency and cultural survival, such as in the following quote:

I think the women in my family, my mother's sisters have all exuded [determination] in the way that they had raised us. They took us everywhere, they took us to meetings, they took us to rallies, they took us to funerals. We were just always around them. I think that when you're a child, you just watch everything that your mother and your aunts do and so, maybe they weren't able to express the love that they had for us, but I think they expressed the love that they had for the work that they did and that's something that we picked up. I'm not really too sure where that determination comes from. Does it come from the love grandparents have for their grandchildren? Or does it come from the love that a mother has for their children even though they can't express it and they'll just absorb that somehow? Does it come from our ancestors that aren't around anymore? I don't know. I just know that the determination is really strong in my family.

Women discussed how determination included being strong and independent, able to take care of themselves and their children. One woman shared how she had to be strong during childhood in order to survive violence and dislocation. She also exemplified strength by reaching out to other people who would encourage her healing.

I remember when I was growing up, I had to be tough. I had to have the strength all through my life, in my growing up years. I was kicked out of school when I was 7 for fighting, for protecting my sister and then I hit a teacher, so they kicked me out of that school. Then I was sent to different institutions, different lock ups, different group homes. That's where my teenage years were [spent]. I didn't grow up with my mom because at 12 years old, I couldn't take it anymore. I couldn't take the beatings. So I ran. I'd rather be on the streets, be hungry, be thirsty than be in a home where there's nothing but, like my mom had sobered up, but it was that dry drunk kind of stuff where she was very angry.

I didn't want that. I guess you can say the Creator was watching over me because there were different people in life that influenced me in these different places where I was placed. They started encouraging my spirit that I was somebody that I was worth something. That I wasn't that stupid black Indian, that I wasn't that woman that should be a punching bag all the time.

Several women talked about needing to be strong and successful as part of being good parents to their children. The woman in the following quote spoke of the independence needed for survival that is important to being a parent to her children.

And from [my mother] having no parenting skills, I think I've developed and made it my own goal to be an excellent parent to my kids. But part of being an excellent parent is really wanting to survive and to do the best that I can, and not depend on anybody. And just to be there and be successful. I think that part of my determination is those experiences that my mother had, passing to me and telling me that the only way you're going to overcome this is to teach your children right and to succeed and be determined to do it yourself.

Education was a strong theme throughout the women's stories of resiliency. Despite the negative memories of their residential school experience, several of the mothers encouraged their daughters to get an education. They saw education as a means for financial self-sufficiency, which was one part of being resilient.

My mom, even though she had a hard time and went through what she did, she was really, really solid on education and she really pushed that with me and my sisters. 'You gotta get educated, you have to be able to look after yourself.' Because that's what she said 'helped me in my life'. She said that the best thing she ever did is to be able to have a career and be able to look after herself...

Another woman recalled the work that her mother put into her education:

I think that's part of it, that push in education that my mom did give us ... because she was a teacher and when we were in university, and we brought a paper home she would actually edit it for us and spend time in the evenings just doing things like that even though she was half snapped half the time while she was doing it. She was still there for us.

One woman's grandfather encouraged education across the family so that they would not have to work as hard as he did and so they would be self-sufficient.

For my grandfather, like his big thing was education. We all had to go and get an education. We always thought it was kind of strange, with the residential school system being so damaging ... all his kids went to school. He wanted us to get an education.

Most of us thought that meant we need to get an education to help Native people and that's what we thought the message was. One day, I was sitting down with my cousin and she said that it used to drive her crazy because she is so driven. Even though he'd passed away for many years, she was always working so hard to go through school to please him. She was just tired of doing that. I think my aunts overheard and said, 'He wanted you to go to school so that you can look after yourselves, to be independent, so you don't have to struggle like they did'. We were just so shocked, because we were like 'Oh my God, we could have done anything we wanted to.' I don't think that was necessarily a bad thing, I think it just shows how much we really wanted to please him, to make him proud. So we are always trying to please each other by doing the right thing. And for some reason, my family has just chosen university as the way to please each other. So we are always trying to please and most of us hated it but we just keep on doing it.

One woman told how she chose education as means for financial independence in the following quote:

And I knew that I had to go to university because I found myself to be a single parent of an eight month-old boy. I couldn't survive on twelve dollars an hour to pay rent and to do this and whatever. In order to improve my life, that's how I went to make life better for him. This is what I did for us both. At the end of everything I do, is my children. I really think that comes from the experiences I've had, both positive and negative, from home. For me anyway, that's what I think it is my children...

Sharing stories together about being strong, good at things and successful in school and in their careers inspired women to feel and articulate their resiliency. Being resilient did not mean that they did not mistakes, but rather that they were resilient because of or despite their mistakes. One woman explained that:

I've always been a fighter, I have a hard time saying good things about myself and it's nice to hear you what you said this morning to say that you're excellent at what you do because I think I'm excellent at what I do too at my job. I'm excellent at being a mother even though I've made mistakes. We all make mistakes and I understand that nobody is perfect. I learn all the time. I love learning. I love going forward that way.

Also, being independent did not mean being unconnected with others. Connections with family, and particularly to strong women, was discussed as one of the centres of resiliency.

...there's things that she would say that we all hang on to like, 'You guys have to depend on each other, family is everything.' She would always stay connected with her family. She would tell us, 'You have to stay here.' So we would still get together every November long weekend all us girls. This year we are inviting all our female cousins actually to come. We said, 'We want to get together and have the strength of women.' And so my mom used to say, 'You can love a man but never depend on him. Always keep your strength in yourself. You only have yourself and your sisters to depend on.' So we try to hang on to that.

One woman discussed the inter-generational resiliency that came from her connections with family members who looked after each other, live sincerely and with integrity, despite challenges.

We have this huge, humungous family. Nobody lets each other be alone. If there's something ever wrong going on in our life, my family is always there. Despite our dysfunction, when we get together, I can't even describe the laughter, just this really beautiful feeling of being safe when are together, when we are able to get together. I think that comes from my grandfather on my mother's side. [He] was a trapper and my grandmother didn't speak any English. They didn't have a regular income, they lived off the land and had to raise these 15 kids. So their life was really, really hard. [M]y grandfather had a lot of integrity. It was demonstrated in very subtle ways, there's just instances I think all his grandchildren, including myself, saw in different moments that you really have to be sincere and true to yourself in the way that you treat other people. I think that value has really stuck through all of us. I think what it did, is that we really loved our grandparents so much. We wanted to please them, to live a good life, like they did.

Cherished relationships were also seen with the women's close friends. One woman told how both she and her mother have had strong, supportive 'familial-like' relationships with coworkers.

And the other very positive thing that's come out of me being a hard worker is that I have the family relationships that I have and the best and most supportive people in my life have always been my co-workers. Closer than my actual sister are women that I call my sisters that I met from my jobs, from working with them. And that's what my mom did too.

Humour also plays an important role in women's resiliency. There was much humour around the table as the women told their stories, even though many of the stories were of very difficult and painful times. They talked about how they used humour as a coping mechanism and how joking and laughing with friends and families, provided safety and healing. Others talked about using humour to reclaim themselves and their children from painful legacies. For example, one woman told the story of how she reclaimed and renamed a word that was traumatic from her childhood:

You know the word 'lickin' right? I'm sure [most of you grew up hearing] 'you're going to get a good lickin.' And whether it was a stick, a slipper a belt or whatever. I wanted to take that word and change it. And so ever since [my son] was little, a 'lickin' would be 'I'm going to lick your cheek' or 'I'm going to lick your face'. And so I would say [to my son], 'Do you want a lickin'?...and he would laugh and run away...

Humour is another strength that can pass between generations, helping to retain spirit in tough times and providing a balm for pain. The following quote shows how children's humour can help parents to heal.

And the humour, that's a big thing, that's huge. I love it that my son has a sense of humour. He just makes me laugh out loud which feels good. It feels good to laugh out loud even when I'm in my most pain, to laugh out loud.

Women said that healing was an intense journey. That it was a long process travelled daily. Most of them said that they had done one form or therapy or another, be it conventional or spiritually-based.

I spent probably 10 years of dedicated healing. Mental healing. Body healing. I worked hard at it. I did all kinds of therapy. I guess that's another aspect of why I would be considered to be successful I think.

Some women talked about how they engaged in healing for their children. For example, one woman told how she undertook intensive therapy as part of her healing journey. When she was finally able to acknowledge her loss and grief, the healing could begin.

I was afraid I was going to lose my children. ... My love for them is what made me...[go] to intense treatment where I stayed in a treatment place for 6 months. When I came out of there, I went to another treatment place for another 8 months. So, I was in intensive therapy, for close to 14 months. It was in there that I did my healing, I started identifying different losses and different griefs in my life that I never had a chance to acknowledge [and] never had the chance to let go of...

Another woman talked about the journey she and her husband are taking together.

I've made a lot of improvements in myself and so has my husband, he's been through a lot of therapy too. We've struggled so much to just try and be healthy people. In our professional life, we were able to do that but in our home life and personal lives, we haven't been quite so successful.

Women talked about healing themselves for their children and supporting their children themselves to heal.

[My daughter's] waiting to get into therapy. I told her many times that I'll be there to support her. We went to therapy ourselves but sometimes it's so hard, it has to be on-going. For me it has to be on-going, everyday it's about healing for me. Everyday I learn something about my own behaviours.

Not feeling alone, but being together with understanding and supportive people was agreed among the women to be very important to healing. "I think that's the power in numbers kind of thing, I don't know..." Women spoke about how moved they were to talk about these memories and issues with each other and to be supported by each other, "It's kind of a real honour to be able to talk about this because I can't really talk about it with anybody." One woman said that she was able to really talk about how she feels about her relationship with her mother in the group, "So this is actually the first time where I've shared and not sort of "ha, ha, ha, she just talks about the weather." When she hears the words, "You know... it's going to be alright. You are not alone", she cries, both because she didn't hear them as a child and because it's such a relief to be supported. The feeling of being together sharing and not alone allowed the women to set down their defenses and really talk about how they feel about the inter-generational legacy. Relationships were clearly understood to be an integral part of resiliency and healing, as in the following quote:

To me, relationships are really important. So attaching myself to, whether it families, other families, people or just being grateful to be with...say for example, here today, that's how I made it through. Even though I went through times where I thought that it was my fault or that I'm stupid and no good and what is my purpose in life here? Why am I here? Why would somebody with higher power put me in those situations? Whether they were for a minute or whether they're for the rest of my life, it's the relationships that got me through.

Since the residential legacy affected women in all parts of their health - mental, emotional, physical and spiritual - healing one aspect can start to lift pain in the different aspects, restoring balance. One woman talked about the connection between emotional healing and physical healing.

When we talk about what the experiences and all that, I can feel it. I can feel it in my body, like in my bones. It's kind of like that tension it's in my bones. Sometimes, I'd have backaches, my joints are really sore. But as I continue to do my healing, I can feel like it's almost letting some of that go, and I'm not carrying much of that baggage around anymore.

For some, healing from the residential school legacy means reestablishing themselves from the losses in all areas of their lives. Claiming or reclaiming a sense of connection, to their identities and to their spirituality and to their mothers and their daughters has helped the following women to heal. In the following quote, the woman had lost so much of her identity as a child, even her original name.

When I think about it, I think about the words that comes to my mind are reclaiming and claiming. Why? Because I have to reclaim my identity. I didn't have an identity. I didn't know who I was. So, when I found my roots and did my family history and searched for those answers, I finally knew who I was. My name when I was younger used to be [a different name completely] and when they put me in this school system it was [changed].

The woman went on to tell how reclaiming her identity required her to reconnect to Mother Earth and her spirit. Reclaiming her identity and connections helped her to heal.

When I was able to begin that process, I was able to reclaim who I was as a human being, as part of Mother Earth and to be able to open up those doors so that my spirit could come alive, could come back, come back to me. I always call my spirit back to me because sometimes when little incidents happen and I'm getting angry and stuff like that, I know that I have to call my spirit back...I need that help because I couldn't do any of this if it wasn't for that healing, if it wasn't for that spirit. There's also people that came into my life at different points like I mentioned before that gave me a little bit of something that would help me to move forward, to take action, to believe that I could do it and I did.

For some women, reconnecting with spirit could be through traditional spirituality, Christianity or both. The following quote shows how one woman helped her mother to reconnect with her traditional spirituality in order to heal.

A woman Elder up north [has] taken [my mother] out on the land, showing her about the medicines and she's seeing the spiritual way of life, how it's affected my life, how it's changed me...

Out of the traumatic experience of residential schools, some of the mothers were still able to integrate Christianity with their traditional teachings. The following quote illustrates this by showing how for one mother, taking what resonated with her from both kinds of spirituality helps her to heal. Her daughter also adds western therapy into the healing methods.

Because my mom tried to mix her traditional life and she spoke her language too she tried to pass it on but it was kind of hard for her. She always respected the traditions because she still maintained that with her grandparents raising her. She mixed it with her Catholicism. She always had sweetgrass at the house, she would pray with sweetgrass in the house, she would mix the two and she would find a way. I still go to therapy and I haven't been lately. I keep saying that I have to go back and because I know that I'm so far from being the person that I want to be and that healthy person I want to be.

Another woman used some elements of religion to inspire her to pursue traditional spirituality and healing.

Even though she forced me to go to church all the time, to participate in those things now that I think of it, it opened my spirit up. It opened my spirit up to something higher up there. That is really powerful for me to have that realization. I don't want to be angry at the church or be angry of what might work for somebody else just because it didn't work for me. ... I'm a Sundancer and I believe that the healing will come for my family and for my sisters and brothers. I pray all the time that they can find some peace of mind.

One woman expressed a belief that the healing of people, particularly of women, is tied to healing of the earth. In her account, healing can ripple out from people, to families, to the earth.

It's about the reclaiming and claiming, to be healthy at the end, feeding my spirit. I know one thing, when you're on a spiritual journey, it's so wonderful. So wonderful to wake up and realize that as women we are so much like Mother Earth. We're suffering just like Mother Earth is suffering. But if we can do the healing maybe we can make changes and help people understand that Mother Earth needs healing too. The abuse has to stop there too.

A couple of weeks ago, about a month ago I was given a women's drum. It's a ceremonial drum. A young lady had a dream about me two days in a row and brought this drum and gave it to me. And in that drum, she said the name of that drum is 'walking in a good way on Mother Earth.' That drum is for our women to heal, for women to come back to ceremony. For Mother Earth also, for the abuses that are happening to Mother Earth, for us to do what we can as individuals to make that change. If individuals can do it, if enough of them do it, then change can happen and I truly believe that. And healing can happen, for us and our mothers and Mother Earth because we're all like Mother Earth, each and every one of us. Mother Earth has trees with arms and we have arms...the water is her veins. As soon as we start respecting that, and knowing that then we can move on to our healing and our dreams and our higher purposes on this Earth.

The women had each worked on healing themselves and their families, but said that for some survivors and family members, the healing might take a long time or may not come. The following quote explains that the residential school legacy still has a firm hold on some survivors and their children:

When all of this started coming out these stories started coming out, I remember my aunt broke down, we went to visit her because we were out visiting my aunts and uncles here in Regina. It came up in discussion when they were first starting negotiate the [residential school] settlement and they were wanting to put money in the healing fund. We were having this conversation and I don't know how it started but she said, 'I don't want healing, I don't want any of that. They can take their money. They can't heal me. They can never give me back what they did to me'. She was angry. She said. 'I can't hug my kids, I couldn't be the mother to my children and I blame all of that on residential school. No amount of healing is going to fix me.' It was really emotional and that was just the highlights of it. It was more of a half hour cathartic experience with my aunt and my cousin sitting there, listening to her and it was really hard knowing that there's a lot of survivors out there and they're not going to heal.

The women made clear that inter-generational healing is possible and is occurring. Through years of hard work on their healing, rebalancing their relationships with themselves, their daughters and their mothers, women are making this happen.

In an earlier section, the women who did not have close relationships with their mothers talked about how painful this was and how much they would like to reconnect with their mothers. Those women who could establish or reestablish relationships with their mothers spoke of it as a tremendously important, healing experience. Achieving a pure emotional relationship with their mothers was profoundly wished for by many of the women. Many of the women talked about moments of connection with their mothers as turning points in their relationships and hope for the future:

...Between the time she died, which is an incredibly short time, between February and June, is the time...it was just very, it felt like, it felt like you know when you spend time with kids...and it's such a pure relationship to be able to relate with someone and have them, everything about them is so open? It doesn't have anything of like feeling shame or guilt, it's just like, it's just very pure, emotional...it doesn't have things like, 'You shouldn't say this.' Or 'if you say that, it's going to hurt another person.' It was just all open and I had never, ever experienced that before so. When I try to think of things that I have learned from her, I never actually try and think about that but the aspect that even for such a short time with her, I'd really liked to think that was something that I could take.

Seeing my mom's tears, really opening my eyes for the first time, feeling my mom's tear drops, the pain I felt, I didn't want to go on, I just wanted the pain to go away because it was so painful. My mom was looking at me and I was just I couldn't talk. To see her like that, it touched my heart. I thought maybe there's hope for me and my mom after all.

Reestablishing the bonds with their mothers was personally healing, but it is also an important part of the historical healing of the severing of ties that was perpetrated through the residential school legacy. With reconnection, is hope and healing.

Section 7: Discussion and Conclusion

By listening to the stories of women whose mothers are residential school survivors, it is clear that the residential school system has produced ongoing effects for subsequent generations of survivors' families. The stories the women have shared here defy the myth that the effects of the residential school system begin and end with the survivors. Where this myth is found, it needs to be roundly refuted with the knowledge of those who continue to live the residential school legacy and embody the resiliency of multiple generations.

The stories in this report start from daughters' recollection of their mothers' remembrance of residential school, a process designed to "remove and isolate children from their homes, families, traditions and cultures..."³⁹. The stories take us on the daughters' journeys through their own childhoods and the effects the residential schools had on them via their mothers. They share with us their experiences of coping, parenting their own children, being successful, being resilient and healing. Daughters' stories also provide a glimpse into the next generation, the effects on their own children, and full circle to the relationships these children have with the survivors generation.

The women's stories show that the ways daughters of residential school survivors and their children have experienced life, which have been shaped by these inter-generational effects, and the ways they have reacted to the challenges they have inherited. The schools produced disconnection and emotional distance from family members, the culture, language, land, community, tradition. The women's stories tell how they and their daughters and grandchildren responded to the ongoing need to reconnect their relationships with each other and with the parts of themselves that the schools attempted to take away.

Silences, produced by memories of residential school too difficult to recall or to expose their children to, were passed to daughters and then their children as protection against a legacy of pain. Yet mothers and daughters and their children attempted to unblock the flow of experience, to talk about their pain with others, to connect with each other and family members, sometimes through actions when the words could not flow.

³⁹ Government of Canada, Indian and North Affairs Canada, see <http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/sig-eng.pdf>, see Appendix A.

‘Body memory’ was passed on to daughters and then to their children in the voices, muscles, reflexes and habits of survivors. But so was the irrepressible strength, determination and self-sufficiency that mothers passed down through the generations, by being strong themselves, modeling strength, surviving, trying to make a life for themselves and their children.

Struggles emerged for daughters as a result of the ways residential schools had compromised their parents. Like their mothers, or in response to them, they used coping mechanisms, some more socially accepted than others, some considered praiseworthy such as workaholism, which may have contributed to their success as professionals.

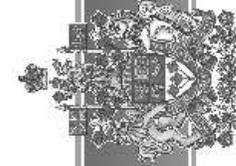
When becoming parents themselves, the daughters worked to keep the good things from their own upbringing and push away some old patterns for new ones. This sometimes left them without past experiences to draw on. Some had to do the hard work of learning or relearning without a model how to parent in the ways that they felt would enable their children to flourish.

Women’s stories tell us a great deal about determination and resiliency and how these are passed through the generations. Many mothers passed on their abilities to deal with crisis, to survive extraordinary and everyday struggles even though they had limitations, to love in the ways they could. Even in the face of their experiences in residential schools, some members of the survivors’ generation strongly encouraged daughters to get an education so that daughters could have an easier life than they did and could be independent and successful. The significance of relationships and close connections with relatives and friends was imparted from many mothers to their daughters, likewise the importance of supporting each other and laughing together despite pain.

Women’s stories also share the journey to heal through the generations, the daily work of it and how it involves emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual aspects. Labouring to heal for the sake of the next generation was a common commitment. They undertook healing through conventional therapy and through reconnecting their bonds with themselves, the generations and with spirit. They also expressed compassion for those who were not able to heal. Telling their stories has been an important part of healing for the women whose mothers attended residential school and also an important way to acknowledge and understand the larger legacy of the residential schools.

The women's accounts of the inter-generational effects in their families are ever-evolving stories. From the stories, we can better understand these women's processes of both of experiencing inter-generational effects and healing and resiliency of reconnecting children and adults with their health, families, traditions, and cultures. When we add these women's stories to the stories of many other Aboriginal women, men, Elders and children it forms the knowledge to counter ongoing legacies of "civilization" and "assimilation"⁴⁰. This report adds to a modest but growing body of research on inter-generational effects. The knowledge and awareness about inter-generational effects of residential schools already reside, however, in the collective and individual experiences, memories, bodies and spirits of women's stories and those of other First Nations people.

⁴⁰ Some suggest that the current child welfare system, with its recent precursors the 60s and 70s scoops, is a continuation of the residential school system by different means. Hookimaw-Witt, J. 1998. "Any Changes Since Residential School?", *Canadian Journal of Native Education*. 22(2):159-170.



Statement of Apology – to former students of Indian Residential Schools

The treatment of children in Indian Residential Schools is a sad chapter in our history.

For more than a century, Indian Residential Schools separated over 150,000 Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools. Two primary objectives of the Residential Schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture. These objectives were based on the assumption Aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was famously said, "to kill the Indian in the child". Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

One hundred and thirty-two federally-supported schools were located in every province and territory, except Newfoundland, New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island. Most schools were operated as "joint ventures" with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches. The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities. Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools. Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered. It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the Government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing

and reconciliation. Therefore, on behalf of the Government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this Chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada's role in the Indian Residential Schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the Government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow, and we apologize for having done this. We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you. Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country.

June 11, 2008

On behalf of the Government of Canada
The Right Honourable Stephen Harper,
Prime Minister of Canada

Appendix

There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever again prevail. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly.

In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools, implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement

Agreement began on September 19, 2007. Years of work by survivors, communities, and Aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership. A cornerstone of the Settlement Agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This Commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian Residential Schools system. It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.