Acimowina: Indigenous Women Leaders Telling Stories

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation explored the role of mentoring in Indigenous women's leadership in education. This abstract introduces the problem of practise, the purpose of the study, research methods used, findings and conclusion.

Problem of Practice: While Indigenous women have increasingly accessed educational opportunities and leadership positions, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles. The consequence of this slow growth is the lack of role models to mentor Indigenous women along their leadership journey. The problem of practice I sought to explore was how mentoring had contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders.

Purpose of Study: The purpose of this study was to establish the role of mentorship in the grow of Indigenous women leaders. I conducted this inquiry through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who have held leadership roles in education administration. The larger inquiry question that guided this study was: How have culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in their leadership roles? Additional guiding sub questions included:

- How had culture and community informed their roles as Indigenous woman leaders?
- How had opportunities or challenges impacted their leadership journey?
- How had mentorship influenced their leadership journey?
- What insights did these Indigenous leaders hope to leave to other Indigenous women in order that other might realize their leadership potential?

Methods: This study used qualitative approaches to gather rich descriptions of Indigenous women's stories about their leadership experiences and the role that mentorship had played in their journeys. The study was conducted using methods found within storytelling methodology including conversations within a Kiyokewin (visiting) practise guided by semi-structured

interview questions. This method was chosen for its alignment with Indigenous research paradigm and practice. This approach embraced the importance of relationality (Wahkohtowin) as a key practice in Indigenous research and in Kiyokewin. The study involved five participants (who have been educators) and who had lived in Treaty 4, 6, and 7 areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Purposive sampling was used in the selection of participants.

Findings: Indigenous women leaders are an understudied group; it is anticipated that the findings will move knowledge forward by discussing the importance of mentoring to leader growth and retention.

Conclusion: Indigenous women were influenced by family matriarchs—mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties—as mentors and supporters in their leadership journeys.

Practice Implications of Inquiry: The study findings contributed to knowledge on Indigenous women in leadership and the role of mentoring to support leadership.

Key Words: Key words in this study included: Ethical leadership, Indigenous, Iskwew, Kiyokewin, Matriarch, Mentor, Nehiyaw, Storywork, Two-eyed seeing, Wahkohtowin.

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kinanâskomitin

DEDICATION

To Indigenous women, girls and two spirit relatives.

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MANUSCRIPT ONE. REFLECTIONS ON LEADERSHIP GROWTH WITH RESPECT TO PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Introduction

I have worked in First Nation higher education for thirty years—as a researcher, curriculum developer, instructional designer, instructor, director, and administrator. I entered a formal leadership role several years ago and have been treading water in the leadership pool since then. I have sought out formal and informal training and professional development at colleges, universities, and private training institutions to equip myself to be an effective leader. I did not see people like me—an Indigenous woman—in leadership positions that could serve as a mentor in this role. This dissertation serves as an extension of my journey to find and create opportunities for other Indigenous women and their leadership growth. The purpose of this proposed study is to examine through life narratives, the influence of mentoring on the experiences of Indigenous women in leadership roles in education.

This dissertation document is comprised of five manuscripts. Manuscript One provides a discussion on my leadership platform, the problem of practice I explored and its significance to educational leadership. Manuscript Two discusses the proposed problem of practice through an examination of literature related to Indigenous women in leadership. Manuscript Three includes a discussion on the research design and methods used in the research study. Manuscript Four provides the findings from the qualitative study and is presented as a stand-alone paper as required by my program of study. Manuscript Five is a synthesis and discussion of each of the papers and their contributions to educational leadership.

The next section introduces the background to the problem of practice and its significance to education leadership.

Background

As a Nehiyaw Iskwew, a Cree woman, I come from a long line of strong, resilient Indigenous women who have provided guidance, support and mentoring throughout my leadership journey. In our families and communities, the First Nations woman, or matriarch, holds an authoritative leadership position. Historical colonial policies and practices removed this position in favor of patriarchal forms of leadership and we continue to see the impact of these policies and practices on Indigenous women (Khalifa et al., 2018; Minthorn & Shotton, 2019).

As I grew personally and professionally in leadership roles, I tried to incorporate, blend and fold together my formal learning with my Indigenous worldview; however, I stopped many times when I hit the crossroads where my two worldviews collided. Usually, one worldview took lead over the other and I compromised either my Indigenous worldview or my mainstream workview. As I matured, I learned to balance and honour both perspectives and experiences.

Throughout this journey, I encountered many Indigenous women who also were seeking training and professional development, trying to develop the skills that would give them an edge in competitive male dominated environments. After thirty years in the paid workforce, I saw that growth of Indigenous women in leadership moved at a snail's pace. A simple driver for this study was the need to hear Indigenous women's voices on leadership and their experiences though a major challenge has been finding published resources to learn of those experiences. Indigenous women leaders continue to be an understudied group which further contributes to a silencing of the Indigenous woman's experience.

In this manuscript I will introduce my understanding of leadership and how this understanding contributed to and formed my personal leadership philosophy and practice. I will

also discuss the impact and influence of my Indigenous worldview on this leadership platform and my aspirations for my leadership journey.

Leadership and Followership Theories

In my work, family life, and volunteer activities, I have strived to see strengths rather than deficits in others, to encourage and grow family, employees, and colleagues, to be a cheerleader and at times, to be an offensive guard. The foundation of transformative and authentic leadership theories relates to inspiring and motivating others, being genuine and living your values, and serving others. Servant leadership in particular "focuses on morality, trust, empathy…and the ethical use of power" (Walker, 2013, p. 28) and influencing others to reach a "common goal." Greenleaf (1970) in *the Servant as Leader* shared that empathy and acceptance are important characteristics of the servant leaders. I relate to these character traits as they are key to how I now approach working with colleagues. My interest and passion to grow others has matured over the past few years and particularly after working with and observing the leadership practices of Indigenous Elders and knowledge keepers.

In my experience, a leader that leads with values, compassion and with a growth mindset, is easy to follow; this leader can flex with the situation as it demands and holds up others who have gifts to lead. As a follower, I relate to Crossman and Crossman's (2011) discussion on situational theories of followership as there is a balance between "leadership and followership styles, focusing attending rather to the context in which leadership and followership operate" (p. 483). I recall an experience working in an organization led by a First Nations woman, with two other First Nations women who were in significant leadership positions. The leaders gathered staff to hold group discussions to collaborate and find common ground on decisions related to policy development. The leaders stepped in and stepped back, like dance steps, allowing and

encouraging staff members and each other to hold agency, to generate discussions and to contribute to decision making for the organization.

In our First Nation communities and our families, the matriarch holds an authoritative, leadership position. McLeod (2012) shared "First Nation female leadership knowledge is grounded in a sense of caring and sharing" (McLeod, 2012, p. 43). A Nehiyew Iskwew leadership style is akin to "a servant-type service for the good of all" (McLeod, 2012, p. 43). The caring and sharing ethic stretched to the whole community. Pidgeon (2012) suggests that this protective, traditional warrior-style of leadership is one that is based on "a larger purpose, the welfare of humanity" (p. 142). Warrior leaders protect people, society, the environment, and those they love. Indigenous leadership sees the relationships among the group and recognizes that "one person alone cannot meet all the needs" (Pidgeon, 2012, p. 144) of the community. Indigenous leadership is wholistic in approach and embodies Indigenous ways of knowing (Pidgeon, 2012). The Indigenous matriarch was more than a nurturing, mothering figure; she was a communal protector.

Leadership and My Workview

My Indigenous worldview cannot be examined separately from my beliefs of leadership. Much of my leadership experience has been shaped in both positive and negative ways through working in First Nations higher education. This work experience has been the 'worldview' or 'lens' that has formed my leadership practice. I call this 'workview,' and to me it means how I make meaning of work, and its relevance to my overall worldview.

Debissage and Brunette-Debissage (2018) discussed their experience as Indigenous scholars working in a mainstream university and offered that individualist leadership paradigms, such as those nurtured in mainstream universities are incongruent with "Indigenous community

models of leadership [that are] based in heterarchical, situational, and community needs" (Debissage & Brunette-Debissage, 2018, p. 126). Indigenous presence in mainstream higher education requires a willful, strategic, "transgressive leadership approach" while at the same time paying attending to grounding Indigenous teachings. Doyle and Hungerford (2015) described situational leadership in Indigenous communities as the ability to adapt to various and diverse contexts and situations. Situational leadership approaches flex, based on the leaders' ability to use their experiences to "refine and enrich" them and their work (Doyle & Hungerford, 2015, p. 342).

My professional experience has been developed within a mix of individualist and heterarchical and situational contexts. The journey has not been easy and many times I wanted to leave but I continue to work in Indigenous education with the purpose of giving back and providing opportunities to others; it is a place where I am connected to my people; and it is an environment that I know how to survive in.

My Leadership Platform

My leadership platform is a work in progress; it is like a patchwork quilt—pieces of Indigenous epistemology and ontology, remnants of systems thinking and systems leadership; large pieces of servant leadership and followership—all stitched together with several years of experience in First Nations environments. My platform is not a final product but begins with a series of beliefs and commitments:

- I believe that we are all in development; we are constantly learning and growing. To lead from a place of development, I need to continuously invest in my growth as a leader.

- I believe that a leader needs to be caring and compassionate. To lead from the heart, I need to treat others with respect and earn the respect of others, and in doing so, not lose myself but rather care for myself with kindness and compassion as well.
- I believe that a leader needs to live their values. To lead from a values-based place, I need to place relationships and Indigenous values as the foundation of my leadership journey.
- I believe that an Indigenous leader needs to honor the teachings. To honor my Indigenous teachings, I need to continue to work with First Nation Elders and my communities to keep learning and living these teachings.
- I believe that a leader needs to give back. To lead from a place of reciprocity, I need to share what I learn and thus continue the circle of reciprocity.

My platform will continue to mature and refine as I sand the rough spots. I aspire to be an educational leader that my community is proud of. As an educational leader and follower, I want to continue to nurture the leadership qualities I see in others and encourage them to find ways to step into leadership roles. I want to teach and create resources to assist younger Indigenous women leaders. I want to be a supportive follower of effective leaders.

I have had mostly family role models and mentors in my personal life; in my professional work life, I have had three male leader mentors. I have longed for a woman leader mentor in my workplace. I want to find or create opportunities for Indigenous women to see themselves as leaders and to nurture their development as leaders. Our societies, clans, nations were built on women playing a leadership role in sustainability of the family and community. Colonization and government policy changed the family and leadership structure of our communities and stripped away the role of women in leadership. It is time to reclaim matriarchal leaders and lift women to leadership roles.

The ever-present issue is that Indigenous women have not stepped into leadership roles or have been recognized as leaders with the same pace as non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women who have helmed organizations are slowly growing in numbers; however, they carry many responsibilities in addition to organizational leadership and risk burnout or early departure (Fitzgerald, 2006). How can we support Indigenous women in leadership and mentor and grow the next generation of Indigenous leaders? This problem of practice seeks to examine how mentorship can support women's leadership development.

Key Concepts Related to Problem of Practice

My experience as a curious but floundering leader served as the context for understanding the issue of mentorship. The Carnegie Foundation described a problem of practice as "a persistent, contextualized, and specific issue embedded in the work of a professional practitioner, the addressing of which has the potential to result in improved understanding, experience, and outcomes" (Carnegie Project on the Education Doctorate, 2021). I was interested in exploring, through a narrative discovery, how mentoring contributed to other Indigenous women's leadership experience.

As a first-generation university student in the 1980s, I did not have access to Indigenous mentors, supports or service at university. As lone Indigenous students, we found each other in shared classes, and created family-like networks through student associations, councils, and political and social movements, while supporting the growth of early Native Studies units and departments. As an administrator in higher education institutions, I have seen the growth and professionalization of many areas of Indigenous student and staff support; however, I have not seen the growth of Indigenous women in leadership positions in education administration to the same extent as Indigenous men. While there has been growth and expansion in programming

through innovative programming in Indigenous education institutes, the path to leadership for Indigenous women has been rough and poorly paved in Indigenous and non-Indigenous education.

There is a small body of research on Indigenous women in education administration. Brunette-Debissage (2021) conducted research with Indigenous women administrators in higher education administration to "address gaps in the research literature…of Indigenous women's voices in educational leadership and policy research" (p. i). Brunette-Debissage found that Indigenous women experienced an intersection of three complexities: working in colonial structures, leading in male dominated arenas, and balancing Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds.

In an elementary school setting, Robinson et al. (2020) studied five Mi'kmaw women leaders and their approaches to leadership. The research identified the role that context of experience played in the women's leadership approaches. The political, cultural, and social contexts, along with obstacles to leadership as well as supports, the impact of Elders' leadership—all played an important role in the Mi'kmaw women's leadership (Robinson et al., 2020). The authors noted that barriers such as gender discrimination, lack of mentors and role models, and general limited opportunities in leadership contributed to barriers and challenges for Indigenous women seeking leadership opportunities.

Barriers and challenges became a major theme in the research on Indigenous women in leadership though few resources specifically targeted the role of mentorship in leadership journeys. The lack of mentors and role models from personal experience combined with the barriers and challenges to increasing opportunities for prospective leaders became a motivator for examining mentorship as a feature of successful leadership.

This project used a qualitative approach to explore Indigenous women's experiences in education leadership and how mentoring could contribute to increasing opportunities for women in leadership roles.

Allied Concepts of Problems of Practice

Despite efforts by organizations to develop inclusive, welcoming workplace, Black, Indigenous, People of Colour (BIPOC) women still experience barriers entering leadership spaces (Laidler, 2022). A recent survey from the Prosperity Project, an organization that supports women's leadership in Canada, found that the underrepresentation of women who identify as BIPOC, women with disabilities and 2SLGBTQIA+ women, was dismally low. Of the 98 organizations that participated in the survey, a mere 1.5% of BIPOC women held executive positions (Prosperity Project, 2022). Of racialized women, 0.3% of Indigenous women held leadership roles (as a board member, executive officer, senior management, or in a management pipeline) in reporting organizations (Prosperity Project, 2022); this number remained the same from the previous year.

Within the academic sector, the number of BIPOC leaders remains concerning. A national study commissioned by Universities Canada in 2019 found that 1.3% of the 21% of BIPOC full-time university faculty, were Indigenous (Hamzavi & Brown, 2023). These dismal numbers were consistent with research by Brunette-Debissage (2022) who found that Indigenous women fared slightly better than Indigenous men in higher education administration in Canada.

While it is clear that women of colour are underrepresented in education leadership, the limited research on Indigenous women in leadership still paints a dismal picture of access and success.

Theory Pertaining to Problem of Practice

I have been employed professionally in First Nations adult and higher education for over thirty years. This problem of practice is connected to my experience working in high education workplaces for the past three decades. My worldview and my view of work, or workview, is shaped by the experiences both good and bad in these environments. The First Nation education work environment replicates that of any other non-Indigenous educational organization; the operational structure has been shaped to mirror business and management structures. From strategic plans to performance reviews, as higher education has become increasingly corporatized, the First Nation organization has also developed similar structures (Pidgeon, 2016).

Working within this environment and learning within non-Indigenous environments has resulted in a challenge that McLeod (2012) calls a “dual leadership identity” (McLeod, 2012, p. 19). This dual leadership identity exists when tensions develop that are comprised of conflicts between corporate expectations and personal identity and values. My First Nation identity informs my responsibility to consider collective, communal, and cultural considerations.

As I grew in experience, I became what Ghate and Lewis (2013) considered an effective “systems leader.” Ghate and Lewis (2013) summarized multiple studies on systems leadership and described a systems leadership style as a one where leadership is “distributed” (Ghate & Lewis, 2013, p. 6) and nurtured among other potential leaders. The systems leader is patient, confident and resilient since change in the system is not immediate but may occur in “lengthy and unpredictable time lines” (Ghate & Lewis, 2013, p. 6). In the systems I have worked in, there has not been enough time to build nurturing relationships as the environments are constricted by short-term fiscal agreements and action-oriented outcomes. The inability to plan long-term or build capacity in short-term staff prevents a leader to invest time in others.

My understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing derive from growing and developing within my Nehiyew/Cree families and communities. I was not raised traditionally, as in raised within a First Nation community, with First Nations language and culture, but rather, I was raised with the knowledge of who I am and who my family is. I am an intergenerational residential school survivor, a Nehiyaw Iskwew, a new-age warrior. The long-lasting impact of the residential school system has resulted in a patchwork of restored language learning and cultural immersion experiences. This worldview courses through my blood memory.

Theories of transformational and authentic leadership that inspire and motivate and call to leaders to live values and serve others connected with my perspective on strengths-based leading. In my work and volunteer activities, I strive to see strengths, to encourage and grow employees and colleagues. Maracle et al. (2020) discussed the principles of context, relationality and servant leadership within an Indigenous context and their study of the work of an Indigenous matriarch leader. My interest and passion to grow others has matured over the years, especially after working with and observing Indigenous Elders these past few years.

I extended my research on ethical leadership after reading Haar et al.'s (2019) work on Maori values and ethics and the impact of relationships between leaders and followers. I became more interested in ethical leadership as followership study was new to me, and I was intrigued with how to find balance as a leader and a follower and in what instances we could be both.

O'Reilly and Chatman (2020) cautioned us about the fine line that can be impeded when transformational leadership crosses over to pseudo-transformational or narcissistic leadership and how both types of leadership have commonalities such as leaders with compelling visions that had "fervent followers," and could both be transformational (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020, p.

2). The narcissistic leader though can cross over to the dark side of leadership and be abusive, exploitive and damage the people and organization (O'Reilly & Chatman, 2020).

I was curious about ethical leadership within Indigenous contexts and was drawn to research on the importance of a caring, moral, collaborative, and relational approach to leadership. Catacutan and de Guzman (2015) and Robinson et al.'s (2020) works were a jumping off point to explore Indigenous perspectives in leadership with a focus on Indigenous women in leadership.

As a leader it had always been a challenge to remove the emotional connections I had to the people I worked with, and I was sensitive to what Daly and Chrispeels (2008) cautioned about the importance of vulnerability, communication, and trust as "predictor(s) for both adaptive and technical leadership" (p. 34) and the need to develop a trusting relationship by having open communication with colleagues. As a learner and an educational leader, I have made a strong effort to apply what I learn to my workplace situations.

I was also drawn to the work of health researchers whose work embraced 'two-eyed seeing' praxis which is examining a problem through the shared lenses of Indigenous realities and experiences and a western or non-Indigenous space to find solutions to health and related challenges. Two-eyed seeing or Etuaptmumk was coined by a Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall in 2004 (Institute for Integrative Science & Health, 2022). As an Indigenous person, living and working in a non-Indigenous space, I related to this perspective as I found myself walking the junction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous realities in everyday life. Indigenous people draw on their social capital (assets and strengths) in their home and familiar social situations, but in new environments like a university campus or an urban workspace, people may be removed from that strength. Quinless (2022) discussed Bourdieu's social capital theory and how colonization

impacted Indigenous peoples' social capital and how as a relational and transformative concept, social capital was embedded in cultural meaning and symbols and is connected to individual and community wellness (Quinless, 2022).

The transformative potential of critical theories challenges and disrupts political and colonial environments and has encouraged critical conversations about power relations among Indigenous communities and the impact of colonial legacies of patriarchy (Starblanket, 2017). Exploring phenomena through a decolonizing and critical lens allows researchers to centre Indigenous worldviews and experience (Wilson, 2008).

I also used an Indigenous research paradigm in this dissertation project. Kovach (2009, 2021) discussed how an Indigenous-centered epistemology can be the basis for Indigenous research. Kovach's (2009) work *Indigenous Methodologies* discusses how Indigenous methodologies are distinct, unique methodologies that emphasize the "importance of respect, reciprocity, relation, protocol, holistic knowing, relevancy, story, interpretative meaning, and the experiential nested in place and kinships systems" (p. 67). Indigenous-grounded perspectives are aligned with decolonial perspectives and processes.

As a graduate student in a non-Indigenous university, I am acutely aware of the colonial history of higher education; thus, I was also drawn to the decolonizing work of Indigenous standpoint theory which challenges colonial knowledge (Cox et al., 2021, p. 462) and recognize myself in the in-between spaces of Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews. Coates and Trudgett (2021) used a combination of Indigenous standpoint theory (that privileges the Indigenous viewpoint) and institutional theory (that examines the evolution of institutional rules) as the bases for conducting their research and proposed the development of a new framework

called "Indigenous Institutional Theory" which the authors suggest might be used by Indigenous researchers when studying Indigenous experiences in institutions.

My worldview, beliefs and ethical approach have also been influenced by several theories and perspectives including: my life story as a Nehiyaw woman, critical theories such as Indigenous feminist theory (Green, 2017; Starblanket, 2017), Nakata's Indigenous standpoint theory (Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003, Nakata, 2002), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005). My continued exposure to knowledge and experiences contributes to a refinement and polishing of how I approach research.

This collection of theories and perspectives served to challenge me to examine leadership with a critical, yet reflective eye. As a researcher who has worked in Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education, my epistemology, ontology, and axiology have been influenced by several theories and perspectives including my Nehiyaw/Cree ways of knowing, being and doing that intersect with growing, living, and working within urban and Indigenous communities and organizations. It is through this complex, yet multi-faceted lens that I view both the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership, but also the problem of how to increase the opportunities for Indigenous women to access and be successful in leadership roles. I believe that mentoring may provide an opportunity to increase access and success.

Contexts Pertaining to Problem of Practice

As the Indigenous student population at universities and college grew in the 1970s, institutions were pressed to respond to increasing demands to recognize Indigenous worldviews, to hire Indigenous faculty and staff, and to recognize Indigenous knowledge and research (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pidgeon, 2012). The work of Indigenous scholars to centre Indigenous worldviews, knowledge, and research, served to shape and refine Indigenous research paradigms

and decolonize research and evaluation (Hart, 2010; Kovach, 2009, 2021; Smith, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Decolonizing education research, evaluation and improvement requires a critical examination of many facets of the process including perspective, methods, and analysis, but of importance is the need to decolonize the self (M. Berryman, personal communication, June 2022; Datta, 2018a).

Within international contexts, Coates and Trudgett (2021) examined the roles of Indigenous leaders in higher education governance in Australian universities and how the universities purport to incorporate Indigenous leaders into the governance structures. The research project was conducted to establish a benchmark for best practice. The authors concluded that incorporation of Indigenous leaders at senior positions in Australian universities was mainly an ad hoc practice (Coates & Trudgett, 2021). In Canada, the United States and New Zealand, Fan and Liu (2020) examined Indigenous education leadership research over an eighteen-year period and found that the research focused on eight commonly researched topics including: leadership in education, women's educational leadership, leadership development, principals' perspectives on leadership development, youth leadership development, community and curriculum development and a smaller undefined area of mixed topics (Fan & Liu, 2020). The commonly researched areas or the mixed topics did not include research on ethics or values in Indigenous leadership or leadership in Indigenous higher education institutions.

In an Indigenous higher education context, Chandler's (2020) dissertation examined two Indigenous-controlled higher education institutions: the Sinte Gleska University (South Dakota on the Rosebud Reservation) and the Te Wananga o Raukawa (Otaki, New Zealand). Both institutions were created in response to "historically rooted…systemic extermination of Indigenous people and culture…where self-determination movements in response to Indigenous

survival…toward thriving and Indigenous independence” and were based on guiding principles and values that aligned with Indigenous values and principles (Chandler, 2020, p. 185). Chandler (2020) added:

> Values and guiding principles are connected to the core of what makes postsecondary institutions inherently Indigenous. The daily practice of thinking through an Indigenous worldview, via guiding principles, as an avenue to decolonize our thinking and re-membering our ancestral ways of life. (p. 222)

The study also found that the role of values in decision-making supports “a strong Indigenous worldview, cultivated through daily application of cultural values in decision-making” (Chandler, 2020, p. 222).

The research on women in education leadership is growing, particularly research in primary and secondary education leadership; however, Indigenous women in higher education leadership continues to be an understudied area. As Indigenous women’s participation in higher education spaces increases, we will begin to see more research in these spaces (Brunette-Debissage, 2021; Lajimodiere, 2011).

Purpose and Research Questions

The underrepresentation of Indigenous women in education leadership points to the need for knowledge in this area. The purpose of this proposed study was to establish how mentoring contributed to Indigenous women’s growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who were leaders in education administration. The research used an Indigenous storywork methodology and included conversational interviews within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach with participants.

The inquiry question that guided this study was: How did culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship support Indigenous women in leadership roles? The research inquiry was supported by additional sub questions:

1. How did culture and community inform your role as an Indigenous woman leader?
2. How did opportunities or challenges impact your leadership journey?
3. How did mentorship influence your leadership journey?
4. What would you leave to other Indigenous women so they could see their leadership potential?

The research questions used qualitative methods to gather and analyze data.

Relevance or Significance to Educational Leadership

As an insider to this project, I viewed this problem through many lens—as a participant, as a researcher, and as an Indigenous woman leader. It was through this complex lens that I saw the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership, and the need for opportunities for Indigenous women to access, and be successful in, leadership roles.

Indigenous women in leadership have been an understudied group, as such, it was challenging to find published resources on the Indigenous woman's experience. The limited resources and studies of Indigenous women in leadership and the limited training and support for women leaders has contributed to a continued silencing of the Indigenous experience.

It has been necessary to add to the scholarship on Indigenous leadership and Indigenous women in leadership to counter the silencing and to showcase the contributions of Indigenous women in education. To resist or delay will continue to marginalize the Indigenous voice and experience.

Stipulative Definitions

To assist the reader, the following terms are described and include the context for their inclusion in this study.

Ethical leadership–Leadership ethics, beliefs, morals, and principles relate to a leader's conduct and character (Kogler Hill, 2019). Ethical leadership refers to the choices and responses that leaders make as directed by their ethics.

Indigenous–Indigenous is an umbrella term for three distinct groups: First Nations, Métis and Inuit people. Throughout these papers, I will refer to Indigenous or Aboriginal as it is reflected in referenced documents, and First Nation, Métis, and Indian when they are reflected in referenced documents or identified by participants.

Iskwew–Iskwew is a Nehiyaw or Cree term for woman (Acoose, 1995).

Kiyokewin–Gaudet described Kiyokewin or keeoukaywin as a kinship approach to visiting. Keeoukaywin is a visiting-way methodology (Gaudet, 2019).

Matriarch–Matriarch is a term that refers to a woman and often a woman in an authoritative or leadership position. Gray (2022) described re-matriation as an Indigenous feminist paradigm of resurgence and recovery.

Mentorship–A mentor is a person who offers support (social, academic, coaching) in a relational context. Indigenous mentorship is a non-hierarchical approach that honours knowledge and gifts through a mutual, respectful relationship (Indspire, 2021, p. 10).

Nehiyaw–a Cree word that means a Cree person; it is also a phrase that translates to four spirits referencing the multiple dimensions that reside in a person (R. Saddleback, 2024, personal communication).

Storywork–Archibald (2008) coined the term storywork to express the hard work of stories and storytelling. Storywork might include oral stories, songs, and speeches (Archibald, 2008, p. 4).

Two-eyed Seeing—Two-eyed seeing, also known as Etuaptmumk, is an approach or principle that encourages one to see the strengths of Indigenous and Western knowledges (Roher et al., 2021). Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshal from Eskasoni First Nation are credited as first articulating this phrase that has since been used in health-related research and practice.

Wahkohtowin–a Cree phrase that connotes relatives, relations, relativity, relational. The next section discussed the limitations and delimitations of the research.

Limitations and Delimitations

Limitations

The limitations of this study are outlined in two areas: methods and researcher. With regards to the data collection method, the sample size was intentionally small to gather rich data. The small size and purposive sample did not allow for conclusions to be generalized to a larger population. The risk of the sample size was that the research findings may not transfer to readers outside of these relations; however, with detailed notes about observations, memos, the dissertation readers will determine whether these findings might be transferable to other contexts (Nowell et al., 2017).

The data gathering time frame was also short. This impacted the ability of participants to be flexible with their meeting schedules; as a result, not all meetings could be held in person thus, requiring participants to attend some meetings virtually. Meeting virtually may have impacted the ability to have in-depth conversation about experiences. The researcher travelled

throughout Saskatchewan and to southern Alberta to accommodate in person meetings and reduce the potential for virtual meetings.

Regarding the limitations and the researcher, the participants were known to the researcher which may have presented an opportunity for bias, and which warranted the need for researcher reflexivity and participant member checking of data.

At least half of the intended participants were older than me and attended residential schools. The rest of us are intergenerational survivors of residential school trauma. In anticipation that participants might share negative experiences about impacts of residential school trauma, colonial trauma, institutional or interpersonal racism, harassment, and discrimination, I provided two virtual wellness service contacts (Hope for Wellness Helpline and Talking Stick) and was prepared to provide information on First Nation Inuit Health approved counsellors to distribute to participants if requested.

Delimitations

The delimitations of this study address the size and duration of data collection. I selected individuals that I knew through personal and work relationships. Each relationship had been established, nurtured, and cemented through various Indigenous ceremonies. The individuals lived in northern, central, and southern Saskatchewan and southern Alberta on the lands of Treaties 4, 6 and 7. The risk of the sample size was that the research findings might not transfer to readers outside of these relations. Researcher reflexivity including notes about observations might mitigate this potential and readers can determine whether findings can be generalized.

My intention was to gather rich and manageable data but also to gather manageable data within a short time frame of three months. As well, I planned to conduct the data collection during the winter season, specifically after the snow had settled and frozen on the ground. The

significance of this time is that storytelling, especially traditional sacred stories, occurred during the wintertime in Indigenous traditions. However, due to delays with the university ethics board, the data gathering occurred during an unseasonably warm period in late winter and early spring when the snow was no longer on the ground.

Assumptions

In preparing for this study, the identified participants were best positioned to provide data to explore the problem of practice. My assumptions were related to participants' willingness to provide forthright, honest responses. I assumed that the research participants would be comfortable with the research process and be forthcoming within the conversational approach of the data collection process. As well the purpose of establishing relationality and ensuring reciprocity of respect, knowledge and protocols of gifting was intended to honor Indigenous cultural traditions as well as creating a safe space for sharing experiences.

Philosophical and Theoretical Frameworks

The philosophical foundation of epistemology (ways of knowing), ontology (ways of being), alongside axiology (our values and beliefs), guide the work of the researcher. Cohen et al (2018) shared that the social scientist must examine the assumptions that form their understanding of the world, including the assumptions of the "essence of the social phenomena…the bases of knowledge…the relationship between human beings and their environment…[and] the implications for the methodological [practices]" (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 5-6). Assumptions about knowledge are formed and reformed throughout our maturity as researchers and they paved the way for how we informed and developed our research methodology.

This dissertation was influenced by several positions. Firstly, my Nehiyew experience, education, and Nehiyew ways of knowing, being and doing arise from growing, living and working within my Nehiyew families, communities, and organizations. As a member of Mistawasis Nêhiyewak Cree Nation in central Saskatchewan, I come from family histories that connect with signatories of Treaty Six. My families are firmly rooted in nations that stretch across Treaty six territory in Saskatchewan and Alberta. I am indisputably from this land, and the land claims me.

Secondly, as a Nehiyew woman I was increasingly drawn to the work of Indigenous feminists whose work has encouraged critical conversations about power relations among Indigenous communities and the impact of colonial legacies of patriarchy (Starblanket, 2017). I was also drawn to the work of Indigenous standpoint theory which works to "decolonize social science research on health and combat colonialist knowledge claims" (Cox et al., 2021, p. 462), and further positioned myself within the complex junction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews.

Within this document is a collection of theories and perspectives that served to challenge me to examine leadership with a critical and reflective lens. As an Indigenous researcher who has worked in Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education, my epistemology, ontology, and axiology are influenced by several theories and perspectives including my Nehiyaw/Cree ways of knowing, being and doing that intersect with growing, living, and working within urban and Indigenous communities and organizations.

Organization of the Dissertation

This dissertation consists of five manuscripts, each briefly described below:

Manuscript One was a reflection of my leadership growth and discusses my evolving and growing leadership platform, which helped to shape the problem of practice that I studied in this paper, alongside its significance to educational leadership.

Manuscript Two explored the problem of practice through an examination of literature related to Indigenous women in educational leadership.

Manuscript Three included a discussion on the research design and data collection methods and analysis used to examine the problem of practice.

Manuscript Four discussed the findings of the research and is prepared as a stand-alone document which was a requirement of my program of study and includes summarized information from all of the papers in this dissertation.

Manuscript Five included an overall synopsis of each paper in this dissertation as well as implications for leadership, practice, theory and research.

Summary of Manuscript One

In this manuscript I introduced my understanding of leadership and how this understanding contributed to and formed my personal leadership philosophy and practice. I also discussed the impact and influence of my Indigenous worldview on this leadership platform and my aspirations for my leadership journey.

I discussed leadership theories that resonated with my philosophy as well as the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership. I proposed that mentorship may provide an opportunity to increase access and success of women in leadership. This gap in knowledge assisted in the construction of the problem of practice.

I proposed that this study would establish how mentorship contributes to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who

were leaders in education administration. The research included conversational interviews with individuals within a Kiyokewin (visiting) environment.

MANUSCRIPT TWO. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE AND BACKGROUND TO PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

Abstract

This second manuscript reviewed the background to the problem of practice and explored the problem through an examination of literature related to Indigenous women in leadership. The key themes that emerged in the literature on Indigenous women in leadership were the importance of ethical leadership, leading with traditional values and culture, the collaborative and communal nature of Indigenous women and their leadership perspectives and practices, and the scarcity of information on mentorship from an Indigenous perspective. Additional research on mentoring and leadership will continue to be an area for further exploration. The next section described the problem of practice that the study sought to examine.

Background to the Problem of Practice

Indigenous women have not held leadership roles or have not been recognized as leaders at the same pace as non-Indigenous women. Indigenous women leaders are slowly growing in numbers; however, action is required to boost the participation rate. How can we support Indigenous women in leadership and mentor and grow the next generation of Indigenous leaders? This problem of practice sought to examine how mentorship has supported leadership development. The following section discusses the strategy used in the literature search.

The search for resources included use of the researcher's university database, as well as Google Scholar, the Indigenous iPortal, the Harvest database, and reviewing and searching references from articles and publications. A combination of search terms included: Indigenous, women in leadership, educational leadership, mentorship, and Indigenous research. The literature

review included international resources with most sources referencing research on Indigenous women's leadership in New Zealand and to a lesser degree, the United States.

As an insider to this study, I viewed this problem through many lenses—as a participant, as a researcher, and as an Indigenous woman leader. It was through these complex, intersecting lenses that I saw the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership, and the need for opportunities for Indigenous women to access and be successful in leadership roles. The limited resources and studies of Indigenous women in leadership and the limited training and support for women leaders contributed to a continued silencing of the Indigenous experience. The key themes that emerged in the literature review were ethical leadership, Indigenous leadership, women in leadership, and Indigenous mentorship. Each are discussed in the following section.

Ethics in Leadership

The term ethics was often used interchangeably with value-laden concepts such as beliefs, morals, and principles and their use with decision-making processes. Leadership ethics, beliefs, morals, and principles related to a leader's conduct and character (Kogler Hill, 2019); conduct was referenced with behavior and how a person acted or behaved, and character related generally to personality. Regarding leadership, Kogler Hill (2019) stated that ethics in leadership refers to,

> what leaders do and who leaders are. It has to do with the nature of leaders' behavior, and with their virtuousness. In any decision-making situation, ethical issues are either implicitly or explicitly involved. The choices leaders make and how they respond in a given circumstance are informed and directed by their ethics. (p. 330)

Thus, when leaders made decisions, they were guided and informed by their ethics and their morals.

A couple decades ago, traditional leadership focused more on strategy and goals rather than values and beliefs. Kezar and Caducci (2009) proposed that ethical discussions in leadership have gained “popularity in recent years” (p. 19). Traditional leadership processes, including policy setting and decision making, attempted to “neutralize and downplay the role of values” (Kezar & Caducci, 2009, p 19) within these processes. After the mid twentieth century, logic and evidence-based decision making, and planning processes functioned alongside efforts to create more benevolent or service-oriented processes.

Greenleaf’s work on the servant leadership model in the mid 1970s, “embrace(d) notions of character, authenticity, and credibility” (Kezar & Caducci, 2009, p. 19). Greenleaf (1970) shared that leaders who desired an ethical foundation of leadership began to embrace values, emotional development, and care-based thinking. Ethics then were seen as desirable characteristics of leadership and the study and practice of leadership ethics and principles began to influence the environment of organizations.

Northouse (2016) in *Leadership, Theory and Practice* identified five principles of ethical leadership which had its origins in the time of Plato and Aristotle. Northouse (2016) shared that respect for others, service to others, fairness and justice, honesty and community were principles that “provide[d] a foundation for the development of sound ethical leadership” (p. 341). Northouse’s principles of ethical leadership were general core values or principles that have a congruence with Indigenous values and principles in leadership. To understand Indigenous values and principles though, the next section begins with general information on Indigenous approaches to leadership.

Indigenous Leadership

In an art program at a northern Cree school in Saskatchewan, the concept of leadership was discussed by Indigenous artists. Linds et al. (2019) noted that "healthy, decolonized relationships was key to Indigenous leadership" (p. 69) and that "Indigenous leaders base their actions on traditional values and relationships" (p. 69). The relationship that served the community was one that was based on reciprocity, respectful listening, and investment of self. Linds et al. further added that "place is a significant aspect of Indigenous leadership in that leaders situate[d] themselves and their life journeys in the collective and in relation to others, both physically and metaphysically" (Pinay-Schindler, 2011, as cited in Linds et al., 2019, p. 69). Thus, place was part of the larger wholistic concept of life that was connected on a continuum from the past to the future.

Among the Maori in New Zealand, Haar et al., (2019) studied ethical leadership and explored how Indigenous cultural values, beliefs, and knowledge and guided ethical leadership among employees. Maori leadership was based on stewardship of past and future generations and was relational; Maori leaders connected and interlaced people together to build a strong collective. Part of the study identified Maori leadership values as humble and self-disciplined, altruistic, and generous, future orientated, collectivist/relational, and culturally authentic or knowing one's culture. In the study, ethical leaders were "those who think about long-term consequences, drawbacks and benefits of the decisions they make in the organization and for their follower" (Haar et al., 2019, p. 625). Ethical leaders were concerned with modelling their ethics for others and being a positive influence.

Among the four nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy, Gladstone and Pepion (2017) examined traditional Indigenous leadership and studied how the Blackfoot worldview influenced

current and historical leadership. Blackfoot Indigenous leadership practices were based on shared authorities, were influential, were situational, and had a spiritual foundation based on the authority of the medicine bundles (Gladstone & Pepion, 2017).

Indigenous languages and worldview also influenced leadership. Housman (2015) defined leadership from a Hawaiian perspective as a “leader leads, directs, lifts up, and carries the people around him on a journey down a pathway, which leads to a common goal” (p. 49). Indigenous leadership was described through a strengths-based approach. A leader must have a clearly defined vision that was “visible in the mind, heart and soul” (Housman, 2015, p. 57). The vision was anchored by a strong cultural identity (language, knowledge, culturally authentic, relationship, spiritual). A leader inspired and united others towards a common goal, helped them stand strong against adversity and was steadfast and committed to the journey. A leader adhered to spirituality and its relationship to the cosmos and showed respect to those they mentored, and their vision lived on through those they mentored (Housman, 2015). Indigenous leadership was shaped through a cultural perspective.

Another leadership concept described by Indigenous people in Australia was listening with intent, or also known as deep listening. Brearley (2014) described ‘deep listening’ as an Indigenous notion or “way of learning, working and togetherness that is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity” (Brearley, 2014, p. 91). Leaders who listened ‘deeply’ drew on their senses to observe, listen with respect, and used great patience. Leaders who exemplified deep listening were collaborative learners and facilitators, respected culture and the land, invested in relationships, built trust with others, would uphold wisdom, grew their knowledge, were caring stewards and were future focused with their intentions. Brearley added, that these principles formed the core of leadership.

The examples provided demonstrate the relevance of traditional values and perspectives and how the language and culture were connected to expressions of leadership. Much of the recent research in leadership in education has expanded to include Indigenous woman in leadership; thus, the next section briefly discusses the important role of Indigenous women in leadership.

Indigenous Women's Leadership

Indigenous women historically held important leadership roles in our communities. Much of the research on Indigenous leadership has not focused on Indigenous women, as such the literature on Indigenous women in leadership is small but growing. This section presents key thoughts on Indigenous women's leadership.

Robinson et al. (2020) studied five Mi'kmaw women leaders and their approaches to leadership within an elementary school setting. The research identified the role that context of experience played in the women's leadership approaches. The political, cultural, and social contexts, along with obstacles to leadership as well as supports and the impacts of Elders' leadership—all played an important role in the Mi'kmaw women's leadership (Robinson et al., 2020). The authors also noted that barriers such as gender discrimination, lack of mentors and role models, and general limited opportunities in leadership contributed to barriers and challenges for Indigenous women seeking leadership opportunities.

The importance of collaboration, cultural connection, and spirituality was significant to shape the collectivist role of Elders in leadership. Indigenous women have often held roles in communities that did not have formal positions, rather they have been leaders in education, academia, and health (Robinson et al., 2020). From these positions, Indigenous women saw that they could use these places to build opportunities while also challenging the status quo.

Indigenous women leaders were purposeful in their collaborations and created and maintained strong community relationships. Women were supported by their families, communities, and workplaces to be strong role models and mentors and shared a rich knowledge and understanding of the culture, language, beliefs, and values with their families and communities. The women all learned about and were influenced by qualities such as "respect, responsibility, relevance, and reciprocity" (Robinson, et al., 2020, p. 700) and that the women were successful because their epistemologies and methodologies were respected and supported.

Hill and Keogh Hoss (2018) proposed the development of an Indigenous women's leadership pathway model, based on a centered-leadership model to examine how Indigenous women negotiated two diverse worldviews and the impacts on their decision making. The pathway model brought together the concepts of identity, culture, family, and community and reflected women's leadership style as "circular...democratic and collaborative (Hill & Keogh Hoss, p. 233). The model also recognized the barriers or challenges faced by Indigenous women on their path towards formal leadership roles.

Using storywork as Indigenous methodology to gather information, Maracle et al. (2020) examined the contributions of Indigenous women leadership in an urban Indigenous center in Ontario. The key themes from their research included: cultural knowledge, creating space for new leaders, and servant leadership. Maracle et al. (2020) discussed how a culture-based model of leadership incorporated Indigenous identity, cultural traditions, "emotionally validating spaces," principles of servant leadership, and Indigenous knowledge transfer (p. 286).

In our First Nation communities and our families, the matriarch has historically held an authoritative, leadership position. The government policies and practices removed the matriarch governance, authority, and roles in favor of patriarchal forms of leadership. Women were seen as

leaders in their communities because they were caring, collectivist and community focused. Pidgeon (2012) suggested that Indigenous women were warrior leaders and that a traditional warrior-style of leadership was based on “a larger purpose, the welfare of humanity” (Pidgeon, 2012, p. 142). The wholistic nature of leadership focused on the ‘whole system,’ embodied Indigenous ways of knowing, and respected the relationships among the group recognizing that “one person alone cannot meet all the needs” (Pidgeon, 2012, p. 144) of the community. Warrior leaders protected people, society, the environment, and those they love.

While the literature on Indigenous women in leadership was scant, it did provide valuable discussion on the importance of culture, values, and community engagement (Shotton & Minthorn, 2020). More research is needed that discusses leadership from an Indigenous voice or perspective. The next section shares research highlights on mentoring and mentorship with a focus on the Indigenous experience.

Indigenous Mentoring and Mentorship

Mentoring and mentorship has had a long history and was most often considered in the space of education or in the workplace whereby a relationship was formed between someone experienced and someone seeking knowledge or support from the experienced one (Atay & Murry, 2023; Early, 2020; Hinsdale, 2016; McInnes, 2011; Pullman, 2011), or alternatively the informal process of peer mentoring (Preston, et al., 2011). While there was no shortage of mentorship definitions that were based on mainstream concepts of mentorship, these models often do not acknowledge or reflect the Indigenous experience and the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. Hinsdale (2016) advocated for a decolonial approach to mentorship that considered relational qualities and practices such as connectedness through self-reflection, listening skills, and showing openness and power sharing. Hinsdale (2016) noted that, “The

traditional mentoring literature ignores the complicated historical, social, discursive, and academic contexts that demand a decolonial approach to mentorship, and little attention is given to relational qualities of the mentor/protégé bond" (Hinsdale, 2016, p. 4). Hinsdale described the importance of relationship in traditional mentoring and how deficit notions and assumptions played a role in the relationship.

Mentorship that was based on Indigenous practices featured "Indigenous values, ethics, beliefs, customs, family structures, and identity" (Sawyer, et al., 2023, p. 197) that were focused on the mentee. Atay and Murry (2023) examined an Indigenous mentoring model that included six behavioral categories: fostering Indigenous identity, following Indigenous ethics, practicing relationality and reciprocity, encouraging critical thinking, advocating for self and others, and were tailored to the mentee (Atay & Murry, 2023; Atay et al., 2023; Sawyer, et al., 2023). The model and similar models were based on relationality as the permeating force in all of the categories.

Chew and Nicholas (2021) also examined an Indigenous mentor relationship between a mentor-mentee model in academia. The mentoring relationship was a reciprocal relationship that developed and matured as the mentee worked to complete their graduate degree. The authors confirmed that "mentorship was a 'kinship responsibility' based on a respectful and caring relationship" (Chew & Nicholas, 2021, p. 75) and was distinguishable as a relationship that was led from the heart rather than one that was transactional. An Indigenous model of mentoring, a relationship mentorship model, then asked us to consider how we were living Wahkohtowin (being a good relative) to a mentee in our relationship with them (Bordeaux, 2021).

Relational mentorship was a transformative, rather than transactional relationship, where the goal was to 'take care' of the mentor-mentee relationship (Bordeaux, 2021; Chew &

Nicholas, 2021). Pratt et al. (2021) described how an ethic of care was the precondition for a relationship-based mentorship. The authors proposed a decolonized, collaborative approach to mentorship that centered Indigenous principles and worldviews. The authors considered their approach to be an 'ensemble' or new approach to mentorship. A transformative, relationship model of mentorship considered the importance of a collaborative, cultural, values-based leadership approach.

Access to mentorship was often mentioned in the research as a barrier or challenge to increasing connection and support (Burke & MacDonald, 2020). Barriers and challenges were a major theme in the research on Indigenous women in leadership though few resources specifically targeted the role of mentorship in leadership journeys. The lack of mentors and role models from personal experience combined with the barriers and challenges to increasing opportunities for prospective leaders became a motivator for examining mentorship as a feature of successful leadership.

While the literature on Indigenous women in leadership and Indigenous mentorship are small, they are growing and necessitate continued research to explore mentorship and leadership from an Indigenous lens. The next section discusses the key themes within the explored literature.

Discussion of Themes

The purpose of the literature search was to explore what was known about Indigenous leadership and mentorship with a focus on Indigenous women in education. I began the literature exploration by using a combination of search terms that included: Indigenous women, leadership, education administration, and Indigenous mentorship within education and business databases and specialized databases including Indigenous IPortal and the Harvest database, found within

the University of Saskatchewan library. I also expanded the search using the search terms in Google Scholar as well as examining sources found within reference sections of publications.

The key themes in the literature review were: Indigenous leadership was influenced by ethics; Indigenous epistemology and culture had an impact on leadership; the collaborative and communal nature of Indigenous women was evident in their leadership practises; Indigenous women were wholistic, community and culture focused; mentorship based on relationality was in alignment with Indigenous perspectives; access to mentorship was a barrier or challenge to leadership opportunities; and mainstream models of mentorship do not reflect the Indigenous experience. Authors noted that limited resources and narrow perspectives of Indigenous women in leadership contributed to a continued silencing of the Indigenous experience.

Resources on Indigenous mentorship and leadership were not readily available in the literature and will be an area for further research. Indigenous mentorship could be a promising framework for culturally appropriate mentoring and support for Indigenous women, youth, and other marginalized groups.

Summary of Manuscript Two

This manuscript was the second of five chapters of a dissertation and discussed the background to the problem of practice and explored the problem through an examination of literature related to Indigenous women in leadership.

The key themes that emerged in the literature on Indigenous women in leadership centered on ethical leadership perspectives and practices, the importance of leading with traditional leadership values, the collaborative and communal nature of Indigenous women and their leadership perspectives and practices. There was also a small but growing body of literature

on Indigenous mentorship; however, like literature on Indigenous women leaders, additional research on mentoring and leadership will continue to be an area for further exploration.

MANUSCRIPT THREE. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODS

Abstract

Manuscript three provides a framework for the research design and the methods chosen to operationalize the study. This paper begins with a framing of the problem of practice research, followed by a discussion on the approach to inquiry. The research question and sub questions formed the basis of the inquiry which used Indigenous methodologies and methods and were in alignment with the researcher's worldview. The data was collected with a conversational, one-to-one, semi-structured interview method within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the narratives of Indigenous women leaders and to answer the research questions.

This study was designed to address issues of trustworthiness with an emphasis on researcher attention to reflexivity. This chapter closed with a discussion on ethical considerations. The findings are expected to contribute to knowledge sharing to address the problem of the limited number of Indigenous women in leadership positions and how mentoring could contribute to increased access and success for Indigenous women in education leadership.

Framing the Problem of Practice for Research

The purpose of this manuscript was to frame the problem of practice in a research study on the influence of mentorship on Indigenous women's leadership journeys. The study used an Indigenous storywork methodology within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach to collect and understand data. The research questions used qualitative methods to gather and analyze data.

The manuscript included a discussion on the methodological approach to inquiry, methods, coding, and analysis used in the study.

Approach to Inquiry

The philosophical foundation of epistemology, ontology, and axiology guided the work of the researcher. Assumptions about knowledge are formed and reformed throughout our maturity as researchers and they pave the way for how we inform and develop our research methodology. Cohen et al. (2018) shared that the social scientist must examine the assumptions that form their understanding of the world, how they gain knowledge, and “the relationship between human beings and their environment” (Cohen et al., 2018, pp. 5-6).

Indigenous epistemology is understood to be uniquely tied to Indigenous language and culture. An early published work on Indigenous epistemology by Willie Ermine, a Nehiyaw knowledge keeper, Elder and scholar from central Saskatchewan described how Indigenous epistemology is “grounded in the self, the spirit, the unknown…It was in the self that the richest sources of information could be found by delving into the metaphysical and the nature and origins of knowledge” (Ermine, 1995, p. 108). An Indigenous worldview began with an understanding of the self which was gained through language and culture. As an Indigenous person, my Indigenous worldview played a significant role in forming the approach to inquiry for this study.

Kovach (2009, 2021) examined how Indigenous research methodologies were distinct, unique methodologies tied to Indigenous knowledge. Kovach (2010, 2021) discussed Nehiyaw knowledge and how a tribally centered epistemology served as a framework for conducting Indigenous research. As a Plains Cree researcher, Kovach (2009) shared that a Plains Cree knowledge base, “emphasizes the importance of respect, reciprocity, relation, protocol, holistic knowing, relevancy, story, interpretative meaning, and the experiential nested in place and kinships systems” (p. 67). Indigenous research methods must be aligned with and make sense

with Indigenous knowledge paradigms and include relationality, reciprocity, respect and responsibility (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2010).

Indigenous knowledge paradigms and oral traditions have a foundation in storytelling. The next section discusses storytelling and storywork as a research methodology.

Storytelling as a Methodology

Stories and storytelling are central to Indigenous worldviews (Chan, 2021; Datta, 2018b; Ledward & Kana'iaupuni, 2023; McIvor, 2010). Stories were the main conduit to connect past and future, with the storyteller being the tool to disseminate and give meaning to the story (Smith, 2021). A renowned leader in Indigenous storywork, Archibald (2008) conveyed the foundations and practice of Indigenous storywork through her work with Elders and Knowledge keepers. According to Archibald (2008), "storytelling is not myth or fabrication of reality…but rather literacy developed through knowledge sharing and knowledge building" (p. 35). Absolon (2022) also noted that "Indigenous storytelling is grounded in ceremony, the land, lived histories, experience and ways of knowing, being and doing" (Hare, 2012, as cited in Absolon, 2022, p. 35).

Maracle et al. (2020) examined the contributions of Indigenous women leadership using storywork as Indigenous methodology to gather information. The researchers saw how cultural knowledge, creating space for new leaders, and servant leadership, were key themes that arose from the research. The authors discussed how a culture-based model of leadership incorporated Indigenous identity, cultural traditions, "emotionally validating spaces," principles of servant leadership, and Indigenous knowledge transfer (Maracle et al., 2020, p. 286). Indigenous-grounded perspectives were also aligned with decolonial perspectives and processes. Khalifa et al. (2018) in a literature review on Indigenous, decolonial leadership values and practices,

recognized that leaders who lead from a place of Indigenous epistemology were connected to and served community and engaged in transformative and inspirational work that privileged Indigenous cultural values (p. 29). Indigenous knowledge transfer has historically had a practice of oral transmission through storytelling and conversation. Storytelling and storywork are closely connected with narrative inquiry. The next section briefly discusses this connection.

Narrative Inquiry

Narrative inquiry explores experience through conversations with research participants connecting time and place with narrative recollection and interpretation. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (p. 2); thus, narrative was both a methodology and a method. As a methodology, narrative inquiry involved "storytelling and restorying" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) where the collected data played a key role in the research. Narrative research across generations allowed the researcher to "document variable and shifting ways of understanding experience, both within and between individuals" (McAlpine, 2016, p. 40).

The attraction of a narrative inquiry approach was the control and ownership that the participant had on what they were willing to share with the researcher. The autonomy of the participant to be in control of their narrative was an important consideration in any research and this methodology may support participant autonomy. Autonomy of the participant was an important consideration as the stories that they shared were held and owned by the storyteller, rather than by the researcher. Narrative inquiry and storytelling as methodology are complementary to exploring this problem of practice. The next section discusses the use of a principled practice referred to as two-eye seeing and how it contributes to a decolonized approach to research.

Two-Eyed Seeing

Two-eyed seeing—originally referred to as Etuaptmumk—was a concept that embraced the spirit and intent of co-creating, co-learning, and collaborative learning among Indigenous and Western knowledge (Roher et al., 2021). Mi'kmaq Elders Albert and Murdena Marshal from Eskasoni First Nation "describe the process of bringing together the strengths of Indigenous and Western knowledges" (Roher et al., 2021, p. 2) to bridge knowledges. The concept was understood as a principle that guided research but could be flexible and evolve over time (Colbourne et al., 2019). The two-eyed seeing approach was initially used in health settings but expanded to social and education contexts as practitioners found ways to incorporate the principle of two-eyed seeing in their research approaches.

Researchers have also discussed how a blended, or multi-paradigm approach could advance decolonization (Held, 2019; Peltier, 2018). Held (2019) described how research was shaped and directed by paradigms that were in constant change and that Indigenous ways of knowing must be included in academia to decolonize research. Held proposed that using a two-eyed seeing approach was one way to advance decolonization because it was an example of a transdisciplinary pathway to braid Indigenous and Western knowledge. Anishinaabe researcher Peltier (2018) conducted research with Anishinaabe cancer patients and presented their stories through a grounded Indigenous research paradigm and participatory action research. The research was situated in Indigenous communities, with Indigenous Elders, knowledge keepers and Indigenous cancer patients collectively shaping the research process, thus, blending Indigenous epistemology and methodology with Western theories and methodologies.

Using a blend of qualitative approaches such as Indigenous storywork, storytelling and narrative inquiry supports a multidisciplinary approach to study and understand diverse perspectives.

Kiyokewin

Kiyokewin is a Nehiyaw phrase for visiting or kinship visiting (Flaminio et al., 2020; Gaudet, 2019). Visiting as a methodology involved a conversational exchange in a safe space. Much like kitchen table conversations (Stevenson & Troupe, 2020), visiting has served to connect families and communities. Stevenson and Troupe (2020) explored the early, informal leadership style of Métis women who gathered and rallied in communities in the 1960s. Women collected to visit and share with families, and often these gatherings would spark political conversations. The visiting forums served as avenues for activism and early political organizations were developed from these kitchen table conversations (Stevenson & Troupe, 2020).

Visiting was also an important part of protocol in Indigenous storytelling. 'Naa-mehl' (Marcia Dawson) described the significance of visiting and its importance in establishing and maintaining relationality with research participants. Much like visiting with family, visiting with research participants included spending time listening, sharing space, building trust, and following protocols for knowledge sharing (Dawson, 2012).

The blend of storytelling and aspects of narrative inquiry, along with visiting with participants provided the framework for data collection. The next section describes the methods that were used for data collection.

Methodology and Methods of Inquiry

As a researcher who has worked in Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education, my epistemology, ontology, and axiology have been influenced by several theories and perspectives that intersect with growing, living, and working within urban and Indigenous communities and organizations. My worldview, beliefs and ethical approaches have been influenced by several theories and perspectives including: my life story as a Nehiyaw woman, critical theories such as Indigenous feminist theory (Green, 2017; Starblanket, 2017), Nakata's Indigenous standpoint theory (Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003, Nakata, 2002), and Tribal Critical Race Theory (Brayboy, 2005) alongside storywork, storytelling, narratives and visiting. This collection of theories and perspectives served to challenge me to examine leadership with a critical, multi-paradigmatic, yet reflective eye. It is through this complex, multi-faceted lens that I view both the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership and the problem of how to increase the opportunities for Indigenous women to access and be successful in leadership. The qualitative research design in this study used data collection methods intended to gather rich descriptions of Indigenous women' stories about their leadership experience in supportive spaces for building relations and thematic analysis of the collected data (Kovach, 2010).

Sampling and Participants

The purposive and non-random sample for this research project was five self-identified Indigenous women leaders in education who were registered as citizens from distinct and sovereign First Nations in the central prairies. They ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-60s and they served in education administration roles at various stages in their professional careers. The participants, of various ages and lived experiences, were known to the researcher as personal and professional colleagues. I extended an invitation to six participants to meet in person or virtually

to gauge interest and to discuss the project purpose, time commitments, activities, the participant consent process, and the right to withdraw from the research project. I held a first meeting with participants to discuss the project and sent each participant a copy of the recruitment poster (Appendix A) along with the approval from the university ethics board and my research certification (Appendix B). I immediately received confirmation from all six individuals of their interest to participate in the project. At the outset of scheduling meetings, one of the individuals experienced a family loss and I chose not to pursue her participation during her grieving period. Thus, I continued with a committed group of five participants. As a participant observer I recorded observational notes in a journal for reflection on the project and my role as a researcher in the academic environment.

Data Collection

Based on the methodology, I chose the following data collection methods and will briefly describe each method.

Semi-structured Interviews

I used semi-structured, conversational interviews to understand and make meaning of participant experiences. At a scheduled second meeting, I met with individuals to gather the data through conversations that occurred in social, cultural, familial, and territorial spaces of the participants. The data collection meeting was held in person at a location that was determined by the participant including workplaces, homes, and secluded eating establishments. The intent of meeting at a place of comfort was to replicate a casual, comfortable, conversation and visiting space. As a researcher, I am familiar with and have an established relationship with all intended participants; however, it was necessary to rebuild and reconnect with one another to nurture our

relationships. The necessity to establish and nurture relationality is an important feature of an Indigenous research paradigm (Minthorn & Shotton, 2019).

Prior to each interview, I provided the participant with a copy of the consent form with detailed project information (Appendix C), and the semi-structured, open-ended, interview questions (Appendix D) so they would have time to reflect on their experience before we met. When we met, I offered tobacco as a formal request for them to share their knowledge and experience in the research. Inclusion of Indigenous protocol and involvement of Elders aligned with my worldview and with an Indigenous research paradigm. The data collection meeting ranged in duration from one and a half hours to three and a half hours and each meeting was recorded with an audio recorder.

A third meeting was held virtually to review the transcribed data, to clarify researcher interpretations, and to validate the first interview. Since participants had time to reflect on the interview, I anticipated that they may want to further expand on their experiences; however, there were no expanded or additional information. Each meeting took place over an hour with one meeting extending to an hour and a half. These meetings were not recorded.

The participants all indicated their interest in receiving a summary of the research findings at a future, informal fourth meeting. In alignment with reciprocity, I will offer a final gift to each participant in appreciation of their contribution and to recognize and validate their stories.

Observations, Notes and Reflections

As a researcher, I participated in all meetings as an observer and documented observations and reflections in a journal after the data collection meetings. I found that I would switch from observer to participant observer as a natural extension of the conversational nature

of the data collection meeting. The notes served to refresh my memory and provided context to the conversations which aided in preparing the fourth manuscript.

My interest in gathering the experiences of Indigenous women as leader, was intended to challenge and disrupt the often-invisible guise of strong but silent leaders. I expected and believed I gathered a rich collection of life histories, family stories, recollections of mentoring relationships, good and bad work stories, and cautionary stories from the research participants.

Data Analysis

The following section describes the planned data analysis for this study. The data analysis process included several steps aligned with thematic analysis but was also mindful of the context of the participants' experiences.

The audio recordings were reviewed three times each to identify and contextualize the conversations, to review alongside the raw transcription, and to ensure a clean accurate transcript. Each transcription was sent to participants for their review, and they were invited to a follow-up virtual meeting.

First level analysis involved reading through transcribed interviews and personal notes to familiarize myself with the content and to reflect on the conversations that I had with participants. At this first level analysis review of transcripts, I also reviewed my notes to identify concepts and assign open codes to these concepts. This step was followed by a second level review to identify relationships and connections between the first level of codes. Kovach (2010) referred to this as relational analysis or axial coding. The purpose of this step was to identify patterns and interpret the patterns within the context of the conversations. After a third review of transcripts, all codes, and grouped codes, I organized the information and prepared for a third meeting with participants.

A third meeting was scheduled with participants to review and validate the transcripts and to discuss the process of how the transcripts were prepared, the coding process I had used, and my initial thoughts of the material. Participants were encouraged to share their thoughts about our conversations and the importance of telling their stories.

According to Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022), there would be points when answers to the inquiries become apparent and that this would be "the point to start thinking narratively in terms of storytelling over time and place" (Pino Gavidia & Adu, 2022, p. 3). Near the close of the second (data gathering) meetings, the responses to the semi-structured questions began to form patterns. The patterns and themes were organized in response to the research sub questions.

Data Storage

All data were stored electronically on the Researcher's University of Saskatchewan OneDrive account. The OneDrive account is password protected with multifactor authentication. After the defense, all collected data will be stored by the supervisor, in password protected files, for the required five-year storage requirement.

Trustworthiness of the Inquiry

This study was designed to address the trustworthiness features of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and audit trail (Nowell et al, 2017). Each feature is described below.

Credibility was addressed through the practice of member checking. Participants had an opportunity in the third meeting to review the transcribed conversation and the researcher's interpretations of the conversations. As well, participants were invited to a fourth, optional meeting to discuss the research findings. Transferability was addressed through the purposive

sample selection of participants and the detailed rich descriptions of the conversations and thorough explanations of the research process.

Dependability and audit trails were addressed through detailed journal notes of researcher reflexivity, and through the provision of transcriptions to participants. Researcher reflexivity also situated the researcher as more than an observer but also a participant in the conversation (Sawyer et al., 2023; Shotton et al., 2017).

Confirmability was addressed through the reflection and recognition of using an Indigenous research paradigm for the study.

Trustworthiness of the research was also addressed through careful adherence to Indigenous protocols related to offering tobacco and gift giving. Prior to the commencement of the interview process, the researcher offered tobacco and a gift to each participant. The tobacco offering by researcher and acceptance by participants signals what Wilson & Restoule (2010) consider as "activating relationships" (p. 29), including sacred relationships and knowledge sharing. The offering and acceptance covenants participants and ensure ethical truth finding and honesty in discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The research study considered the following principles: the regulatory ethics of the university, ethical practice in working with Indigenous participants, and Indigenous protocol practices. This study required an application and approval from the University of Saskatchewan Behavioral Research Ethics Board. Additionally, I provided participants with an interview schedule and supporting documentation so that they were fully informed about the research project, they were ensured confidentiality, and were duly provided with information about

ongoing informed consent. The summary report did not include participant names nor identify participants' residences.

I maintained confidentiality throughout the study and assigned pseudonyms to participants in preparing the fourth paper. I selected the names of various prairie flowers and encouraged participants to select a flower to use as their pseudonym. I continually checked with participants regarding ongoing consent and assurances of confidentiality.

As part of the ethical protocols related to working with Indigenous participants, I offered tobacco and gift to participants prior to the commencement of our meetings. As an Indigenous researcher, I connected with Indigenous research methods and further committed to the processes of ceremony, relationality, and reciprocity in my work (Kovach, 2010; Quinless, 2022; Wilson, 2008; Whetung Nashnaabeg & Wakefield, 2019). At the completion of the study, I will share the findings of the study with participants to recognize and honour their experience.

Summary of Manuscript Three

This paper focused on designing a research study to examine Indigenous women in non-traditional or informal leadership roles. The methodology and methods are derived from Indigenous storytelling and Kiyokewin.

The research question and sub questions formed the basis of the inquiry which used Indigenous methodologies and methods that align with the researcher's worldview. The data collection through a conversational, one-to-one, semi-structured interview method within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach, and thematic analysis were chosen as the methods to gather narratives of Indigenous women leaders and to answer the research questions.

This study was designed to address key issues of trustworthiness with an emphasis on researcher attention to reflexivity and closed with a discussion on ethical considerations.

The findings contribute to knowledge sharing about the problem of the limited number of Indigenous women in leadership positions and how mentoring might contribute to increased access and success for Indigenous women in education leadership.

MANUSCRIPT FOUR. FINDINGS TO RESEARCH QUESTION AND DISCUSSION

Abstract

While Indigenous women continue to access educational opportunities and leadership positions, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles. The consequence of this slow growth has been the lack of role models to mentor Indigenous women along their leadership journey. The purpose of this study was to establish how mentoring contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women leaders in education administration.

This problem of practice sought to explore how mentoring has contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders in education. The inquiry question that guided this study was: How has culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles? The study used a qualitative approach that included methods found within storytelling methodology including conversations within a Kiyokewin (visiting) practice guided by semi-structured interview questions. This method was chosen because it aligned with the researcher's Indigenous paradigm and used practices that embraced the importance of relationality (Wahkohtowin) as a key practice in Indigenous research and in Kiyokewin. The study used purposive, non-random, sampling to select five participants (who are educators) and who were located in Treaty 4, 6 and 7 areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The findings are anticipated to contribute to the knowledge on Indigenous women in leadership by discussing the influence of mentoring to leadership growth.

Introduction to Problem of Practice

I have worked in First Nations higher education for over thirty years in various roles and capacities and I did not see people like me—a Nehiyaw Iskwew—in leadership positions that

could serve as a mentor to me in these roles. This search for support formed the basis for this study to examine through life narratives, the influence of mentorship on the leadership experiences of Indigenous women in leadership roles in education.

In our families and communities, First Nations women held leadership positions, though historical colonial policies and practices removed this position in favor of patriarchal forms of leadership. We continue to see the impact of these policies and practices on Indigenous women (Khalifa et al., 2019; Minthorn & Shotton, 2019). Indigenous women have not stepped into leadership roles or have been recognized as leaders with the same pace as non-Indigenous women. The need to hear Indigenous women's voices on leadership and their experiences in published materials is an important but major challenge as published resources are scant. Indigenous women leaders continue to be an understudied group which further contributes to a silencing of the Indigenous woman's experience. How can we support Indigenous women in leadership and mentor and grow the next generation of Indigenous leaders? As indicated, this problem of practice sought to examine how mentorship contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who have held leadership roles in education administration.

The inquiry question that guided this study was: How had culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles? The inquiry question was supported by additional sub questions including:

1. How did culture and community inform your role as an Indigenous woman leader?
2. How did opportunities or challenges impact your leadership journey?
3. How did mentorship influence your leadership journey?

4. What would you leave to other Indigenous women so that they can see their leadership potential?

The research conversational interviews were conducted within a Kiyokewin (visiting) environment and thematic analysis to examine the data.

As an insider to this project, I viewed this problem through many lens—as a participant, as a researcher, and as Indigenous woman in leadership. It was through this complex lens that I saw the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership, and the need for opportunities for Indigenous women to access and be successful in leadership roles. The limited resources and studies of Indigenous women in leadership and the limited training and support for women leaders have contributed to a continued silencing of the Indigenous experience and prompted the need for further study. The next section briefly described the existing literature on mentorship and Indigenous women leaders in education.

Brief Description of Extant Literature

The search for resources for this study included use of the researcher's university database including the Indigenous iPortal, the Harvest database, as well as Google Scholar, and secondary reference searching. A combination of search terms included: Indigenous women, leadership, education administration, and Indigenous mentorship. The key themes in the literature review that shaped the study were Indigenous leadership was influenced by ethics, Indigenous epistemology and culture, Indigenous women in leadership led from a community and culture focus, and mainstream models of mentorship do not reflect the Indigenous experience. Each theme is summarized below.

Indigenous Leadership

Leadership among Indigenous groups was influenced by cultural protocols, Indigenous worldviews, cultural values. Leaders understood and were committed to prioritizing culture and values as guidelines for leaders' behaviors (Haar et al., 2019, pp. 622-23). Values such as humility, self-discipline, altruism, generosity, future orientation, collectivist/relational, cultural authenticity, and spirituality were revered and respected behaviors for leaders (Gladstone and Pepion, 2017; Haar et al., 2019; Linds et al., 2019). Linds et al. (2019) noted that healthy relationships that were decolonized and that served the community were based on reciprocity, respectful listening, and investment of self for others and were necessary characteristics of Indigenous leadership. Indigenous leaders must have a clearly defined vision anchored by a strong cultural identity, inspire and unite others towards common goals, and help others to persevere (Housman, 2015).

Indigenous leaders demonstrated the relevance of traditional values and perspectives and how the language and culture was connected to leadership. The next section briefly discusses the important role of Indigenous women in leadership.

Indigenous Women's Leadership

Indigenous women have often held roles in communities as leaders in education, academia, and health where they could build opportunities while also challenging the status quo and be strong role models and mentors. (Robinson et al., 2020). Robinson et al (2020) studied five Mi'kmaw women leaders and their approaches to leadership within elementary school settings and identified that political, cultural, and social contexts, obstacles and supports, and the impact of Elders' leadership—all played an important role in the Mi'kmaw women's leadership (Robinson et al., 2020). The authors also noted that gender discrimination, lack of mentors and

role models, and limited opportunities in leadership contributed to barriers and challenges for Indigenous women seeking leadership opportunities.

Indigenous women leaders who were influenced by their worldview, culture, language, beliefs and values were respected and supported by their communities (Hill and Keogh Hoss, 2018; Maracle et al., 2020; Robinson, et al., 2020). Hill & Keogh Hoss (2018) and Maracle et al. (2020) examined how Indigenous women negotiated diverse worldviews and the impacts on their decision making. The authors found that Indigenous women leaders incorporated cultural knowledge, created space for new leaders and operated as servant leaders.

The Indigenous matriarch was a communal protector that grounded their practice in caring, protection, and service—the Indigenous women's leadership style was a traditional, warrior-style of leadership (McLeod, 2012; Pidgeon, 2012). Indigenous leaders saw the relationships among the group and approached leadership as wholistic in practice (Pidgeon, 2012).

The Indigenous presence in mainstream higher education is growing but requires a strategic approach while at the same time paying attention to being grounded in Indigenous teachings. Brunette-Debissage (2021) found that Indigenous women experienced an intersection of three complexities while working in administrative leadership: working in colonial structures, leading in male dominated arenas, and balancing Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds. Debissage and Brunette-Debissage (2018) also discussed their experiences as Indigenous scholars working in a mainstream university and offered that individualist leadership paradigms, such as those nurtured in mainstream universities are incongruent with "Indigenous community models of leadership [that are] based in heterarchical, situational, and community needs" (Debissage & Brunette-Debissage, 2018, p. 126).

While the literature on Indigenous leadership and particularly Indigenous women in leadership was scant, it offered valuable discussion on the importance of Indigenous culture and values and their role in leadership. More research though is needed about leadership from an Indigenous worldview. The next section shares research highlights on mentoring and mentorship with a focus on the Indigenous experience.

Indigenous Mentorship

Mentoring and mentorship has had a long history and is most often considered in the space of education or in the workplace whereby a relationship is formed between someone who is experienced and someone who is seeking knowledge or support from the experienced one (Atay & Murry, 2023; Early, 2020; Hinsdale, 2016; McInnes, 2011; Pullman, 2011), or alternatively the informal process of peer mentoring (Preston et al., 2011). While there is no shortage of mentorship definitions that are based on mainstream concepts of mentorship, these models often do not acknowledge or reflect the Indigenous experience and the impact of colonization on Indigenous peoples. Hinsdale (2016) advocated for a decolonial approach to mentorship that considered relational qualities and practices such as connectedness through self-reflection, listening skills, and showing openness and power sharing. Hinsdale described the importance of relationship in traditional mentoring and how deficit notions and assumptions might play a role in the relationship.

Mentorship that is based on Indigenous practices feature “Indigenous values, ethics, beliefs, customs, family structures, and identity” (Sawyer et al., 2023, p. 197) that are focused on the mentee. Atay and Murry (2023) examined an Indigenous mentoring model that included six behavioral categories: fostering Indigenous identity, following Indigenous ethics, practicing relationality and reciprocity, encouraging critical thinking, advocating for self and others, and is

tailored to the mentee (Atay & Murry, 2023; Atay et al., 2023; Sawyer et al., 2023). The model and similar models were based on relationality as the permeating force in all of the categories.

Chew and Nicholas (2021) also examined an Indigenous mentor relationship between a mentor-mentee model in academia. The authors confirmed that "mentorship was a 'kinship responsibility' based on a respectful and caring relationship" (Chew & Nicholas, 2021, p. 75) and was distinguished as a relationship that was led from the heart rather than one that was transactional. Relational mentorship is a transformative relationship, where the goal is to 'take care' of the mentor-mentee relationship (Bordeaux, 2021; Chew & Nicholas, 2021). Pratt, et al. (2021) described how an ethics of care is the precondition for a relationship-based mentorship. The authors proposed a decolonized, collaborative approach to mentorship that centered Indigenous principles and worldviews. The authors considered their approach to be an 'ensemble' or new approach to mentorship.

Access to mentorship is often mentioned in the research as a barrier or challenge to increasing connection and support (Burke & MacDonald, 2020). Barriers and challenges were a major theme in the research on Indigenous women in leadership though few resources specifically targeted the role of mentorship in leadership journeys. The lack of mentors and role models from personal experience combined with the barriers and challenges to increasing opportunities for prospective leaders became a motivator for examining mentorship as a feature of successful leadership.

Blended Theories and Perspectives

My worldview, beliefs and ethical approaches have been influenced by several theories and perspectives including: my life story as a Nehiyaw Iskwew, critical theories such as Indigenous feminist theory (Green, 2017; Starblanket, 2017), the decolonizing work of Nakata's

Indigenous standpoint theory (Cox et al., 2021; Foley, 2003, Nakata, 2002), Tribal Critical Race Theory that challenged colonial thought (Brayboy, 2005), as well as Mi'kmaw Elder Albert Marshall's perspective on Etuaptmumk, or two-eyed seeing (Institute for Integrative Science & Health, 2022). This collection of theories and perspectives served to challenge me to examine leadership with a critical, yet reflective eye.

As a researcher who has worked in Indigenous and non-Indigenous higher education, my epistemology, ontology, and axiology have been influenced by several theories and perspectives that intersect with growing, living, and working within urban and Indigenous communities and organizations. It is through this complex, yet multi-faceted, lens that I view both the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership, but also the need to increase the opportunities for Indigenous women to access and be successful in leadership roles. I believe that mentoring may provide an opportunity to increase access and success.

The transformative potential of critical theories challenges and disrupts political and colonial environments and has encouraged critical conversations about power relations among Indigenous communities and the impact of colonial legacies of patriarchy (Starblanket, 2017). Exploring phenomena through a decolonizing and critical lens allows researchers to centre Indigenous worldviews and experience (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous-grounded perspectives are aligned with decolonial perspectives and processes.

The key themes from the literature review were the importance of leading with traditional, cultural values, and influenced by wholistic, communal and collaborative efforts. Resources on Indigenous mentoring and leadership were not readily available in the literature and could be an area for further research. Indigenous mentoring could be a promising framework for culturally appropriate mentoring and support for Indigenous women, youth, and other

marginalized groups. Additional research on mentoring and leadership will continue to be an area for further exploration.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to frame the problem of practice in research on the influence of mentorship on Indigenous womens leadership journeys. This study employed a qualitative approach to explore Indigenous women's experiences in education leadership using an Indigenous storywork methodology within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach. The research question used qualitative approaches to gather data and thematic analysis to analyze the data.

This section includes a discussion on the methodological approach to inquiry, methods, coding, and analysis for the study.

Inquiry Goal

Indigenous epistemology is uniquely tied to Indigenous language, culture, spirit, and land. An Indigenous worldview begins with an understanding of the self which is gained through language and culture. Indigenous worldview formed the approach to inquiry for this study.

A leader in Indigenous research and methodologies, Kovach (2009, 2021) examined how Indigenous research methodologies were distinct, unique methodologies tied to Indigenous knowledge and how a tribally centered epistemology served as a framework for conducting Indigenous research (Kovach, 2010, 2021). Indigenous research methods must be aligned with and make sense with Indigenous knowledge paradigms (Absolon, 2022; Kovach, 2010).

Indigenous oral traditions and knowledge transfer have a foundation in storytelling. The next section discusses storytelling and storywork as a methodology.

Storytelling as a Methodology

Stories are central to Indigenous worldviews (Chan, 2021; Datta, 2018; McIvor, 2010). Stories connected the past and the future, with the storyteller being the tool to disseminate and give meaning to the story (Smith, 2021). A renowned leader in Indigenous storywork, Archibald (2008) conveyed the foundations and practice of Indigenous storywork through her work with Elders and Knowledge keepers. Storytelling contributed to knowledge acquisition and was grounded in ceremony, experience, and worldview (Absolon, 2022; Archibald, 2008; Maracle et al., 2020). Indigenous-grounded perspectives were also aligned with decolonial perspectives and processes. Narrative inquiry is closely connected to storytelling; the next section briefly discusses this connection.

Narrative Inquiry

As a methodology, narrative inquiry involved "storytelling and restorying" (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990, p. 4) where the collected data played a key role in the research. Narrative inquiry explored experience through conversations with research participants. Narrative connects time and place with recollection and interpretation. According to Connelly and Clandinin (1990), "narrative names the structured quality of experience to be studied, and it names the patterns of inquiry for its study" (p. 2); thus, narrative is both a methodology and a method. The attraction of this approach is the control and ownership that the participant has on what they are willing to share with the researcher. The autonomy of the participant to be in control of their narrative is an important consideration in any research and this methodology may support participant autonomy.

Kiyokewin

Kiyokewin is a Nehiyawak phrase for visiting. Also known as "kinship visiting" (Flaminio et al, 2020; Gaudet, 2019), visiting as a methodology involves a conversational

exchange in a safe, comfortable space. Much like kitchen table conversations (Stevenson & Troupe, 2020), visiting has served to connect families and communities. Visiting is also an important part of protocol in Indigenous storytelling. ‘Naa-mehl (Marcia Dawson) described the significance of visiting and its importance in establishing and maintaining relationality with research participants. Much like visiting with family, visiting with research participants included spending time listening, sharing space, building trust, and following protocols for knowledge sharing (Dawson, 2012). The blend of storytelling and aspects of narrative inquiry, along with visiting with participants provided the framework for data collection in this study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The potential limitations of this study were outlined in two areas: methods and researcher. The sample size was intentionally small to gather rich data which did not allow for a representative population size or conclusions to be based on a larger population. The delimitations of this study focused on the size and duration of data collection. I selected individuals that I knew through personal and work relationships that had been established and nurtured over time. The participants were known to the researcher which could have presented an opportunity for bias and warranted the need for researcher reflexivity and participant member checking of data. The data gathering time frame was short which impacted participants’ schedules and resulted in accommodations to hold meetings virtually and in person. The other concern with meeting virtually was the potential impact on in-depth conversations about experiences. The researcher traveled to meet participants to reduce the need for virtual meetings.

Anticipating that participants might share negative experiences about impacts of residential school trauma, colonial trauma, institutional or interpersonal racism, harassment, and

discrimination, I was prepared to provide two virtual wellness service contacts to distribute to participants if requested; however, no participants requested support service contacts.

Assumptions

I assumed that the research participants would be comfortable with the process and forthcoming in the conversational approach of the data collection process due to their interest in the topic and our historical relationships. The purpose of establishing relationality and ensuring reciprocity of respect, knowledge and protocols of gifting was also intended to honor Indigenous cultural traditions as well as creating a safe space for sharing experiences.

Trustworthiness of the Inquiry

This study was designed to address the trustworthiness features of credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and audit trail (Nowell et al., 2017) described below.

Credibility was addressed through the practice of member checking. Participants had an opportunity prior to the third meeting to review their respective transcribed conversation. During this meeting we discussed the conversational interview process and our respective interpretations of the conversation. As well, participants indicated an interest to receive a copy of the study and meet informally after the study to discuss the findings. Transferability was addressed through the rich description of the conversations with the participants of the study and thorough explanations of the research process.

Dependability and audit trails were addressed through notes of researcher reflexivity and through the provision of transcriptions to participants. Researcher reflexivity also situated the researcher as more than an observer but also a participant in the conversation (Sawyer et al., 2023; Shotton et al., 2017).

Confirmability was addressed through the reflection and recognition of using an Indigenous research paradigm for the study. Participants appreciated the nature of the conversational visiting approach and its alignment with relationality.

Additionally, trustworthiness of the research was addressed through the careful adherence to Indigenous protocols related to offering tobacco and gift giving. Prior to the commencement of the interview process, the researcher offered tobacco and a gift to each participant. The tobacco offering by researcher and acceptance by participants signals what Wilson & Restoule (2010) consider as "activating relationships" (p. 29), including sacred relationships and knowledge sharing. The offering and acceptance covenants participants and ensure ethical truth finding and honesty in discussion.

Ethical Considerations

The project received approval from the research ethics board of the university, as well as support from colleagues who were members of the Indigenous community pressing me to ensure that I carried out this research respecting Indigenous research ethics.

I provided participants with a consent form that described in depth the project, their right to informed consent, right to withdraw and assurance of confidentiality. After interviews were scheduled, I sent each participant an interview schedule and supporting documentation so that they were fully informed about the research project, they were ensured confidentiality and the use of pseudonyms in the transcription and final report, and they were reminded of the ability to withdraw their participation in the project. To ensure confidentiality, I assigned pseudonyms to participants and de-identified where they lived and worked and the connection with their First Nation or Métis community.

As an Indigenous researcher, I connected with Wilson's (2008) Indigenous research methods and committed to the processes of ceremony, relationality, and reciprocity (Quinless, 2022; Whetung Nashnaabeg & Wakefield, 2019; Wilson, 2008). Prior to commencing the research, I participated in ceremonies with pipe carriers, sweats were held, and offerings and prayers continuously guided my work. As part of the ethical protocols related to working with Indigenous participants, I offered tobacco and gifted participants prior to the commencement of our meetings and provided an honorarium at the completion of the data collection to recognize and honour their experience.

Sample and Data Collection

Purposive and non-random sampling was used to select five Indigenous women who were registered as citizens from distinct and sovereign First Nations in the central prairies. They ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-60s and they served in education administration roles at various stages in their professional careers. The participants, of various ages and lived experiences, were known to the researcher as personal and professional colleagues. I extended an invitation to six participants to meet and gauge their interest in the project purpose, time commitments, and the consent and withdrawal process of the project. I held a first meeting with participants to discuss the project and sent each participant a copy of the recruitment poster (Appendix A) along with the approval from the university ethics board and my research certification (Appendix B). I immediately received confirmation from all six individuals of their interest to participate in the project. At the outset of scheduling meetings, one of the individuals experienced a family loss and I chose not to pursue her participation during her grieving period. Thus, I continued with five participants for the duration of the project. As a participant observer I recorded reflections on the process and of my role as a researcher.

As a researcher, I am familiar with and have an established relationship with all intended participants; however, it was necessary to rebuild and reconnect with one another to nurture these relationships. The necessity to establish and nurture relationality is an important feature of an Indigenous research paradigm (Minthorn & Shotton, 2019). I travelled to territories in Treaty 4, 6, and 8 to meet with participants and honored my travels with appropriate tobacco offerings to the land in each area. I chose the following data collection methods and will briefly describe each method.

Semi-structured Conversational Interviews

I used semi-structured, conversational interviews (Kovach, 2010) to understand and make meaning of experience within social, cultural, familial, and territorial spaces by gathering in-depth, rich data through conversations with participants. The conversations were informal, and an interview schedule was used as a guide for the conversations. There were three meetings with participants. The first meeting was held in person, on the phone and virtually, to gauge participant interest in the study; this meeting did not include data collection. At a scheduled second meeting—the main data collection meeting—I met with participants in a visiting space of casual comfort to hold a conversation. One of the meetings had to be rescheduled and held virtually to accommodate the participant's tight work and travel schedule; the other four meetings were held in person over shared meals and coffees.

Prior to each interview, I provided the participant with a copy of the semi-structured, open-ended, interview questions to enable them time to review the questions and reflect on their experiences. When we met, I offered tobacco, a kokum scarf, and a box of tea, as a formal request for each to share their knowledge and experience. Inclusion of Indigenous protocol aligns with my worldview and with an Indigenous research paradigm. The meetings ranged in length

from one and a half hours to three hours in length. During our data collection meeting, each conversation was recorded with an audio recorder. At the end of the data collection conversation, I offered a financial honorarium to each participant as a thank you gift. The recorded conversations were transcribed and sent to the participant for review.

A third meeting was held virtually to review and validate the transcribed data from their recorded interview. Since participants had time to reflect on the interview and to review their transcripts, we discussed the process of the research design and often conversations veered to the importance of storytelling and visiting and upholding old, but familiar ways of gathering and sharing to ensure that relationality was a continued practice. The third meeting was about forty minutes to one hour in length and was not recorded.

All participants indicated their interest in receiving a copy of the summary report, with most indicating an interest to meet in person. At the fourth meeting, I will close with thanking the participant and offering a final gift.

Observations, Reflections, and a Shift to Bearing Witness

I took notes soon after each conversation; however, based on the relationships I had with participants, I could not be a passive, objective observer; rather, in the spirit of Kiyokewin, we ate, we visited, and we talked.

My interest in gathering the experiences of Indigenous women as leaders was to challenge and disrupt the often-invisible guise of strong but silent leaders. While I had expected to hear rich stories of life and family histories, recollections of mentoring relationships, good and bad work stories, and cautionary stories from the research participants, I had not expected to be so impacted by the gravity of the stories. The notes that I made were reflections of the weight of carrying these life stories of leadership. I carried these reflections for several days and weeks

wondering how I could possibly present the stories of these amazing women in a way that demonstrated the significance of their individual stories and their collective message.

I recalled participating on a planning committee on Indigenous identity in the university and how the practice known as 'bearing witness' was a role assigned to selected guests. Bearing witness was the solemn and honoured role of observing, listening, reflecting, and sharing and was also a critical, formal role for many participants who attended the National Truth and Reconciliation Commission that travelled across Canada from 2008 to 2015 and that culminated in a series of reports and Calls to Action (University of Alberta, 2017). This recall of bearing witness and the significance of the role allowed me to shift from being a researcher and participant observer to being a witness to these amazing women's stories, and to honour and remain in relation with research participants. The next section describes the processes used in analyzing collected data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis process included several steps that are aligned with thematic analysis. It was important to the analysis to keep context in mind during the analysis. Kovach (2021) shared that when research is approached through an Indigenous lens that thematic analysis "even though it is an established academic tradition, can be considered with an Indigenous conceptual framing" (p. 206). The analysis herein follows the systematic steps of coding and grouping coding but is considered within my lens as an Indigenous researcher and is cognizant of the context from which the data was gathered and where it will be contextualized.

Each audio recording underwent three reviews; the first review included listening to the recording and noting the conversation and any nuances in the conversation. The audio file was uploaded to the computer and converted into a transcript using the researcher's Microsoft Word

account transcription feature and then saved on the student OneDrive account. The second review included examining the transcript against the audio recording and cleaning the transcript by removing background noises from the transcript and correcting incorrectly transcribed words, which resulted in a cleaned transcript. The transcript, a transcript release form, and a set of guiding questions were sent to all participants for their review along with a request for a follow-up virtual meeting.

I reviewed each transcribed file to familiarize myself with the content and to reflect on the conversations that I had with participants. At this first level analysis review of transcripts, I also reviewed my notes to identify concepts and assign open codes to these concepts.

This step was followed by a second level review to group the codes and identify relationships and connections among the codes (Kovach, 2010), referred to as relational analysis or axial coding. I sought to identify patterns and interpret the patterns within the context of the conversations. After I completed a third review of the transcripts, the codes, and the patterns, I organized the information and prepared for a third meeting with participants.

Our third meeting was held virtually with each participant. We connected and visited and then I discussed the process of how the transcripts were prepared, the coding process I had used, and my initial thoughts of the material. Participants shared their thoughts about our conversation and the importance of telling their stories. According to Pino Gavidia and Adu (2022), there would be a point when answers to the inquiries may become apparent and that this would be "the point to start thinking narratively in terms of storytelling over time and place" (p. 3). After the third participant interview, the responses to the semi-structured questions began to form patterns. The patterns and themes were organized in response to the research sub questions. The next section presents the findings from the conversations with participants.

Research Findings

The Indigenous women in this study ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-60s with varying life and work experiences. The women have held a myriad of jobs including, teachers, adult educators, program coordinators, directors, vice principals, and principals. All participants came from humble family origins and acknowledged that their early experiences shaped decisions and aspirations in education, employment, and leadership. Daisy, Rose, Prairie Lily, Violet, and Sunflower (all pseudonyms) were strong, inspirational, and powerful Cree, Cree/Métis, and Cree/Saulteaux women. Each woman had walked a unique path in their educational leadership journey; all were supported in their efforts through mentoring relationships with significant maternal figures.

All participants were intergenerational survivors of the residential school experience. Either their mother or grandmother, sometimes both, attended the infamous schools, and two participants attended day schools in their communities. The women spoke about the impacts of trauma, death, addictions, racism, family breakdown and poverty on their journeys, though coupled with many instances of bravery, fierceness, resilience, and strength as matriarchs and soon-to-be matriarchs of their respective families.

The Indigenous women were all university-educated individuals, some of whom entered college or university after high school, others whose academic journeys began after having children. The older participants were comfortable and confident in wearing a leadership hat; while the younger participants were less likely to identify as a 'leader' but could acknowledge that others may see them as leaders.

All participants were earnest and forthright in sharing their leadership stories. The following sections include the main themes organized by research sub questions.

Influence of Family Matriarchs

The women in this study were influenced by mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties—a tribute to the strength and power of matriarchs in our communities. Participants indicated the important role that maternal figures played in their early life and in their growth as professionals. All participants spoke about strong family and community role models that helped shape them into being survivors, warriors, fighters, builders, caregivers, and leaders.

Daisy was raised by her grandparents after losing her mother at a young age. She shared that her grandmother was a significant presence in shaping her Nehiyaw worldview which was foundational to her growth as a young person learning about her identity and cultural values.

> My grandmother was Cree and she used to always make star blankets and it hit me one day when I was doing my master's, through stories, that now I understand when I went out to university, she made me a star blanket. She says here, this will protect you. Make sure to pray, you know that prayer piece was definitely from her, even though she experienced abuse at residential school. It was that that prayer piece, that kind of humbled me. (Daisy)

Daisy described how her grandmother, and grandfather, raised her and her siblings and instilled through family and ceremony, the power of both her Cree and Métis heritages and how both were instrumental in shaping how she lived and worked. Notable to this study, as she grew older, her connection to culture and its importance to her leadership grew in significance as she gained experience in leadership.

Prairie Lily was raised by both her mother and her grandmother and spent an equal amount of time living in her First Nation community and in a large urban centre. She identified that both her mother and her grandmother had a comparable presence as caregivers through

different points of times in her life and were influential throughout her life as mother and a leader. She learned perseverance and hard work from both women, “I think a lot of that stems from where you know the way that I was taught from my mother and my grandmother. Because those are the influences in my life” (Prairie Lily).

Prairie Lily’s childhood and youth were marked by a strong work ethic which carried her through challenges as a young mother seeking higher education and employment, and later as a mature learner in her master's program and in her various leadership positions in higher education administration.

Rose who was raised by both her parents and grew up in a mid-sized urban centre shared how her mother and her kokum were both strong Nehiyaw women who taught her the importance of family and faith as the foundation of their family which contributed to her sense of stability and leadership training ground.

> That's the path they're leading us on. You have that person to support and those that support the woman in your life, those women who have led that path. And if your family is good, you're giving to your community. If your community is good, they're going to come back on you younger ones because you guys have paved that path. (Rose)

Rose’s maternal influences and strong paternal influences impressed upon her the power of family unity and community service. As a young child and now as a mother to young adults, Rose continues to be a leader that serves various communities to whom she is a member.

Sunflower, the youngest participant, similarly spoke of being raised by a single mother and the influence of her grandmother, alongside other strong Indigenous women who played significant roles in her upbringing as caregivers and role models.

> All the women in my life were actually single parents. A lot of my aunties and the women that were in my mother's lives, became my aunt. These were all single women, and they were all very educated, Indigenous, strong-willed, single women. (Sunflower)

Sunflower spoke with great affection about the many women whose paths have crossed her own, and how each woman contributed to her growth as an individual and of their influence in shaping her outlook on service and leadership.

Violet grew up in a single parent household helmed by her mother, in an urban centre, and was a member of a large, loving family. While her early life was disrupted by the government policies of the 60s scoop that removed her and her siblings from their mother's care, Violet was nonetheless positively shaped by her strong mother as well as role models such as her older sister and beloved Aunties. As shared by Violet, "I was influenced by a lot of women and still continue to be, you know, it's not like again you start this journey and you forget because you don't" (Violet). Violet described how strong, fierce women embraced and supported her throughout her life, in her academic, employment and community building activities.

All participants reflected on their early experiences wearing leadership hats with most recalling how they found themselves as leaders in their youth including being spokespersons in their school, in their family, in their university programs, or in their respective communities. The two younger participants though, were reluctant to call themselves leaders or acknowledge that they were, or could be leaders; the older participants, with more life and work experience though, comfortably and confidently spoke about leadership experiences.

The women had strong opinions on the matriarch influences but had varied perspectives about the influence of culture and community on their leadership. The next section discusses the influence of culture and community on leadership.

Influence of Culture and Community on Leadership

Participants spoke with pride about their respective cultural backgrounds as Cree, Cree/Métis, and Cree/Saulteaux women. One participant spoke at length about the influence of her Métis grandfather and her Cree grandmother who raised her and how her early upbringing of being immersed in both cultures shaped her worldview and her approach as a leader in her workplace and community.

> It was so important to me when I became a leader and the importance of language to that connection to that spirit and learning my language at my age of 40. I think that has really influenced me as a leader because I had to go back as well and relearn and really walk two worlds [Cree and Métis]. (Daisy)

The youngest participant spoke of being a Cree woman working in Blackfoot territory and how she struggled culturally in a workplace that was led by Blackfoot leaders. She shared that as she has matured and gained work experience and exposure to mature leadership, she became more confident to express herself as a Cree person and as an emerging leader. She shared how she was cared for and nurtured personally and professionally by an influential leader in her workplace and how working from two cultural lenses helped in broadening her perspective on leadership in the workplace.

For Rose, culture and community were indistinguishable as both were tied closely together. As a youth and as an adult, her family was always involved in their community, and she also raised her children to be family and community focused as well. She was raised in the church and went to ceremony, both having a shared and equal presence in her family. Rose stressed the importance of having pride in her family and community and how knowing your community was key to being connected and being in relation with others.

Rose described the strongest influence of culture and community on her leadership practice from an early age. The other four women spoke with pride about their cultural backgrounds and its influence on their practice but culture as an influence was more likely to emerge as a significant influence when they were adults and, in the workforce, or when they were exposed to cultural influence in their university experiences.

The participants also reflected on the impact of their respective communities but more often in the context of communities of practice or communities that they were members of, such as First Nation communities, or urban communities, or workplace communities.

While the women shared the impacts and influences of culture and community on their leadership practice, they spoke at length about the opportunities and challenges that they experienced on their leadership journeys.

Opportunities and Challenges on Their Leadership Journeys

The participants spoke about opportunities and challenges that they encountered at various stages in their life and work experiences; oftentimes though they were discussed as lessons learned from challenges or opportunities that arose from challenges. The next section outlines how professional development, support from colleagues, and fitting in were both opportunities and challenges for the women.

Professional Development

Participants sought leadership learning opportunities in workshops and seminars, usually as professional development activities through their workplaces. These opportunities served to help them gain knowledge and skills as well as gain confidence to help them in their positions or to help them advance in their careers. One participant spoke about a life changing workshop that

sowed the seed for future leadership roles. In her recall, she enthusiastically, and in detail, spoke about the importance of believing in herself.

> I think that was my first revelation or experience about the strength that an individual could have in achieving their goals or in believing in yourself. So, I have a hard time even sympathizing [with] people who say I can't. I think we're our worst enemies. We talk ourselves into things and out of things. (Prairie Lily)

The workshop that Prairie Lily described was a transformative turning point in her life, building her confidence and prompting her to explore opportunities for growth and advancement in her workplace.

Rose had worked several years at her workplace and throughout the years would take advantage of opportunities that were presented to her. These opportunities—whether it was workshops, professional development training or new job positions—helped her to move into positions with more responsibility and allowed space for her to flex her growing leadership skills. Rose shared,

> There's a reason why I'm put in these places and even when you talk about opportunity, there's a reason why opportunities are given to me. There's a reason why, and I think that would be a very common thing for Indigenous women that we don't see that in ourselves. (Rose)

Rose also spoke about her community activities and similarly being given opportunities to take on leadership roles in community boards and on committees.

Challenges were also an opportunity to be an inspiration; however, there was a dark side to taking advantage of some opportunities. Rose shared how her attendance and participation at

certain academic administrative tables was exhausting. Her frustration was palpable and measured. Rose shared,

> Because you’re just a woman, you’re just an Indian, you’re a chick. People who look at you and automatically assume that you’re lesser. Your opinion is less. So we have to steel ourselves. They still kind of put you a little bit low even though you’re sitting at the same table. You’re the last person they want to hear from. (Rose)

As an educated woman with two degrees, respected by her community and colleagues, Rose routinely experienced having her voice silenced at meetings. Violet also shared similar thoughts about how others perceived Indigenous women,

> It’s how we’re looked at and we’re not looked at, or valued in my opinion, in leadership roles. We're not always valued as Indigenous women. I think that the biggest challenge for women in leadership is being listened [to] and being heard. But more importantly, is respecting their voice. And I don’t see representation. (Violet)

Daisy took a different approach to challenges, acknowledging that, “Some of the hardest experiences in my life, the most challenging, most inspirational, I’ve learned through the challenges of putting myself in situations where I didn’t think I could do it, but I did it anyway” (Daisy). Daisy shared how she learned to flip these challenges into opportunities to improve and grow herself and her practice.

The women discussed how challenges were not limitations to their resilience, rather challenges fueled their determination. Opportunities were often viewed as options or goals that would help them advance in their work or professional endeavors. The women described the impact of positive support from colleagues and that support helped to increase opportunities as well. The next section described how support from colleagues impacted participants.

Support from Colleagues

Participants shared that receiving encouragement from colleagues and supervisors contributed to early leadership roles and positive experiences. Encouragement also contributed to building confidence, which participants noted was an important characteristic/attribute of leaders.

Daisy spoke about collegial relationships that developed over time and how their acknowledgement and support permitted her to explore new initiatives for her school and how their support enhanced her confidence and validated the encouragement she received from her workplace colleagues.

Sunflower appreciated the opportunities she had through her short career including stepping into a temporary administrative leadership position in her workplace as well as support from colleagues to take on impromptu leadership activities in various positions she held. Sunflower's experiences of being given opportunities at work were initially perceived as positive opportunities until she began to question whether the opportunities were genuine leadership opportunities or self-serving for school board administrators. Her reticence in taking on additional leadership roles though was tempered by questions about administrative intent. For example, in a few instances, as a young Indigenous educator, her school administration and school board would request her to be guest speaker, facilitator and host at school events, where she was one of a small handful of Indigenous participants. She shared,

> I worry that my leadership opportunities have been given to me based off of the way that I look on the outside. They wanted to listen to what I had to say and showcase the findings through this language study that they had done, which wasn't my language, but I think they just wanted me as the visual. (Sunflower)

Sunflower discussed that while colleagues supported her to take on overt and visible roles, she also wondered if it was due to a romanticized or tokenized perception of her as a fair-skinned, attractive Indigenous woman, rather than an appreciation of her knowledge and abilities as an orator.

The women all acknowledged how valuable it was to have supportive colleagues and how that support helped them navigate challenges on their journeys.

Fitting In

Two participants saw opportunities to participate and to fit in to counter the feeling of growing up feeling displaced or not feeling as though they fit in anywhere, either at school, in community or at work.

To fit in, Daisy had learned early to adopt a practice of compliance and conformity to fit in with others and not rock the boat. As an early career professional, she would listen to other educators, or bosses and depending upon the situation, and learned that,

> They liked very much the good little Indian that was compliant, that I did what she was told. My journey at work was to be agreeable because that was the expectation, not only as a woman, but as an Indigenous person that I couldn't rock the boat. In retrospect, had I had a stronger voice, where would I be today? (Daisy)

Like Daisy, Sunflower, as a young leader, extended herself and was available for new opportunities to fit into a new career and new workplace. As she became more confident in herself as a professional though, the need to fit in was not as prevalent as it was in her early career.

Participants shared how professional development and support from colleagues provided increased opportunities for them and how their support was also a means to mitigate challenges.

The women reflected on how they were able to find lessons that could help them change thoughts or practices to help them be successful in their leadership practices as they walked the fine line of balance in both worlds.

Walking Both Worlds

Participants shared about how they worked to find balance as Indigenous women trying to hold onto their Indigenous identity while working as educators and administrators. Daisy reflected on her three decades of work and how when she first started on her career journey, she was more aware of the need to fit in and recognized that she would slip into a compliance mode but as she matured in her personal and professional development, that she could recognize where she felt the need for compliance and could shift to use her voice. Daisy stated, “I think I just had to do that with some people. I just had to give them the part of the Indian or the Métis that they needed” (Daisy). Daily she felt that she walked both worlds being Indigenous and working in non-Indigenous workplaces.

Sunflower insisted, “I find the balance within myself every day I think about how different I am from my colleagues every time I walk into my school” (Sunflower) in reference to her workplace where she is one of three Indigenous staff in an Indigenous-focused program serving a predominantly Indigenous population. Prairie Lily added, “finding balance is difficult” (Prairie Lily) in reference to working in a colonized workplace that also served a large Indigenous population. In the effort to work from a de-colonized mindset and be aware of two different worldviews, she shared that it was exhausting to shift between worlds to find that space where there was comfort or acceptance.

All participants experienced microaggressions and racism, sometimes covert or subtle, and other times blatant behaviors, in various facets of their lives, whether as youth, or as leaders around the boardroom table.

Microaggressions

In their professional lives, the women have worn the heavy cloak of emotional labour, experiencing subtle or overt racism and lateral violence, feeling the impact of power imbalances, being dismissed by non-Indigenous colleagues, or having their voices not heard at workplaces and professional workspaces such as committee and board tables. The women alluded to working in spaces where their voices were either silenced or not heard which to some contributed to frustration and feelings of futility.

Rose shared that at the many boards and committees she attended, that she faced dismissal by non-Indigenous men and women, though she was confident in expressing her thoughts and frustrations. She recalled an instance of working with a senior university board committee, where leaders gathered to talk, yet again, about their efforts to Indigenize aspects of their university community. As one of two Indigenous people on the board, she is often called on to address any 'Indigenous' issues, often feeling frustrated when she would be centered out and expected to respond to issues relating to the Indigenous experience.

Both Violet and Sunflower, two lighter-skinned Indigenous women, have felt the impact from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people about their appearance. Violet fielded comments questioning her authority due to being "biracial" and "not dark enough;" whereas Sunflower shared how she has heard from non-Indigenous colleagues who said, "you're not what I expected" in reference to working with an Indigenous colleague and their perceptions of Indigenous people. Violet also shared that she would respond and deflect negative comments and

perceptions about her degree from an Indigenous-focused program which had the same degree outcome as other non-Indigenous graduates, but she felt she had to counter perceptions that her degree was modified, or lesser than in rigor and quality as other degrees.

All participants reflected on strengths and confidence gained from negative experiences and microaggressions and how they were determined to focus on supporting others in their journey. The next section provides answers to the question of the influence of mentorship on leadership journeys.

Mentoring Relationships

The participants spoke about the importance of mentors in their life and professional experiences. The next section outlines how family matriarchs were a significant source of mentorship, how being an ‘auntie’ was a meaningful mentoring role, how colleagues in their workplaces served as key mentors for the women, and how mentoring relationships informed their practice as mentors to other individuals.

Family Matriarchs

The women all spoke with passion about the matriarchs in their respective families that they were in a mentoring relationship with. Four of the participants spoke of the connection they held with a grandmother or grand mothering figure. They recognized that their grandmothers were survivors of the residential schools and acknowledged their strength and legacy as warriors and influencers in their families.

Rose spoke of her enduring relationship with her 91-year-old godmother who she described as her ‘constant,’ a guiding light and source of strength and love. Sunflower also spoke of her grandmother—a quiet, calm but fierce protector of her children and grandchildren—whom she admired for her resilience and perseverance.

The women spoke highly of their mothers and mothering figures as their mentors, suggesting the powerful function of role modeling behaviors. Sunflower shared,

> I would put my mother under that umbrella, who showed me that working and empowering yourself through reading and writing and educating yourself on various topics. She's been in administration positions, leadership positions for pretty much my whole life. (Sunflower)

Rose attributed her mother's unwavering sense of justice and fairness when working with people. She shared, "my mom would talk to people, all kinds of people. She worked in corrections and addictions and everything and still talked to people…just talking to them where they're at" (Rose). Rose attributed her mother's role modelling on how to address and treat people with respect as a key tenet in how she too works with people.

Prairie Lily spoke of how as the oldest child she was required to hold responsibilities at a young age and acknowledged that her mother and grandmother were significant mentors in shaping qualities such as determination, work ethic, and independence, that she took into her adult life. She said,

> One of our biggest mentors was always my mother...even my grandmother. They played a big role in my life. They taught me to be independent. I think that's a big thing was that I learned how to be independent almost to a fault. (Prairie Lily)

Violet spoke of her oldest sister as being a leader and mentor in her family. She spoke of seeing her sister graduate and go to university and her sister encouraged Violet to explore a similar path.

All the participants talked about the influence of aunties in their lives. In our communities, our familial and communal relationships embrace the role of 'aunties' as nurturers,

guides, cheerleaders, teachers, protectors, and warriors. The ubiquitous role of the auntie as mentor in our communities is discussed in the next section.

Big Auntie Energy

The women spoke with love and laughter about aunties in their lives who played a mothering, nurturing role and influenced their lives as Indigenous women as well as their roles as aunties to others. Sunflower shared about significant women relationships, many of whom became aunties to her,

> The women who have become my family by just being my mother's friends, peers over the years being single mothers, educated mothers working those nine to fives supporting their children. (Sunflower)

She also attributed her own ‘auntie energy’ as a confident, almost authoritative, characteristic that she demonstrated when she worked with others.

Rose, as a mother to young men, talked about her role as auntie to nephews and to other young people she helped raise. She attributed her connection to young people as being “an auntie thing” (Rose). Prairie Lily, also an auntie to many, held an auntie role because she was considered a matriarch in her family, while Daisy, also an auntie to many, was inspired by one of her aunties who she called a hero. Auntie mentors were all considered to be strong, smart, powerful influences on the women participants.

The women also spoke about their relationships with colleagues and bosses and their role as mentor influences in their journey. This influence and its significance is discussed next.

Colleagues as Mentors

The women could all recall relationships with colleagues and bosses and each women identified at least one colleague who served as a significant mentor in their professional life.

Whether that mentor was an Elder or knowledge keeper at their workplace, a close colleague with whom a friendship also emerged, or a boss that encouraged her to step out of her comfort zone—workplace mentors were a significant influence in women's leadership journeys.

Daisy spoke about her colleagues from a master's degree program and how they learned and supported each other. She also spoke about a fierce Indigenous woman who impacted her as a teacher and as a leader.

> She was bright, she was knowledgeable, she came from a place of experience, of knowing, and I was like wow. I found that really changed my life as a teacher. She was just fierce. Her personality. She had a voice. (Daisy)

She also spoke about a male vice principal who also influenced her work as a new leader in administration who encouraged her to take on new challenges and step out of her comfort zone.

Prairie Lily spoke about many supervisors who each had unique ways of leading and influencing her allowing her to build a cache of knowledge from each person. She added, "As I worked under particular people, I gained some knowledge and some thoughts and experiences from how they lead. I know one boss that I had. We used to think like that of her [negative]. We're friends today" (Prairie Lily).

Sunflower shared how women bosses have been mentors to her: "They taught me how to be good leaders. They taught me how to be sensitive leaders, and they taught me how to not be leaders. And each and every one of them was a mother."

Rose also had workplace colleagues who encouraged her and expressed their faith in her. Rose also spoke about one colleague that saw something in her (in reference to her leadership skills) and expressed belief in Rose's leadership abilities. She also spoke lovingly about Elders

she worked with who humorously nudged her to: “get off your ass, I know you can do this. You're better than this with, what the hell. Of course, our Elders are always bugging us, giving us that little push” (Rose).

Violet shared about academic leaders and fellow students who were mentors to her while she was a graduate student and in her roles as a leader in education administration. She recalled how many of those women academic leaders paved the way for Indigenous students to be successful in their academic journey and take those skills into their workplaces. Rose also recalled an administrator at her school who she maintained a lifelong connection with as he encouraged her as a young adult, parent and now leader.

Workplace colleague mentors were not limited to women. Violet, Daisy, and Prairie Lily all spoke about men who were significant influencers that encouraged and mentored them. Violet recalled a male boss who she worked with for several years and besides mentoring, taught her about confidence, professionalism, and generosity. Daisy recalled how a vice principal encouraged her to try her hand at an interim vice-principalship position that provided an opportunity for her to become a formal administrative leader in her school and in her school district.

The importance of having a supportive mentor at a workplace often informed how the participants would role model or mentor others. The women all shared instances where they assisted others as mentors which is discussed next.

Being a Mentor

The women all served as mentors to other people at different points in their leadership journeys. Daisy was actively mentoring a co-worker who was preparing for her role as a vice-principal, and she also mentored students who continued to become teachers. Prairie Lily

recalled a former staff of hers who thanked her for mentoring her when Prairie Lily was her boss. She acknowledged how hard it was to accept praise and it was necessary to show humility to others. She recalled receiving a compliment from her former staff,

> She had said, you know, I learned a lot from you. I learned and you know this person is now a director of a non-profit organization and doing really well. She came back to me many times for references and stuff like. She credits my leadership to her for her success. And I never knew that I had that effect on somebody. (Prairie Lily)

Prairie Lily did not know she influenced her colleague but expressed how the compliment she received affirmed and validated her experiences and how her mentorship contributed to the success of another Indigenous woman.

Sunflower, as a younger leader, felt that she needed to be aware of her impact as a role model to others.

> I always think I need to make myself feel confident so that I can give respect to my people and to all of our little kids in here who look up to me as a healthy, safe, Indigenous teacher, role model, adult person. (Sunflower)

Sunflower felt the heaviness of the responsibility of being a role model and a mentor and was cautious about her impact on others.

The participants shared how impactful mentorship was to their growth as leaders and how mentoring relationships needed a strong relationship to be successful. Family matriarchs (mothers, grandmothers, and aunties) served as the most significant mentorship relationship followed by having a significant connection with at least one person in the workplace. The women acknowledged how strong relationships formed the foundation for success in their

journey and how it was incumbent upon them to pay forward their successes. The next section discusses the importance of continuing to pave the path forward for future leaders.

Paving the Path for Future Leaders

Participants acknowledged how their journeys were made easier because the paths they travelled were trodden by other women who toiled, sacrificed, and paved the paths for future generations. The women shared how important it was for previous leaders to create the paths for them to follow and how it is now their responsibility to tread that path and make it a bit easier for those that will follow them. Daisy shared,

> The trail blazers that are always walking ahead of us. Finding our own way. Watching people that you know. Watching powerful women succeed is so inspiring, and it says like, ohh well, maybe I can do that. And that's what we want to instill in them, right?

Regarding the path, Rose added,

> You know, it gets a little softer as years go by because my grandparents had to trudge it down, and then my parents walked on it. And my older siblings and aunts and uncles walked on it, and I still have to walk on it to make that path for my kids and my grandkids and great grandkids.

The women offered advice to younger or future women encouraging perseverance, holding each other up, creating spaces to support women, looking for teachers, being humble and willing to learn, being brave, being role models, believing in self, being courageous and confident, not giving up, and being willing to walk with them on their journey. The youngest participant, also the most optimistic, spoke about the need for mentoring programs for women seeking leadership opportunities. The oldest participant cautioned about spaces where men and

women could hold you back and that it was important to decolonize your perspective and create safe spaces for others.

As the women shared their journeys, two ideas stood out as supports for leadership: the power of voice and relationships. Both are discussed below.

Power of Voice

Participants spoke about the power of having their voice heard and shared their recollections of when they first used their voice. Whether that occurred as youth or as adults, the transformative impact of using their voice was often a critical point for participants as they gained confidence and strength from that pivotal act.

Violet spoke of the first time using her voice. It occurred in a classroom when she stood up and expressed her outrage at the professor's lecture. Like an out of body experience, she was not aware that it was her voice, until she sat down and reflected on the event and the power of using her voice. She shared, "That's the day that I realized I was using my voice. From that day forward, I've never quit using my voice" (Violet). Violet added that it is a big challenge for women in leadership to be heard and that, "even today [people] still aren't ready to listen to our voices" (Violet).

For some participants, they bravely continued to use their voice and their voice became a tool of strength and power in spaces where it was critical to make changes to benefit Indigenous peoples. Rose shared that,

> People don't think that they should be able to speak, or sometimes they don't think that they're qualified or that anyone should listen to them. There's [sic] people who don't feel like they can be heard. So, you have to be that voice, if you're able to use it, then use your voice. (Rose)

For others though, it took many years to develop that voice and to use it with confidence. Daisy first saw the power and agency of women who used their voice when she entered university. Daisy said,

> In college when being surrounded by these strong, Iskwew women who did have agency, who did have power, and being part of this group of women really empowered me. They accepted me and my learning journey. That was very powerful medicine. (Daisy)

She added, "I'm in awe of everyone that has a voice. It took a long time for me to develop way into my 50s my voice and my voice in regard to adversity" (Daisy).

The women expressed how important it was for future women leaders to be encouraged to find and use their voices, even in instances where voices are dismissed or not heard. Additionally, as leaders, we are responsible to uplift the voices of each other and hold space for new and different voices that will emerge.

Wahkohtowin

The women all shared how necessary it was to recognize and build relationships with others. Relationships or relationality, also known as Wahkohtowin in Cree, is a power law that determines how we respect and treat other living beings. Whether through family relations or work relations, there is a "universal understanding that we are all related" (Daisy). Sunflower shared, "I've seen great administrators and I think it's all about relationships and I think it has a lot to do with how you're brought up and the relationships that you have with others and yourself" (Sunflower).

Daisy added her thoughts on relationships,

> It goes that relationships are key and that universal understanding that we are all related, that we are related to every person. You know the water, the trees, the animals--that we have to treat everybody with those values, right, those tipi teachings. (Daisy)

Daisy continued to share how she learned from her grandparents, Elders, knowledge keepers, community members and other leaders, that it was important to be in right relations with staff colleagues, parents, and students. Once she was able to be in good relationship with community, then she felt powerful as a person and as a leader in her workplace.

The participants felt strongly that their success was measured by how well someone else had paved or created paths for them. The study did not intend to ask questions about participants' voice or the importance of relationships, but both were consistently shared with the researcher and noted here as themes that emerged in conversations when offering advice to prospective leaders. The next section wraps up with a discussion of the findings and its connection with the literature review.

Discussion of Findings

The Indigenous women in this study shared their stories of early leadership experiences and workplace experiences and how they were influenced and supported by significant individuals in their leadership journey. This section discusses the research findings and connects the findings with the literature review.

The participants were influenced by family matriarchs—mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties—a tribute to the strength and power of matriarchs in our communities. All participants spoke about strong family and community role models that helped shape them into being survivors, warriors, fighters, builders, caregivers, and leaders. The women shared stories and reflections about their early experiences with leadership and recalled how they held leadership

roles in their youth, or were recognized as spokespersons in their family, in their school or university experience, or were identified as a leader in their respective community.

The Indigenous matriarch was a communal caregiver, protector, and service provider. McLeod (2012) and Pidgeon (2012) described Indigenous women's leadership practice as one that was grounded in practices that embraced traditional, cultural perspectives, and were protective and service oriented. The women spoke about being warriors and family leaders and having strong women role models in their lives. In their stories, the women shared the importance of relationships in their practice. Pidgeon (2012) also discussed wholistic practices in leadership; however, only one person specifically alluded to wholistic practice while the others spoke broadly about how leadership practice had a wide reach beyond immediate family or work circles.

Robinson et al. (2020) described the importance of strong role models and mentors that shared cultural knowledge with others which in turn contributed to affirming strengths found within Indigenous worldviews. The women confirmed this importance, describing feeling support from families, communities, and workplaces and they also shared how important it was to have a solid foundation in their sense of self in terms of confidence, but also the importance of Indigenous identity.

The participants described direct examples and alluded to experiences where colonial practices and patriarchal leadership impacted their work. Khalifa et al. (2019) and Minthorn and Shotton (2019) discussed the persistent impacts of patriarchal forms of leadership though this study did not examine the impacts of patriarchy on the Indigenous matriarch role and the literature review did not examine re-matriation and the potential for resurgence of Indigenous women in leadership. However, in our families and communities, the First Nations woman, or

matriarch, still holds this leadership position and the women affirmed the significance of women in their lives that respected the role of the matriarch.

Influence of Culture and Community on Leadership

The women also spoke with pride about their respective cultural backgrounds as Cree, Cree/Métis, and Cree/Saulteaux women, though they did not speak at length of how their cultural background shaped their leadership approaches; rather, culture and community were both described as significant in shaping worldviews and approaches to leadership.

Gladstone and Pepion (2017), Housman (2015) and Linds et al. (2019), all discussed how Indigenous leaders led from a place influenced by their worldviews and values. The participants in this study were prideful and recognized the value of cultural identity (Maracle et al., 2020); however, they focused on the influence of their respective communities and how community shaped and guided their leadership practices.

The women shared how varied contexts such as political and social spaces could enable or impact their leadership. Like Robinson et al.'s (2020) research, the women shared how relationships among communities helped to shape their position among the communities and provided spaces for them to connect and collaborate with community members, also affirming that space and place were important considerations to wholistic approaches to leadership (Pidgeon, 2012).

Opportunities and Challenges

Participants spoke about opportunities and challenges that they encountered at various stages in their life and work experiences; oftentimes though they were discussed as lessons learned from challenges or opportunities that arose from challenges. These opportunities served to help the women gain confidence and experience as well as challenge them in their pursuits.

All participants spoke about the challenges of being Indigenous in spaces that were not always welcoming or spoke of the need to create spaces to counter the challenges they faced. Like the work by Brunette-Debissage (2021) and Debissage and Brunette-Debissage (2018) the women shared stories of having to balance working in Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds that were male dominated and that operated with colonial structures and how this results in incongruities with Indigenous perspectives of leadership and Indigenous worldviews. Participants shared about how they worked to find balance as Indigenous women trying to hold onto their Indigenous identity while they experienced microaggressions such as carrying the emotional labour of Indigenizing spaces or work, experiencing covert or overt racism, and feeling as though they either did not fit in to certain spaces or their voices were not heard in certain spaces.

The women also spoke about how the lack of role models and mentors were challenges to opportunities for women which was consistent with Burke and McDonald (2020) and Robinson, et al. (2020) who identified that mentorship was important to finding supportive networks for individuals seeking leadership opportunities.

Influence of Mentoring

The findings suggested that respectful relationships were key to positive mentoring experiences for the participants. Mentorship that was based on relationship and reciprocity (Atay & Murry, 2023; Hinsdale, 2016) served to create a transformative rather than a transactional relationship which was in alignment with relationship mentorship (Bordeaux, 2021; Chew & Nicholas, 2021). The relationships with women in familial or communal relationships were significant in creating supportive influences for women in leadership because they reflected a kinship-style of mentorship that was based on nurturing but also responsibility and accountability (Chew & Nicholas, 2021).

Participants also spoke about their relationships with colleagues and bosses and each women identified at least one workplace colleague who served as a significant mentor in their leadership journeys and how that relationship was based on respect and caring. Pratt et al. (2021) described how an ethics of care was the precondition for a relationship-based mentorship.

The women all valued the relationships they had with mentors which encouraged women to all serve as mentors to other people as well.

Paving the Path for Future Leaders

Participants shared how important it was for previous leaders to create the paths for them to follow and how it was their responsibility now to navigate spaces to create more affirming spaces for other women leaders (Hill & Keogh Hoss, 2018) and to provide encouragement and create spaces for other women and to tread the shared path so it was easier for those that will follow them.

Participants spoke about the power of having their voice heard and the transformative impact of using their voice was often a critical point for participants as they gained confidence and strength from that pivotal act. All women expressed how important it was for future women leaders to be encouraged to find and use their voices; even in instances where voices are dismissed or not heard. The women shared how necessary it was to be supportive to other women leaders and to uplift women to build confidence and encourage positive experiences. The women also shared that it was important to recognize and build relationships with others as relationality was an important factor in their success. The study did not ask questions about voice or relationships, but both were consistent themes that emerged in conversations with the women participants.

The next few sections discuss implications of the study to practice and recommend areas of further research.

Implications of the Study to Practice, Theory and Further Research

The findings from this study provide some direction for future leadership practice based on decolonized and Indigenous approaches to leadership. Participants spoke about the need to connect with others who were supportive as the path to leadership was not smooth and could be lonely. The participants were influenced by significant Indigenous women, often in their early lives but also in their professional spaces; however, there remains insufficient numbers of Indigenous women holding leadership roles to mentor future leaders. Thus, a shift in practice is required to ensure women are encouraged and supported to take on these roles. An Indigenous model of mentorship based on relational mentorship with a practical application could serve to bridge gaps when the leader does not have a significant matriarchal relationship.

The amount of research on Indigenous women in leadership is small but growing. More work is required to learn about leadership from Indigenous perspectives and experiences. The literature review also did not delve deep into the work of decolonial or feminist scholars and theories and this could be an area for future exploration.

The findings also suggest that more research is required on the role of the matriarch in Indigenous communities and how efforts to re-matriate or matriarchal resurgence could contribute to the knowledge on leadership roles.

Finally, more research is required on the power of storywork and Indigenous methodologies generally to understand contextualized experiences of leadership. As a method and methodology, storywork and storytelling align with Indigenous worldviews, knowledge

transmission, and teaching practice and can offer new ways to connect and share leadership experience.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to learn how mentoring contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders by having conversations with Indigenous women leaders in education administration. The problem of practice sought to explore how mentoring has contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders. The inquiry question that guided this study was: How has culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles? The study used qualitative approaches that included storytelling, Kiyokewin (visiting) and thematic analysis that aligned with an Indigenous paradigm and embraced the importance of relationality (Wahkohtowin) as a key practice.

The five participants were Indigenous women who worked as teachers, adult educators, and administrators. The participants spoke with pride about their respective cultural backgrounds as Cree, Cree/Métis, and Cree/Saulteaux women and how their culture and community influenced their leadership experiences.

Participants encountered opportunities and challenges at various stages in their life and work experiences including workplace professional development and learning opportunities; receiving support from colleagues and supervisors; and struggles with fitting in within various spaces. The women spoke about having to balance walking in both worlds, including holding onto their Indigenous identity while working in education administration. Participants also shared how they struggled with experiences of microaggressions and encountering racism working in non-Indigenous spaces.

The women shared about the impact of maternal mentor relationships throughout their life and how they reciprocated in mentoring others. The women also discussed the significance of having a workplace colleague as a mentor in their professional life. The women acknowledged how their leadership journeys were easier because previous generations created paths for them to follow and they shared how they now had to create paths for future generations. The women shared how the power of voice and relationality were important elements of leadership.

Our societies, clans, and nations were built on women playing a leadership role in the sustainability of the family and community. Colonization and government policy changed the family and leadership structure of our communities and stripped away the role of matriarchs in governance and leadership.

As an Indigenous woman in leadership, I have had mostly family role models and mentors in my personal life; in my professional work life, I have had three male leader mentors. I have longed for an Indigenous woman leader mentor in my workplaces. I wanted to find or create opportunities for Indigenous women to see themselves as leaders and to nurture their development as leaders. This dissertation served as an extension of my journey to find and create opportunities for other Indigenous women and their leadership growth.

This study examined through life narratives, the influence of mentoring on the leadership experiences of Indigenous women in leadership roles in education and found that Indigenous matriarchs played a significant role in encouraging, supporting and mentoring Indigenous women in leadership. The findings also suggest that support from colleagues, family and mentors contributed significantly to confidence and to early leadership roles and positive experiences.

MANUSCRIPT FIVE. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Overview and Synopsis of Dissertation

In this manuscript, I provide an overarching summary of the preceding manuscripts in relation to the research purpose, question of the study and implications of the findings to Indigenous women in leadership. This chapter will conclude with a discussion on researcher thoughts on leadership.

The purpose of this study was to examine how mentorship contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who have held leadership roles in education administration.

The problem of practice sought to explore how mentoring has contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders. The inquiry question that guided this study was: How has culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles?

Manuscript One - Synopsis of Main Narratives and Themes

In the first manuscript, I introduced my understanding of leadership and how this understanding contributed to and formed my personal leadership philosophy and practice. I also discussed the impact and influence of my Indigenous worldview on this leadership platform and aspirations for my leadership journey.

I discussed leadership theories and perspectives that resonated with my philosophy of leadership as well as the gaps in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership. I proposed that mentorship may provide an opportunity to increase access and success of women in leadership. I discussed my work experience and need for mentorship in my leadership journey

along with the gap in knowledge about Indigenous women in leadership which assisted in the construction of the problem of practice.

I designed a study to examine how mentorship contributed to Indigenous womens' growth as leaders; I did this through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who were leaders in education administration. The research was framed within an Indigenous research paradigm including qualitative methods to gather and analyze data.

While Indigenous women have increasingly accessed educational opportunities and leadership positions, they remain underrepresented in leadership roles. The consequence of this slow growth is the lack of role models to mentor Indigenous women along their leadership journey. Additionally, there remains limited information on Indigenous women in leadership roles. This problem of practice sought to explore how mentoring has contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who have held leadership roles in education administration.

The findings from this research may add to the literature and thought around Indigenous women in leadership and the role of mentorship in supporting leadership growth.

Manuscript Two - Synopsis of Literature

The second manuscript provided a synopsis of the literature related to the problem of practice. The purpose of the literature search was to learn about what was known about Indigenous leadership and mentorship with a focus on Indigenous women in education. I began the search for literature by using a combination of search terms that included: Indigenous women, leadership, education administration, and Indigenous mentorship within education and business databases and specialized databases including Indigenous IPortal and the Harvest database, found within the University of Saskatchewan library. I also expanded the search using

the above search terms in Google Scholar as well as examining sources found within reference sections of publications.

I found that the key themes in the literature were: Indigenous leadership was influenced by ethics; Indigenous epistemology and culture had an impact on leadership; the collaborative and communal nature of Indigenous women influenced their leadership practises; Indigenous women were wholistic, community and culture focused; mentorship based on relationality was in alignment with Indigenous perspectives; and mainstream models of mentorship do not reflect the Indigenous experience.

Resources on Indigenous models of mentorship and leadership were not readily available in the literature and will continue to be an area for further exploration and study. Burke and McDonald (2020) noted that access to mentorship was often mentioned as a barrier or challenge to increasing connection and support. Indigenous mentorship could be a promising framework for culturally appropriate mentoring and support for Indigenous women, youth, and other marginalized groups. Additional research on Indigenous leadership and Indigenous women in leadership will continue to be an area for further exploration.

Manuscript Three - Synopsis of Inquiry into Problem of Practice

The third manuscript focused on the research project design to examine Indigenous women in leadership roles in education. The research study was designed from an Indigenous research paradigm that was aligned with the researcher’s Nêhiyewak worldview along with the literature on Indigenous women in leadership and mentorship which helped shape the research questions and sub questions. The study design embraced qualitative methods including Indigenous storytelling and Kiyokewin (visiting) to collect data.

A purposive, non-random sample of five participants was chosen to gather narratives with a conversational, one-to-one interview method guided by semi-structured research questions which acted as a guide for the conversations. Conversations were held with participants within a Kiyokewin (visiting) approach which was welcoming for participants and was a familiar, comfortable approach. The data collection conversations occurred over three months with travel to Treaty 4, 6, and 8 territories in Saskatchewan and Alberta to meet with participants. The collected data was transcribed and cleaned and sent to participants to review prior to a meeting to discuss the collected data.

The transcribed data were coded and reviewed, then patterns were identified and organized. A meeting was scheduled to discuss the transcriptions and initial patterns from the data. After this meeting the information and patterns were organized into themes to answer the research question and sub questions. Thematic analysis was chosen to organize and make meaning of the data as it included the ability to be systematic while coding the data and could consider the contextualized narratives and the researcher role to answer the research questions.

The study was designed to address key issues of trustworthiness with an emphasis on researcher attention to reflexivity and closed with a discussion on ethical considerations with an emphasis on ethical approaches and protocols used in the study. The fourth manuscript follows and discusses the research findings of the study.

Manuscript Four – Findings to Research Questions

The fourth manuscript presented a synopsis of the overall project with an emphasis on research findings and was organized as a standalone chapter, which was a requirement of the researcher's program of study.

The purpose of this study was to learn how mentoring had contributed to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women leaders in education administration. The problem of practice was derived through the researcher's lived experience as an Indigenous woman in leadership. I viewed this problem through many lens—as a participant, as a researcher, and as Indigenous woman in leadership. It was through this multifaceted lens that I saw the need for support and opportunities through mentorship for Indigenous women in leadership to access and be successful in leadership roles.

A literature search included broad use of terms such as: Indigenous women, leadership, education administration, and Indigenous mentorship. A combination of search terms included: Indigenous women, leadership, education administration, and Indigenous mentorship using various library and internet databases. The key themes in the literature review that shaped the study were Indigenous leadership was influenced by ethics, Indigenous epistemology and culture, Indigenous women in leadership led from a community and culture focus, and mainstream models of mentorship do not reflect the Indigenous experience.

The inquiry question that guided this study was: How has culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles? The study used a qualitative approach that included storytelling methodology including conversations within a Kiyokewin (visiting) practice. This methodology was chosen because it aligned with the researcher's Indigenous paradigm and used practices that embraced the importance of relationality (Wahkohtowin) as a key practice in Indigenous research and in Kiyokewin. The study used purposive, non-random, sampling to select five participants, who were educators and lived in Treaty 4, 6 and 7 areas of Saskatchewan and Alberta. Thematic

analysis was chosen to analyze the data and organize contextual themes and answer the research question.

Research Findings

The participants ranged in age from mid-30s to mid-60s and were university-educated Indigenous women with diverse life experiences holding positions in education as teachers, adult educators, and administrators. All participants shared stories of their modest upbringings and the impact of early life experiences in shaping their journeys in education, employment, and leadership. The findings to the research questions are summarized below followed by a discussion of the findings.

Culture and Community

Participants spoke with pride about their respective cultural backgrounds as Cree, Cree/Métis, and Cree/Saulteaux women and how their culture and community influenced their leadership experiences.

Opportunities and Challenges

Participants spoke about opportunities and challenges that they encountered at various stages in their life and work experiences, including professional development and learning opportunities accessed through their workplaces; the impact of receiving support from colleagues and supervisors; and the struggle with feeling as though they fit in in various spaces.

Walking in Both Worlds

Participants also spoke about the need to balance walking in both worlds, most often holding onto their Indigenous identity while working in education administration. Related to this struggle was the experience of microaggressions, particularly racism they experienced when working in non-Indigenous spaces.

Mentoring Relationships

The women spoke highly about the role that maternal mentoring relationships played in their early life and in their growth as professionals and how each participant was either an 'auntie' or was nurtured and supported by an 'auntie'. The women spoke about their relationships with colleagues and bosses and could identify at least one colleague who served as a significant mentor in their professional life. Participants all served as mentors to other people at different points in their leadership journeys.

Support for Future Leaders

The women acknowledged how their journeys were made easier because their paths were paved by previous generations, and they shared how important it was for them to continue the work of creating paths for future generations.

Voice and Wahkohtowin

Two ideas emerged as supports for leadership: the power of voice and relationships. The women shared instances when they first used their voice and expressed how important it was to encourage future leaders to find and use their voices. The women also shared that it was important to build respectful relationships or relationality, also known as Wahkohtowin in Cree.

The findings are anticipated to move knowledge on Indigenous women in leadership forward by discussing the influence of mentoring to leadership growth. The implications of this study include contributing to the knowledge on Indigenous women in leadership.

Manuscript Five - Discussion and Implications for Research

Manuscript five is the final manuscript within this dissertation and provides a discussion of the study and implications for research and practice in educational leadership. This section discusses the strengths and limitations of the study, the implications for educational leadership

and practice, theory and research, implications for my personal practice, and ends with concluding thoughts.

Strengths and Limitations

The strengths of this study include its potential as contributions to the conversation and literature about Indigenous women in educational leadership as well as the use of Indigenous methodologies and combining varied perspectives in theory and methodologies to recognize the varied experiences of Indigenous women in leadership.

With pride, the participants shared their stories of leadership and by the end of each conversation, participants felt confident about their sharing their voices and their experiences. One participant was insistent that I share this work as more people needed to hear about their experience.

Limitations to the study included the short time frame for gathering data which may have impacted the depth of the conversations and the small sample size which prevents making any generalizations across other populations. As well, as the researcher it was important to be reflexive in my approach to prevent inserting myself in other's stories. This was a challenge, as the genuine nature of the conversation was enhanced by the relationship that existed between me and each participant.

Implications of the Study to Practice, Theory and Further Research

The findings from this study provide some direction for future leadership practice based on decolonized and Indigenous approaches to leadership. Participants spoke about the need to connect with others who were supportive as the path to leadership was not smooth and could be lonely. The participants were influenced by significant Indigenous women, often in their early lives but also in their professional spaces; however, there remains insufficient numbers of

Indigenous women holding leadership roles to mentor future leaders. Thus, a shift in practice is required to ensure women are encouraged and supported to take on these roles. An Indigenous model of mentorship based on relational mentorship with a practical application could serve to bridge gaps when the leader does not have a significant matriarchal relationship.

The research on Indigenous women in leadership is small but growing. More work is required to learn about leadership from Indigenous perspectives and experiences. The literature review also did not delve deep into the work of decolonial or feminist scholars and theories and this could be an area for future exploration.

The findings also suggest that more research is required on the role of the matriarch in Indigenous communities and how efforts to re-matriate or matriarchal resurgence could contribute to the knowledge on leadership roles.

Finally, more research is required on the power of storywork and Indigenous methodologies generally to understand contextualized experiences of leadership. As a method and methodology, storywork and storytelling align with Indigenous worldviews, knowledge transmission, and teaching practice and can offer new ways to connect and share leadership experience.

Implications for My Leadership and Practice

My interest in mentorship was sparked by a casual conversation with a former colleague who extolled with appreciation my role as a mentor to her in her education and practitioner journey. I thanked her but stood in silence as I was never addressed as a mentor before this instance. I was in my late 20s, surely too young to be a mentor to anyone, and limited in workplace and life experience.

There was no starting point for my leadership journey but a collection of starts and stops, shaped by life, education, and work. As a Cree woman, a single parent, working in an Indigenous higher education workplace, there were few Indigenous women in leadership positions, and at that point, I was not seeking leadership opportunities, I was focused on survival. As an intergenerational survivor of the notorious residential schools, and a disenfranchised Indian, a path to leadership did not unfold at my footsteps. In retrospect though, much like the participants' stories, I too held unofficial, untitled leadership roles—as an oldest child who cared for and corralled siblings, as a quiet but curious participant in student leadership, as a Board member and a volunteer on various committees, and eventually as a leader in different workplaces. The participants' stories in this research study mirrored my story as an Indigenous woman leader, so in the interest of reflexivity and to avoid conflating my story with the participants, I offer my response to the research question below.

I was raised by strong maternal influences, particularly family members from my maternal lineage and from my husband's family. I had a mixed collection of cultural experiences from a young age but was more impacted by my Indigenous identity as an adult and more so in leadership positions within Indigenous organizations.

I also took advantage of training and workshops to build my knowledge and skillset in leadership; but the most impactful opportunities were those spent with Elders and knowledge keepers, learning the importance of listening to stories and building relationships with people. Like the participants, I experienced many challenges—the most impactful being those related to misogyny, sexual violence, and verbal abuse which impacted my safety, sanity, confidence, and resilience. Stepping away from unsafe spaces allowed me to grow and move forward on my leadership journey.

I, too, have had women mentors including my mother, and aunties and friends who I retrospectively saw as mentors, but did not intentionally seek them out as mentors. Seeking an Indigenous woman mentor was sparked by discomfort, lack of fit, a sense of isolation, and lack of workplace support networks.

Much like an antenarrative, a collection of fragmented stories, as coined by David Boje (Boje, 2021; Yolles, 2007), I see an 'auntie-narrative' shaping here. This collection of fragments of imperfect stories is held together by heart, by big auntie energies, and by the hard work and heavy lifting of Indigenous women ancestors. Our work as leaders is to navigate spaces and make them kinder, to open doors or even windows for marginalized voices, and to be good role models, mentors, and ancestors.

Concluding Thoughts

During this research study, I gained a new understanding of Indigenous research methodologies and the role of the matriarch in Indigenous women's leadership journeys. Using qualitative approaches to gather Indigenous women's stories about their leadership experiences and the role that mentorship had played in their journeys, I used storywork conversations within a Kiyokewin (visiting) practice and learned that Indigenous women were significantly influenced by family matriarchs—mothers, grandmothers, sisters, aunties—as mentors and supporters in their leadership journeys.

Indigenous women leaders continue to be an understudied group and the findings contribute to conversations about the importance of mentoring to leader growth and development.

The women's stories in this study are snapshots in time; they are recollections of contextual experiences that have shaped their current understanding of themselves as Indigenous

women leaders. How will these fragments of stories and narratives shape our understanding of women in leadership? How do they shape my understanding of the role of mentorship? I learned how critical it was to create spaces that supported learning and growth and to create and nurture relationships as the foundation to supporting safe, nurturing spaces for Indigenous women leaders, and that it was equally critical to uplift the voices of Indigenous women. It is my turn to carry the young ones on my shoulders.

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APPENDIX A: RECRUITMENT POSTER

Recruitment Invitation

Department of Education Administration
University of Saskatchewan

PARTICIPANTS NEEDED FOR RESEARCH IN

Stories of Indigenous Women's Leadership

You are invited to participate in a study of Indigenous women' leadership experiences.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to: participate in one initial engagement meeting, one conversational interview, a second conversational meeting to review your transcript, and one optional meeting to discuss research findings. Your participation would involve potentially four sessions; each session will range from 30 minutes to 120 minutes. Participants will receive compensation in appreciation of their time.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Dr. Vicki Squires, Principal Investigator
(Education Administration)
at: *(vicki.squires@usask.ca)*

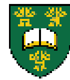
Kim Fraser-Saddleback, Graduate Student Researcher
(Education Administration)
at: *(kef131@usask.ca)*

This study has been approved by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board

Behavioural Application
03 December 2018

Page 1 of 7

APPENDIX B: UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN RESEARCH ETHICS APPROVAL & ETHICS COURSE CERTIFICATE OF COMPLETION



UNIVERSITY OF SASKATCHEWAN

Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) 11-Mar-2024

Certificate of Approval

Application ID: 4545

Principal Investigator: Vicki Squires

Department: Department of Educational Administration

Student(s): Kim Fraser-Saddleback

Funder(s):

Sponsor: University of Saskatchewan

Title: Stories of Indigenous Womens Leadership

Approved On: 11-Mar-2024

Expiry Date: 11-Mar-2025

Approval Of:

* Behavioural Ethics Application form
* Interview guide
* Recruitment Poster
* Participant Consent form

Acknowledgment Of:

* TCPS2 CORE certificate: Kim Fraser-Saddleback
* transcript release form

Review Type: Delegated Review

CERTIFICATION

The University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board (Beh-REB) is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans TCPS 2 (2022). The University of Saskatchewan Beh-REB has reviewed the above-named project. The proposal was found to be acceptable on ethical grounds. The principal investigator has the responsibility for any other administrative or regulatory approvals that may pertain to this project, and for ensuring that the authorized project is carried out according to the conditions outlined in the current approved protocol. This Certificate of Approval is valid for the above time period provided there is no change in experimental protocol or consent process or documents.

ONGOING REVIEW REQUIREMENTS

Any significant changes to your proposed method, or your consent and recruitment procedures must be reported to the Chair through submission of an amendment for Beh-REB consideration in advance of implementation.

To remain in compliance, a status report (renewal of closure form) must be submitted to the Beh-REB Chair for consideration within one month prior to the current expiry date each year the project remains open, and upon project completion. Please refer to the Research Ethics Office website for further instructions and current forms.

Digitally Approved by Pammla Petrucka
Chair, Behavioural Research Ethics Board
University of Saskatchewan

1 / 1

PANEL ON RESEARCH ETHICS
Navigating the ethics of human research

TCPS 2: CORE 2022

Certificate of Completion

This document certifies that

Kim Fraser-Saddleback

successfully completed the Course on Research Ethics based on the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS 2: CORE 2022)

Certificate # 0000943451

25 July, 2023

APPENDIX C: CONSENT FORM

Participant Consent Form

You are invited to participate in a research activity entitled: Indigenous Women's Leadership Stories

Student Researcher(s): Kim Fraser-Saddleback, Graduate Student, Education Administration, University of Saskatchewan. Kef131@usask.ca.

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Dr. Vicki Squires, Principal Investigator/Co-Supervisor, Associate Dean (Research, Graduate Support and International Initiatives), Education Administration, University of Saskatchewan, 306-966-7622, vicki.squires@usask.ca; Dr. Keith Walker, Principal Investigator/Co-Supervisor, Faculty, Education Administration, University of Saskatchewan, 306-220-0614, keith.walker@usask.ca.

Purpose and Objective of the Research:
The purpose of this proposed study is to establish how culture, opportunities, and mentorship contribute to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who are leaders in education administration. The research includes conversational interviews with individuals within a Kiyokewin (visiting) environment.

Procedures:

- The researcher will meet with participants to discuss the research project, to gauge interest, suitability, and time commitment for the study. If the participant agrees to participate in the study, the researcher will arrange subsequent meetings and provide the participant with project information, interview questions, and a consent form.
- In the second meeting, the researcher will review the research process, discuss consent and confidentiality, and participant right to withdraw. The researcher will ask questions and record responses. The second meeting will be audio-recorded. If the participant would like to take a break from recording, they can request for the recorder to be turned off, without giving a reason. The researcher will also take notes for clarification.
- In the third meeting, the researcher will review with the participant the transcribed data and interpretations that the researcher has made. The participant will be given the opportunity to ask questions and clarify comments that were made. The third meeting will be audio-recorded. If the participant would like to take a break from recording, they can request for the recorder to be turned off, without giving a reason. The researcher will also take notes for clarification.
- In an optional fourth meeting, the participant will be invited to meet to discuss the report findings and to debrief the project. The researcher will take notes for clarification.
- The second and third sessions will be audio recorded with a Sony digital recorder. If the sessions are held virtually, then the sessions will be recorded using the Zoom web-

conferencing recording function. The participant can request that the recording device be turned off, without giving a reason. If the participant chooses, either or both interviews can be conducted via telephone; in this instance, the call will be audio recorded.

- The interviews will be conducted in person at the participants home if desired, or virtually depending upon participant availability.
- The anticipated time commitment for all activities will be 3.0 hours to 6.0 hours.
- The researcher will transcribe the recordings of the interviews. The participant can ask any questions regarding the procedures and goals of the study or the participant role.

Funded by:

- Not applicable

Potential Risks:

- Potential risks may include emotional discomfort if a participant shares instances of colonial trauma, racism, harassment, or discrimination.
- The researcher will have information available on counselling services, information on Elders and knowledge keepers, and virtual wellness services. The contact information for the Hope for Wellness helpline--a free and readily available (24/7) support service is: 1-855-242-3310. A website link with a chat function for Hope for Wellness is found at: https://www.hopeforwellness.ca.

Potential Benefits:

- The benefit of the research is to identify supports and services to enhance Indigenous women in leadership or seeking leadership opportunities. Indigenous women's voices and experiences will be acknowledged and respected and may contribute to the enhancement and investment of supports for future leaders.
- Indigenous women's voice and experiences will be honored as knowers and sharers.

Compensation:

- Participants will be offered an honorarium of $100 (provided in one installment) after completion of the data collection interview (second meeting).
- Compensation will not be dependent on completion of the project.
- Participants will receive a small gift at the end of the project.
- Any personal information collected as a record of honorarium payment will be stored separately from the data by the PI and may be kept for 7 years in case the University of Saskatchewan is subjected to a financial audit.

Confidentiality:

- Data collected in the process of this research will be used in the researcher's dissertation, publication in at least one academic journal, and a summary report for participants.

- Participant identity will be kept confidential. Consent forms will be stored separately from the data so that it is not possible to associate a name with any responses.
- All data will be reported anonymously and in summarized form. Pseudonyms will be used in all transcriptions and documents.
- Participants will not make any unauthorized recordings of the content of a meeting (including data collection session).
- A master list will be created that will contain the participants' names linked to a pseudonym. This will allow the researchers to track which participant provided what data while keeping the data coded, in the instance that a participant elects to have their data removed. Any data collected, whether electronic, transcribed or interview notes will be identified by participant pseudonym only. The master list will be stored separately from any collected data. The master-list will be stored separately from the data; the master-list will be stored for two years.
- If direct quotes are used, the participant will be given the opportunity to approve these quotes and know the context that the quote will be used in.
- If participants choose to participate via online videoconferencing, the researcher will use the USask registered Zoom platform. Zoom is an internet-based communication tool that will allow us to connect with a video. The platform also allows us to record the video communication. The platform is encrypted and only invited participants can enter the virtual meeting space. A password will be used to enter the meeting room. The recording will be encrypted, passcode-protected and accessed only by the researcher. The recording will be saved to the researcher's local USask-managed account.
- There will be no data stored outside of Canada, as USask's agreement with Zoom ensures that all data is stored on servers in Canada.
- For participants who choose to participate via Zoom (videoconference), the researcher will host the videoconference in her private home office that will not be accessible by individuals outside of the research team during the interview. If participants choose to participate via Zoom, they are encouraged to be a private space that is not accessible to others.
- There are security risks associated with using any video conferencing tools. The main risks relate to access by uninvited persons. The researcher will mitigate the risk by using settings that permit only invited participants and by storing data locally rather than on the cloud.
- Participants are advised that there is no guarantee of privacy of data with any recording device.
- If the need to monitor this research study arises, a member of the University of Saskatchewan Research Ethics Board and/or this institution may also consult your research data. By agreeing to participate in this study, you authorize such access.

Please put a check mark on the corresponding line(s) to grant or deny your permission:

I grant permission to be audio recorded during the two data collection interviews.	
I grant permission to be video recorded if the two data collection interviews are conducted virtually.	

Please only select the options that agree to below:

I wish for my identity to be confidential.	
I wish for my identity to be confidential, but you may refer to me by a pseudonym.	
You may quote me and use my pseudonym.	
I would like to be acknowledged (by pseudonym) for contributing to the research.	

Storage of Data:

- The Principal Investigator will oversee the storage and security of all research data.
- Electronic data will be stored on a password-protected computer during file transfer from audio-recorder and analysis and will be moved to a USask system for long-term storage (OneDrive).
- The collected data will be stored for five years post-publication.
- Once the data is no longer required and following the required storage period, the data will be destroyed beyond recovery.
- Consent Forms will be stored separately from the data collected. Any physical data will be securely stored in a locked cabinet in a locked office at the Department of Education Administration.

Right to Withdraw:

- Participation is voluntary, and participants can answer only those questions that they are comfortable with. Participants may withdraw from the research study for any reason, at any time without explanation or penalty of any sort.
- Should participants wish to withdraw, their data will be deleted from the research project and destroyed beyond recovery.
- Participant right to withdraw data from the study will apply until submission of the draft dissertation. After this, data analysis will have already occurred, and it may not be possible to withdraw participant data. The deadline date for withdrawal from the project is April 30th, 2024.

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Follow up:

- The summary of the findings is estimated to be available by May 15, 2024. A summary report will be provided to the participant via email. The graduate student researcher will email each participant to provide a summary report if they desire.

Questions or Concerns:

- Contact the researcher(s) using the information at the top of page 1.
- This research project has been approved on ethical grounds by the University of Saskatchewan Behavioural Research Ethics Board. Any questions regarding your rights as a participant may be addressed to that committee through the Research Ethics Office: ethics.office@usask.ca; 306-966-2975; out of town participants may call toll free 1-888-966-2975.

Continued or On-going Consent:

- At each meeting, we will review your consent to ensure that you continue to consent to participate in this research.

Signed Consent:

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand the description provided.

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. I consent to participate in the research project. A copy of this consent form has been given to me for my records.

______________________	______________________	__________
Name of Participant	*Signature*	*Date*

______________________	______________________
Researcher's Signature	*Date*

A copy of this consent will be left with you, and a copy will be taken by the researcher.

Oral Consent:

I read and explained this consent form to the participant before receiving the participant's consent, and the participant had knowledge of its contents and appeared to understand it.

______________________	______________________	__________
Name of Participant	*Researcher's Signature*	*Date*

APPENDIX D: PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interview Guide - Meeting Two

Interview Schedule

Welcome

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this research. General welcoming comments.

Review consent form and ensure consent form is completed.

Research Project

Brief review of research and research question:

The purpose of this proposed study is to establish how culture, opportunities, and mentorship contribute to Indigenous women's growth as leaders through engaging in conversations with Indigenous women who are leaders in education administration. The inquiry question that will guide this study is: How has culture, community, opportunities or challenges, and mentorship supported Indigenous women in leadership roles? Additional sub questions will include:

- How does culture and community inform your role as an Indigenous woman leader?
- How have opportunities or challenges impacted your leadership journey?
- How has mentorship influenced you as a leader?
- What will you leave to other Indigenous women so that they can see their leadership potential?

Situating Self

1. Please tell me about yourself:
    a. Yourself, your family, your community (as comfortable),
    b. Your education background, your work experience

2. What is your understanding of leadership?

3. Can you share your first or earliest experience as a leader?

Are you comfortable continuing with the next set of questions?

Culture and Community

4. How has your <Indigenous> culture informed your role as a leader?

5. How has your community (formal or informal) shaped and supported your leadership?

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Opportunities and Challenges

6. What opportunities were available to you as you sought leadership opportunities?

7. What insight can you provide about the challenges you experienced in your leadership journey?

8. How did you find balance as an Indigenous woman working in Indigenous or non-Indigenous workplaces?

9. Have your heard about 'two-eyed seeing'? (A principle or approach that encourages seeing the strengths of both Indigenous and Western knowledges)?
    a. Can you share how you may have used this approach in your leadership practise?

Role of Mentorship

10. How has a mentoring relationship played a role in your leadership journey?

11. How did the mentoring relationship develop and how did it change over time?

12. How did kinship or cultural relationships play a part of the mentoring experience?

Support for Future Leaders

13. What can Indigenous women do to support future or new leaders?

14. What advice would you share with Indigenous women seeking leadership opportunities?

Do you have any final comments or questions for me?

Confirm next meeting date, time, location.

Thank you for meeting with me and sharing your thoughts and experiences.