

2023-04-06

# Blackfoot Art and the Ongoing Survivance of Blackfoot Communities in Covid-19

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Tabor, S. M. (2023). Blackfoot art and the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities in Covid-19 (Doctoral thesis, University of Calgary, Calgary, Canada). Retrieved from <https://prism.ucalgary.ca>.  
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UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Blackfoot Art and the Ongoing Survivance of Blackfoot Communities in Covid-19

by

Shannon Michelle Tabor

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE

DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

GRADUATE PROGRAM IN EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY

CALGARY, ALBERTA

APRIL, 2023

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## **Abstract**

In this dissertation I, Shannon Tabor, offer an introduction to myself that provides a context for understanding my research and writing as a non-Indigenous counselling psychology doctoral student and psychologist. I outline the underpinnings and foundational concepts that guide my research engagement with Blackfoot communities. I discuss my community-based work and describe its foundations in relational accountability. I share the methodological process of how I collaborated with a Blackfoot Advisory Council in exploring the question: “How have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic?” Specifically, I outline the methods applied for recruiting, protocol, knowledge gathering, meaning making, and ensuring quality that emphasize a value for the knowledge offered by both story and inward knowing. Finally, I share the results of my meaning making process in three visual concept maps and conclude this dissertation with a discussion. The first map outlines factors of survivance and associated threats of Covid-19: (1) meeting basic needs vs. need insecurity; (2) connection vs. isolation; (3) finding purpose vs. losing purpose; (4) being present vs. grief and fear; and (5) awareness of spirit, culture, and self vs. disconnection from culture. The second map then outlines the specific ways that art contributes to each factor of survivance. The third map places the personal strengths of Blackfoot people and artists, also referred to as the Blackfoot Warrior Spirit (strength, courage, perseverance, adaptability, confidence, love, caretaking, and compassion) at the core of Blackfoot survivance. I discuss the findings from the meaning making process in relation to existing research and literature and share reflections on how this might apply in the field of counselling psychology and make recommendations accordingly. I further consider the strengths and limitations of my dissertation research and present considerations for future research.

## Keywords

Art, Blackfoot, Blackfoot Warrior Spirit, Circle of Survivance, Community-Based Research, Concept Map, Covid-19, Counselling Psychology, Culturally Rooted Intervention, Decolonization, Hierarchy of Needs, Indigenous, Pandemic, Reconciliation, Resurgence, Resilience, Resistance, Story, Storywork, Strength-Based, Survivance, Wellness

## **Preface**

This dissertation is original, unpublished, independent work by the author, S. Tabor. The experiments reported in this dissertation were covered by Ethics Certificate number REB21-0013, issued by the University of Calgary Conjoint Health Ethics Board for the project “Blackfoot Art and the Ongoing Survivance of Blackfoot Communities in Covid-19” on August 3, 2021.

This dissertation was supported by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR).

## **Acknowledgements**

This dissertation was made possible with the support of my supervisor Dr. Karlee Fellner whose understanding and genuine caring were vital in my ability to produce this work. The added assistance and encouragement from my committee members Aubrey Hanson and José Domene was so appreciated and further helped me achieve this undertaking.

I could not have gotten through the final stretches of this process without the open ears and unwavering support of my peers, Marisa Van Bavel and Christy McMurter. There are no better people to have gone through this experience with and I hope to repay the favour.

I also need to profusely thank my sister-in-law and editor extraordinaire, Rebecca Tabor, for reviewing my sometimes-garbled thoughts and making them cohesive.

I am so grateful for my parents, Mark and Shawna St. Pierre, who allowed me the freedom to chart my own path in life and have supported me unconditionally through every step. Knowing my worth is unconditional is what allowed me to venture down this long and often challenging path without fear of failure. This is a gift you gave me that I hope to offer to my own children.

Finally, I must acknowledge my husband, Jason Tabor, who is completing his own PhD alongside me. The past decade (or so) of academia was made better by having my partner, peer, and best friend with me along the way to commiserate through every obstacle and celebrate every achievement. As we are both about to wrap up the major milestone of completing our dissertations and walk the stage as doctors, I look forward to the next stage of life with you and everything our future has in store. You will be as exceptional a father as you are a scholar.

## **Dedications**

This dissertation is dedicated to the Blackfoot First Nations of Alberta and Montana. I am eternally grateful for the relationships and knowledge I have gained from my time spent engaging with members of the Kainai-Blood First Nation, Peigan-Piikani First Nation, Siksika First Nation, and Blackfeet Amskapi Piikani Nation. Thank you to Theron Black, Star Crop Eared Wolf, Perry Day Chief, Terran Last Gun, Florence Shone, John Pepion, Jared Tailfeathers, and Ryan Willert for your contributions to this dissertation. I hope that you can each be proud of this work, that you feel it honours your voices as Blackfoot people and that it contributes to the narrative of survivance as we intended.

I also dedicate this work to my unborn child, who has been within my womb during the hardest part of this writing process. Thank you for giving me a pleasant pregnancy and allowing me to finish my writing and oral defense before you joined the world!

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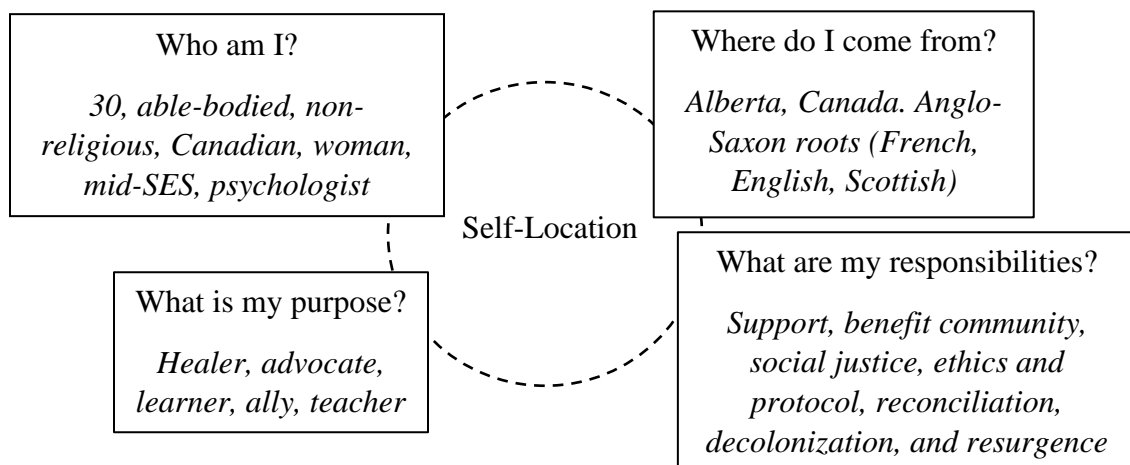
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## CHAPTER 1: SELF-LOCATION AND INTRODUCTION

To introduce myself in relation to the research, I answer four questions: (1) “who am I?”; (2) “where do I come from?”; (3) “what is my purpose?”; and (4) “what are my responsibilities?”. These questions support the process of self-locating, an important component of doing research with Indigenous people (Kovach, 2009). Figure 1 depicts a visual representation of the questions I ask myself in my process of self-location and the answers to these questions. After sharing my process of self-location, I introduce the research topic, briefly outline the methods used, and provide readers with a guide to the structure of my document.

**Figure 1**

*Starting with Self-Location*



*Note.* Margaret Kovach (2009) and Shawn Wilson (2008) recommend self-location as the first step in the research process. The questions around the circle can help guide the process of self-location. I was first exposed to these questions in an Indigenous Research Methods in Education course (EDER 630) taught by Dr. Aubrey Hanson at the University of Calgary in the Winter term of 2020. Hanson introduced these questions to guide explorations in the course. She adapted them from questions initially posed by Saulteaux scholar Jacqueline Ottmann in her teaching and

Anishnaabe scholar Tanya Talaga (2018) in her book *All Our Relations*. Answers to these questions make clear why I chose to conduct this research. Additionally, they help the reader form a relationship with me and gain a better understanding of the context from which I write (Wilson, 2008).

### **Who am I?**

Each time I answer the question “who am I,” I refer to the work of Hays (2008) on cultural self-assessment. Hays shared a process for investigating one’s own cultural influences using the acronym ADDRESSING: age and generational influences, developmental disability, disability acquired later in life, religion and spiritual orientation, ethnic and racial identity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, Indigenous heritage, national origin, and gender. I consider all these components in introducing who I am. I am a white, 30-year-old, cis-gender woman born and raised in Canada. I am married to a white, cis-gender man with whom I live in a middle-class household. Though our current socioeconomic status is middle-class, both myself and my spouse were raised in upper-middle class households that gave us the privilege to be pursuing doctoral level post-secondary education. My household is non-religious, although I am open to spirituality and a connectivity to others and the world around me. I have no disabilities, visible or invisible. I have limited knowledge of my ethnic identity, but from what I do know I have European ancestry, specifically French, English and Scottish, and presumably do not have Indigenous heritage. I hold a lot of unearned privilege in society because of the life I was born into. I believe it is my responsibility to use that privilege to be an advocate and ally to people who experience oppression and marginalization.

Extending beyond culture, I think it is also important to share the aspects of myself that I see as important or defining, especially as it relates to my research. Since before I graduated high

school, I have focused a lot of my time and energy on learning about and contributing to the field of mental health and psychology. I began my post-secondary educational journey in 2010. I completed my BA (hons.) in psychology in 2014, then worked as a youth and family counsellor for two years before I returned to school to complete my MSc in counselling psychology from 2016 to 2018. I am now a doctoral student in counselling psychology, focused on research, teaching, and clinical practice. Throughout my time in and out of school I volunteered and worked in helping positions, gaining experience in therapy, crisis, and trauma support. I am now a registered psychologist and an adjunct assistant professor of psychology. I have dedicated my entire adult work life to supporting mental health and wellbeing, so being a helper or healer is a central part of who I am. I am also a daughter, granddaughter, sister, wife, auntie, friend, and expecting mother. My relationships and experiences have shaped me and the way I see the world and are exceptionally important to me. All the things that have impacted me have led me to a social constructionist perspective of the world. I will define and elaborate on social constructionism in the third chapter of this dissertation when I outline the theoretical groundings of this research project.

### **Where Do I Come From?**

I am slowly learning more about my family history and still do not have a complete picture of where I come from. Unfortunately, stories from both my mother and father's sides of my family have been lost for various reasons. Histories of early death, mental illness and adoption have disrupted the passing of stories between generations. It was only recently that I started digging deeper into my family background and answering the question of where I come from. What I have learned is that my family on my father's side has been in Alberta for at least five generations, specifically in Cold Lake, Beaumont, Edmonton, and Calgary. The only certain

ethnic heritage on my father's side is French, with all traceable ancestors having French surnames. On my mother's side, my family has been in Alberta for at least three generations with English and Scottish roots. My mother was adopted, so although I consider my grandparents family and share their cultural identity as a Canadian with Anglo-Saxon roots, we are not biologically related. Biologically speaking, my background from my mother's side is presumed to be French and English. I was born and raised in Calgary, Alberta, and identify as a Canadian, acknowledging that I have Anglo-Saxon roots.

I have lived on the traditional land of the Treaty 7 Nations of Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakoda, and the Blackfoot Confederacy in Calgary, Alberta my entire life. I recognize that it is a privilege to call this land my home and that I directly benefit from colonization in this way. I am grateful to those who resided and worked on this land pre-colonization and hope that the positive relationships I have formed and the research I have completed with members of the Blackfoot Confederacy contributes to reconciliation.

### **What Is My Purpose?**

For as long as I can remember I have felt called towards helping people, which has shaped my educational and vocational paths. Over the course of my life, my experiences have highlighted my capacities to listen, care, empathize and respond calmly in crisis. These are innate qualities that I have fostered by opting to pursue educational and vocational opportunities in mental health. What began as isolated incidents became life-shaping experiences that turned into a passion for a holistic approach to wellbeing. I feel that my purpose as it relates to research is to learn about, utilize and share approaches to wellbeing that support groups that are oppressed and marginalized in our society, and to promote holistic wellness overall.



## What Are My Responsibilities?

As a mental health professional and researcher undergoing research with Indigenous communities, specifically Blackfoot communities, it is my responsibility to follow ethical and cultural protocols. It is also my responsibility to be an advocate and strive toward allyship. In my research I wanted to be able to contribute to a body of knowledge that promotes wellness, mental health, and social justice. I believe it is my responsibility to use the privileges I have received in this world to support those with less. Research can, and should, be used to promote social justice by acting as a platform for social advocacy and empowerment (Ratts, 2009). To do this responsibly in research with Indigenous communities, I – as a non-Indigenous person – should use a community-based approach by ensuring the community is involved in every stage of the research and is benefited by that research (Halseth et al., 2016; Smith, 2012).

In Canada, *counselling psychology* is defined as a branch of professional psychology that is collaborative, client-centred, holistic, strength-oriented, and sensitive to sociocultural factors in therapy and research (Beatch et al., 2009; Bedi et al., 2011; Canadian Psychological Association [CPA] Board of Directors, 2009). Counselling psychologists generally aim to promote the wellbeing and health of clients as well as the broader community (Beatch et al., 2009; Bedi et al., 2011; CPA Board of Directors, 2009). They are meant to be especially mindful of cultural considerations in both practice and research. In the past 15 years there has been a shift toward a focus on social justice in the field of counselling psychology (Beatch et al., 2009; Bedi et al., 2011; CPA Board of Directors, 2009; Ratts, 2009). Such a shift demands actions of advocacy and activism to support marginalized people and communities (Ratts, 2009). As the focus in counselling psychology has shifted, a need for *cultural sensitivity and humility* has been endorsed (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Hays, 2008; Hook et al., 2013). Cultural sensitivity and

humility require the counselling psychology student, practitioner, and researcher to relinquish any stance of superiority and to respect the knowledges and ways of being of other cultures (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Hays, 2008; Hook et al., 2013). Given my role as a student, researcher, and practitioner in counselling psychology, it is my responsibility to conduct collaborative research that aims to intervene in a system that impedes on the wellbeing of a community, in this case the Indigenous communities of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Furthermore, it is my responsibility in doing research with Indigenous communities to highlight the voices and stories of those communities with an emphasis on ensuring those voices are present and full in the text.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada ([TRC], 2015a) Calls to Action emphasise a need for those who can effect change, such as researchers, to recognize the value of Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing. They further highlight a need for community-based research to emphasize the voices of Indigenous community members and their experiences with healing, truth, and reconciliation (TRC, 2015a). In response to the TRC Calls to Action, the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) and Psychology Foundation of Canada (PFC) established a task force (CPA & PFC, 2018). The task force recommended that all people in the profession of psychology in Canada follow the guiding principles of cultural allyship, humility, collaboration, critical reflection, respect, and social justice. More specific to researchers in psychology, the task force endorsed the guiding principles outlined by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC) and the Tri-Council Agencies (i.e., FNIGC, 2020; Government of Canada, 2018). As a researcher in counselling psychology, I must follow these guidelines, which require that at a minimum I (a) approach research with Indigenous people collaboratively with community members; (b) acknowledge community ownership, control, access, and possession of the data collected; and (c) recognize issues of power, privilege, and

social justice (CPA & PFC, 2018; FNIGC, 2020; Government of Canada, 2018). Further, I must prioritize good relationships when working with Indigenous people and communities, which “begin with respecting community-based protocols and connecting with Elders, knowledge holders, and community leaders throughout the work” (Fellner et al., 2020, p. 652). As a researcher living on the traditional territories of Treaty 7 Nations, I believe that research that focuses on the health and wellbeing of local Indigenous communities, such as those of the Blackfoot Confederacy, is imperative.

Beyond the surface of what is required for reconciliation, some Indigenous scholars have argued that *decolonization* and *resurgence* are at the core of healing and bringing about necessary change in society (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hanson, 2017; Smith, 2012).

Decolonization requires that Western epistemologies are no longer privileged over Indigenous thought and knowledge (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Smith, 2012). It involves the breaking down of colonial power through acknowledging multiple ways of knowing and doing (Smith, 2012).

Resurgence is the empowerment and assertion of Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing as having value (Hanson & McKegney, 2021; Smith, 2012). Rather than solely focusing on the issue of colonialism and the process of decolonizing the settler’s mind, resurgence “insistently focuses on Indigenous communities as sites of power and regeneration” (Hanson, 2017, p. 74).

Resurgence places a great deal of importance on the strengths of Indigenous cultures, traditions, worldviews, stories, and ways of being, doing and knowing (Hanson, 2017).

Canadian universities have a history of reinforcing colonial thought and have contributed to the systemic oppression of Indigenous people and communities (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). For positive progress to occur, universities and the scholars at those institutions must now work to centre Indigenous knowledges when considering the goal of wellness for Indigenous

communities. For reconciliation to move toward actual institutional change, Western epistemologies cannot continue to be privileged over Indigenous ways of being, doing and knowing, and Indigenous stories must be shared in scholarly work (Archibald, 2008; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). This means I must consider my role as a non-Indigenous scholar in a university.

The University of Calgary is situated on the traditional land of the Treaty 7 Nations of Tsuu T'ina, Stoney Nakoda, and the Nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy including the Kainai-Blood First Nation, Peigan-Piikani First Nation, Siksika First Nation, and Blackfeet Amskapi Piikani Nation. In the spirit of reconciliation and right relationship (Gomes et al., 2013), it is appropriate that I focus my research on collaborative work with Treaty 7 communities. In 2016, I began my MSc with the intention of conducting research that contributed to social justice and supporting marginalized populations via advocacy and allyship. I completed my master's thesis (see St. Pierre, 2018) in collaboration with members of the Blackfoot Confederacy and my supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, to support the implementation and evaluation of a cultural art workshop that was held at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School. I became involved in research with Blackfoot communities in my master's degree by way of relationship. After taking a course in cultural influences in professional practice with Dr. Fellner, I approached her to discuss the possibility of a supervisory relationship. We spoke about projects she was working on, and from there I was invited to become involved in facilitating the cultural art workshop that became the focus of my master's thesis. I formed relationships with several of the Blackfoot artists at the workshop, and some of the artists I met there agreed to engage in research conversations with me for my master's research. Most of the artists I worked with in my master's work became the advisory council for the current project. Thus, continuing collaboration in these relationships, my doctoral work takes place with the Siksikaitsitapi (Blackfoot-speaking people, referring to the

Blackfoot Confederacy) and focuses on how art, a traditional approach to wellness, is related to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities through the Covid-19 pandemic. I elaborate on the term survivance in the literature review provided in chapter two.

Decolonizing through resurgence is a “process built on collaboration, consensus, and meaningful partnership” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 224). Over the past seven years I have been building relationships with Blackfoot community members including an Elder and several artists that make up the Blackfoot Advisory Council that guided and supported me in a collaborative and community-based research process. A Kainai-Blood First Nation Elder, Perry Day Chief, compared my role as a non-Indigenous researcher to that of a radio (personal communication, March 6, 2020). He said that my role as a researcher is to broadcast the stories of Blackfoot people: the artists, the Elders, and the community. This means that for me to conduct responsible research I must aim to centre the voices and stories of Blackfoot people and communities.

Over the time that I have spent engaging and forming relationships with the Blackfoot Advisory Council I have received many stories. The stories shared with me by Council members have consistently drawn attention to the strengths of the community and its members, something that is lacking in much of the literature involving Indigenous people (Eigenbrod, 2012; Vizenor, 2008). Over time I have come to understand that these are stories of survivance. The Blackfoot Advisory Council has asserted that stories of survivance require further exploration and should be shared, as they offer so much in the way of healing and promoting wellness. It is through conversations with this Advisory Council that the importance of survivance narratives in healing was illuminated for me. Thus, deepening my understanding of survivance, what contributes to it, and how it impacts community wellness is important for me to understand, as it is critical to conducting collaborative research in the spirit of reconciliation, decolonization, and resurgence.

## **Introduction to the Research**

The research presented in this dissertation focuses on Blackfoot art and survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Specifically, in collaboration with the Blackfoot Advisory Council I aimed to answer the research question: “How have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic?” In Chapter 2 I provide a review of the relevant literature on Indigenous survivance, the relationship between art and survivance, and the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as parallel survivance during this global pandemic.

### **Rationale for the Current Research**

My responsibilities as outlined earlier in this chapter provide a rationale for the current research. It is important that research with Indigenous communities use a community-based approach to promote social justice and benefit for that community (Halseth et al., 2016; Ratts, 2009; Smith, 2012). Community-based research requires engagement with community through all steps of the research (Halseth et al., 2016), therefore, the Blackfoot Advisory Council who were representatives for the Blackfoot community took part in deciding on the research topic and question. Their intuitive knowing of what is important for their own community was considered the primary rationale for doing research that focused on Blackfoot art and survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research is important because the Blackfoot Advisory Council emphasized it as being so. I believe that such a rationale emphasizes and honours the voices of Blackfoot community members and their experiences with healing, truth, and reconciliation (TRC, 2015a) and further follows the principles of reconciliation, decolonization, and resurgence (Hanson, 2017). My role as a researcher was then to consider the existing literature and

determine if there was additional support for this research, which I outline in the literature review in Chapter 2.

### **Overview of Methods**

This research question and study was theoretically grounded in relationality and social constructionism and followed a storywork and inward knowing methodology. In Chapter 3, I elaborate upon these theories and methodological frameworks and share how the research question was informed by self-location, community, and these theoretical underpinnings. I then present the specific methods used for recruitment, protocol, gathering, meaning making, and ensuring quality when answering the research question.

Recruitment was based in the relationships I have formed over the past five years since I initially met the members of my Blackfoot Advisory Council at a cultural art workshop that was held at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School in the Spring of 2018. I followed the guidance of a Blackfoot Elder, Perry Day Chief, and adhered to ethical protocols for research with Indigenous communities. Grounded in the theories I mentioned above, knowledge gathering included the sharing of stories in research conversation and the use of journalling inward knowing throughout the research process. Meaning making then involved intuition and interpretation on the part of myself as the researcher. After listening to each research conversation multiple times and reflecting on what each storyteller wanted me to learn, I demonstrated my meaning making process using concept mapping. Quality was ensured by upholding the values of relational accountability and by facilitating a process of encircling. I explain and elaborate on each of the steps of my methods in Chapter 3.

## **Structure of This Dissertation**

This dissertation tells a research story. Beginning first with self-location, Chapter 1 orients the reader to who I am, where I come from, my purpose, my responsibilities, and the research presented in this dissertation. This helps the reader form a relationship with me and understand the context from which I write (Wilson, 2008). Chapter 2 lays a foundation for understanding the importance and relevance of Indigenous survivance, the relationship between art and survivance, and the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic as well as parallel survivance during this global pandemic. This provides further rationale for the current research. Chapter 3 then continues the story, considering community context and theoretical grounding in addition to self-location in the process of coming to a research question. After clearly locating the research question, I share the specific methods used for answering the question. Throughout these first three chapters I provide concept maps that offer a visual representation of the research story that starts with the first figure shared in this chapter (see Figure 1). The maps build upon one another, telling a story of how I started with self-location and then considered community and theoretical groundings to come to a research question that then guided the methods used.

While the first three chapters outline the process leading up to answering the research question, the final two chapters focus on the findings after having completed the knowledge gathering and meaning making process. In Chapter 4 I share the findings from the meaning making process. Findings are also shared in concept maps. Finally, Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation with a discussion of the findings.



## CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this literature review I provide an exploration of the concept of Indigenous survivance, its role in reconciliation, its relevance to counselling psychology, and its presence in culturally rooted approaches to wellness, specifically art. I consider literature on art that points to its utility as a culturally rooted activity in contributing to a narrative of survivance, being an act of survivance, contributing to wellness, and being a method of therapy. I then review the ongoing impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the parallel survivance during this global pandemic. The contents of this chapter are shared through my own lens and reflect my subjective engagement with the literature reviewed.

### Coming to Understand Survivance

*Survivance* is a relatively new term in the field of counselling psychology (Fellner, 2019; Hartmann et al., 2019), stemming out of Indigenous literary studies (Vizenor, 1992; Hanson & McKegney, 2021). It has been described as “a narrative of resistance that creates a sense of presence over absence, nihility and victimry” (Vizenor, 2008, p. 1). Breaking down the definition of survivance, the suffix *ance* indicates action, meaning survivance is the action of surviving, or remaining alive (Vizenor, 2008). A narrative of survivance requires a shift away from a deficit narrative and toward one of power, strength, resistance, and resilience (Vizenor, 2008). In this way, survivance entails the sharing of Indigenous stories of triumph, tradition, and culture.

I have read countless stories and research articles that speak of the trauma and victimry of Indigenous people and communities. These stories have helped me, as a white-settler person, empathise with and have a deeper understanding of the people and communities that experience ongoing issues related to the collective traumas imposed by colonization. Indeed, understanding colonialism and cultural genocide in Canada gives a context for understanding issues like why

Indigenous youth in Canada are at statistically higher risk of addiction, suicidality, and criminal activity (Corrado et al., 2014; McKenzie et al., 2016; Pollock et al., 2016). However, a major problem with many of these stories is that they paint all Indigenous people with the same brush of passive victimry and remove any sense of agency (Vizenor, 2008). In some moments this leaves me wondering if even narratives of intergenerational trauma are much of an improvement from the horrible misrepresentations where Indigenous people are portrayed as the noble savage or lazy drunk (Walter, 2006). The latter images depict Indigenous people as less than human and contribute to both racist beliefs and Indigenous peoples' internalization of oppressive labels (Duran, 2006; Harding, 2006; Tuck, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I now question if the image of passivity that can be associated with explanations of intergenerational trauma without considering the parallel stories of survivance could be equally as dehumanizing and culpable of contributing to internalized deficit and helplessness (Fellner, 2019). I elaborate on this consideration later in this chapter.

Though acknowledging the history of the cultural genocide of Indigenous people in Canada is important (Duran, 2006), it is essential to carefully avoid defining Indigenous people and communities singularly as victims of trauma. Alongside those same histories of trauma are histories of resistance and agency (e.g., McKegney, 2007). Additionally, there is so much variation in experience between and within Indigenous communities that generalizing stories of trauma and ongoing risk are an unfair representation (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin et al., 2015). In fact, contrary to the statistics of risk ascribed to Indigenous people in Canada that I shared earlier, there are numerous Indigenous communities with greater indicators of wellness than the general population, with some being essentially free of suicide and substance abuse (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin et al., 2015). Indigenous people in Canada also “have among

the highest rates of abstinence from alcohol, and drink less often than the general population” (Dell et al., 2010, p. 111).

Survivance emphasizes Indigenous resistance to oppression (Eigenbrod, 2012; Vizenor, 2010). Taking on a lens of survivance means avoiding romanticizing tragedy and suffering and respecting the multi-dimensionality and depth of human experience (Eigenbrod, 2012). Canada’s history of colonization includes the implementation of policies that were meant to deny Indigenous peoples’ rights, eliminate their governments, and force their assimilation (TRC, 2015b). Laws were in place that made it illegal for Indigenous people to engage in their cultural and spiritual traditions (TRC, 2015b). Indigenous children were taken from their homes by force and placed in Indian Residential Schools (TRC, 2015b) where the purpose was to “kill the Indian in the child” (Young, 2015, p. 65). The goal was to eradicate Indigenous culture, and not only did Indigenous people survive, but they also emerged victorious (Eigenbrod, 2012). Through everything, Indigenous people resisted defeat and held on to their cultural practices, languages, and knowledges (Eigenbrod, 2012; TRC, 2015b; Vizenor, 2010). In many stories of survivance, Indigenous people share how they found innovative and creative ways to cope (EagleSpeaker, 2014; Eigenbrod, 2012; TRC, 2015c).

As I read about survivance, a particular story often came to mind. Years ago, I worked as a youth and family counsellor in a front-line role with adolescents in a residential treatment facility. This story demonstrates the power of survivance in practice through the strength and resistance of two Indigenous youth I worked with. Names used in this story are pseudonyms.

*Chameleon and I shared a positive relationship, I thought. He came to me when he had a bad day at school, or when he couldn’t sleep at night. We laughed together often. I taught him many skills like cooking, cleaning, and emotional regulation. We created art together and he*

would ask me to draw for him, which I did. I thought this was a strong and positive relationship at the time, one that would hopefully leave a lasting impression on Chameleon's life as he grew.

Badger was a trickier child to learn. It seemed that he was "resistant" to relating with me and the other workers. He was not the first and would not be the last child to oppose treatment. He was a child that many labelled as oppositional, or even as having Oppositional Defiant Disorder. I never did like that label...

Though Badger didn't bond with the staff quickly, he did find a relationship with Chameleon. As their relationship grew, my relationship with Chameleon was challenged. Chameleon no longer wanted to learn from me. He no longer wanted to draw with me. He didn't come to me, or any other staff for that matter.

One day, Chameleon and Badger ran away. I followed. I worried for their safety. I especially worried for Chameleon. As I followed, Chameleon and Badger yelled back at me, "Leave us alone!"

I told them genuinely, "I care about you and want to make sure you are safe."

Badger started to yell back, "WHITE DEVIL, WHITE DEVIL, WHITE DEVIL" and Chameleon joined in, "WHITE DEVIL, WHITE DEVIL, WHITE DEVIL!"

I was hurt in that moment. I was confused. Thoughts raced through my head trying to explain away what they were saying, trying to quickly justify that maybe Badger's past experiences of trauma were at play here. I knew about intergenerational trauma, and I knew that Badger's family had suffered so much of it. I knew I was there to help, and I just wished they could see that. Even more, I wondered why Chameleon would join in with Badger. Didn't he know me by now? So, I asked, "Why do you call me that, 'white devil?' I only want to help."

*“Go away,” the children yelled, “leave us alone if you want to help!” At this point I could feel that I was doing something wrong, or seeing something wrong, or maybe missing something altogether. I took a breath and reset.*

*In my experience leading up to that moment I had learned that “opposition” is a behaviour that never comes without a reason. I stopped trying to convince them of my good intentions and instead decided it was time that I listened. I sat down on the curb and stopped following. “I am afraid I haven’t been listening very well. Can you please help me to understand?”*

*This seemed to surprise Badger. They both stopped in their tracks. Badger said, “You’re always trying to force us to follow your rules. That’s all you care about, rules.” Silence... “You make us answer stupid questions and write it down on paper. You say that’s treatment, but how does it help? It doesn’t help me. It’s a waste of time! It makes me angry!”*

*I thought for a moment, and then I responded, “Huh, yeah, it seems silly to make you do something that doesn’t help.” The children sat down then. I asked, “What do you think we should do instead?” Badger didn’t skip a beat before responding, “Maybe a smudge.”*

*“Okay,” I said. I’d never seen a smile so big on Chameleon’s face.*

*Chameleon and Badger sometimes came to me when they had bad days at school, or when they couldn’t sleep at night. Sometimes they would ask to smudge or go for a quiet walk among the trees. We laughed together often. I taught them the same skills I had before, and they taught me about their cultures and their lives back home. We created art together and I would ask them to draw instead of writing for their treatment work. These were important relationships, ones that have left a lasting impression on my life as I have grown.*

I chose to share this story because I believe it highlights these youths' strength and resistance to colonial pressures. They were my teachers. I was a witness to their survivance in the face of ongoing oppression in a system that privileged Western views of psychology. I also chose this story because it demonstrates how, though a good place to start, good intentions are not enough to be an advocate or ally. I also did not realize at the time that I was acting out of an internalized saviour stance that only reinforced my power-over position (Fellner, 2016). Though I remain imperfect and sure to make mistakes along the way, this story shows a moment of personal growth and learning that was crucial in preparing me to undergo research with Indigenous communities. My relationships with these youth opened my mind to possibilities that challenged the training I had that was almost entirely steeped in positivist thought and a deficit narrative of dysfunction.

### **Emphasizing Indigenous Survivance in Counselling Psychology**

Narratives of Indigenous survivance are necessary and relevant in counselling psychology in several ways. In research, survivance informs how we write, how we conceptualize or analyze, and how we choose what we study. In practice, survivance offers a genuinely strength-based therapeutic narrative that avoids patronizing and has the potential to be healing. Research and literature on survivance in the field of counselling psychology is extremely limited. However, there is a demand for cultural sensitivity and humility in counselling that I believe can be addressed through a survivance narrative (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Fellner, 2019; Hays, 2009). To demonstrate how I have come to understand survivance as it relates to counselling psychology, I share a review of literature that has contributed to a shift in my conceptualization of trauma.

## ***From Trauma Theories to Understanding Oppression and Forced Sociocultural Change***

Concepts of *intergenerational and historical trauma* have dominated recent literature around the psychology of Indigenous people. Intergenerational trauma is defined as a cumulative trauma that is passed from one generation to the next (Bombay et al., 2014). Similarly, historical trauma is the emotional and psychological wounding from a large group trauma that is then passed through generations (Brave Heart et al., 2011). A substantial body of research has yielded results that support these concepts, linking historical and intergenerational trauma to psychological and biological symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, substance abuse disorders, dissociation, poor emotion regulation, decreased self-esteem, suicidality, and criminal activity (Bombay et al., 2014; Brave Heart, 1998, 1999, 2003; Corrado et al., 2014; Thoits, 2010; McKenzie et al., 2016; Pollock et al., 2016; Walters et al., 2011; Whitbeck et al., 2004). Although there is validity and value in these concepts, they have been criticized for being overly inclined to a *psychological-mindedness* that is deficit-based and neglects Indigenous survivance (Hartmann & Gone, 2016; Hartmann et al., 2019). Such a way of thinking focuses on deficits within an individual that imply maladaptive reactions and psychological processes are at the root of problems (Hartmann & Gone, 2016; Hartmann et al., 2019).

Intergenerational and historical trauma are part of a discourse that offers a contextualization of the health and risk disparities in Indigenous communities (Gone, 2014). These concepts explain psychological injury as a direct result of colonization and historical oppression (Hartmann & Gone, 2014; Kirmayer et al., 2014). However, these conceptualizations of trauma also assume a Western-based psychological-mindedness and discourse of determinism (Hartmann & Gone, 2016; McKegney, 2007). Trauma in this sense is seen as a psychological dysfunction that can be passed through generations (Hartmann & Gone, 2016). The concepts of

intergenerational and historical trauma are individualistic and deficit-focused, involving the labelling of responses to trauma as personal dysfunction (Hartmann & Gone, 2016). To me, this gives off a sense of vulnerability of Indigenous people, that they are sensitive and breakable. As well, the idea of a heightened risk for disorder among Indigenous people because of the past traumas of their ancestors leaves me feeling as if there is an almost predetermined outcome of dysfunction for Indigenous people. In contrast, others have queried if the health disparities of many Indigenous communities may be due to the destruction of Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing via both colonization and the continued systemic oppression of Indigenous people (Gone, 2007; Hartmann & Gone, 2016; McKegney, 2007).

Rather than internalizing the deficit narratives of dysfunction caused by intergenerational and historical trauma, the problem can instead be understood as external from the individual. From this perspective, systemic oppression and social disruption are the roots of the health disparities and difficulties experienced by some Indigenous communities (Gone, 2007; Hartmann & Gone, 2016). Further, by shifting away from psychological-mindedness, rather than assuming traditional psychological interventions as being the route to healing, the return to traditional cultural practices and ceremony is a viable course of action for combatting the health concerns that occur in some Indigenous communities (Gone, 2007). This shift in thought is in line with making space for survivance over pathology (Hartmann et al., 2019), and may also offer a more culturally appropriate understanding of health and illness (Duran, 2006; Gone, 2007; Monchalin, 2016).

Hartmann and Gone (2016) interviewed health and human service providers working on a Great Plains reservation to explore the degree of psychological-mindedness of those who worked with Indigenous people. They found that 17 of 22 service providers did not support the definition



of historical trauma as I defined it earlier. Rather than attributing psychological risk and vulnerability to ancestral experiences of trauma, most service providers took a critical discourse approach to understanding trauma and chose to rearticulate their understanding of hardship today as being due to social and economic problems. The service providers reframed historical trauma as historical oppression, recognizing that the route of suffering was oppression by colonizing Europeans. Additionally, they explained that ongoing oppression was at the root of ongoing issues. These perspectives externalize blame outside of the marginalized group and support a need for those contributing to the systemic oppression of Indigenous communities to effect change (Hartmann & Gone, 2016; TRC, 2015a). Another perspective shared by the service providers in this study was that the socio-cultural change forced in colonization was and continues to be a primary source of community distress. Displacement and loss of cultural traditions are seen as sources of the past and ongoing mental and physical health problems Indigenous people experience (Hartmann & Gone, 2016). Hartmann and Gone (2016) promoted externalizing the source of Indigenous suffering, proposing that “the local cultural preference for socio-cultural narratives of oppression with minimal psychological-mindedness illustrates an alternative route toward historicizing contemporary suffering in light of ancestral experiences with colonization” (p. 238).

Upon later reflection, Hartmann and colleagues (2019) concluded that if the problem is socio-structural then the solution should involve critiquing Western psychology and practicing survivance. They suggested that this renewed understanding of historical trauma is a prerequisite for supporting Indigenous wellness and understanding survivance as an act of resisting colonial violence. Hartmann and colleagues (2019) shared a perspective that empirical support for

practicing survivance from community-based research is a next step necessary for advancing the field of psychology.

Engaging with the literature presented here has supported shifts in my own understanding of ongoing health and risk disparities: my views have shifted away from psychological-mindedness and toward seeing the problem as oppression and forced socio-cultural change. This has had a profound impact on how I approach research related to Indigenous wellbeing. First, by moving away from a deficit narrative, there is more space for strengths and possibilities for positive change. Second, by seeing the ongoing concerns that result from oppression and forced socio-cultural change, wellness goals shift away from individualistic psychological interventions and toward cultural engagement and traditional ways of being, doing and knowing.

### ***Survivance Stories of Resilience, Wellness, Balance, and Trauma Wisdom***

As I discussed earlier, the pathology narratives that dominate the field of psychology have been criticized as disempowering and irrelevant to marginalized populations such as Indigenous people (Episkenew, 2009; Fellner, 2016; 2019; Hartmann et al., 2019; McKegney, 2007). Indigenous professionals have compared stories to medicine and recognized the healing capacity of narratives (Episkenew, 2009). For example, Tafoya (as cited in Episkenew, 2009) stated:

Stories are a type of medicine and, like medicine, can be healing or poisonous depending on the dosage and type. Indigenous people have heard poisonous stories in the colonial discourse. To heal, people must write or create a new story or script of their lives. (p. 13)

This highlights the importance of survivance stories that can contribute to the healing of Indigenous people.

Survivance offers a counternarrative that is relevant to Indigenous ways of understanding wellness (Fellner, 2019; Hartmann et al., 2019; McKegney, 2007). Cree-Métis scholar Fellner (2019) offered a perspective on Indigenous wellness that considers a narrative of survivance. Fellner discussed survivance as it relates to counselling psychology and drew a direct connection between survivance and a culturally appropriate approach to addressing challenges that occur as results of colonialism and oppression.

Rather than using Western psychological interventions to address trauma, Fellner (2016; 2019) shared success in Indigenous approaches that honour survivance and *trauma wisdom*. Fellner defined trauma wisdom as “the personal and collective medicine that emerges through direct, vicarious, collective, or intergenerational traumas” (2019, p. 156). As I read about trauma wisdom, I considered how there might be valuable knowledge in trauma experiences. I thought about the perspective that there is a purpose to everything, including pain – one need only listen. This is an empowering perspective that highlights an individual’s capacity to overcome difficulty by listening to their own inward ways of knowing. As Fellner (2019) explained, listening to trauma wisdom leads to growth and change. In this way she promoted a narrative of survivance as she emphasized the capacity for resilience and growth demonstrated by Indigenous people.

Oppression, marginalization and cultural genocide have certainly impacted Indigenous people and communities. However, even in stories of trauma there are stories of wellness, abundance and survivance (Fellner, 2019). I find myself in awe of the resilience and the ongoing pushback from so many community members who deny the story laid out for them by colonization. Instead, they reconnect, they survive, and they flourish. They find wisdom in even the darkest of places. Trauma wisdom is a narrative of survivance that emphasizes the value of Indigenous experience and knowledge (Fellner, 2019).

## **Art as Survivance**

After exploring and reflecting on how survivance will inform how I conceptualize and write about Indigenous people and communities, their histories, ongoing stories and wellness, I next considered how survivance could more specifically guide what I studied.

Determining what is important to study has many steps. Most notably, it must be informed by the community and should aim to benefit the community (Halseth et al., 2016). As well, it should be guided by existing research and should ideally fill a gap or contribute to expanding or enriching the existing body of literature. To do this well, one must first know what has already been done. The relationship between art and survivance was emphasised by the Blackfoot Advisory Council as an important area for exploration, so this is where I started my literature review. While I have defined survivance to help the reader better understand this review, I have not yet offered a definition of art. What we each consider to be art is subjective. Within the context of this study, I define art openly, including any research in which the authors identify what they studied as art. This might include any traditional or contemporary creative activity such as painting, dancing, hiking, theater, crafting, photography, beading, drum making, ledger art, music, or any mixed media or visual art.

## **Art as a Narrative of Survivance**

As recently as the 1960s, museum art curators attempted to dictate what could and could not be considered Indigenous artwork (Vizenor, 2010). Expressionism and visionary mixed media arts were not accepted as Indigenous art styles by white-settler people who controlled the production, representation and distribution in galleries and museums (Dion & Salamanca, 2014; Vizenor, 2010). Rather, “Indian” art that depicted flat and stereotyped representations of culture was the only style recognized as Indigenous (Vizenor, 2010). The belief perpetuated by this

limited view was that there was only one authentically Indigenous way to create art, a way that was in fact often inappropriately taken from sacred ceremonies (Vizenor, 2010). I find this to be a tremendously belittling method of oppression that sought to limit who and what an Indigenous person could be. In the 1960s through to the 1980s, the narratives of Indigenous artists shifted, resisting the predetermined mould and creating art using individualistic artistic freedom.

Through art, Indigenous people have shared narratives that express diversity of experience and images of Indigenous identities that have intersectionality and depth (Dion & Salamanca, 2014; Taunton, 2011; Vizenor, 2010). Art has a long history of activism and resistance and offers a space where visionary, creative and innovative narratives of Indigenous people are widely found (Taunton, 2011; Vizenor, 2010). Many Indigenous artists have created art to resist and respond to colonialism (Taunton, 2011). As Dion and Salamanca (2014) shared, “Contemporary Indigenous art reflects our stories and our current story is one of recuperating from and speaking back to the violence of colonization, decolonizing our selves, our communities, and institutional spaces including art institutions, museums and school” (p. 163). Art is a method of storytelling that can empower Indigenous voices and rewrite deficit narratives by exploring and representing stories of survivance (St. Pierre, 2018).

### **Art as an Act of Survivance**

The action of creating art is one of survivance. In many Indigenous communities, art is inseparable from culture (Hanson & McKegney, 2021; St. Pierre, 2018). By continuing the practice of art creation, Indigenous people have effectively resisted the oppressive government rules that outlawed cultural and traditional expressions (Dion & Salamanca, 2014; TRC, 2015b).

In a case study with coastal Southern California’s diverse Indigenous communities, Chavez (2019) demonstrated a counternarrative to the misrepresentations of Indigenous

communities. Chavez shared that through basket weaving, communities refused to abandon cultural practices based in tradition. Despite oppression, discrimination and limited resources, community members held on to basket weaving traditions and the knowledges tied to them. This case demonstrates a clear action of resistance and survivance in the process of creating traditional art. In another article, Indigenous artwork was presented and discussed as “active instigations of survivance in Vizenor’s terms” (Biddle, 2019, p. 1).

### **Art for Continuing Wellness**

Connection with culture and cultural expression have been linked with desirable wellness outcomes among Indigenous communities (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin et al., 2015; McKenzie et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2012). The inseparable nature of art and culture make art a good decolonizing method to address wellness among Indigenous people and communities (Bombay et al., 2014; Duran, 2006).

Narratives of survivance and engagement in traditional cultural practices such as art offer alternative approaches to wellness that challenge Western psychological-mindedness. Indeed, (re)connecting with culture and sharing survivance stories through art may be a culturally appropriate way to promote the continuing wellness of Indigenous people and communities (Dion & Salamanca, 2014; Fellner, 2019; Gone, 2007; Hartmann et al., 2019). The process of sharing survivance stories through art set in the past, present and future is both educational and healing (Dewar, 2016). Artistic expression offers an alternative method of sharing stories and an opportunity to engage with culture in a healing capacity (Dewar, 2016; St. Pierre, 2018).

### **Art as Therapy**

Considering my self location as a psychologist, I am particularly interested in the use of art in counselling. Art has been incorporated into therapy by many and its benefits have been

extensively researched (Newcomb & Centeno, 2020). Some reported benefits include improved emotional and social functioning, personal achievement, expression of emotions, self-image, empowerment, distraction, understanding of the self, perspective, development of relationships, relaxation, and emotional insight as well as positive cognitive and behavioural changes (Haeyen et al., 2020; Scope et al., 2016; Uttley et al., 2015). The use of art in therapy might be particularly beneficial for Indigenous clients because of its connection with culture, land, and identity (Arslanbek et al., 2022; St. Pierre, 2018). Art can further serve as a culturally appropriate tool for practitioners to connect with Indigenous clients (Cameron, 2010; Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; St. Pierre, 2018).

### **Survivance in a Global Pandemic**

Initially as I planned for my doctoral research project, I collaborated with the Blackfoot Advisory Council and together we had begun the planning of a multi-community culturally rooted art installation event that was meant to take place on the four First Nations Reserves of the Blackfoot Confederacy: Kainai-Blood First Nation, Siksika First Nation, Peigan-Piikani First Nation and the Blackfeet Amskapi Piikani Nation. Community members would have been invited to come together to create mixed-media murals representing the history and traditional stories of Blackfoot people, including stories of survivance. This event would have been the foundation on which to base my research question. Shortly after we started our planning however, the Covid-19 pandemic halted our plans, and forced us to revisit what we could feasibly and safely do. Needing to pivot, we decided to focus on the survivance of Blackfoot communities in response to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

## Challenges Faced During the Covid-19 Pandemic

Covid-19 first emerged in December 2019 and by March 2020 the outbreak was considered a global pandemic (World Health Organization, 2020). The first case of Covid-19 in Canada was identified in January 2020 (Canada Institute of Health Intervention, 2022). With over 4,000,000 cases and almost 50,000 deaths across Canada to date (Government of Canada, 2022b), Covid-19 has undoubtedly impacted the lives of many. The province of Alberta accounts for over 600,000 of these cases and more than 5,000 deaths (Government of Alberta, 2022). Of these, over 20,000 cases were reported on First Nations reserves in Alberta (Government of Canada, 2022a). These numbers are likely to be underestimated due to individuals using at home testing or choosing not to be tested. Further, data that includes Indigenous people living off-reserve in Alberta is unavailable.

The Covid-19 pandemic has come with many challenges to physical and mental health. The Public Health Agency of Canada described *post-Covid condition* as a possible outcome that 30-40% of people experience, with at least one symptom persisting more than 12 weeks after getting Covid-19 (Government of Canada, 2022c). Possible persistent symptoms associated with post-Covid condition include fatigue, memory problems, sleep disturbances, shortness of breath, depression and anxiety, general pain and discomfort, difficulty thinking or concentrating, and posttraumatic stress disorder. Further, psychological reactions to disease, isolation, and uncertainty including fear and anxiety have contributed to increased psychological distress, sleep disturbances, depression, and suicidality (Iftene et al., 2022; Satici, et al., 2020; Sher, 2020). Covid-19 and the associated mandates (i.e., masking, social distancing, stay-at-home orders, testing, and isolation) have also impacted people's engagement in health behaviours, leading to



overall increases in sedentary behaviour, screen time, alcohol use, and poor eating habits (Zajacova et al., 2020).

Health inequities that stem from colonialism place Indigenous people in Canada at greater risk for disease and mortality (Indigenous Services Canada, 2018). Indeed, social determinants of poor health such as poverty, homelessness, food insecurity, lower levels of education, and unemployment are experienced at a greater rate among many Indigenous communities due to such inequities, and contribute to poorer mental, emotional, and physical health outcomes (Bombay et al., 2014; Corrado et al., 2014). Further, looking at the outcomes of past pandemics such as the H1N1 influenza (Mousseau, 2013) and Spanish influenza (Summers et al., 2018) pandemics highlights the “devastating effects past pandemics have had on Indigenous health and capacity to practice culture which is [...] medicine” (Power et al., 2020, p. 2739). This unfortunate reality meant a high probability of more severe outcomes for Indigenous people in Canada when the Covid-19 pandemic hit (Clay et al., 2019; Power et al., 2020).

Some provinces collected and analyzed Covid-19 data that revealed Indigenous people were testing positive for the virus at over twice the rate of the general population and were experiencing more severe outcomes at younger ages, with the median ages of hospitalization, ICU admission, and death being 11, 6, and 18 years younger than the general population, respectively (First Nations Health Authority, 2021). Research has now further shown that Indigenous people, specifically those living in Alberta, have experienced greater burdens of stress, anxiety, and depression during the Covid-19 pandemic (Lawal et al., 2021). Indigenous people have also been more likely to experience exacerbated food insecurity (Han et al., 2022; Levkoe et al., 2021). These higher rates of poor physical and mental health outcomes among

Indigenous people highlight the clear health inequities faced by Indigenous communities in Canada.

In addition to recognizing the impact of health inequities it is important to consider the likely impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on Indigenous peoples' access to land and cultural practices. Given that such factors are considered protective (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fortin et al., 2015; McKenzie et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2012; St. Pierre, 2018), it is reasonable to conclude that mandates that have limited such activities (e.g., stay at home orders, limits on social gatherings) could have an additionally negative impact on Indigenous people.

### **Survivance During the Covid-19 Pandemic**

Despite the undeniable challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic, people found ways to cope, and many demonstrated fierce resilience. Engagement in physical activity, forming routines, practicing acceptance-based coping, mindfulness, engaging in creative activities, positive reframing, social support, and professional support were associated with lower levels of anxiety, depression, and feelings of stress (Fluharty et al., 2021; Polizzi et al., 2020; Rose et al., 2021). Some researchers suggested that physical activity was a particularly protective strategy due to its mental and physical health benefits and ability to strengthen the body's immune system (Burhaein et al., 2021). Further, connection with culture, religion, or spirituality could have played a constructive role that helped people cope with the concept of death, live a meaningful life, and find lessons or reasons in the pandemic (Omidvari, 2021).

In addition to engaging in the previously mentioned coping strategies, some Indigenous people and communities across Canada have reported drawing on cultural strengths in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. One Dene land-based arts educator, Melaw Nakehko, shared that returning to the land helped her and her community care for one another (Banning, 2020).

Indigenous artists across Canada found new ways to apply traditional arts, including the making of non-medical masks featuring Indigenous designs and the creation of online video series that used comedy and storytelling to help people see new possibilities (Banning, 2020). One study of 263 self-identified Indigenous participants found that a strong sense of community was associated with reduced anxiety and depression during the pandemic (Burnett et al., 2022). Another study done with 17 Indigenous nursing students found that while the Covid-19 pandemic worsened mental and physical health overall, these Indigenous students also demonstrated survivance (Van Bever, 2022). The author highlighted that many participants “‘found their own strength’ and experienced growth by developing new hobbies and interests, rekindling relationships with family members virtually, and reconnecting with the land” (p. 6).

### **Concluding Remarks**

This literature review supports the relevance and importance of the research question that was chosen in collaboration with the Blackfoot Advisory Council: “How have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic?” Given the current global context of the Covid-19 pandemic and the threats it has posed to Indigenous survivance, focusing on Blackfoot survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic is both important and relevant today. Additionally, art might offer a valuable, culturally rooted method of supporting survivance and is thus it is worth knowing more about how it might contribute to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people and communities through the Covid-19 pandemic.

## CHAPTER 3: WAYS OF KNOWING AND COMING TO KNOW

In this chapter I outline the theoretical underpinnings that serve as the foundation of this research project and offer the reader an understanding of perspectives and assumptions that guided it. I then outline the specific methods used for recruitment, following protocol, knowledge gathering, meaning making, and ensuring quality of the research.

### **Being Community-Based**

Considering my self-location as a non-Indigenous researcher and psychologist, it is important that any research I do with Indigenous communities is community-based. Community-based research (CBR) requires the researcher to engage community members in every stage of the research process (Halseth et al., 2016). This means involving the community in the planning, conducting, analysing, and disseminating stages of research. Further, CBR involves doing research *with* rather than *on* the community, with the goals of benefiting that community and emphasizing previously unheard voices (Halseth et al., 2016).

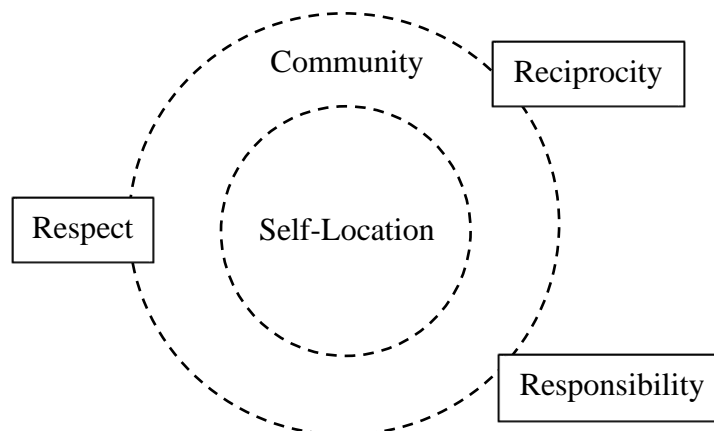
I engaged with Blackfoot community members throughout this research project. All phases of the research project were guided by a Blackfoot Advisory Council that included a Blackfoot Elder from the Kainai First Nation as well as several Blackfoot artists and knowledge holders from across the nations of the Blackfoot Confederacy. Through my interactions and conversations with the people who make up this Blackfoot Advisory Council, and by reading literature on Indigenous research methodologies, I came to understand that doing research with Blackfoot communities requires *relational accountability* (Weber-Pillwax, 2001; Wilson, 2008). Stating it simply, relational accountability means upholding the values of that community in the research and being accountable to all your relations. Three key values of relational accountability with Indigenous communities are: (1) respect; (2) reciprocity; and (3) responsibility (Kirkness &

Barnhardt, 2001; Wilson, 2008). To ensure I adequately *respect* Indigenous people and communities, I must honour and value Indigenous voices, knowledges, and worldviews (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). To uphold the value of *reciprocity*, I must consciously maintain balance in researcher-participant relationships, equally valuing all parties as active contributors in meaning making (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016).

In Canadian universities, researchers are granted positions of authority and power in society (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). Such privileging is problematic, as it most often reinforces colonial thought and contributes to systemic oppression of marginalized communities (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). To hold to the value of *responsibility*, I as a researcher must not privilege Western thought over Indigenous worldviews and must centre the voices of Indigenous people in any research involving Indigenous people and communities (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2016). Throughout this chapter I share concept maps that offer a visual story of how I started with the foundations of self-location, community, and theory to inform the research question and methods. Maps are cumulative and build from one another as you go through the chapter. Figure 2 builds upon Figure 1, adding community as a foundation in addition to self-location.

## Figure 2

### *Adding Community to the Map*



## **Theoretical Grounding**

My self-location and the community I worked with informed the theoretical perspectives that guided my research methods. My own theoretical perspective is one of social constructionism, and many of the community members I worked with align more with the Indigenous perspective of relationality. Though not identical, the core concepts of a Western social constructionist perspective and those of an Indigenous perspective based in relationality are very similar. Thus, methods built out of a social constructionist theoretical framework also lent themselves well to doing this research with Blackfoot communities.

### **Epistemology and Ontology**

*Social constructionism* is a postmodern western ideological perspective, which stresses the belief that human beings create meaning through their interactions with other people, language, and society (Anderson & Burney, 1996; Sommers-Flanagan & Sommers-Flanagan, 2004; Truscott, 2010; Young & Collin, 2004). This worldview contends that there is no single truth, as each person forms reality through their own experiences, interactions, and relationships. *Relationality* is an Indigenous worldview that emphasises the importance of relationships in making meaning or understanding reality (Wilson, 2008). From this perspective, reality is understood as a process of relationship and “reality is the relationship that one has with the truth” (Wilson, 2008, p. 73).

Ultimately, the basis for each perspective is that we form our understanding based on our interactions and relationships with others; we do not come to know anything without those interactions and relationships, and that is what shapes how we think and what we know (Anderson, 2000; Wilson, 2008). Both perspectives also acknowledge that truth is subjective by nature (Anderson, 2000; Wilson, 2008) and that “knowledge is historically and culturally

specific” (Young & Collin, 2004, p. 377). Finally, both heavily value stories as sources of knowledge (Anderson, 2000; Wilson, 2008). Relationality and social constructionism as I have discussed them answer the questions associated with the philosophical branches of *epistemology* and *ontology*. Epistemology answers the question: “What is the nature of the relationship between the knower (the inquirer) and the known (or knowable)?” (Guba, 1990, p18). Ontology answers: “What is the nature of ‘reality’?” (Guba, 1990, p18). The short answer to both questions is that it is all relational (Wilson, 2008).

### **Axiology**

*Axiology* answers: “What part of this reality is worth finding out more about?” (Wilson, 2008, p. 34). Based on the reflections I shared in my self-location, I believe it is important to answer questions that support wellness and Indigenous – specifically Blackfoot – survivance narratives, offer opportunities for advocacy and voice, explore counselling, and respect culture and identity. Following a community-based approach, I have collaborated with my Blackfoot Advisory Council to discuss what they deem worth finding out more about. In line with my own axiological beliefs, they stressed the importance of promoting wellness in their communities, promoting the voices of community members, and exploring art as a culturally rooted intervention that contributes to a survivance narrative.

Further, as I will describe in the “Coming to a Research Question” section of this chapter, in collaboration with my Blackfoot Advisory Council, I considered the global context and shared experience of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. Due to the significant impact and the uncertain nature of the Covid-19 pandemic, we agreed that it would be worthwhile to prioritize exploring what challenges it has posed to Blackfoot people, and how they have been surviving through it.

## **Methodology**

In addition to epistemology, ontology and axiology, a question related to *methodology* also needs to be answered to guide the research process. Methodology answers the question: “How should the inquirer go about finding out knowledge?” (Guba, 1990, p18).

Stemming from a base of relationality and social constructionism, a methodology for inquiry would be learning from story and inward knowing (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009).

## **Story**

Kovach (2009) asserted that knowledge and story hold an inseparable relationship. Kovach further explained how story is an appropriate form of inquiry in line with the epistemological and ontological views of relational accountability:

Story and Indigenous inquiry are grounded within a relationship-based approach to research. The centrality of relationship within Indigenous research frameworks, and responsibility that that evokes, manifest themselves in broad strokes throughout research in the form of protocols and ethical considerations. (2009, p.98)

Sto:lo author and scholar Jo-Ann Archibald (2008) presented story as an Indigenous research methodology in a process she referred to as *storywork*. Archibald shared the perspective that storytelling is a traditional Indigenous method for knowledge sharing and meaning making, asserting that there is knowledge in story. She maintained that stories offer valuable knowledge in the way that they encourage each of us to think and reflect on our actions, thoughts, and feelings. For these reasons, I refer to my research participants as storytellers, as this term most aptly represents their role of sharing knowledge and experience through story (Archibald, 2008).

Archibald outlined seven principles for inquiry through story: (1) respect; (2) responsibility; (3) reciprocity; (4) reverence; (5) holism; (6) interrelatedness; and (7) synergy.



Earlier in this paper, I shared definitions of the first three of these principles as values of relational accountability as outlined by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) and again by Wilson (2008). *Reverence* requires that a researcher highly regard storytellers and honour their voices and stories (Archibald, 2008). *Holism* calls for the researcher to recognize the interrelatedness of all parts of a healthy person. This includes the intellectual, spiritual, physical, and emotional aspects of oneself, family, community, and nation (Archibald, 2008). *Interrelatedness* includes the relationships between story and listener, as well as between text and reader. This requires all parties to be actively engaged in the storytelling process. Finally, synergy requires harmonious interaction between storyteller and listener (Archibald, 2008). These principles must be at the core of research involving story as a methodology for inquiry with Indigenous communities (Archibald, 2008).

I considered and applied these methodological principles of storywork when choosing and carrying out the methods I outline later in this chapter. Specifically, I chose to use research conversations that allowed me to uphold the seven principles outlined by Archibald and followed her advice for how to go about such conversations.

### ***Inward Knowing***

Among several Indigenous scholars, Archibald (2008) and Kovach (2009) emphasize the value and importance of *inward knowledge* in research. Inward knowing includes internal experiences such as thoughts, reactions, feelings, and intuition (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). As well, referring specifically to a Cree perspective, Kovach shared that “seeking out Elders, attending to holistic epistemologies, and participating in cultural catalyst activities (dream, ceremony, prayer) are all means for accessing inward knowledge” (2008, p. 50). In the research process my role is first to actively engage with the stories shared with me as a listener and then

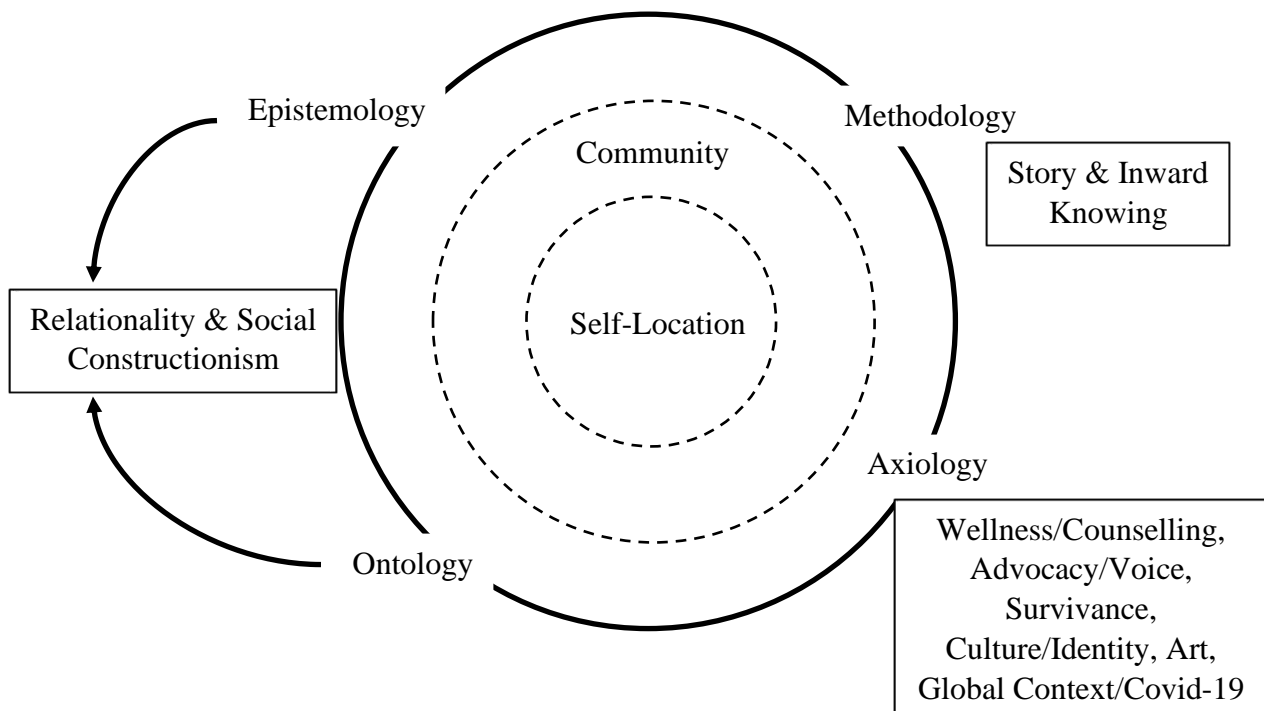
to share my relationally constructed subjective interpretations (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2008). As a storyteller in the process of research sharing, I am inseparable from the story, thus my own values, beliefs and interpretations will be inherent through the entire process.

**Summary of Theoretical Grounding**

Figure 3 summarizes the theoretical foundations that guide the research methods I will later propose. The outermost circle representing the four philosophical components of theory in research (i.e., epistemology, methodology, ontology, and axiology) is drawn from Wilson’s (2008, p. 70) depiction of an Indigenous research paradigm as a circle. Figure 3 shows self-location and community at the core of the four theoretical branches influencing the research process. It demonstrates a cyclical and inseparable relationship between epistemology, ontology, methodology and axiology (Wilson, 2008). Further, it shows the specific theoretical orientations as well as the methodological considerations that guided the research methods for this study.

**Figure 3**

*Adding Theoretical Grounding to the Map*



## **Coming to a Research Question**

The first step in coming to a research question was to form a Blackfoot Advisory Council to guide the collaborative research process. To do this, I considered my relationships. In the process of completing my master's thesis in 2018, I formed relationships with the five Blackfoot artists with whom I had conversations for the purpose of my thesis research – Perry Day Chief, Star Crop Eared Wolf, Theron Black, Lauren Monroe Jr., and John Pepion – as well as a Blackfoot knowledge holder and Wellness Coordinator at the Kainai Board of Education (KBE), Tisha Bromley-Wadsworth. These are the Blackfoot community members I approached to ask if they would be willing to be part of my Blackfoot Advisory Council for my doctoral work when I began to plan my doctoral research in the Summer of 2019. Due to demanding schedules, Monroe Jr. and Bromley-Wadsworth opted out of the council; however, both offered to be available for supplementary support through this research process.

## **Considering Self-Location, Community Context, and Theoretical Grounding**

As previously stated, the Blackfoot Confederacy is made up of the four Blackfoot Nations: Kainai-Blood First Nation, Siksika First Nation, Peigan-Piikani First Nation and the Blackfeet Amskapi Piikani Nation. Today, these communities experience the ongoing impact of having their territories separated by the Canada-United States border, which restricts access to traditional territories and interferes with spiritual, economic, social, and political relationships. Thus, connecting all four Blackfoot Nations through a project such as this one offers an important opportunity for inter-community connection that may contribute to healing the wounds of colonization. Along with day schools and other colonial institutes, each community also holds the legacy of residential schools. In the Kainai-Blood First Nation there were two residential schools that have left legacies of pain: St. Paul's Anglican Residential School (1880-1978) and

St. Mary's Catholic Residential School (1898-1988). Peigan-Piikani and Siksika each had their own schools: Sacred Heart Catholic Residential School (1887-1961) and Old Sun (Blackfoot) Anglican Residential School (1896-1971), respectively. Finally, in Amskapi Piikani there were three Indian Boarding Schools: Holy Family Mission Catholic School (1888-1940), Cut Bank Boarding School (1905-1960s, and still operating today as a boarding dormitory), and Willow Creek School (1892-unclear). Given the significant presence and impact of residential schools among Blackfoot communities, a project that supports awareness, healing, and honouring is immeasurably important.

Between the Summer of 2019 and the Spring of 2020, my Blackfoot Advisory Council and I initially discussed a project focused on coming together to create art with the intention of supporting, healing and honouring Blackfoot survivance. This would have been a multi-community culturally rooted art installation event that would take place over the course of four weekends and a celebratory one-day powwow. However, when Covid-19 was announced as a global pandemic in March of 2020 we collaboratively decided to shift the project. Due to the ongoing risk of spreading Covid-19, large community events such as this were not permitted at the time, thus we did not carry out this plan in order to reduce the risk of transmission of the virus among Blackfoot communities. Safety of all people involved, including community members, my Blackfoot Advisory Council and myself, was the priority. All protocols outlined by Government of Alberta (2020) health officials as well as additional guidelines set out by the Blackfoot Confederacy Tribal Council (2020) and the four nations' health officials dictated that we not host unnecessary events.

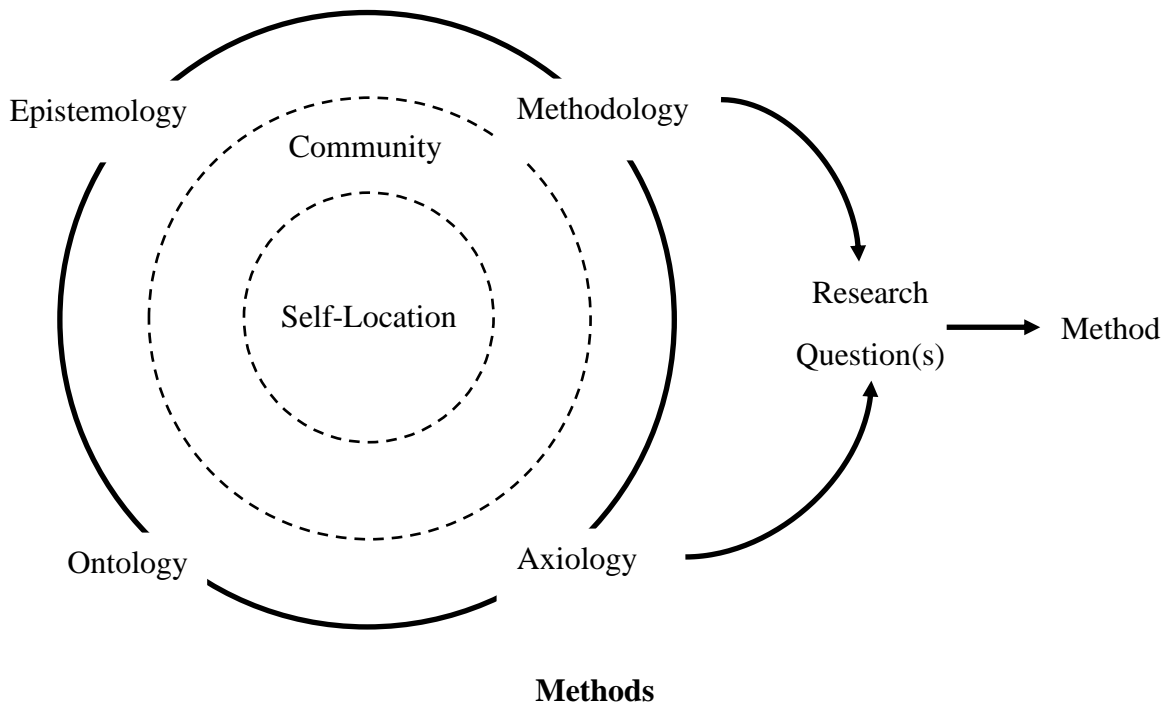
Over the Spring and Summer of 2020, my Blackfoot Advisory Council and I then discussed the needs and strengths of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Through these conversations it became clear that an important topic to focus on was Blackfoot artists' contributions to and perspectives on the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities throughout the Covid-19 pandemic.

Considering this project while taking the previously discussed theoretical groundings and a community-based approach into account, coming to a research question around this project involved engagement from community members. In virtual collaboration with my Blackfoot Advisory Council that took place over a Zoom meeting in August 2020, our research question became: “How have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic?” Knowing that art has been essential to the identity and wellbeing of Blackfoot people throughout their existence, the Advisory Council and I wanted to know more about how art was vital at this difficult time. We became committed to understanding art's role in Blackfoot survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic. Figure 4 shows my visual map, including its connection to forming this research question, which guides the specific methods of research. In addition to self-location, community and theoretical foundations, the process of coming to a research question must also be supported by existing research and literature. To this end, I discussed literature on Indigenous people's wellness, Indigenous survivance narratives, art as it relates to wellness and culture, and the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic in the previous chapter.

**Figure 4**

*Adding Research Question(s) to the Map*

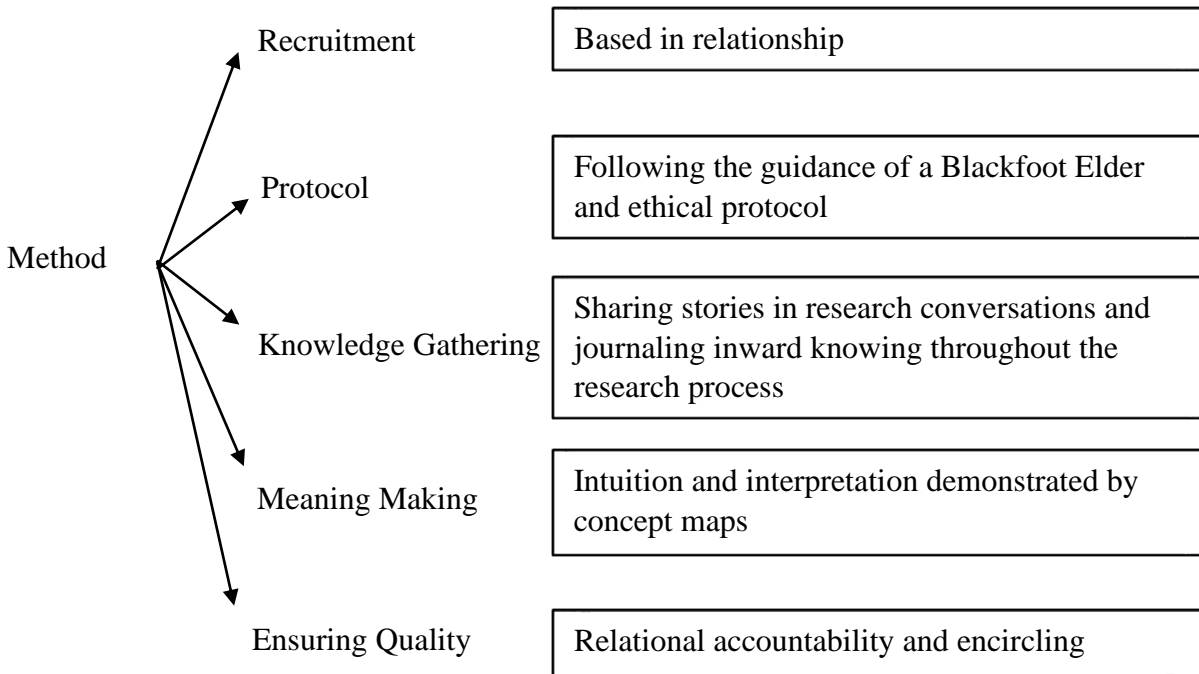


The methods used in this study were based on my theoretical grounding, review of the literature and collaboration with my Blackfoot Advisory Council. Methods were directly drawn from a methodology of story and inward knowing. I adjusted and refined the methods throughout the research process, based on the guidance I received from my council. This flexibility was required for adequate collaboration with community members throughout the CBR process with the goal of benefiting the community (Halseth et al., 2016). In this section, I outline specific methods implemented for recruitment, protocol, gathering, meaning making, and ensuring quality. I also discuss ensuring the quality of this research. Because the methods are grounded in both Indigenous and western theoretical underpinnings, they incorporate both Indigenous and western approaches to research. When deciding to incorporate Indigenous methods as a non-Indigenous person it was important that I acknowledge a risk of appropriation and seek guidance

in how to best go forward with such methods (Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). With the support of my supervisor and Blackfoot Advisory Council I opted to incorporate Indigenous methods to honour Indigenous ways of knowing. To use these methods in a good way, it was imperative that I (1) collaborated with community; (2) ensured I had an understanding of colonialism in Canada; and (3) followed the principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy as I outlined earlier in this chapter (Archibald, 2008; Kirkness & Barnhardt, 2001; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). This process is illustrated in Figure 5. The complete map can be found in Appendix A.

**Figure 5**

*Adding Methods to the Map*



**Recruitment**

Kovach (2009) recommended that recruitment be based on relationship. She explained that relationship is required to offset the mistrust that the legacy of research has created for Indigenous peoples (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). Thus, because of the relational requirements, recruitment is not simply a matter of the researcher choosing storytellers; the process is more reciprocal. I understand this to mean that I, as a researcher, must engage with the communities I intend to do research with. Since beginning graduate studies in 2016 I have gradually formed relationships with my Blackfoot Advisory Council and other Blackfoot community members I have met at events and ceremonies. All members of the Blackfoot Advisory Council were invited to voluntarily participate. Further recruitment was conducted through my existing community relationships. Each council member as well as my supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, were asked to



invite other Blackfoot artists whom they believed might like to be a part of this research process. Blackfoot artists who expressed interest were then provided with my email so they could contact me to express interest in participation. Rather than contacting me, many Blackfoot artists opted to provide their contact information to me via a mutual relationship so that I could instead reach out to them. I then provided further information to those potential participants that expressed interest in participating and sent a formal invitation to participate in a research conversation via their preferred method of electronic communication (i.e., email, text, or instant messaging).

Eight Blackfoot artists opted to participate as storytellers in research conversations with me that took place between January and June of 2022. Four were members of the Blackfoot Advisory Council – Theron Black, Star Crop Eared Wolf, Perry Day Chief, and John Pepion. The additional four storytellers were Terran Last Gun, Florence Shone, Jared Tailfeathers, and Ryan Willert. Storytellers were from all four Blackfoot Nations including the Kainai-Blood First Nation, Peigan-Piikani First Nation, Siksika First Nation, and Blackfeet Amskapi Piikani Nation. I introduce each storyteller in more detail in the next chapter.

## **Protocol**

Collaborating on research with Indigenous communities requires that cultural protocol be followed (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). As a white researcher working with Blackfoot communities, it was important that I sought the expertise of Blackfoot community members for following appropriate protocol. The membership of the Blackfoot Advisory Council included a Blackfoot Elder, artist, and residential school survivor, Perry Day Chief, who agreed to provide additional guidance in following cultural protocol.

When considering protocol, I also thought about ethical considerations for research involving Indigenous people. To ensure that ethical protocols were followed I adhered to the

ethical protocols for research involving Indigenous peoples of Canada outlined in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement* (Government of Canada, 2014). By following the recommendations for applying the policy, I ensured that this research project: (a) included community engagement; (b) respected Blackfoot governing authorities; (c) respected Blackfoot customs and codes of practice; (d) could benefit the Blackfoot communities and research storytellers; (e) recognized Elders as knowledge holders; (f) respected privacy and confidentiality; and (g) involved community (i.e., the Blackfoot Advisory Council) in the interpretation and dissemination of results.

Additionally, intellectual property rights of the research are important to highlight. I am storing all data; however, if the Blackfoot Advisory Council requests the data at a later date for community use, my supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, and I will collaborate with the council as to how the community can use the research findings such that storyteller identities are not compromised. Storytellers were given the option to be identified or to have their identities remain confidential. All storytellers opted to use be identified by their names. The Blackfoot Advisory Council does not have access to these confidential identities and any future data sharing will be completely deidentified. This was explicitly discussed and agreed upon prior to conducting the research because the Blackfoot Advisory Council as a First Nation community has the rights to *ownership, control, access to and possession* (OCAP™) of research data. Guidelines for OCAP™ as laid out by the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC, 2014) were followed. The FNIGC (2014) has provided a definition of OCAP:

OCAP™ means that First Nations control data collection processes in their communities, and that they own, protect and control how their information is used. Access to First

Nations data is important and First Nations determine, under appropriate mandates and protocols, how access to external researchers are facilitated and respected. (p. 2)

## **Knowledge Gathering**

In keeping with my two primary methodological foundations, namely story and inward knowing, knowledge gathering was conducted in two different ways: (1) research conversations; and (2) reflexive journaling. Research conversations were open-ended, flexible and accommodating of oral story traditions (Kovach, 2009). Reflexive journaling as a method of knowledge gathering honoured inward ways of knowing (Kovach, 2009). Both of these forms of knowledge gathering are reflected in the understandings developed in this study, as detailed in the following chapters. Both research conversations and reflexive journaling were considered primary sources of knowledge but were incorporated in different ways. The stories shared in research conversations served as a foundation of knowledge that I then engaged with via listening and reflexive journaling. The journaling I did included notes on what stood out to me, what seemed the most emphasized by the storytellers, and how concepts connected. This then informed the construction of my concept maps, which I elaborate on in the meaning making section of this chapter.

### ***Research Conversations***

Research conversations are a flexible and unstructured method of collecting information congruent with Indigenous cultural protocols (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). Not to be mistaken with a typical Western research interview, research conversations are open-ended and involve reciprocity in a conversation where both parties engage rather than simply having the participant answer the researcher's questions (Kovach, 2009). Research conversations emphasize the importance of story and the storyteller's reflection and dialogue with the researcher

(Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). I used research conversations to discuss how Blackfoot artists' engagement with art in their communities has contributed to Blackfoot community survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic. As recommended by Archibald (2008), research conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed for the purpose of meaning making. This allowed me to listen and engage fully during research conversations while also providing an opportunity to listen again for further reflection and interpretation. Storytellers were given the option to engage in research conversations either face-to-face while following provincial Covid-19 health and safety guidelines (for instance, masked and/or distanced) or alternatively to meet via phone or a virtual conferencing service such as Zoom (Zoom Video Communications, 2020). See Appendix B for the guidelines used for engaging in research conversations.

### ***Journaling***

Throughout each phase of the research project, I engaged in reflexive journaling. Journaling offered a strategy for examining my subjective assumptions, beliefs and values throughout the research process (Ortlipp, 2008). It was also meant to reflect my intuition and inward knowing (Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009). Sharing reflections in the meaning making process offers transparency and an opportunity for readers to better understand the context of my subjective understandings (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

### **Meaning Making**

Following the framework of Indigenous storywork as outlined by Archibald (2008), meaning making should involve intuition and interpretation on the part of the researcher. This acknowledges the subjective nature of reality and respects that knowledge exists in story (Archibald, 2008). Following Archibald's (2008) guidance, I listened to each recording twice before transcribing, after first reflecting on what each storyteller and council member wanted me

to learn. I then demonstrated my meaning making process using *concept mapping*. Concept maps are a graphical and visual tool for both organizing and representing knowledge (Novak & Cañas, 2010). They depict concepts that can be represented by words, phrases or symbols and the relationships between those concepts, traditionally shown by unidirectional or bidirectional arrows linking the concepts (Novak & Cañas, 2010). The result is a visual map or maps that demonstrate a researcher's thought process or cognitive structure of what they have learned (Novak & Cañas, 2010). Concept maps offer meaningful learning that is sensory, creative, intellectual, and emotional (Wilson et al., 2016). As well, they help individuals create, interpret, and understand on a deeper level (Murry et al., 2013; Wilson et al., 2016). Concept maps allow the researcher to interact with the data or stories, uncover new relationships and view the information from a different perspective (Wilson et al., 2016).

Both Kovach (2009) and Archibald (2008) argued that there is a need for an interpretive and inductive method of meaning making, and I believe that concept mapping offers what is both an interpretive and inductive method, making it an appropriate method to use within an Indigenous methodology. The method of concept mapping encourages the construction of knowledge, or meaning making, in a meaningful way by facilitating the creative interaction between the researcher, their current cognitive structures and the new information that was presented in a storyteller's story (Wilson et al., 2016). I understand this to mean that I as a researcher can and should incorporate my own pre-existing and inward knowledge as well as my interpretation of the stories the storytellers share with me. In this way, concept mapping is a method that reflects a respect for interpretation of story as valid knowledge and lends itself well to including inward ways of knowing.

Based on my review of the literature, I believe that concept maps connect to Indigenous communities in several ways. First, concept maps are made and created in much the same way as art (Wilson et al., 2016). This is highly appropriate in research with Indigenous people because in many Indigenous communities, specifically Blackfoot communities, art is culture (St. Pierre, 2018). Art as a form of communication articulates cultural values and beliefs and allows self-expression beyond the typical restrictions of written or even spoken language (St. Pierre, 2018). Concept mapping requires creativity, which allows for a more holistic learning experience and allows voice to be shared in new ways (Wilson et al., 2016). The visual representation of knowledge may be seen as more accessible to community members across a broader range of educational and disciplinary backgrounds, offering an alternative to the typical written format of knowledge transmission in research (Murry et al., 2013).

For me, the most exciting and beautiful thing about concept mapping is that it truly lends itself to creativity and art. Being someone who researched the impact of art and creating, this is a method that seemed to fit so perfectly in a way that brings my project full circle. This method allowed me to participate in the process of making something in my research. I could create and share my own research story through something visual. Additionally, I used this method in a community-based way that included my Blackfoot Advisory Council (Murry et al., 2016). Together we co-created a concept map of the research process and of what we know and what we want to explore further. Finally, what concept mapping offers is a visual defense of how the researcher engages in meaning making. By being able to offer the audience a visual representation of your meaning making process, you can provide a sense of trustworthiness and rigor that may not otherwise be apparent in the sharing of your interpretations of story (A. T. Murry, personal communication, August 31, 2018).

In this way I was able to share my understandings and interpretations of the stories shared with me in the research conversations. Through this method of meaning making, I was also able to integrate my journal reflections in a thoughtful way. Journal reflections included my standouts, takeaways, and drafted maps that helped me to consider what was important to include within my maps. Further, these reflections drew connections between concepts that I was then able to organize into the maps.

### **Ensuring Quality**

Ensuring the quality of this research required both relational accountability and the related process of encircling.

### ***Relational Accountability***

For this research to hold value, relational accountability as I defined it earlier must be upheld (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). It was a priority for me to be accountable to all my relations and the voices, knowledges and worldviews of the Blackfoot communities with whom I engaged. Several scholars have emphasized a need to measure the quality of community-based research by considering the benefit to the communities where research is conducted (e.g., Castleden et al., 2012; Greenhalgh et al., 2016; Halseth et al., 2016; Kovach, 2008; Smith, 2012; Socholotiuk et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). This means that in addition to being in collaboration with community members throughout the research process, I considered how this research could benefit the Blackfoot communities, Advisory Council and storytellers involved.

Some possible benefits of this research include: (1) contributing to a body of decolonizing survivance literature that highlights the historical and ongoing strength and resistance of Blackfoot and Indigenous people in Canada (Kovach, 2008; Vizenor, 2008); (2) offering a space for Blackfoot community members to share their stories (Kovach, 2008; P. Day

Chief, personal communication, March 6, 2020); and (3) providing a strong defense for funding of future events and similar projects in Blackfoot communities as well as other Indigenous communities across Canada.

### ***Encircling***

As stated earlier, to ensure quality in research, I must engage in ongoing conversation and collaboration with Blackfoot community members, a process some researchers have found to benefit the community involved (Ball & Janyst, 2008; Halseth et al., 2016). To establish accountability and credibility and to increase benefit to the community, I followed a process of *encircling* (Wilson, 2008). After my initial meaning making, storytellers and my Blackfoot Advisory Council were invited to engage in additional one-on-one conversations with me about the findings. They were then invited to read, review and revise all findings as they saw fit (Archibald, 2008; Halseth et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008). This helped to ensure that the community had control of how they are represented and that findings would meet the goal of benefitting the community (Archibald, 2008; Halseth et al., 2016; Wilson, 2008).

The encircling process occurred between June 2022 and January 2023. All storytellers were offered one-on-one encircling conversations to discuss the drafted maps. Seven of the eight storytellers engaged in these initial encircling conversations at least once and collaboratively contributed to the maps, offering feedback and recommendations for change, as needed. After adjusting the maps to reflect the recommended changes, all eight storytellers were provided with the revised maps and were offered another opportunity to provide feedback. At that point, only minor changes were requested, and all storytellers approved the maps. Additionally, each storyteller reviewed and provided permission to use the direct quotes that appear in this dissertation.





## **CHAPTER FOUR: MAPPING THE STORIES**

This chapter begins with an introduction of the storytellers who engaged in research conversations with me and the stories they shared. Following their introductions, I share the findings of my meaning making process in visual concept maps that are supported by quotes and interpretations from our research conversations.

### **Conversations with Blackfoot Artists**

I had the pleasure of engaging in research conversations with eight Blackfoot artists between January and June of 2022: Theron Black, Star Crop Eared Wolf, Perry Day Chief, Terran Last Gun, Florence Shone, John Pepion, Jared Tailfeathers, and Ryan Willert. Seven of the eight artists engaged in audio-recorded research conversations and the following encircling process. One artist, Florence Shone, engaged in a research conversation that was not recorded due to technical issues. Continued communication with Shone was made difficult by additional technical issues and scheduling conflicts; therefore, while her contribution was included in my reflections and must be acknowledged, she was unable to engage in the initial part of the encircling process and I was unable to listen to our research conversation multiple times or draw direct quotes from it. Despite these challenges, Shone was able to review the concept maps on her own and approved the final maps along with the other storytellers in the last stage of the encircling process.

Each storyteller provided a brief introduction of themselves, shared at the beginning of each conversation summary below, to allow readers of this paper to better understand the context of their perspectives. The introductions were provided by the storytellers. I then made minor edits to provide some continuity in writing style, tense, and perspective as some had written in first person. These introductions and conversation overviews are ordered alphabetically by last

name. All conversations started with an informed consent process that included introductions in cases where we were previously unknown to one another. Storytellers who I met with virtually were then offered tobacco and a gift that would be sent in the mail or given in person at a later date to begin the research conversations.

### **Theron Black**

Theron Black holds an Addictions and Mental Health Counselling degree and a Bachelor of Indigenous Social Work. Black is currently completing his final year of his Master of Education degree with the University of Calgary and will work on pursuing a PhD next. Black is a respected member of the Kainai First Nation (Blood Reserve) and an advocate for his people. He is passionate about speaking about issues faced by Indigenous people and supporting the change that needs to happen. Black also enjoys sharing culture through powwow dancing and professional development. As an engaged member of his community, he prioritizes building relationships and understanding the process of healing together. In addition to doing his own artwork, Black runs leather workshops and coordinates art programs for Indigenous people in the Calgary and Lethbridge areas.

I met Black at a cultural art workshop that was held at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School in the Spring of 2018. Black was one of the artists who facilitated this workshop. He engaged as a storyteller in my master's research, which was based on this workshop, and opted to continue a relationship as a member of my Blackfoot Advisory Council since then. Volunteering to engage in another research conversation with me for my doctoral research, Black and I had a research conversation for the current study on January 31, 2022. From the comforts of each of our own homes, we met virtually over Zoom.

Black began by sharing how art provided him with a financial living during the pandemic, allowing him to be comfortable and giving him the means to help other members of his community. He then shifted into speaking about how art is healing and emphasized the importance of bringing art to his community. Black shared that he hosts art workshops for this reason. When facilitating art workshops, he intentionally incorporates cultural teachings, self-awareness, and reflection on how to be a better person. He spoke about how many people in his workshops struggle with anxiety, depression, and PTSD, and shared that encouraging intentional reflection to build self-awareness in addition to forming human connections, treating everyone with compassion and love, and appreciating them and their artwork contributes to healing.

Elaborating on Blackfoot teachings of self-awareness, Black said, *“we come from a beautiful culture, where fear is not known in our ways.”* He continued to explain that *“basically, it is just living in the now.”* Black explained that living in the now, as opposed to the past or the future, was protective against fear, stress, and helplessness, particularly during the Covid-19 pandemic. He then spoke of engagement in art as being spiritual and as a method for being present in the moment, thus contributing to wellbeing.

Black continued on to share his own life experience, explaining that he had in the past struggled with addiction and found healing through art, land, culture, and spirituality. He explained that spirituality to him is self-awareness, coming to better know oneself and one’s culture. He then spoke of how art was a way to foster this awareness of spirituality, self, and culture. Black affirmed that *“if we can paint, we can do our own therapy.”* He explained that art helps bring awareness to inner thoughts and feelings without becoming stuck. He shared that being present with this awareness is what allows for processing, healing, and moving forward in a good way.

Black continued by emphasizing the importance of and his appreciation for cultural teachings and Blackfoot ways of being. He shared that to Blackfoot people *“our Elders are our PhDs.”* He explained that creative expression and self-awareness were necessary to understand the stories and teachings shared by Elders. Black shared that from speaking with and listening to Elders and becoming more aware of himself, his culture, and spirit, he had learned that Blackfoot people are warriors and learned the importance of loving connection with others. He spoke of how balancing both warrior spirit and loving connection or relations was a source of power for him as a Blackfoot person. He said, *“We give what we have, we feed people who come here and treat them well. And that gets reciprocated.”* He shared that from his perspective relationships are wealth and having good, loving relationships is protective against harmful thinking and becoming stuck and pulled by negative emotions. He described art as a way to connect community and bring people together, connecting them to culture and spirit, and supporting them in returning to Blackfoot ways of knowing.

I reflected on Black’s sharing and said to him then that I knew I would need time to process and return to this conversation to better understand a fuller picture of what he was sharing. What stood out to me most in that moment was the importance of being present, and I asked Black to elaborate on how being present was healing.

He explained that through life experience people have come to know that doing art allows them to look back in their life, bringing on emotions in the present that can then be seen, heard, understood, and healed. Theron shared that sometimes these were messages from ancestral spirits that come when being present with art. He then spoke about how facilitation from others can help a person learn and come to understand through relating with others.

Theron and I agreed that there was something intuitive about knowing that being present with art is healing, and knowing exactly how it heals was both complex and individual. We then spoke about how we came from different cultural backgrounds but held similar appreciation for being present. We agreed that being present was healing and allowed people not to be stuck in unhelpful or negative thinking that tends to come when we are focused on the past or the future. We further agreed that worries about the future with Covid-19 produced significant fear for many people, and that being present allowed us to unhook from this fear and continue living well.

Throughout this conversation, Black brought up examples of living through and healing from addictions. I asked him if he would share his perspective on the impact of Covid-19 on addictions in his community. He shared that even through Covid-19 he did not have a desire to return to addiction. He attributed this to his healing and connection with art. He expressed gratitude for the loving and positive energies in his life that supported his ongoing wellness. He recognized that others might struggle more during the pandemic, and then shared how he has been grateful for witnessing the healing of others, speaking then of seeing many others who engage in his art workshops express themselves and heal as they connect with self and culture through art. He shared his own experience of healing and then explained that healing the self is necessary before you can help others. Black referred again to warrior spirit, explaining that “*a true warrior will go in to help other people.*”

Finally, Black shared his own experience with physical illness and the importance of cultural teachings and healing. Black explained that he previously had cancer and emphasized that his culture brought him strength and healing at that time in his life. After learning of his diagnosis and initially being faced with fear, sadness, and anger, Black turned to the teachings he

had learned about being present. He recognized that fear of what the future might hold was not helpful and was making him weaker. He encouraged those around him not to be afraid and actively decided to fight and continue living his life. He requested loved ones to be with him without fear. Black sought support from a Blackfoot Medicine Man while also receiving assessments from Western medicines. He attended ceremony and then actively decided to continue to live his life in the present. In this way he put aside anger, fear, and stress, recognizing that these would only serve to worsen his life and his prognosis. Black is now cancer-free, and he attributed his improved health most to Blackfoot ways of being, continued practice of being present, engagement in ceremony, and being a warrior who fought for himself and continued to help others.

Again, we shared similar perspectives while coming from different backgrounds. I shared my own understanding of the impacts of stress on physical health with Black, explaining that through both life experience and several years of education as a student in psychology I have come to understand that stress is a significant source of many illnesses and diseases.

In a final reflection before ending our conversation I shared what stood out to me most as Black had shared his stories. I expressed a belief that there is space for incorporating the knowledge Black shared in a counselling psychology context. I reflected that I could see significant benefit in incorporating a focus on being present, healing through art, connecting with others, and fostering awareness of self, culture, and spirituality.

### **Star Crop Eared Wolf**

Star Crop Eared Wolf is a *Niitsiitapi* multidisciplinary artist, curator, and member of the Kainai Nation. *Niitsiitapi* means original people in the Blackfoot language (F. Shone, personal communication, February 2, 2023). Crop Eared Wolf graduated from the University of

Lethbridge with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Native art and museum studies. Her past and current media include painting, sculpture, photography, video, and beading. She uses her art practices to explore themes centered around land, culture, and social and political issues impacting Indigenous peoples.

I first met Crop Eared Wolf in March 2018 at the cultural art workshop that informed my master's research. Crop Eared Wolf was one of the artists who facilitated that workshop and was a storyteller in my master's research and has since continued to work with me as a member of my Blackfoot Advisory Council. She opted to engage in a virtual research conversation with me on March 18, 2022, for the current research.

As we began our conversation, I could hear the TV playing in the background of Crop Eared Wolf's home while she updated me on how busy she had been with her art and work recently. She informed me that her son was watching Ghostbusters in the living room while she spoke with me. Immediately I thought about how well this moment demonstrated resilience and strength. Crop Eared Wolf was a mother of two who was working from home that day while balancing motherhood and multiple jobs during a pandemic – and she was smiling. We related in how busy we had each been during the pandemic up to that point, and then laughed together about the changes in this research project caused by the pandemic before proceeding to each sip our coffees and shift into talking about survivance during the pandemic.

Crop Eared Wolf began by recognizing that Covid-19 had impacted the lives of everyone. She explained that the pandemic impacted artists negatively at first because art was typically an in-person and hands-on activity, so everything moving online was initially *“limiting and shocking at first.”* She then moved into talking about how people adapted, moving their work online and focusing on social media. At this point, Crop Eared Wolf said that *“things were*



*starting to look brighter.*” Her approach was to “*create things, take pictures of them, and put them online.*” Additionally, she taught art workshops online. She shared the story of the first time she taught online. She talked about some of the challenges of this transition, explaining that people had to be on mute because too many people talking at once or having background noise online was distracting. This resulted in it feeling like Crop Eared Wolf was “*talking basically to [her]self.*” It also made it more challenging to get feedback from students and to communicate to individual students or offer support to those students who might have needed it. She then shared that while there were challenges, some things were made easier by being online. For example, she explained that in an online setting she “*didn’t need to stop what [she] was doing and go talk with people, [and could] just say what she needed to say,*” being better able to stay on track. She shared that while there were positive and negative aspects of the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, ultimately, she was glad to be able to continue teaching during the pandemic and believed this demonstrated the resilience of a Blackfoot artist.

Crop Eared Wolf then shared about an in-person class she taught during the pandemic. She explained how Covid-19 required people to follow health and safety protocols that at times created barriers in the classroom. For example, she shared that while wearing masks, some people wouldn’t talk or couldn’t hear as well, resulting in a quieter environment and less relationship building than she was used to. However, she said that “*the art didn’t suffer for it*” and explained that people were still able to learn and engage, even if differently.

Crop Eared Wolf returned to speak about how Blackfoot artists adapted during the Covid-19 pandemic by moving online and following safety protocols as required. She emphasized adaptability, sharing that “*this is what we have to do to sell artwork, this is the new way*” and explaining that she “*witnessed the ability for Indigenous artists to still be relevant –*

*adapting to the challenges that were occurring.*” She continued, *“it never stopped, artists kept creating, if not creating even more.”* Further she said that Covid-19 *“brought out the artist in [people]”* who were trying to find things to do and to add purpose to their days spent at home.

At this point, I took a moment to reflect on what had been shared. The innovation, persistence, resilience, and adaptability of Blackfoot artists is what stood out to me at that point. Further, I was curious about how engaging in art helped people cope during the pandemic and asked Crop Eared Wolf to elaborate.

Crop Eared Wolf shared her perspective that art is therapeutic and could help reduce stress. She noted that the pandemic brought significant stress and fear, describing worries about what the future might hold. She explained that engaging with art could help shift focus away from worries and that the repetitive actions of something like beadwork could be relaxing. Further, she explained that *“through the chaos, you are working on something and creating something beautiful”* she said that such creating could *“build your self-esteem”* and instill a sense of pride and confidence in oneself. Further, she explained that when lacking control in the world, creating art was something that people could have control over and could provide people with something to do, helping people to feel less anxious.

Watching myself on video again after this conversation, I could see that I was nodding persistently while Crop Eared Wolf shared her perspective on art as being therapeutic. I reflected back that it seemed that art could help settle the mind, relieve stress, and connect with self. Further, I noted that it seemed that creating a piece of artwork and having a finished product could instill pride and a sense of accomplishment and could also serve as a reminder that we are each able to bring beauty into the world. Crop Eared Wolf agreed with these reflections.

Thinking about previous conversations with Crop Eared Wolf, I asked her to share her thoughts on if art contributes to survivance because of the connection between art and culture. Crop Eared Wolf shared that *“the traditional use of art is to represent yourself, your people, and who you are, [as well as to] share stories and pass on knowledge.”* She explained that oral sharing of stories is itself a form of art. Crop Eared Wolf then shared a story of how her and her mother would bead and her daughter would draw while they were all home together during the pandemic. In their time spent together doing art, they would share stories and pass on traditional knowledge. As if now knowing they were being spoken about, one of her children came to Crop Eared Wolf to ask for help – she had to press play on Ghostbusters! Crop Eared Wolf helped her child and then returned to continue describing how the pandemic pushed her outside of her comfort zone, encouraging her to explore Blackfoot territory on her own. Reconnecting with the land provided her with ideas for artwork. She was then able to pass on knowledge through art, which she described as demonstrating resilience and power.

Wrapping up our discussion, I thanked Crop Eared Wolf for her time and expressed excitement to return to our conversation and listen again to learn more.

### **Perry Day Chief**

Perry Day Chief is a Niitsiitapi Elder from the Kainai First Nation and was born in Cardston, Alberta. He has been in southern Alberta most of his life. He attended school there and is a residential school survivor. Day Chief is trained in many trades and is a self-taught artist. After buying himself a camera, he built his skills in photography. He also works with wood, metal, and leather and whatever materials he can get his hands on. Leather is what he enjoys working with most.

In addition to creating and crafting, Day Chief enjoys being outdoors on Blackfoot land, walking, sightseeing, taking pictures, fishing, hunting, riding horses, singing at powwows, and engaging in traditional hand games and ceremonies. He also enjoys teaching anyone who wants to learn from him, especially young students. Day Chief has taught leatherwork to young students attending Kainai Junior High School and is working toward running camps where he can teach more students art and traditional Blackfoot teachings. He believes that everyone has a hidden talent that will come out once given a chance to learn.

Like the other members of my Blackfoot Advisory Council, I first met Day Chief at a cultural art workshop hosted at Tatsikiisapo'p Middle School in the Spring of 2018. Since then, Day Chief and I have maintained regular contact. In addition to being a member of the Blackfoot Advisory Council, Day Chief has provided me with guidance in following cultural protocol over the past five years. Day Chief was the only storyteller I had the opportunity to visit in person for our research conversation. I drove down to his trailer on his land in the Kainai First Nation on a cloudy Spring day in 2022 – a drive I had done several times over the years prior. Upon arriving, Day Chief welcomed me with his usual greeting of a hug and warm smile. We started our conversation inside his trailer, where we began with banter and catching up. As we transitioned the conversation, I offered him tobacco and we began our research conversation.

Unfortunately, our initial conversation was not recorded due to technical errors. In the trailer, I recall Day Chief speaking about art as being an activity he engaged in throughout the pandemic to give himself something to do and to elicit positive emotions and a sense of calming. He spoke of how creating was a relaxing process. Further, he shared stories of creating artwork for other people and spoke of the purpose and sense of pride and joy this gave him as well as the joy it offered those receiving the artwork. Additionally, he spoke about the importance of

teaching culture through art. He explained that he wanted to run workshops and camps where young people could learn on the land and be given practical skills, including several crafting skills, as well as traditional knowledge. After speaking here for some time, Day Chief asked if I would like to go for a drive. I agreed, and we set out in his truck to explore his land. As we drove, I recall Day Chief talking about some of the threats of Covid-19. Specifically, I remember him mentioning that Covid-19 resulted in job loss and caused significant fear and loneliness among many people.

Driving off-road, we came across a herd of wild horses, something I had not had an opportunity to see in this way up close before. At one point we stopped and walked on the land. The canyons we walked atop of were strikingly beautiful with views of mountains in the distant horizon. There was a cloud covering that day that made all the colours muted in a way that softened the entire landscape. There wasn't as much conversation at this time, we were just enjoying our time outside while connecting to the land. Returning to the truck, Day Chief shared that this drive and walk was something he would do regularly during the pandemic. It was a safe activity he could enjoy alone, and by connecting with land he would feel more present and calm and would also get ideas to bring into his artwork. He could then craft and create and continue to foster this connection with land while being present with his crafting. Upon returning to his trailer, Day Chief and I expressed gratitude to one another for the visit we had before parting ways. I returned to my car and drove home feeling lighter and calmer than I had before our visit.

Realizing later that I had lost the audio recording of our conversation due to technical errors, I reached out to Day Chief to request an additional conversation to ensure I could reflect more on what he shared and could quote him directly in my writing. Day Chief agreed, and we met virtually to have another research conversation on December 30, 2022.

Again, we started our conversation with banter and check-ins on one another's health and wellbeing. Day Chief started this time by sharing how things changed when Covid-19 initially hit. He explained that powwows, ceremonies, and gatherings were mostly cancelled and shared that he stayed away from such gatherings to avoid contracting Covid-19. He then shared that *"on the other hand, it gave me a chance to work on my crafts, and that gets me into my own little world and helps me to relax."* He spoke about increased isolation happening parallel to increased time for himself, highlighting both the negative and positive outcomes of the pandemic. Day Chief recognized that many people found isolation very challenging and explained that the reduced socialization could cause loneliness. However, he explained that he was able to cope more easily by engaging in arts and crafts and by spending time on the land.

Day Chief spoke about ongoing precautions he was taking to protect himself from Covid-19. He shared that he was *"staying home and being safe."* He then shared how he was taking precautions now that he had returned to work driving a school bus. Happy to speak of his work, Day Chief shared that he *"became a driver and a teacher for these kids"* explaining that he spent time teaching the Blackfoot language while driving children to school. He emphasized the importance of learning to speak Blackfoot.

Returning to talk about his art and craft work, Day Chief said, *"every time I come up with a new idea, I feel good because I am going to do something I have never tried before, and that really helps me through this pandemic."* Day Chief shared that he had spent a lot of time alone outside on the land. For example, he shared stories of going to the mountains to hunt, take pictures, or to simply spend time on his own. He said, *"when I am up in the mountains it also gives me ideas for my [art]work, and that is the good part about it."*

I reflected on what Day Chief had shared so far and summarized that spending time doing art and being outside were relaxing and beneficial for coping during the pandemic. Recalling another conversation we had previously, I then asked Day Chief how he was able to continue engaging with cultural practices while isolated.

Day Chief emphasized that people can “*pray at home*” when unable to attend ceremonies. He explained that even in ceremony people are encouraged to help themselves by praying for themselves. He spoke about the benefits of attending ceremony and speaking with Elders, and followed up by again emphasizing that these resources ultimately help people learn to help themselves. Speaking again about the threats of Covid-19, Day Chief explained that conversations with Elders are typically in-person, and he spoke to there being limitations of what can be shared over the phone. For some people this meant having less access to cultural and spiritual support during the pandemic. Day Chief emphasized for another time the importance of teaching people to help themselves by connecting to spirit or culture on their own.

Day Chief shared a story of making a belt for his niece as well as a purse and hand game set for her mother. He explained that he had to make and then re-make this belt to improve the quality. He shared pride in his work and said that he would not consider a project complete until he is satisfied with what he had created. He explained that when giving his art to others he “*would rather see someone else smile than to make [him]self happy.*” Day Chief connected this to another story, in which he had been given a buffalo hide that was frozen. He shared that he brought the hide to a man in a small town who did tanning and taxidermy to ask that he repair it. Day Chief left the hide with this man, and when he returned to pick it up and pay for it he found that the hide had holes in it. Day Chief explained to the man that he had intended to have this hide tanned so he could use the buffalo robe to paint the stories of his life on. He explained that

this was a traditional practice for telling stories through art. Day Chief said that he could not use this hide for this purpose, but would use it for other crafts. He told the man he would bring another hide in once he could get one without holes. The man then told Day Chief that he would gift a tanned hide to him, which Day Chief said made him “[*feel*] so good.” He shared that “*it feels good knowing there are other people out there that don’t charge for everything.*”

Day Chief and I ended our conversation discussing our recent holidays and both expressed looking forward to our next in-person visit that would likely be in the Summer of 2023 when Day Chief could meet my son after his birth.

### **Terran Last Gun**

Terran Last Gun/Saakwaynaamah’kaa (born 1989, Browning, Montana) is a Piikani (Blackfeet) citizen and visual artist. Last Gun’s work centers around the process of colour exploration and the visual documentation of nature, the cosmos, cultural narratives, and recollections of home. Often employing geometric aesthetics, he is contributing to an ancient Indigenous North American narrative through various media that include ledger drawing, printmaking, painting, and photography.

Last Gun received his BFA in Museum Studies and AFA in Studio Arts from the Institute of American Indian Arts in 2016. He has received awards from the First Peoples Fund, 2020 Artists in Business Leadership Fellowship, and the Santa Fe Art Institute 2018 Story Maps Fellowship. Most recently, he was named one of the 2022 12 New Mexico Artists to Know Now in *Southwest Contemporary* (formerly *THE Magazine*). He currently lives and works in Santa Fe, New Mexico.

I met Last Gun virtually over Zoom for our research conversation on May 23, 2022. He was in an office he used for creating his artwork in Santa Fe, New Mexico and I was in my home



office. Last Gun reflected on what he had done throughout the pandemic and began by sharing that he had been laid off early in the pandemic, which pushed him into focusing on his artwork full-time. He shifted his art medium as well and expanded from screen printing into also doing ledger drawings and murals. Last Gun shared that he *“had been sitting with antique paper for a number of years and wasn’t ready to use them”* until then. He then spent 2020 *“hustling”* to promote his artwork on social media.

Considering his art and what he is inspired by, Last Gun explained that a lot of his art has stemmed from Blackfoot painted lodges and then elaborated to say that *“it goes back to ancient past, our history, our culture, how long we have been in Montana and Alberta – for 10,000 plus years – and then it goes into the future ... thinking about the next 10,000 plus years [here].”* Last Gun spoke more about considering the past and the future and highlighted that the Blackfoot Nations have different histories after being split by the international border and influenced more by either the Canadian or American governments. Last Gun explained that his artwork is full of stories, particularly Amskapi Piikani stories.

Last Gun shifted back into talking about the impact the pandemic had on him and his art. Feeling isolated in the pandemic, Last Gun shared that *“just to keep busy, [he] kept trying to create.”* He said that it pushed him to *“take risks and challenge [him]self.”* Further, he took online language courses, which *“helped [him] feel connected to home ... and describe [his] work in Blackfoot.”* He explained that taking this course got Last Gun involved with the Blackfeet Community College, where he was then able to connect with others across the Blackfoot Confederacy via Zoom. Last Gun took more courses and soon went on to collaboratively teach a course on Blackfoot painted lodges with two other Piikani community members, together representing three generations. He shared that painted lodges are the cosmic worldview of

Blackfoot people. He explained that these painted lodges included images and teachings of the land, mountains, hills, and plains as well as stories of important people and Blackfoot origins and of what he referred to as the helper and the authority. Last Gun shared that in this course they focused on different aspects and teachings of the lodge. Further, he expressed a belief that courses like this one that bring people together in a virtual environment to engage in cultural teachings and activities such as art are an excellent example of Blackfoot survivance.

At this point in our conversation I reflected on what Last Gun had shared. What struck me at that time was that in some ways this pandemic shed light on pre-existing disconnection between the different communities within the Blackfoot Confederacy and pushed people who had been distanced to connect more in a virtual setting. We took a moment to acknowledge that while the Covid-19 pandemic came with many challenges and threats, it also created new opportunities and showed us where we were already struggling. For example, it shed a light on the fact that many people and communities were isolated or cut off from one another and then encouraged new ways to connect, such as via Zoom and other virtual mediums and social media.

Last Gun described a recent art piece he had been working on that depicted aspects of a traditional, ceremonial story of Scarface. He explained again that Blackfoot stories “*are so connected to the cosmos, our solar system, planets, moon, and stars*” and shared that this went into his art piece. He explained that this took him several months to complete because it involved important time spent researching Blackfoot history, listening to stories of Scarface, seeking advice as to what was appropriate to depict given the ceremonial nature of this story, and reflecting on how he wanted to represent what he learned to share with others. Last Gun explained that this was an example of Blackfoot survivance because it involved the continuation

of learning and sharing traditional stories and was a way to connect with others within his community.

I reflected again at this point in our conversation, this time noticing how art was a way to learn and share, both contributing to a greater sense of connection with others in the past, present, and future. Last Gun agreed and then shared the image he had just described. This was a black and white image that looked simple upon first glance but had so much thought and story informing it. Last Gun spent some time then sharing part of the story of Scarface as he explained what each component of this artwork represented. We discussed how important it is to be sensitive to what can be shared, how, and with who. Last Gun explained that when working with a ceremonial story such as this it is important for him to consult with Elders and others. In this way, even the process of creating was one that supported connection with others.

At this point in our conversation, I was curious about how – if at all – engaging in art contributed to Last Gun’s own wellness during the pandemic. He shared that creating helped him stay busy, providing him with something to do that felt meaningful and also helping to keep negative thoughts or worries related to the pandemic off of his mind. Further, he shared that for him creating also was a means to meeting financial needs. From there he went into explaining that he is always considering how art can connect him and others to one another as well as to culture and history. He explained that connecting to culture through art and contributing to the ongoing history and stories of Blackfoot people is especially beneficial for him and makes him feel more connected and provides a sense of wellbeing for him.

Quickly pausing our conversation to plug in his laptop, Last Gun and I shared a laugh as we reflected on how we have adapted and are continuing to adapt to spending more time in virtual spaces with others. Last Gun then returned to the topic of wellness. He spoke about the

importance of representation from Blackfoot people and how empowering it was to see Blackfoot history, ideas, and stories shared in art. Further, he shared that *“it is such a rewarding experience to see a finished piece and to know personally what it connects back to.”* He explained that continuing stories through his art and creating artwork that was meaningful to him made him feel good and proud of his work. Last Gun shared that he tries to insert himself into more general art areas where Piikani, Blackfoot, and Indigenous voices are not typically seen. He explained that it is important to him to share in these spaces where Indigenous people are typically misrepresented, correcting the narrative by sharing Blackfoot stories through his art.

Wrapping up our discussion, we ended by talking about how knowledge can be represented visually in art and I shared my intention to create concept maps in my research. Last Gun expressed support for this way of sharing and expressed gratitude for being invited to share his voice in this research conversation. Before ending our conversation, Last Gun shared a final reflection that *“art is communication”* and *“it is healing, whether you are creating or just appreciating that artwork.”*

### **Florence Shone**

Florence Shone is a self-taught artist who originates from Piikani Nation and is a descendant of Many Swans, a Chief and signer of Treaty 7. Shone is a 60's scoop survivor. She resides in Edmonton and has been painting for twenty years, working mainly in acrylic paint but also watercolour and clay. Shone explores through colour and imagery landscapes and historical portrait work as subjects in her art of southern Alberta and the original inhabitants; the Niitsitapi. Shone creates paintings from portrait to Plein-air, working outdoors on-site. Her artworks use the mediums of pastels, graphite, and watercolour. The creation of portrait art brings awareness of the people that were here from time immemorial, this can include important cultural symbols of

sustenance and spirituality through the eagle and buffalo and landscapes where her ancestors lived.

Shone has participated in art shows in Edmonton and Calgary (2010 People of the Plains, Calgary Stampede, Light and Darkness, Art of Sixties Scoop Survivors). She has also taught art for youth at the Sun and Moon Artisan Society and the Glenbow Museum. Her work is in the collection of Alberta Foundation of the Arts. Notable owners of her work include the former Deputy Prime Minister of Canada Anne McClellan and former late Lieutenant Governor of Alberta Lois Hole.

I met Shone virtually over Zoom for our research conversation on May 30, 2022. Our conversation started off with technical difficulties. Unfortunately, I was unable to hear her, and we had to do a lot of trouble shooting before eventually deciding to use Zoom for video and the phone for audio. Once we finally had ourselves organized, we were able to laugh about these technical difficulties and both shared that this was not the first and was unlikely to be the last time we would have such difficulties while having meetings online. Even after our trouble shooting, the audio for our research conversation did not record properly and so I was unable to re-listen to our conversation. Due to busy and conflicting schedules, Shone and I were unable to meet again, so the summary here is based on what I was able to remember after initial reflection.

We began our conversation with introductions. Shone was in her art studio where I could see beautiful artwork on the walls and the easel behind her and I was in my home office. Shone shared with me that she was a child of the 60's scoop and was raised outside of Blackfoot culture. She shared with me how art has played a big role in her life, helping her to reflect and to share her lived experiences through art. She explained that this helped her connect to herself, supporting awareness of her self, culture, and spirit. She further shared how creating pieces in

which she can express where she is at emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually has offered a sense of healing.

Shone shared that during the Covid-19 pandemic, art was again a way of expressing herself and sharing where she was at. She spoke of art as something that helped her get through the challenges brought on by the pandemic. She shared a piece of art that she painted during the pandemic with me. It was a striking image of a woman wearing a mask. The bright blue of the mask popped out against the yellow background of the painting, and I recall thinking of how front and centre Covid-19 was in this image. After sharing this image with me I remember Shone saying that she often paints people she knows and things that she knows.

Sometime during our conversation, I remember her explaining that from her perspective it was impossible to separate art from who she is. At this point I asked if she saw art as something that connected her with culture, and Shone explained that defining culture was complex, particularly given that she was not raised Blackfoot. A statement Shone made that struck me was essentially that she did art as a human being, not as someone connecting with one particular culture, but more so as a person connecting with her humanness.

In talking further about how Shone coped or demonstrated survivance through the Covid-19 pandemic, she said again that she cannot separate herself from art, explaining that everything she has survived, she has survived as an artist. What stood out to me while she spoke about survivance as an artist during the Covid-19 pandemic was that engaging in art seemed to offer her a space to be introspective and self aware. Further, it was a way to express herself and connect with others and was a way to cope with fear and loss. Finally, I recall Shone sharing that during the pandemic she recognized what was outside of her control and shared that engaging in

art was something she could control in that she could choose to create and put something beautiful into the world.

Shone spoke about art again as a way of sharing stories in a non-verbal way. We spoke of the art piece she shared again and how one painting can be interpreted in so many ways the same way a story can be interpreted in so many ways. For example, within the one piece there was an image of resilience and of a woman who was doing what she needed to survive the pandemic and there was also an image of woman who had likely been faced with grief and loss as well as fear during the pandemic.

I know that she shared more, but without being able to listen again these are the points that stood out most to me from my conversation with Shone. The technical difficulties I experienced with Shone truly highlight some of the challenges that came with the Covid-19 pandemic, and our determination to do what we could to make necessary adjustments was a demonstration of adaptability and perseverance in the face of such challenges.

### **John Pepion**

John Isaiah Pepion is a Plains Indian graphic artist from the Piikani Band of the Blackfoot Confederacy. He is based out of the Blackfeet reservation in north-central Montana, where the Rocky Mountains meet the plains. He is best known for his ledger art, which is an art tradition that developed in Plains tribes: as the buffalo hide they traditionally used for painting became scarce, Plains people were forced to adapt by making artwork on ledger paper from accounting books. Pepion comes from a family of artists, and ledger art has been in his family for hundreds of years. Pepion began teaching as a Blackfoot artist near the start of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020.

I met Pepion in March 2018 at the cultural art workshop where I met all members of my Blackfoot Advisory Council. Pepion was a storyteller in my master's research and chose to engage in a virtual research conversation with me on March 25, 2022, for my doctoral research.

Pepion began by sharing that prior to when the pandemic hit the Blackfoot community in Montana very few people had a social media or internet presence. He explained that people had to find new ways of selling their art and that the Covid-19 pandemic pushed Blackfoot artists forward into the online world. He shared how people in his community began to share their talents widely, highlighting strengths, stories, and skills of his community.

Pepion spoke about opportunities that came from the pandemic, specifically sharing that he was presented with an opportunity to teach high school art. Additionally, he was asked to paint murals for the school he worked with. He shared that since the beginning of the pandemic *“two years [had] gone by and [he] is an art teacher now and [he] is a muralist.”* He shared that *“a lot of the murals we are doing are instilling pride in our communities because [they are] engaging our community members [and encouraging] them to ask [questions about culture and Blackfoot history].”* He elaborated to say, *“the murals bring identity, resilience, and pride in our communities.”*

Pepion shared that being a Blackfoot art teacher working with Blackfoot students was empowering for many students, allowing them to see a successful Blackfoot person and to learn about culture as well as art skills in his class.

Pepion said he was impressed by how Blackfoot artists seemed to flourish during the pandemic, demonstrating resilience and adaptability when they shifted online. I reflected at that point and considered how the community has been innovative and adaptable in shifting to an online space. Further, the opportunities that people seized during the pandemic also stood out to



me as a significant strength. I asked Pepion to elaborate on how he has seen art contribute to the survivance of his students during the pandemic.

Pepion shared that the biggest challenge initially was getting supplies to the students. After that was managed and classes started, he noticed that *“it gave the students something to do, especially when they could not leave their households.”* Further, he shared that engaging in art *“helped the students move along”* during the pandemic, continuing to live life despite the many threats that the pandemic posed. Pepion elaborated to say that *“art is healing. I see it healing me and my community.”*

Pepion shared that it could be challenging to teach art online, expressing a preference for being in-person for hands-on involvement. I agreed with these challenges and related this to my own job as a psychologist, sharing a perspective that it can feel like some connection is missing when online. Pepion agreed and spoke about how Covid-19 led to significant isolation, separating families and other relationships and being a barrier to attending ceremonies. However, he said, *“it was a very difficult time, but I also think it made us stronger and [made us] figure out new ways to work with each other as a confederacy.”* He then spoke about how the shift to virtual relating allowed people who had been separated by the imaginary line that makes up the U.S.A-Canada border to reconnect and build relationships. Further, he shared that this shift also removed barriers between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, explaining that sharing Blackfoot art more widely was *“making non-Indigenous people more interested in why we are doing this kind of work and the kind of artwork we are doing,”* sharing that he had since been asked to paint murals and teach workshops in non-Indigenous communities. He emphasized that the art, artists, and community was stronger than it was before the pandemic.

This statement struck me, and I reflected on how having to go through a challenging event such as the Covid-19 pandemic made people stronger in some ways. Specifically, I considered that many people were put in a position where they had to find new ways to survive and to connect.

Pepion agreed and then said that it also seemed people got more creative during the pandemic. He explained that “*we always had that talent here*” and the pandemic brought this out in people. I found this point particularly interesting and asked Pepion why he thought it was that so many people became more creative and turned to engaging in arts during the pandemic. He shared his perspective that many people had more time on their hands and art gave them something to do that was purposeful. Further, he said that “*when people had that extra time, they had time to do what they wanted*” stating that art was enjoyable for people to engage in.

I reflected again on how the Covid-19 pandemic came with both threats and opportunities. It came with significant losses of jobs, health, connections, and lives, but also came with more time and new opportunities.

Pepion continued, “*it felt like a lot of people in our community here in Montana on the Blackfoot reservation started exploring the land more and started asking more questions about who we are, what things mean in our language, and how things came to be.*” Further he said, “*it seemed like more people in my community were out gathering medicines and roots and were making balms and remedies.*” He explained that it felt like there was a push for people to explore who they were and where they were from and to teach the same to their children. He shared that “*it seemed like there was a lot of self realization and awareness of self identity*” and explained that this was related to healing from historical traumas.

Again, Pepion shared that in the face of significant grief he saw people rising to challenges and uplifting one another during the pandemic. He explained that people returning to culture was healing and helped people thrive through the pandemic and heal from past wounds. Pepion shared that he is an advocate for healing through art, explaining that art supports people in learning about themselves and connecting with culture in a healing way.

Pepion discussed his mural work and described his murals as representative of his community, highlighting images of Blackfoot leaders and children. He emphasized the importance of this representation and how it can be empowering to people to see themselves in these images. He described this as another way that art connected community even while people had to be distanced.

Pepion and I spent some time at the end of our conversation discussing ideas for a future project and hoped to be able to bring all of the artists who engaged in research conversations with me to come together to create a community mural that depicted the strengths and survivance of the community during the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Jared Tailfeathers**

Jared Tailfeathers is a multidisciplinary, bi-racial Blackfoot (Kainai) artist, musician, inventor, workshop facilitator/teacher, amateur historian/researcher, activist, and author. He builds original musical instruments for interactive projects, performances, workshops, recording, and for sale. He works in various art styles, media, genres, and materials depending on the project or commission.

My first time meeting Tailfeathers was for our research conversation held over Zoom on May 31, 2022. It was a sunny day, so Tailfeathers met from his home porch in High River while

his dogs and children played outside. I was working in Edmonton that particular day, so being able to meet via Zoom was especially helpful for us.

Tailfeathers began by considering how survivance was relevant to Covid-19 and acknowledged the challenges that Blackfoot community members were faced with whether they lived on or off reserve. The first thing he identified was that it was very important to consider how being able to maintain a job during the pandemic was related to survivance. Further, he acknowledged the impact isolation, fear, and other concerns brought on by the pandemic influenced mental health and increased suicide rates in his community. For Tailfeathers, the pandemic meant changing his wedding plans and deaths of family members.

Considering his own survivance, Tailfeathers shared that being an artist allowed him to work flexibly during the pandemic while also spending time with his newborn daughter. This allowed him to *“go research on the land, go to museums, talk to Elders, learn protocols, learn how to make traditional drums and apply that to [his] work.”* He described being quite productive during the pandemic, stating that he *“created two instruments based on traditional methods of making and wrote a whole album.”* He explained that *“the pandemic focused [his] energy into that [art], because we weren’t allowed to see people ... and [he] had a lot more time.”*

Tailfeathers then shared a project he worked on during the pandemic that focused on using art to teach about Treaty 7 history, racism, and colonization at Mohkinstsis, the Blackfoot name for Calgary, and more specifically for Fort Calgary. He shared that while this pandemic brought isolation, it was also a *“rich time for art, research, and connecting with community members,”* explaining that connection did not stop but rather was adapted and even enhanced to support his and his community’s ongoing survivance. He stated, *“The Blackfoot members of the*

*community were very adjustable and able to work through strange and unknown things such as the pandemic.” He elaborated on this point, hypothesizing that “it probably goes back to our traditional ways of living on the land and having to build our own tools with our hands and ... be able to see a storm when it is coming and weather that. I think that this translated to being able to flow with the punches.”*

At this point in our conversation Tailfeathers was interrupted midsentence by his daughter, who wanted to ride her bike. This reminded us that we were meeting virtually again and that having family around during meetings had become more common. This was something that came out of the pandemic that allowed for some parents such as Tailfeathers to spend more time with family.

Returning to our conversation, Tailfeathers again recognized the significant loss of connection and isolation faced by many. He also acknowledged the significant pains and losses that came from losing loved ones to Covid-19. Despite such challenges, Tailfeathers said, *“For the most part I think we have done very well adjusting to this way of living.”* He then spoke about how experiencing the pandemic has led society more generally to realize that people can do good work outside of an office, can meet over Zoom, and can accomplish great things without being in the same physical space as others. He shared that he was able to record an album with other musicians without ever having to meet together in person. This demonstrated skills in collaboration, creativity, and adaptability and demonstrated survivance. He said that *“the pandemic made [him] a better artist in the end ... and made [Blackfoot people] stronger and better community members and aligned everybody to [work together] to make things work.”*

Pausing to reflect, I acknowledged that Tailfeathers had already shared a lot of knowledge and experiences in his stories that I would need to take time to listen to again. What

stood out to me in that moment were a few things. First, that the pandemic brought a lot of hardship and in many ways forced people, in this case the Blackfoot communities, to adapt. Second, I noticed that the pandemic inspired more creative ways of thinking and doing, both in artwork as well as in day-to-day work and routines. I then wondered to what degree creating and engaging with art supported wellness and survivance through the pandemic.

Reflecting on this, Tailfeathers said, *“If I wasn’t making my art and hadn’t figured out a way to [see] my musician friends and art collaborators, it would have been terrible [for my mental health].”* He expanded to consider other people as well and shared that the people he knew who had creative outlets seemed to be doing better than those who did not. Considering how he spends his time in general and how he had been able to spend more time doing art during the pandemic Tailfeathers shared, *“It took the pandemic for us to re-examine some of the ways we live our lives and what actually brings us joy.”* Returning to emphasize the strength demonstrated by the Blackfoot community, Tailfeathers said, *“What doesn’t kill you makes you stronger, so there are lots of things that made our community stronger in that way ... we made community connections that would never have come up before.”*

I considered how while the pandemic threatened social connection, many people responded to this by creating new ways of connecting and putting more positive energy into connecting, finding joy, and actively countering the threats of the pandemic. Tailfeathers agreed and confirmed that art was a way that could support such connecting and joy. Shifting slightly, I found I was still curious about the increased available time Tailfeathers had referred to and asked him to elaborate on this.

Tailfeathers shared that he had more time to connect with land, which was important to his art. He explained that his connection to the land helped him to understand his location as a

Blackfoot person and connect more deeply with his heritage and spiritual identity. He explained that being on the land highlighted to him what he inherited from ancestors and helped him to learn his own history and where he comes from. Further, it has taught him how to live in harmony with the land, care for it and survive on it. Tailfeathers emphasized the importance of land in his connection and awareness of his own culture, and then explained that the connection between art, land, and culture is inseparable from his perspective. Art was a part of life, he explained,

*We wouldn't be living our traditional ways without art being there too. You can't separate them. Our regalia, the dancing, everything has its place, and it is more encompassing than just being a pretty thing to look at or being [just] art. It is that, but it is also an expression [of self and culture].*

He shared that his way of becoming more aware of himself and his culture was through his art. Tailfeathers shared that since he was unable to connect to culture through speaking Blackfoot when he was growing up, he found that physical connection through art supported this connection and learning for him.

Tailfeather said he felt he shared what needed to be shared at this point and we concluded our discussion with friendly banter before signing off from our respective locations.

### **Ryan Willert**

Ryan Jason Allen Willert was born and raised in Central Alberta, growing up in the Red Deer and Innisfail area. Raised in a non-Native community, he has since reconnected with his Blackfoot roots (Siksika Nation). He is now an accomplished Sundancer with The Path of the Buffalo on the Kainai Nation and is a member of the Kainai Sacred Horns Society.

Willert uses art and storytelling to teach, explore and inspire others in his community. He has created teaching and cultural murals through Artist in Residence programs in various Calgary schools. Willert has become a very well-known artist internationally and has been fully booked with highly professional murals and installation jobs for well-established organizations for many years. He has contributed to several publications including the second best-selling nonfiction book *Colouring It Forward – Discover Blackfoot Nation Art & Wisdom: An Aboriginal Art Colouring Book*, *Oh, Canada! Reads Colouring Books* and *the Colouring It Forward Calendar*. Willert is currently a full-time professional artist residing in Alberta and hopes to inspire others to heal as well as learn about their Blackfoot roots and culture.

The first time I met Willert was April 21, 2022, when we had our research conversation over Zoom. Willert was in his gallery while I was engaged from the comfort of my home. Prior to beginning our conversation, Willert lit a smudge. Willert started by sharing that the first thing that came to mind when considering art and survivance was his history of panhandling and selling art on the streets. He explained how “*being an Indigenous man was hard for [him]*” in the past because of racism and poor treatment of Indigenous people in Alberta. However, Willert shared that since he has stayed consistent with his art and his spirituality, he has been connected to the power of being Blackfoot and the history of being from a war society. He explained that he carries power from that, which has helped him to survive and thrive as a Blackfoot artist.

Willert continued to discuss how prior to colonization Blackfoot nations were “*strong and had plentiful resources*” that allowed them to “*dominate the prairies.*” He explained that being a war society did not mean they were always fighting, and in fact Blackfoot people did what they needed to maintain their resources and “*were caretakers of the land.*” He shared that “*our responsibility was to protect [the land] and keep it in good shape.*”



I considered what Willert had shared so far and what stood out to me was what he had said about doing well as long as he engaged in art and spirituality. I asked him to share more about this. Willert started by explaining that not everyone is an artist, clarifying that others might have their own roles in society. He highlighted the importance of a healthy lifestyle and connection with culture and shared a perspective that these supported his work as an artist, more so than the other way around. He said, *“I don’t believe art is healing, I believe that [if you] look at someone’s art it shows where they are at in life ... it is a way to express where I am at in life.”* Explaining this further, he said *“I believe that the actual healing comes from working on yourself, going to sweat lodges, building a relationship with your smudge, going to Sundances, and going to ceremonies to let go of trauma.”* He said, *“My resiliency comes from my spirituality.”* Explaining how art fits into wellness, Willert said that *“art is a way to express [himself] ... and gives [him] purpose in life.”* Willert shared that art was also something that allowed him to survive as selling art was his way of making money.

Looking back on his own life, Willert shared that he experienced physical and emotional abuse as a child that contributed to being unwell, being hooked into addiction, and living on the streets through parts of his life. He explained that abuse at home as well as racism and bullying at school led to depression, suicidal ideation, dropping out of school, and turning to drugs and alcohol. He started selling art on the streets and was then able to pay for food and rent. He said that *“art put food on [his] plate and fed [him],”* but did not inherently heal him. With everything he faced in life, Willert always persevered and eventually when he was in his 30s, he *“joined a Sundance and sobered up and has been sober ever since.”* He continued to share that since connecting with his culture and spirituality, he has been *“the happiest [he has] ever been in [his] life.”*

I took a moment to reflect on Willert's story and the different perspective he offered. I noticed the significant impact of colonization and systemic racism in his life and clarified that it was a return to culture and ceremony that was most healing for Willert. He responded with agreement and then shared that since he had maintained his cultural and spiritual engagement and awareness he has faced less adversity. He explained that the energy he portrayed in the world contributed to how people would treat him as well as how he would respond to experiences of racism. He explained that in his past he had a depressed energy, whereas he has had a powerful energy since connecting with his own culture and spirituality.

After sharing his own experience, Willert went on to explain that *"you cannot speak for everyone, you can only speak for yourself,"* recognizing that others might find different benefits from art that are also valuable. He stated, *"everyone has the right to heal."*

Appreciating Willert's dedication to his own healing and the healing of others in his and other Indigenous communities, I wondered how this applied during the pandemic. Willert shared that *"this pandemic has caused a lot of mental health issues"* and recognized the negative impacts of isolation and family conflict that occurred during the pandemic. In contrast he *"flourished through the whole pandemic ... learned from it, got healthy from it, got a lot done during it, and never struggled financially."* He attributed this again to his awareness of and engagement with culture and spirit. He elaborated to share that *"a clear mind is an open mind and being here in the moment is an open mind."* Willert described Blackfoot resilience and emphasized the importance of having a relationship with land, which was *"taught to us through spirituality."*

At this point what struck me was that while Willert did not attribute healing to art in the same way as most of the other artists, he did identify similar factors that contributed to his

survivance during the pandemic and throughout his life. Willert's connection with culture was the way forward for healing for him, and for others art offered similar healing, often because it was a tool for connecting with culture. I expressed gratitude for Willert's different perspective as we ended our conversation.

### **Concept Maps**

To share the findings from my meaning making process I have developed three concept maps in collaboration with my storytellers. The first map outlines the identified factors of survivance and the associated threats of Covid-19 (see Figure 6). The second map then outlines the specific ways that art contributes to survivance (see Figure 7). The third map places the personal strengths of Blackfoot people and artists, also referred to as the Blackfoot Warrior Spirit, at the core of Blackfoot survivance (see Figure 8). Along with each map I shared quotes from my storytellers that support the concepts presented in the maps.

### **Factors of Survivance and the Threats of Covid-19**

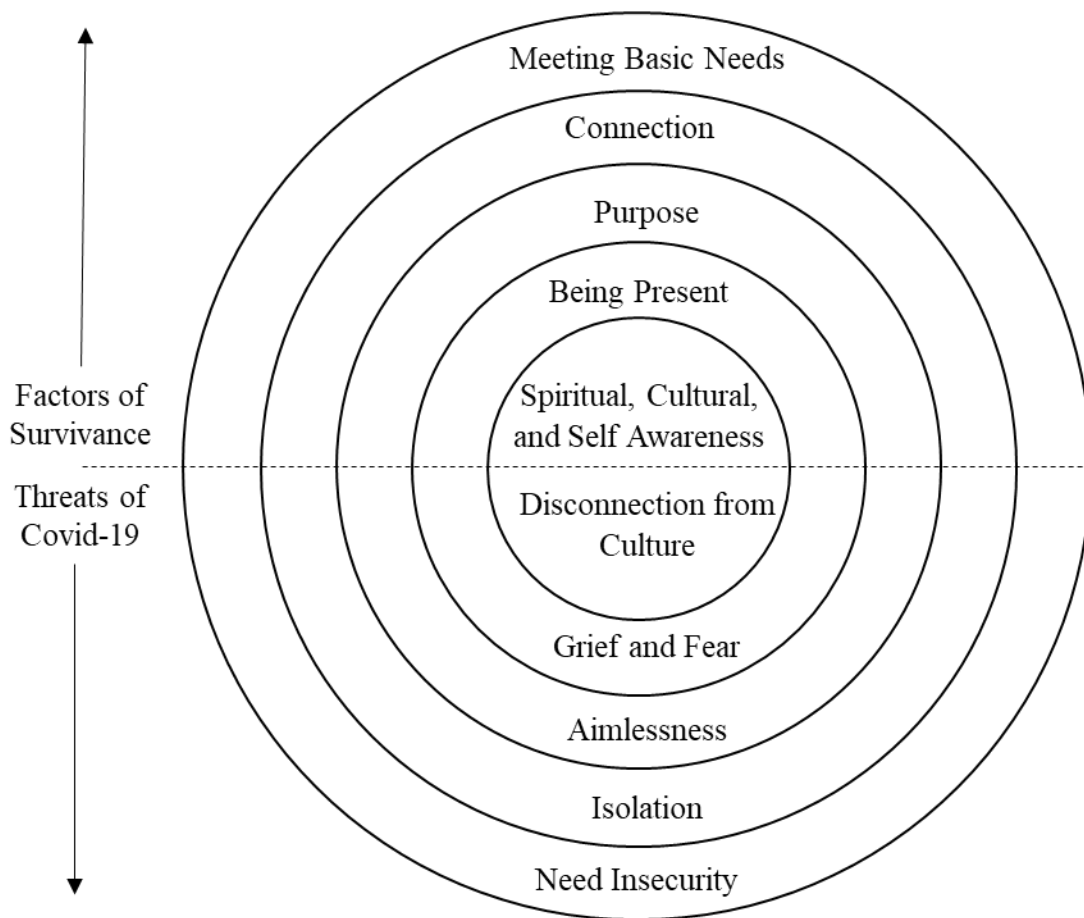
It became clear when listening to my research conversations that to understand how art might contribute to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people and communities, I first had to consider factors of survivance and how Covid-19 was threatening that survivance. Through the meaning making process, five main factors of survivance were highlighted: (1) meeting basic needs; (2) connection; (3) purpose; (4) being present; and (5) awareness of spirit, culture, and self. Each of these factors of survivance were threatened by Covid-19 as for many people, the pandemic led to significant need insecurity, isolation, losing purpose, grief, fear, and disconnection from culture.

Figure 6 offers a visual map of how each of these threats related to a factor of survivance, depicting the factors of survivance on the top half of the circle and the corresponding threats of

Covid-19 on the bottom half. This map is intentionally circular as it is meant to demonstrate how Blackfoot knowledge of survivance is circular and not hierarchical. No factor is more or less important than another, and all are interconnected and related rather than being entirely separate concepts. The circular shape is also intended to show that it is possible to experience both survivance and threats at the same time to varying degrees, as survivance is not the absence of threat but instead exists in relation with threats. In the encircling process, all storytellers supported the circular shape of this map, with several specifically emphasizing the appropriateness of such a shape representing the traditionally circular, nonlinear ways of knowing of Blackfoot people.

**Figure 6**

*Factors of Survivance and the Threats of Covid-19*



### ***Meeting Basic Needs vs. Need Insecurity***

Today, access to finances is necessary for survival. Money is required for meeting basic needs such as having shelter or food on the table. Being resourceful and capable of making a living then contributes to survivance in the most literal form – it enables people to survive. Jared Tailfeathers supported this when he said “*survivance was in [one] way monetary. [We] had to make sure that everyone kept their jobs.*”

Covid-19 threatened many people’s ability to meet their basic needs. John Pepion emphasized how the pandemic threatened financial security. He shared that “*there was a [lot of] job loss*” that contributed to financial strain in Blackfoot communities. He further explained “*we had online schooling and all this online stuff, but there were some people that had no access to the internet and couldn’t afford the internet,*” highlighting the unequal access to support caused by financial challenges during the pandemic.

### ***Connection vs. Isolation***

Connection to others was emphasized by all the storytellers in their initial research conversations. A sense of belonging and identity within a community contributed to survivance when faced with isolation. Pepion shared how, despite the challenges associated with the isolation caused by Covid-19, his community found ways to connect that contributed to survivance:

*It got to the point where families couldn’t see families anymore for birthdays, funerals, holidays, or even ceremonies. ... It was a very difficult time ... but I also think it made us stronger. [We] tried to figure out ways to work with each other as a confederacy, especially with the struggle of the border or the ‘imaginary line’. ... We’re not even far from each other, but that border has us feeling like [people on the other side of the*

*border are] far away. I think that during the pandemic a lot of us [were brought] back together [online].*

Terran Last Gun spoke about the silver linings of the pandemic, specifically reporting that adapting to an online medium of connecting led to building connections he would not have had otherwise:

*I was able to engage with other Blackfoot members via Zoom. ... Something ... good that came out of [the pandemic was that it] connected the various communities. It personally connected me to my community. ... It also connected me to my family in that we were able to experience [online] courses together. ... I think this just showed that it is possible to stay connected with people outside of ... reservation boundaries, or even state boundaries or province boundaries or international boundaries. ... We are one nation that was split in half by the international border.*

### ***Finding Purpose vs. Losing Purpose***

Early in the pandemic when stay-at-home mandates were in place, many people's typical routines and sense of purpose day-to-day were challenged. Perry Day Chief explained that "when Covid hit, it disrupted a lot of stuff, including social gatherings, ceremonies, ... powwows. I stayed away from [events] like that [because] I didn't want to catch it." He continued to say "being stuck at home is something a lot of people don't like. ... [They] want to go out [and do what they usually do]." The pandemic disrupted many people's feelings of having purpose in life as it was barrier to engaging in typical activities that would normally provide people with a sense of direction and meaning. For example, some people lost their jobs or were no longer able to work toward goals or engage in the activities that felt meaningful to them because they were instructed to instead isolate at home.

Several storytellers shared how the act of creating art or crafting contributed to a sense of purpose. For example, John shared that art gave people something to do that was purposeful. People could set goals to create an art project and would feel pride and accomplishment after completing that project. Further, Star agreed with this and said that being able to create something beautiful when the world was chaotic could offer people something to direct their energy into and could then elicit feelings of pride and joy after having created something. Day Chief shared his experience of how he adjusted during the pandemic and found new purpose and meaning in his day:

*It made a big difference [for] the Blackfoot people. ... They weren't social anymore and [weren't doing what they did before]. It was a big change in everybody's life. ... [We] were limited in what we could do, [for example], I couldn't go out to get my [art] supplies. ... But it gave me time to think about what else I could make [and what else I could do with my time]. ... I am getting more ideas of what to do ... and how to keep myself busy ... I'm trying things I've never tried before... and that helped me through the pandemic.*

### ***Being Present vs. Grief and Fear***

Multiple storytellers shared Blackfoot teachings that being present was foundational in holistic wellbeing. Storytellers like Pepion described how “*in the pandemic there was also a lot of loss and grief and tragedy.*” Tailfeathers further explained:

*For our community members that live within the reserve, there were quite a few deaths from Covid-19. And mixing that with the struggles that already are there made things quite a bit harder. ... It was very hard not [knowing if we would be okay]. ... [There was*

*a lot of] depression ... going on. Lots more suicides – and we already had a lot of that going on.*

The pandemic was exacerbating some pre-existing issues and added new concerns to the mix, instilling a lot of grief and fear. It was widely agreed that to combat the significant impacts of grief and fear, the practice of being present was essential. Black shared:

*If we learn to look at ourselves and dig deep within our being ... we come from a beautiful culture, where fear is not known within our ways. And if we learn to pray every morning and every evening, and to accept what the day brings to us ... that takes away the stress of Covid. ... Basically, it's just living in the now, and that's what we as Aboriginal people are [taught], living in the now.*

He elaborated on this and pointed out how colonialism has changed or challenged traditional ways of being:

*My understanding, and my cultural way is that we live in the now and we're not thinking about the past or future... The Western perspective has hindered that ... making you think about everything all the time and stress about vanity [and] materialistic things.*

### ***Awareness of Spirit, Culture, and Self vs. Disconnection from Culture***

Heightening awareness of culture, spirit, and self was spoken about as pivotal in a process of healing and surviving referred to by all storytellers. Ryan Willert explained that from his perspective, healing and survivance comes from awareness of and engagement in culture:

*I believe that the healing comes from an actual working on your healing. Going to sweat lodges, building relationship with your smudge, going to Sundance, doing ceremonies, and letting go of trauma. Forgiving people, forgiving yourself.*



He spoke further about connection with land, a significant component of Blackfoot culture, as relevant to survivance:

*We're more than just a war society, we're caretakers of the land and our obligation was to protect it and to keep it in good shape. ... I think people are going to do a lot better if they start praying the way that the land wants them to pray.*

Black also spoke about culture and asserted that for Blackfoot people, “everything we need is in our culture... Our culture [and] our lands [are] everything we need ... to heal.” He explained how culture and spirituality are related to self-awareness:

*When I talk about [being] spiritual, it's basically self-awareness. [Awareness] of who we are as [Blackfoot] people. We have culture ... and once we find [and connect with] that culture we are going to find healing and ... new understandings ... and our minds are going to evolve in a sense [as we] start knowing ourselves [and] our hearts. ... Self awareness is spiritual, and being a good person is spiritual, and coming from a loving place is spiritual... You don't need to be in a society to be spiritual, [but] you need to know [the] history of our people, [and] you need to know our culture to ... evolve to a better place of happiness.*

Day Chief added his perspective that relating with culture and spirit did not require attending ceremonies, but was something that could be achieved on one's own:

*You don't need to go to an Elder, if you can't make it to an Elder pray at home. It doesn't matter how you pray as long as you pray. ... When I go out, ... I look at it as visiting with the Creator ... and that is how I do most of my praying. ... It makes a big difference for me, and that is why I give people the advice to pray at home if they can't make it anywhere.*

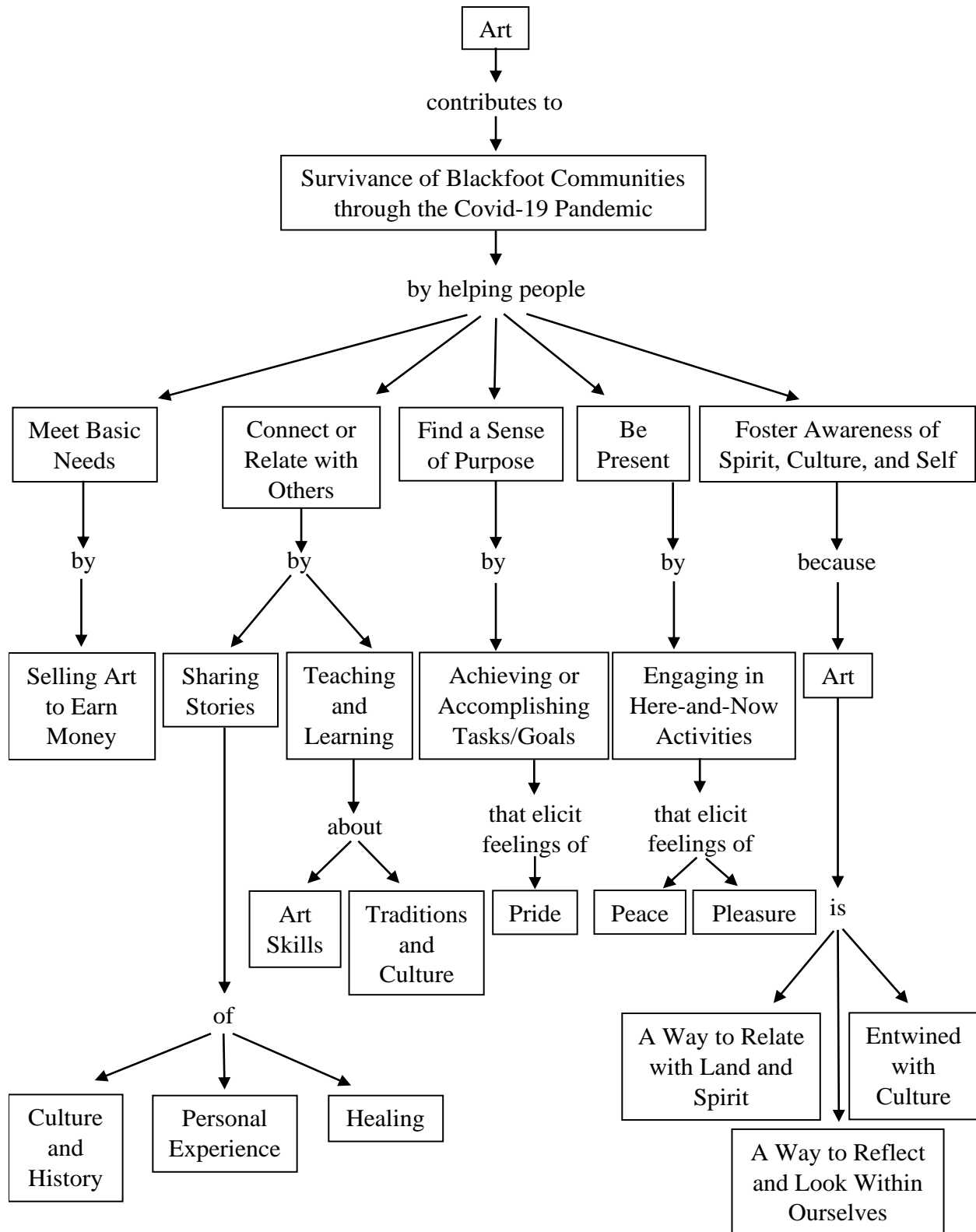
This illustrated how Blackfoot people were able to continue their connection to spirit and culture when ceremonies and other traditional gatherings were banned due to mandated limitations on social gatherings and stay-at-home orders during the pandemic. From this perspective, spirituality and culture aren't only about attending structured ceremonies and cultural events, but can also be fostered internally through self-awareness.

### **Art and Survivance**

Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributes to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people by fostering each of the five factors of survivance I discussed. Figure 7 outlines the specific ways the storytellers and I saw art as contributing to each of the factors of ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people and communities during the Covid-19 pandemic.

**Figure 7**

*How Art Contributed to Survivance During the Covid-19 Pandemic*



### ***Art for Meeting Basic Needs***

Throughout the Covid-19 pandemic, many Blackfoot artists were able to meet their basic needs by creating and selling artwork. Black shared:

*Through art I was able to have a living, even through Covid. In Covid times ... it's been a struggle for people to have full time jobs, and to provide for their family, but through art I've been able to get through Covid and still be comfortable and still be helping out within the communities.*

Pepion had a similar experience and even found new financial opportunities as an artist during the pandemic:

*I haven't had a job since 2009 because I chose to do art full-time. I was dependent on markets and shows, and then when the pandemic hit ... I didn't know what I was going to do because I had no plan. I didn't know how I was going to sell my artwork. But I started teaching [art], so that kept me going. And then at the same time I kept creating.*

### ***Art for Connection***

The Covid-19 pandemic undoubtedly caused issues related to isolation. Social isolation was and continues to be a major point of discussion when speaking on the topic of Covid-19. Tailfeathers highlighted this when he said, “*For Blackfoot artists I know ... the Covid-19 [pandemic] has been challenging and [has made it] really hard to ... stay connected. There was ... a loss of connection – a lot of loss.*” For this reason, it was not surprising then that all the storytellers I spoke with emphasized the need for connection to counter such isolation. Each shared how art helped them to connect with others by using it as a way of sharing stories, as well as a tool for teaching and learning.

Star Crop Eared Wolf shared that *“the traditional use of art is to represent yourself, your people, who you are. [Art is for] sharing stories and passing on knowledge. ... Even telling those stories are a form of art for Indigenous communities.”* Last Gun agreed, stating that *“art is communication. You’re communicating all these ideas about culture and history... From a personal point of view, that is healing – whether you’re creating or just appreciating that artwork.”* During the pandemic, some people spent time creating together, which was a way of sharing stories. For example, Crop Eared Wolf shared her experience:

*[During the pandemic] we spent a lot of our days beading, and my daughter would be sitting there drawing. [My mom and I] would end up telling stories. ... My mom [shared] how she grew up and how different it is today. And then [we] shared my grandparents’ stories ... so it is like passing on that traditional knowledge, but in a contemporary form.*

Others like Pepion noticed that art was being used to share Blackfoot stories with the public via social media. He shared that *“[people made] videos with their artwork ... [that made] non-Indigenous people more interested in why we’re doing this kind of work.”* Furthermore, art as a method of sharing stories was an example of survivance that helped people learn about culture and history and to continue to write the story of Blackfoot people. Last Gun explained:

*Blackfoot stories are so connected to the cosmos and our solar system and planets and moons and stars. ... [Creating art that tells a traditional story] is another example of survivance. ... By continuing these stories [and] continuing to work with my community virtually and continuing to learn myself.*

Finally, Black shared how art could also be a method of sharing stories of healing:

*A lot of our artists have been part of the 60’s scoop or residential school systems and they are doing beautiful artwork. There is energy that’s left on those pieces. [We can] see*

*the healing that came from [the creation of that artwork] ... And the people who are buying [it] are seeing that healing and feeling that energy that was put into the artwork.*

Some of the storytellers I spoke with taught art classes during the pandemic. Crop Eared Wolf shared the challenges faced when forced to move classes online and described how connection was fostered in the online courses she facilitated:

*It was an interesting way to [host] an art class, because I had never done something like that where it was all online. ... [Online,] people were still able to be a part of it ... but it was a different experience from being in a classroom. ... If it was in a classroom there would have been a lot of different dialogue happening, and there wasn't. Art is all about that sharing and building those relationships and those connections ... especially when you're teaching it to someone. ... But [even though there were challenges to being online, it was] still good because I was still able to be teaching art classes even though Covid was really limiting. ... That resilience of an artist and of trying to share the culture and traditions and pass them on [to students who] are wanting to learn ... and regain traditional knowledge ... was something I really enjoyed.*

Black also shared his experience as an art teacher and described some of the benefits of connecting in both online and in person classes with his students while each was creating artwork:

*In the workshops I've been doing, [the participants] have a lot of anxiety, depression, PTSD, and all of these different issues. Working with them, and seeing them, and just talking to them and treating them like humans [is important]. I love them in ways... I see their work and I also put all my heart into sharing my crafts [and] knowledge, and I try*

*to be there for them. ... I feel so happy [knowing] that the little community we have [in art workshops] ... is a loving place [and] a safe place.*

Finally, Pepion shared that he intentionally teaches culture and tradition when he teaches art and described this as an empowering experience. *“Being Blackfoot and becoming a teacher for Blackfoot students is very empowering. ... I’m including a lot of our culture [in my teaching].”*

### ***Art for Finding Purpose***

When people’s lives were forced to change and many people lost access to their typical activities, some turned to creating art to find a new sense of purpose. Art gave people something to do when they were stuck at home without their regular routines. Last Gun shared that this was the case for him, stating, *“Just to keep busy, I kept trying to create.”* Pepion shared how this was also true for the students he taught: *“We started doing our classes online... and it gave students something to do, especially when they couldn’t leave their household.”* Crop Eared Wolf expanded on how art could provide a sense of purpose:

*I saw a lot of people who I didn’t even know were crafters start to come out [with their art, sharing the things they made]. [The pandemic] brought out the artist in everybody. I guess being stuck at home [people] were trying to find ways where they were not going to go insane with boredom.*

She continued to explain how spending time creating could be a meaningful accomplishment that elicits feelings of pride:

*[When you] create something ... you are also building your self-esteem up. ... [You can say to yourself,] ‘at least I created something really nice today’ or ‘I finally got that project I was trying to work on for the past 2 years ... done’. [Completing an art project] gives us that little bit of reassurance in ourselves and that confidence [in ourselves].*

Day Chief agreed and offered his perspective that by creating, “*you’ll feel better [about] yourself because you’ve done something you didn’t think you could do.*”

In addition to offering an individual a sense of purpose by giving them something meaningful to do with their time, art was also spoken of as being more broadly capable of instilling a sense of meaning, purpose, and pride at a community level. Pepion shared how community murals could support this:

*Here in Heart Butte, Montana a lot of the murals that we have done are instilling pride in our community. [The murals are] engaging our community members, [prompting them] to ask [about] who the people we paint are. Some of the murals we painted are leaders or are images of children. It just has everybody curious and wondering what they mean and has [people] questioning who they are. [Seeing cultural murals] may bring [a sense of] identity, resilience, and pride in our communities.*

### ***Art for Being Present***

Several storytellers shared traditional Blackfoot teachings on the importance of being present for fostering a sense of wellbeing that stems from feelings of peace and pleasure in the moment. The losses and uncertainties of the pandemic brought increased grief and fear – challenging emotions that can hook people away from wellbeing, making the need for presence even more pressing. Storytellers described how engaging with art helped them to be more present.

Black shared how being present while creating artwork reduced fear and increased feelings of peace or calm:

*Art is ... singing, dancing, drama, theater, ... hiking. [We can go hiking to] look to [the land] and see ... the environments we live in. [We can] observe [and] see the world as it*



*is. ... All of those things absorb the stress that we [have] in Covid times. ... With Covid, there was fear that [Western-minded government and media] tried to induce into our people... [but] if we started learning to [engage in] any kind of art ... that took away the stress of Covid. ... We are not [afraid] of Covid when we are doing our artwork.*

Crop Eared Wolf shared similar sentiments:

*[Art was] helping with stress. ... It was a stressful time, and when everything was closed down it was also a scary time because [we] didn't know how bad it was going to be – it was unknown territory. [We] didn't know how long it was going to last or if it was going to get worse. And so having that ability to craft and take your mind off of [the fear], and [to use art to] de-stress [was helpful]. ... You [could be] sitting there and just working on something and creating something really beautiful through the chaos. ... When ... you're feeling like you have no control ... art [can be] that one thing that you did have control over. ... [In this way] art was definitely a therapy tool.*

Feelings of joy or pleasure and healing could also come from being present while engaging with art. Day Chief described how being present with his art was beneficial, offering him peace and enjoyment. He explained, *“It gave me an opportunity to work on my crafts, and that puts me in my own little world. And that helps me to relax and do what I enjoy [doing].”* Art was described as a pleasurable activity, and some storytellers further described how being present with their art helped them re-evaluate what contributes to joy in life. Tailfeathers shared that *“it took a pandemic for us to re-examine some of the ways that we live our lives and [consider] what actually brings us joy in our lives.”*

### *Art for Enhancing Awareness of Culture, Spirit, and Self*

Awareness of culture, spirit and self were emphasized by all storytellers as important to ongoing survivance through the Covid-19 pandemic. The way art was described as contributing to this factor of survivance differed from storyteller to storyteller. Some equated art to culture, describing art as being entirely entwined with culture and thus impossible to disconnect from it. In this way engaging with art was inherently engaging with culture. Others spoke of art as more of a tool that could help people relate to land and spirit and reflect inwardly to heighten awareness.

Tailfeathers described art as inseparable from Blackfoot culture:

*Traditionally I was told that we don't have a word for art. ... It is completely ingrained in our identity as people. There's an art form to making your own tools, to making medicine wheels ... and the symbols, pictographs, and syllabics, and our winter count storytelling. For us they are just daily life ... they were just part of [life]. ... For Blackfoot people, there wouldn't be living our traditional ways without art being there too. You can't separate them. You can't separate the [art and culture in] regalia or dancing. ... I identified with my culture through the art of beading. I learned how to bead first, and then to be able to make things out of leather, and woodworking, and making my own tools. [I learned about traditional] face paint, and headdresses, and different intricate parts to everything.*

Last Gun also shared his perspective on how art relates to culture:

*I view [Blackfoot painted lodges] as our entire worldview as Blackfoot people. ... You have the land, the mountains, the hills, the plains, [and the] different stories that happen there. Then you have the top ... which is all of these sky beings and narratives that are*

*important to us in terms of our origin story and our cultural history. And then you have the middle, the belly, which is the helper, the authority. And so ... our whole cosmic worldview is there.*

Black similarly described art as inseparable from Blackfoot culture and shared how this contributed to survivance during the pandemic:

*When we start working with our artwork, or singing, or dancing, or doing [any form of] creative expression, [that] is going to bring us back into our ceremonies and our culture. [Art] is a gateway ... that leads [us] to start learning about our history [and our culture]. ... All of [that] is part of art because eventually [stories of history and culture] are going to come into our artwork, [and] a lot of times ... the artists will talk about ... the feelings ... and experience, ... and how they evolved to the point they are now [compared to] where they were. ... There is a spiritual enlightenment ... a healing enlightenment that comes when we're doing artwork.*

Willert shared the importance of spirit and culture through the pandemic and described how his connection with culture, spirit and awareness of self contributed to his survivance throughout the pandemic:

*With drugs and alcohol, a lot of families struggled over this pandemic. [But because of ceremony and culture] I flourished through the whole pandemic. I was extremely appreciative of everything I learned from it. I got healthy from it. I got a lot done from it. I never struggled financially. I even maintained a family and [had] a baby. Everything positive came from the pandemic [for me].*

Some storytellers shared experiences of connecting with culture, land, and spirit more during the pandemic. Pepion shared:

*A lot of people in our community here in Montana, on a Blackfeet reservation, started exploring more of the land, ... asking questions [about] who we are [and] what things mean in our language. [People] started hiking more ... and going to lakes, fishing, our rivers, and doing [more things in] nature. I noticed it seemed like a lot of people in my community were also out gathering medicines and roots, and making healing medicines. ... There was this constant push to explore our lands, explore who we are and where we're from and to teach our children who we are and where we're from. ... [It is] never too late to learn who you are or speak your language. ... It was a lot of self-realization. Self-identity. ... There's a lot of healing going on from that.*

Crop Eared Wolf also brought up her own experience of connecting with land and how this related to her art:

*I [didn't] want to go anywhere public, so I [started going to] the Timber Limits – a place that the Blood Tribe has a little section back in the mountain area where we can go. It's open to forage plants. ... I started going out there more ... [The pandemic] kind of kept making me a little bit braver to go out there and just explore Blackfoot territory. ... [I was] reconnecting with the land, [and that] was giving me ideas for artwork.*

Day Chief similarly shared that relating with the land provided him ideas for his art, stating, “When I am up in the mountains it gives me ideas for my work.” Willert elaborated on how drawing his art from the land honoured the land and was a way of relating with the land:

*I've started painting a lot of the animals that are in Blackfoot territory. I appreciate them and want them to protect me in this world of flesh, so I've been painting a lot of the animals because I respect them and want to show my respect to them through my art.*

Finally, Tailfeathers shared how art, awareness of land and culture, and adaptability were related and contributed to survivance through the pandemic:

*I had more and more time to go research on the land, go to museums, talk to elders, learn protocol, and learn how to make traditional drums and apply that back to my own work. I created two instruments based on traditional methods of making and wrote a whole album. ... Most Indigenous members of the community, specifically the Blackfoot members, were very adjustable [and were] able to work through the strange and unknown things [that came from] the pandemic. That [adaptability] probably goes back to our traditional ways of living on the land, ... having to build our own tools with our hands, and being able to see a storm when it's coming and being able to weather that. I think that's really translated into being able to really flow with punches and move around and make sure everything works. ... Now I understand when looking out on the land what things would be useful traditionally and what I could still do if things change in life and we [needed to] live the way that we [used to]. Because I've done all my research and have asked elders more specific questions and been able to really connect with the land.*

In addition to supporting survivance during the pandemic, art was described as contributing to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people in general. Last Gun described how art is a way to continue contributing to culture and ongoing stories:

*My work is inspired by our painted lodges. It goes back to ancient past, our history, our culture, and how long we've been in Montana and Alberta. ... Culture is a living entity that is always continuing on. ... You're not just stuck. [For example], when it comes to language [we can] come up with a whole new word to describe something. ... That's what helps with my wellbeing – knowing I might not be home but I am contributing to our*

*history down here through art and through storytelling. [Art] really is like visual narratives. ... I'm trying to continue on stories through my art [and am] trying to make my art feel meaningful to me.*

He further elaborated on how engaging in art is an ongoing act of survivance that pushes against colonialism:

*Thinking of colonization, we're [now] at a point in our history where we have full creative control. We're not being told what to do or ... being sent to boarding schools anymore and having everything stripped away from us. So we're trying [to rebuild and reinvigorate] the landscape with what was here before. That's ... how I see myself contributing to Blackfoot culture today – through my artwork, which I feel is re-inserting itself into this North American landscape that was once so familiar and open to us. ... Colonization has this huge impact on us and I think today we're able to reverse some of that, and if not reverse then just discard [what doesn't work] and start something new.*

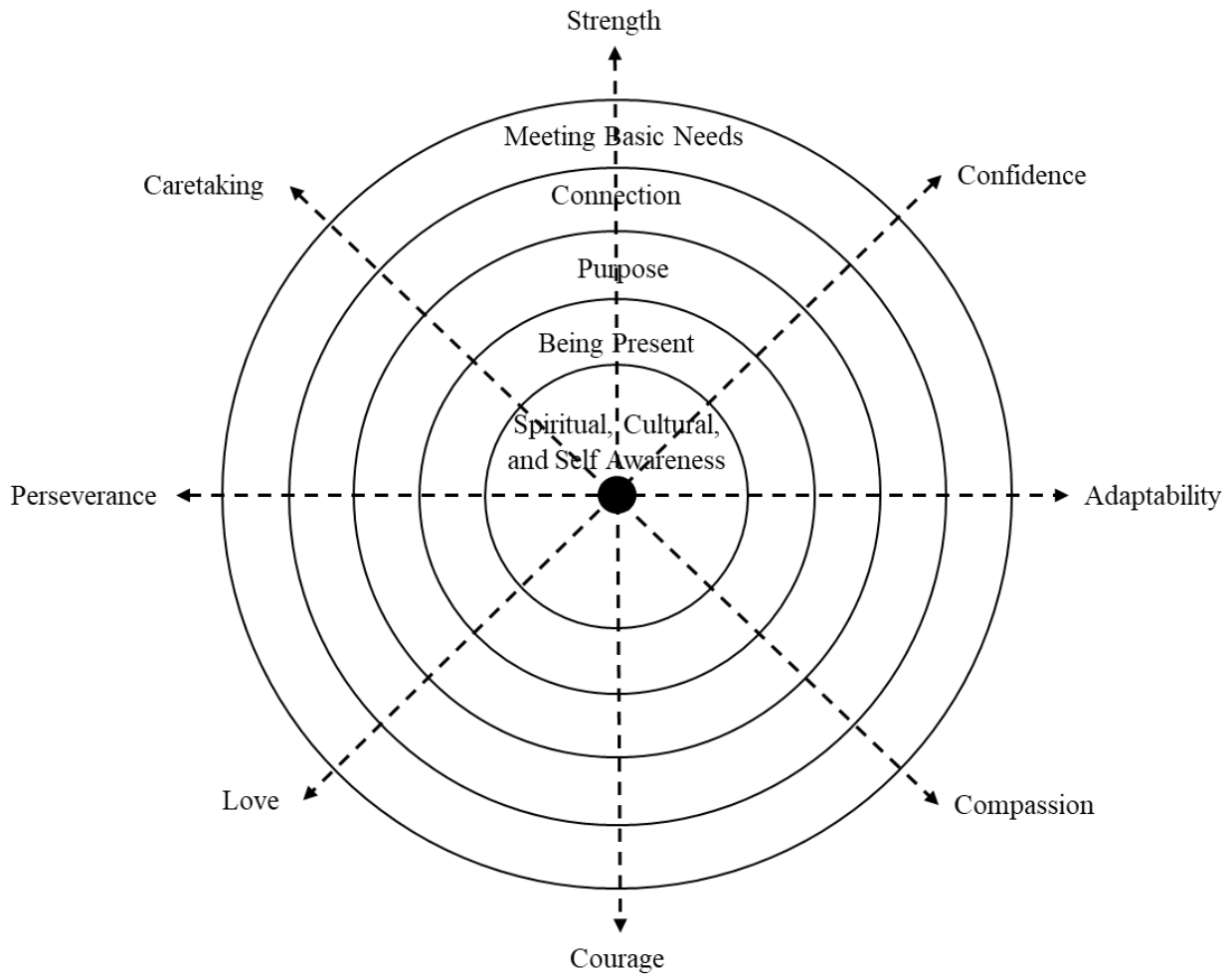
### **Blackfoot Warrior Spirit**

Generally speaking, some people might think of art as a basic activity that people do for leisure without much thought or particular benefit. But for others, art plays a key role in healing and survivance. I would be remiss not to recognize that the Blackfoot artists I spoke with demonstrated personal characteristics that likely contribute to their survivance and their abilities to engage in art in a meaningful way. Not all people or all artists flourished during the pandemic – Blackfoot or otherwise – and not all people who create artwork experience the benefits described by my storytellers. The characteristics I noticed among the storytellers that I believe supported the survivance of these Blackfoot artists include strength, courage, perseverance, adaptability, confidence, love, caretaking, and compassion. I have termed these strengths

together as being *Blackfoot Warrior Spirit*, which is placed at the core of Blackfoot survivance in Figure 8.

**Figure 8**

*Blackfoot Warrior Spirit at the Core of Ongoing Blackfoot Survivance*



Many storytellers demonstrated perseverance and adaptability when they moved a previously in-person community online. Crop Eared Wolf shared how such qualities helped her and the art community connect in new ways when faced with isolation:

*Covid-19 ... impacted everybody in the Indigenous art community negatively at first. ...*

*Art is something we had grown to understand as an in-person, hands-on experience. With*

*Covid limiting [our] ability to go out ... and with schools ... and art galleries in town all closed down, everything had to go online. [We] had to try to find other ways. Everything [moving to] social media ... gave [an] opportunity for artists to put everything online and ... communicate in that way. In a lot of ways [the pandemic] pushed a lot of people to put their art more online. ... I know a lot of Indigenous artists that sew or craft, [and] they started making Youtube channels and ... sharing their work that way. Or [they started] teaching people how to do those different skills [by hosting] online art classes. ... [Things] started to look brighter [as we] focused on the social media aspect of what Covid-19 was doing.*

She spoke further on the adaptability of Blackfoot artists and how this kept the art community viable:

*Because of Covid we didn't [have in-person galleries or markets] anymore. So everything got put online. [People] made a Facebook group page with all of these different artists on there [who] would market their work. [They] adapted to the challenges that Covid brought [by having] everything online. And it worked. ... The adaptability of the artists [was evident]. ... As Covid was ... changing everything, I as an artist witnessed the ability for Indigenous art to still be there and still be relevant, ... adapting to the challenges that were occurring. ... [Being] online really became how Indigenous art was surviving. ... Every challenge that came up there was a new bridge that [we] created to get across.*

Last Gun also spoke of perseverance and adaptability:

*Once the pandemic hit, my ability to go print [was cut off]. ... That really pushed me and made me shift my art practice to doing a different medium. ... 2020 was really about*



*hustling and getting my [artwork out through] social media promotion. ... We've really been able to do some exciting new things due to the pandemic. It was because of this pandemic that ... these ideas and these new ways of thinking [were pushed].*

Tailfeathers shared experiences that demonstrated the courage that led Blackfoot artists to flourish during the pandemic:

*For Blackfoot artists I know that the Covid-19 [pandemic] has been challenging and [has made it] really hard to ... stay connected. ... But for the most part I'd say that we've done very well adjusting to this new way of living ... it hasn't been as hard as we may have thought it would be. ... The challenges that we faced during the pandemic made [me] and the other artists I knew ... better artists ... because we had to try different things to continue to make money off of our art, and [we had] to find ways around not being able to see people or go out. So in the end it made us ... stronger and better artists and better community members because it really aligned everybody into trying to make things work when it was so hard.*

Willert spoke of how strength contributes to survivance:

*[Thinking of] Blackfoot resilience and strength ... back in the day we were a war society. ... We might not be a war society anymore, but that power is still there, and it's a very dominating power. As a Blackfoot ... wherever I go I carry that ancestral dominating power. ... As long as I stay on a good path, stay sober, and keep going to ceremony, I seem to do well and dominate the situation.*

Black spoke more of the strength, caretaking, love, and compassion of Blackfoot people fostering survivance:

*We need to be strong like warriors, to appreciate everything that is around [us], and to help people out. That's how we work. That's how the universe works. The season, the lands, the plants. That's what we need to understand to heal. ... We are human beings, we are spiritual, and we are all one.*

He further explained that he and his wife did what they could through the pandemic to care for others. They recognized that while they were doing well, not everyone was, and Black explained that caring for others and having compassion and love for them was important to his own wellbeing, as this meant living in line with his traditional values as a Blackfoot person. Day Chief also spoke about caring, compassion, and love for others in his community and explained that he created certain art pieces for free for people he knew might benefit from that art. He shared the response of one person he gifted art to: *"She was trying so hard to hold back her tears. ... She said that nobody had ever done something like this [for her] before."* Day Chief spoke about how giving and caring for others makes him feel more positive, explaining, *"That's what makes me feel good, when people order from me or when I give gifts to people, I like to see their facial expressions."*

Willert also spoke of caretaking in this passage that was quoted earlier:

*We're more than just a war society, we're caretakers of the land and our obligation was to protect it and to keep it in good shape. ... I think people are going to do a lot better if they start praying the way that the land wants them to pray.*

Lastly, he spoke of engaging in life with confidence, stating that *"like a buffalo we charged the storm, and at the end of the storm is grandfather sun, Natosi."*

Willert emphasized these personal strengths that contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people and communities through the Covid-19 pandemic as being related to the Blackfoot warrior spirit:

*Blackfoot [spirit] is a force to be reckoned with. ... Especially when we're on a good path and we're really staying persistent with our art and especially our spirituality. ... Ika'kimaat. [It means] try hard, and then it also means I'm up for the task.*

He concluded, “*It is not just resilience. It is Blackfoot resilience. It's tough and it's rough.*”

### **Summary of the Concept Maps**

The maps and the concepts they illustrate were developed through a process of storytelling, active listening, reflection, and encircling in relation to the question: How have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic? The first map highlights the factors of survivance emphasized by the storytellers and the corresponding threats of Covid-19. Blackfoot people and artists faced many challenges that threatened survivance throughout the pandemic, and many were able to flourish despite such challenges. The second map outlines the specific ways the storytellers found art contributed to their ongoing survivance during the pandemic. The storytellers described how their engagement with art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people through the Covid-19 pandemic by fostering each of the five factors of survivance. Finally, the third map illustrates the culturally rooted personal strengths of Blackfoot people and artists that are at the core of Blackfoot survivance. The storytellers demonstrated how this Blackfoot Warrior Spirit contributed to their survivance during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION**

In this discussion I first consider the findings from my meaning making process in relation to existing research and literature. I then speculate on how this work is part of reconciliation and how it can contribute to transforming counselling practice with Indigenous people and communities. I share reflections on how findings might apply in the field of counselling psychology and make recommendations accordingly. I further consider the strengths and limitations of my dissertation research and present considerations for future research.

### **Circle of Survivance**

The concept map depicted in Figure 6 of Chapter Four offers a conceptualization of the factors that contribute to the survivance of Blackfoot people and communities. When creating this first concept map I contemplated several shapes and images it could have taken on. However, it was the circle that was the most appropriate shape because of its relevance to a Blackfoot way of knowing. This was emphasized by the storytellers in my encircling process and is further supported by Blackfoot scholar Betty Bastien (2004), whose work details Blackfoot ways of knowing. She states that “knowing is ... a circular and reciprocal process” (2004, p. 55). In contrast, Bastien contends that a Eurocentric worldview is hierarchical, with power and superiority being fundamental. In alignment with the epistemological and ontological foundation I outlined in Chapter 2 based on the work of Opaskwayak Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2008), Bastien explained that Blackfoot knowledge is based on relationship and interconnectedness of the universe and cosmos, which again the storytellers and I believed to be best demonstrated in a circular shape.

Upon completion of this circular map of Blackfoot factors of survivance, I noticed a striking resemblance to Abraham Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy of needs. This is not surprising

considering that Maslow spent time with the Blackfoot people, specifically with members of the Siksika Nation, conducting field research from which he formulated his proposed hierarchy of needs (e.g., Blood & Heavy Head, 2007; Michel, 2014). Maslow took what he learned in Siksika and presented it through his own western lens. Maslow's hierarchy is a motivational model that assumes a pyramidal shape. Maslow proposed that people are motivated to meet their needs in a hierarchical way, needing to satisfy needs at the bottom of the pyramid prior to those higher up the pyramid. From bottom to top, the needs included in Maslow's hierarchy are physiological needs, safety, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization. Physiological needs as he defined them are needs related the body's efforts to maintain homeostasis, particularly hunger or appetite. Safety needs are those that protect one from perceived danger, such as the desire for reliable routines, physical health and safety, employment, and financial security. Belonging and love needs include a motivation for loving friendships, romantic relationships, and familial relationships. Maslow defined the need for esteem as being people's need for positive evaluation of themselves, seeing themselves as having strengths, achievements, respect, and reputation. Finally, the need for self-actualization at the top of the pyramid refers to living in line with who a person authentically is, fulfilling what they are capable of in life.

While bearing different shapes, the factors of survivance included in the current map (basic needs; connection; purpose; being present; and awareness of culture, spirit, and self) were similar to those on Maslow's hierarchy. Maslow's physiological and safety needs as I described them above align well with the basic needs factor of survivance in Figure 6. His love and belonging needs are closest to the currently proposed factor of connection. Finally, there is some overlap between both Maslow's esteem and self-actualization needs and what I proposed as being factors of purpose and awareness of culture, spirit, and self.

Maslow's hierarchy has faced criticism for being incorrectly hierarchical, particularly when viewed through a relational worldview. Cindy Blackstock (2011), member of the Gitksan First Nation, and Terry Cross (2003, 2007), member of the Seneca Nation, both scholars and activists, have argued this point. Each have proposed that the needs on Maslow's hierarchy are better understood as interdependent elements and should not be viewed in a stepwise manner. Cross (2003, 2007) reinterpreted Maslow's hierarchy of needs through a relational Indigenous worldview and instead proposed a four-quadrant circle for understanding human existence, explaining that "health and well-being is said to depend on the balance between the four quadrants of the circle: mind, body, spirit, and context" (p. 357). Blackstock elaborated upon this work and proposed that the principles of Cross' worldview could be viewed within four dimensions of a holistic model: cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional. After viewing these models, I believe that the factors of survivance that can be seen in Figure 6 correspond with what Cross and Blackstock have proposed as dimensions that are required for health and well-being. Blackstock's physical dimension is akin to the basic needs factor of survivance in Figure 6 and includes food, water, housing, safety, and security. The emotional dimension aligns with the factor of connection I proposed in collaboration with my storytellers. This dimension includes belonging and relationship. The cognitive and spiritual dimensions Blackstock proposed were represented across the final three factors of survivance in Figure 6, specifically purpose, being present, as well as awareness of culture, spirit, and self. Blackstock's cognitive dimension includes self and community actualization, identity, service, and esteem. The spiritual dimension includes spirituality and life purpose. Such similarity in conceptualization serves as support for the concept map in Figure 6 that provides a model of understanding the factors of survivance shared by the Blackfoot storytellers who engaged in the current research.

While the purpose of creating this first concept map was to provide a context for answering my research question, its use might extend beyond this dissertation. The utility of such a model or map in the field of counselling psychology is to provide a basis for conceptualization of people's needs or factors that contribute to survivance. For example, Blackstock (2011) proposed that risks are alleviated when the relational worldview principles outlined within the four dimensions of a holistic model are in balance. Similarly, I propose that threats, specifically those of Covid-19, are eased when Blackfoot people have established factors of survivance. Models such as this that consider an Indigenous – in this case Blackfoot – relational worldview offer an alternative to the more commonly used Western models, such as Maslow's hierarchy of needs.

For counselling psychologists this model could support a more culturally appropriate way of understanding the needs of Indigenous clients. Such understanding stands to benefit Indigenous clients as cultural sensitivity, which includes respect for and incorporation of traditional knowledges when working with Indigenous people, is associated with improved wellbeing and better therapeutic outcomes (Collins & Arthur, 2010; Roysircar, 2009; Sue & Zane, 1987). In addition to benefiting Indigenous clients, having access to both Western and Indigenous models for conceptualization might support the practice of *two-eyed seeing*. Two-eyed seeing was introduced in 2004 by Albert Marshall, an Elder from the Mi'kmaw Nation (Bartlett et al., 2012). It was defined as using one eye to see the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and the other to see the strengths of Western ways of knowing (Bartlett et al., 2012). Further, it is the process of using both eyes to weave between these two worldviews to inform best practice (Bartlett et al., 2012). Aikenhead and Michell (2011) explained that two-eyed seeing, or an understanding of both Western and Indigenous worldviews, is beneficial in that

“people familiar with both knowledge systems can uniquely combine the two in various ways to meet a challenge or task at hand” (p. 114). From this perspective, counsellors from all backgrounds could benefit from understanding multiple worldviews and doing so is likely to benefit more clients (Bartlett et al., 2012). Counselling is primarily based on Western knowledges, and thus integrating Indigenous knowledges is crucial for improving practice. This integration should be supported by advisory councils of knowledgeable stakeholders (Bartlett et al., 2012), meaning we must look to the voices of both experts in counselling and Indigenous knowledge holders to support the process of shifting toward two-eyed seeing in counselling.

### **Relevance of Factors of Survivance and the Use of Art in Counselling Psychology**

When reflecting on how Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic, I consider my position as a psychologist and the knowledge and training I have that shapes how I view the applicability of the findings. In this section, I consider how art's contribution to survivance might inform counselling practice with Blackfoot, Indigenous, and all people when faced with significant challenges such as the threats of the Covid-19 pandemic.

### **Meeting Basic Needs**

It is important that counsellors recognize the impact of unmet basic needs on health. Poverty, food insecurity, homelessness, and unemployment, for example, are associated with poor physical, emotional, and mental health outcomes (Bombay et al., 2014; Corrado et al., 2014). As I mentioned in Chapter 2, these social determinants of health or threats to survivance are experienced at a greater rate among many Indigenous communities due to significant inequities (Bombay et al., 2014; Corrado et al., 2014). By contrast, income security is considered a protective determinant related to better health outcomes for Indigenous people (Bethune et al.,



2018). Secure income from employment allows people to meet their basic needs more easily by affording necessities such as food and safe shelter.

As reported by the Blackfoot storytellers who engaged in research conversations with me, the Covid-19 pandemic threatened many Blackfoot people's incomes, with some facing job loss and with artists initially losing access to their typical methods of selling artwork. While they did see an initial rise in unemployment from 10.4% in 2019 to 15.4% in 2020, Indigenous people in Western provinces have more recently seen unemployment rates that are lower than pre-pandemic levels, with an unemployment rate of 7.6% in December 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2023). The disparity between the Indigenous population and the total population in Western provinces still exists but has also reduced since pre-pandemic levels, with unemployment being 4.6% higher among Indigenous populations in 2019, compared to only 2.5% higher in December 2022 (Statistics Canada, 2023). This significant closing of the gap in unemployment rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations over the course of the pandemic might speak to the survivance of Indigenous communities in Alberta and other Western provinces. Certainly, several of the Blackfoot storytellers supported this point as they shared how they used the circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic to their advantage, taking the leap to change careers, selling art outside of their own communities, and branching into social media marketing and sales.

A counsellor's role in supporting with basic needs might vary depending on where they work and the populations they serve. Some counsellors might advise or support clients with finding or keeping work and understanding possible work options (Swanson & Fouad, 2015), in which cases selling art might be worth considering as a valid source of income for some. Not everyone will be able to prosper by selling art for money, but this option should not be

disregarded, particularly when paired with social media marketing and sales. Counsellors might also work to enhance career development by supporting clients in exploration and reflection to enhance their understanding of themselves, their values, and their identities and helping them choose a path that is meaningful to them and their communities (Swanson & Fouad, 2015). This overlaps with other factors of survivance art contributes to, including awareness of self, culture, and spirit as well as finding purpose. Further, this aligns with a strengths-based approach, which I elaborate on later in this chapter. The role of the counsellor might be to recognize a person's gift, such as art, and work to enhance it (Fellner, 2016).

### **Connection**

It has long been established in research that positive relationships, social support, belonging, or connection with others are associated with maintaining better mental and physical health (Ganster & Victor, 1988; Ozbay et al., 2007). Positive connection with others is a significant protective factor that reduces the negative impacts of stressful or even traumatic events (Kaniasty, 2012; Ozbay et al., 2007). This is true for the general population as well as Indigenous populations in Canada (Anand et al., 2019; Richmond et al., 2007; Schill et al., 2019). For example, in a study that included 1,302 adults from eight First Nations communities in Canada, Anand and colleagues (2019) explored cardiovascular risk factors and found that both trust between neighbours and higher levels of social support were associated with significantly lower cardiovascular risk scores. Additionally, Richmond and colleagues (2007) surveyed 31,625 adult Indigenous people in Canada to explore the relationship between social support and thriving. They found a significant positive relationship between high levels of social support and greater self-reports of thriving health, which the authors defined as “one's ability to flourish in response to adversity” (p. 1827). In a qualitative study, Schill and colleagues (2019) facilitated

individual interviews and sharing circles to explore determinants of mental wellness among urban Indigenous Elders. Elders shared that relationships with family, friends, and the land were associated with mental wellness. Finally, Goodwill and McCormick (2012), Ojibway and Mohawk scholars, respectively, interviewed 12 Indigenous people “representing the Coastal Salish, Cree, Dakota, Navajo, Nisga’a, Ojibway, Shuswap, and Sto:lo First Nations” (p. 25) to explore events or incidents that contributed to the attainment of Indigenous identity. The authors argued that attainment of Indigenous identity was imperative to the health and wellbeing of Indigenous people in Canada, specifically referring to research that supported that such identity was associated with higher self-esteem, resilience, psychosocial adjustment, and mental wellness as well as lower levels of substance use and depression. Incidents that contributed to the attainment of Indigenous identity were categorized, and several categories related to connection were recognized as facilitating Indigenous identity, including: participating in cultural gathering, participating in a group of Aboriginal people, connecting with family, helping other Aboriginal people, verbalizing your experiences as an Aboriginal person, getting support from parents, attending a cultural gathering, and being influenced by a grandparent.

Not surprisingly, researchers found that social support or connection also benefited psychological health of Indigenous people during the Covid-19 pandemic, reducing the threats posed by isolation (Burnett et al., 2022; John-Henderson & Ginty, 2020). For example, Burnett and colleagues (2022) surveyed 263 Indigenous people during the Covid-19 pandemic and found that those who reported a strong sense of community belonging were significantly less likely to report symptoms of anxiety or depression. Further, John-Henderson and Ginty (2020) found that social support was associated with lower levels of psychological stress during the Covid-19 pandemic. In the same study, John-Henderson and Ginty (2020) found that people who

experienced early life trauma were at greater risk of psychological stress during the pandemic; however, having social support protected against this risk as they found that “for individuals who felt that they had people in their life to turn to for support . . . , historical loss was not a significant predictor of changes in psychological stress in response to the COVID-19 pandemic” (p. 3). The Blackfoot storytellers in the current study recognized the threat of isolation on individuals’ wellbeing and shared how engagement with art could increase a sense of connection with others. Specifically, they discussed how art helped them connect with or relate to others by expressing themselves and sharing stories of culture and history, personal experience, and healing. Art was also used to relate to others by teaching and learning about art skills as well as traditions and culture.

The sharing of stories through art is both a way of connecting with others and a culturally rooted form of healing, thus contributing to survivance (Dewar, 2016; St. Pierre, 2018). In my own master’s thesis, I had research conversations with five Blackfoot artists to explore how engagement in traditional and contemporary Blackfoot culture and art benefits Blackfoot middle school students. In that research process the artists interviewed emphasized that “art is culture” (St. Pierre, 2018, p. 83) and “art can be used to empower voice, overcome deficit narratives, [and] create new stories” (p. 84). As a culturally rooted method of sharing stories with others, art was seen as way of connecting, sharing, and expressing oneself that Blackfoot artists believed contributed to student wellness. Art offers a means of self expression and identity building through the process of relating with others (Whitney et al., 2004). In the context of counselling, engagement in art might be a means to communicate between client and counsellor, supporting the process of teaching, learning and fostering the client’s self expression and building of their identity.

## **Finding Purpose**

In some research of factors that contribute to psychological wellbeing, purpose in life has been defined as a sense of directedness and intentionality and as having goals and intentions that contribute to a feeling that life has meaningful purpose (Ryff, 1989; Ryff, 2014; Kang et al., 2021). Such a sense of purpose in life is associated with better outcomes when faced with stressors (Schaefer et al., 2013). The Covid-19 pandemic posed a threat to this sense of purpose as many people's routines, typical activities, and goals were disrupted, with some people experiencing job loss. Kang and colleagues (2021) surveyed 517 adults during the Covid-19 pandemic to explore how purpose in life might relate to both loneliness and health-protective behaviours. Purpose in life was measured using a modified 7-item purpose in life subscale from the Psychological Wellbeing Scale developed by Carol Ryff (1989). Kang and colleagues (2021) found that during the Covid-19 pandemic, a sense of purpose in life was related to reduced loneliness and a higher level of engagement in health-protective behaviours such as hand hygiene and social distancing (Kang et al., 2021). By buffering against loneliness and supporting engagement in health-protective behaviours that were widely recommended for preventing the spread of Covid-19, purpose in life likely served to protect against both mental and physical illness during the pandemic (Kang et al., 2021). Indeed, in another study conducted by Echeverria and colleagues (2021), purpose in life had a protective effect on psychopathology during the pandemic. This study included 149 healthcare workers who completed self-evaluations of anxiety, depression, acute stress, drug abuse, and alcohol use as well as purpose in life. Echeverria and colleagues (2021) found that purpose in life was associated with lower levels of depression, anxiety, and acute stress disorder.

Blackfoot storytellers spoke about how art contributed to their own sense of purpose during the pandemic, explaining that it provided them with something to spend their time doing, and that it was something they could complete or achieve that elicited feelings of pride. Existing research also supports engaging in art activities to find purpose in life, specifically by leading people to feel enabled, proud, or capable when they complete a new art challenge or learn new art or crafting skills (Kim & Kang, 2011; Liddle et al., 2013). For example, Kim and Kang (2011) explored how engagement in art therapy influenced purpose in life. In this study, 28 stroke patients and caregivers were provided colour therapy and 28 were in a control group that received only rehabilitation. Both groups had very low initial purpose in life scores. While the control group did not see changes in purpose in life after rehabilitation, the colour therapy group showed significantly higher purpose in life scores. Specifically, colour therapy participants reported increases in meaning, aim, and value for life. In another study, Liddle and colleagues (2013) interviewed 23 women in their eighties to explore how their participation in art and craft activities contributed to health and well-being. In these interviews they learned that engagement in art and craft supported a subjective sense of purpose in life, contributing to well-being. The participants described art and craft as contributing to purpose in several ways:

Women set goals for what they would make, decided how they would make it and for whom the item was made ... Art and craft activities also provided reasons to continue their own education and self-development, [and] looking forward ... The women identified with particular activities, describing themselves as a “painter”, an “artist”, or a “knitter” and saw these activities as intrinsic to their own natures ... The outputs of these activities were also evidence of their capabilities and productivity. (Liddle et al., 2013, p. 334)

Further, feelings of authentic pride that stem from accomplishing a task or goal, an aspect of purpose in life, are associated with continued achievement and improved performance on future tasks, as well as increased confidence and prosocial behaviours (Weidman et al., 2016; Wubben, 2011). Authentic pride is an emotion associated with accomplishment, self-worth, and achievement resulting from a person's own efforts (Weidman et al., 2016; Wubben, 2011). In three separate studies with adults running long-distance races and undergraduate students, Weidman and colleagues (2016) explored the relationship between authentic pride and achievement. They found that achievement of goals resulted in pride and that pride also served to promote continued and improved performance. The Blackfoot artists who took part in research conversations with me similarly said that creating something and finishing an art project was a source of such a sense of authentic pride that resulted from achievement of a goal or purpose.

While art therapy is a subspecialisation within counselling, as a generalist myself the perspective I come from is that art can be integrated within any practice. Given its benefits in this area, counsellors should consider integrating art into therapy to support clients with finding purpose. This could be done by integrating art within a session or by advising clients to engage in the creation of art as a between-session task. Further, Wilkinson and Chilton (2013) suggested that counsellors could elevate the therapeutic benefits of art by “mining for positive meaning and purpose” (p. 8). It is common for counsellors to recommend tasks or activities to complete between sessions, often with the goal of eliciting a positive emotion such as authentic pride. It could be worthwhile to consider the creation of art as an option for an activity that can provide a sense of purpose when someone is otherwise feeling aimless (Kim & Kang, 2011; Liddle et al., 2013). The completion of an art project or learning new art skills might elicit positive and motivating feelings such as pride (Kim & Kang, 2011; Liddle et al., 2013).

## **Being Present**

The benefits of being focused on the present have been extensively explored in psychological research, particularly in the context of *mindfulness*. Mindfulness is often defined as the practice of non-judgmental present-moment awareness (Baer, 2003; Germer, 2005). Similar to the factor of survivance I described as being present, mindfulness involves in the moment observation of internal and external stimuli and paying attention with curiosity and openness (Baer, 2003; Harris, 2016). Further, like the benefits of being present shared by the Blackfoot storytellers in the current study, the practice of being present in mindfulness has been shown to reduce negative emotion such as fear or grief and increase one's ability to cope with challenges or threats (Blanke et al., 2018). I draw this connection between mindfulness and the Blackfoot practice of being present because of its strong influence in the field of counselling. Recognizing the parallels between mindfulness and Blackfoot practices might support counsellors in integrating mindfulness in a culturally appropriate way when working with Blackfoot and Indigenous clients (Le & Gobert, 2015; Meyerhoefer et al., 2022). For example, Le and Gobert (2015) evaluated a mindfulness youth suicide prevention intervention adapted for Indigenous youth. They collaborated with Elders, community practitioners, and cultural committee members to adapt this intervention. Some adaptations that were considered included sitting in a circle and having facilitators who were from the community. For their evaluation, mindfulness was defined as present moment awareness. The eight Indigenous youth who participated all reported improvements in being able to engage in the present moment. Further, they all agreed that they gained skills to help them cope with stress and reported substantial reduction in suicidal ideation, with 44% having reported thinking that they were better off dead or having thoughts of hurting themselves in some ways several days to more than half the days at



pre-test, and 100% responding not at all to the same item at post-test. Similarly, Barudin (2021) reflectively explored a culturally adapted, trauma-informed yoga and mindfulness program for Indigenous adolescent girls under youth protection. Cultural adaptations included circle sharing and the incorporation of cultural teachings and beadwork. More common mindfulness practices such as breathing techniques and centring practices were also present in this intervention. From Barudin's perspective, based on her own experience of facilitating the program and youth feedback, youth were receptive to this program and benefited from the sense of connection it promoted as well as the practice of being present and engaging in rhythmic movements. Such research indicates that there are likely benefits to integrating or adapting mindfulness practices for working with Indigenous clients to enhance their practice of being present.

The Blackfoot storytellers who engaged in the current study described being present as essential to ongoing survivance. Presence was spoken of as a cultural teaching that could support Blackfoot people in managing stress, healing, increasing positive affect, and inducing relaxation. The benefits of being present experienced by these Blackfoot storytellers aligned with benefits noticed in existing research on being present or mindful. Further, storytellers shared that engagement in art was a method of being present in a here-and-now activity that elicited feelings of peace and pleasure. Mindfulness-based art therapies are based on this same premise and are used to reduce stress and increase positive affect (Beerse et al., 2020; Cheshure & Van Lith, 2022).

Art is an activity that could be incorporated in counselling to support people in being present or mindfully aware, thus supporting relaxation and increasing positive affect (Beerse et al., 2020; Cheshure & Van Lith, 2022). The repetitive, rhythmic, and present-focused nature of art can be relaxing, soothing, and grounding (Collier, 2011; Garlock, 2016; Kaimal & Arslanbek,

2020). Given its connection with traditional Blackfoot teachings, engaging in the creation of art might be a useful tool to incorporate into therapeutic practice specifically when working with Blackfoot and other Indigenous people (Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; Lu & Yuen, 2012; St. Pierre, 2018). It is noteworthy that focusing on this factor of survivance in counselling might additionally serve to strengthen other factors of survivance, as the practice of being present is associated with increased social connection and self-awareness (Blanke et al., 2017).

While there is benefit to incorporating or adapting mindfulness and using art as a culturally appropriate tool for being present in therapeutic practice with Indigenous clients, it is also worthwhile to note that other culturally relevant approaches that have a focus on being present might be more suitable for work with some Indigenous clients. For example, Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) is an approach that is grounded in Indigenous perspectives and being present (Tipple, 2021; Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014). IFOT involves experiential engaging with the body's felt sense in the present while also focusing on wisdoms that might emerge from past, present, or future in that moment (Tipple, 2021). This aligns with an Indigenous belief that time is not linear (Tipple, 2021). While this goes beyond the scope of the current study, it is worth considering as an Indigenous therapeutic approach that has a focus on being present.

### **Awareness of Culture, Spirit, and Self**

As I discussed in Chapter 2, connection with culture and spirit have been linked with desirable wellness outcomes among Indigenous communities (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fellner, 2016; McKenzie et al., 2016; McMahon et al., 2012). All Blackfoot storytellers agreed with this point and underscored the importance of cultural and spiritual awareness and engagement in ceremonies and prayer as healing. Relating with one's culture and spirituality was

spoken of as a way of building a relationship with and awareness of oneself that was healing and contributed to survivance.

In Indigenous communities such as the Blackfoot Nations, many people consider art to be inseparable from culture (Hanson & McKegney, 2021; St. Pierre, 2018). For them, art is a way of directly engaging with and increasing their awareness of their culture. Blackfoot storytellers reiterated this point and spoke further about how art offers a way to relate with land and spirit as well as to reflect internally and build a sense of personal and cultural identity. Storytellers spoke of the role of personal and cultural identity as healing. This is supported by research that has demonstrated that cultural identity and engagement is associated with improved wellbeing for Indigenous people (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Fellner, 2016; Filbert & Flynn, 2010; Kirmayer et al, 2009; Lavallée and Poole, 2009; McKenzie et al., 2016; St. Pierre, 2018). For example, looking at suicide rates and markers of cultural continuity among 17,902 Indigenous youth from 196 Indigenous communities in British Columbia, Canada, Chandler and Lalonde (1998) found that having markers of cultural continuity was associated with reduced rates of suicide among Indigenous youth. Cultural identity and engagement in this way was seen as a protective factor. In another study with 97 Indigenous youth, Filbert and Flynn (2010) found that having greater levels of cultural assets was associated with decreased behavioural difficulties related to emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity and inattention, as well as peer relationship problems. Other researchers such as Fellner (2016), St. Pierre (2018), and Lavallée and Poole (2009) have interviewed Indigenous people in Canada to explore Indigenous perspectives on factors that contribute to health, healing, and wellness. Many of the Indigenous people who engaged in each of these studies shared similar perspectives that cultural identity and engagement is healing and a source of strength and wellness. The connection between art and

awareness of culture, spirit, and self or identity might make art a culturally appropriate tool for counsellors to incorporate into their work with Indigenous and specifically Blackfoot clients (Cameron, 2010; Kaimal & Arslanbek, 2020; St. Pierre, 2018).

### **The Role of Personal Strengths in Fostering Survivance**

When considering my research question – how have Blackfoot artists' engagement in art contributed to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot communities during the Covid-19 pandemic? – I did not have personal strengths in mind, but rather, expected to focus my results on how engagement in art contributes to survivance. However, it was personal strengths that struck me most when engaging in research conversations with Blackfoot storytellers. During each conversation I found myself noticing and admiring the strengths of each storyteller as they shared their own challenges and successes through the Covid-19 pandemic. There was a poignant energy in each of these conversations that I refer to now as Blackfoot Warrior Spirit that encompasses many personal strengths that are culturally rooted. The strengths that make up Blackfoot Warrior Spirit are not necessarily unique to Blackfoot people, nor do all Blackfoot people exhibit them; however, these strengths were emphasized as being culturally valued and relevant to Blackfoot history and traditions as a Warrior society and as caretakers of land. These included perseverance, adaptability, courage, strength, confidence, compassion, caretaking, and love. These strengths positively contributed to all five factors of survivance identified by Blackfoot storytellers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Several researchers have argued for culturally appropriate strength-based approaches to counselling to better support Indigenous people (e.g., Allen et al., 2022; Askew et al., 2020; Fellner, 2016; Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022; Ritland et al., 2020; Tipple, 2021; Wade, 1995). Such approaches focus on the strengths, values, capabilities, and survivance stories of

Indigenous people and communities (Allen et al., 2022; Askew et al., 2020; Brough et al., 2004; Bryant et al., 2020; Fellner, 2019; Okpalauwaekwe et al., 2022; Ritland et al., 2020; Tipple, 2021). Askew and colleagues (2020) argued that a strengths-based approach is fundamental to holistic health practice with Indigenous people. They interviewed 11 Indigenous and one non-Indigenous health practitioners employed in the Inala community in Australia, asking them to define a strengths-based approach and explain how this informed their practices. One of the practitioners stated that a “[s]trengths-based approach is just looking from a positive way at a person or a community and identifying what all the strengths are that person has or that community has and building on that.” Askew and colleagues (2020) further proposed that a strengths-based approach requires meaningful community relationships and the relinquishment of power imbalances and aligns with Indigenous way of being and doing. This focus on strengths in counselling has the potential to benefit Indigenous people’s wellness (Brouzos et al., 2022; Ritland et al., 2020) and prevent suicide (Allen et al., 2022) while also countering the deficit lens of approaches that focus on illness symptoms (Fellner, 2016, 2019).

Considering that such strengths are associated with survivance of Blackfoot people, it would be beneficial for counsellors to support individuals and communities in recognizing and amplifying their embodiment of Blackfoot Warrior Spirit by providing strength-based interventions to promote ongoing survivance. Citing Ross (2014) in her 2016 dissertation, Fellner proposed the use of talking or healing circles in a group counselling context stating that “[h]ealing in circles is strength-based, and reduces therapeutic power dynamics by facilitating equality, humility, and respect” (p. 197). She emphasized the importance of recognizing resilience, survivance, strengths, and gifts and of understanding and valuing trauma wisdom. Further, one of the knowledge keepers she spoke with recommended experiential therapeutic

approaches such as the use of art in therapy and IFOT, an experiential approach that supports people to focus on their inward, physical sensing (Gendlin, 1996; Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014). Both the use of art in therapy and IFOT emphasise strengths by supporting people in healing themselves rather than becoming reliant on their counsellors.

### **Recommendations for Counselling Psychology**

The findings from this community-based research emphasize the voices of Blackfoot community members and their experiences with healing and survivance. The TRC (2015) Calls to Action dictate that the Indigenous ways of being, doing, and knowing shared here must be valued and used to effect change in research and in counselling. To support this, I make recommendations for counselling psychology later in this chapter. Further, the CPA and PFC (2018) task force recommends that those who provide psychological treatment should recognize that “many psychological treatment methods echo colonialist European values of being ‘normal,’ further causing Indigenous people to adapt to a Western ideology perpetuated by colonization” (p. 20). Considering the potential for causing harm to Indigenous people, it is paramount that counsellors be conscientious and consider how to mitigate such risk for harm (CPA & PFC, 2018). With a goal of moving forward toward reconciliation, the CPA and PFC (2018) outlined several recommendations regarding the treatment of Indigenous people in Canada that are relevant to the findings of this research and can help to better serve such communities. Recommendations that are particularly relevant to the current findings require that counsellors (a) value Indigenous wisdom and be in the role of facilitator and supporter of such wisdom that is already present, (b) recognize the value of personal and cultural identity, (c) use a solution-focused or strength-based conceptualization that considers the context of colonization, and (d) familiarize themselves with and incorporate culturally appropriate treatments.

Below are general recommendations for counselling with Blackfoot clients based on the discussions above. These recommendations may be applicable to counselling with other Indigenous clients and even to non-Indigenous clients, but should be considered delicately given that this research focused exclusively on Blackfoot perspectives in the context of Covid-19.

1. **Recognize Factors of Survivance as Interrelated and Non-Hierarchical.** This model of understanding survivance may offer a more culturally appropriate way of conceptualizing the needs of Blackfoot people. Referring to this worldview would demonstrate value of Indigenous, specifically Blackfoot wisdom and may support Western counsellors in practicing two-eyed seeing (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011; CPA & PFC, 2018).
2. **Use Strength-Based Approaches to Foster Blackfoot Warrior Spirit.** Considering the call to shift from a deficit narrative to one that acknowledges the historical and ongoing survivance of Indigenous people (CPA & PFC, 2018; Vizenor, 2008), using strength-based approaches in counselling with Blackfoot people is appropriate. Such approaches may serve to foster the culturally rooted personal strengths of Blackfoot people. Examples of strength-based approaches might include the use of art in therapy, group healing or talking circles, or IFOT (Fellner, 2016; Ross, 2014; Tipple, 2021).
3. **Consider Integrating Art into Counselling.** Given its inseparable connection with Blackfoot culture, integrating art into counselling might offer a culturally appropriate intervention that recognizes the value of cultural identity and can contribute to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot people. Such culturally appropriate treatment options are necessary for taking steps toward reconciliation (CPA & PFC, 2018). Art

might be particularly helpful for supporting people in being present, finding purpose, connecting with others, and increasing awareness of culture, spirit, and self. Further, it might be beneficial to consider the creation and selling of art as a valid way to earn money to meet basic needs.

4. **Refer Appropriately.** While culturally appropriate counselling can support Blackfoot and other Indigenous clients, it is important to consider the limitations of counsellors and enhance practice through appropriate community relationships (CPA & PFC, 2018). For many Indigenous people, connection with culture is a core component of the healing process. Such a connection might be most appropriately fostered by Elders, ceremonies, and other traditions and spiritual activities (CPA & PFC, 2018). It is important that counsellors – particularly those who are non-Indigenous – avoid appropriating Indigenous healing techniques, and in such cases where a counsellor cannot advise on traditional methods of healing, it would be important to refer to appropriate cultural resources.

When considering these recommendations, it is important that counsellors not assume engaging in these four recommendations is, by itself, sufficient to be competent in psychotherapy with Blackfoot or any other Indigenous communities. Counsellors should always consider their individual client, their own familiarity with the client's traditions, and their awareness of historical and ongoing threats to survivance (Weinberg, 2018). Counsellors working with Indigenous populations should seek out adequate mentorship and supervision from a qualified professional who can provide cultural guidance (Weinberg, 2018). Further, for those counsellors who are not yet aware of Canada's history of colonialism and attempted genocide, it is important to seek out information that helps them understand their own relationships with power and



colonialism (Fellner, 2016). It is critical that counsellors come to understand that the health and risk disparities observed among some Indigenous people and communities are not due to a deficit within Indigenous people, but rather are directly related to a historical and ongoing colonial problem (Fellner, 2019). Beyond aiming for competence, counsellors should consider cultural sensitivity and humility (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Hays, 2008; Hook et al., 2013). This requires the counsellor to relinquish any stance of superiority and to respect the knowledges and ways of being of other cultures (Arthur & Collins, 2010; Hays, 2008; Hook et al., 2013). This means respecting the knowledge a client brings into the counselling relationship and seeking to better understand their worldviews and considering this when choosing counselling approaches. This aligns well with the values of counselling psychology outlined earlier in this paper (Beatch et al., 2009; Bedi et al., 2011). It is also important that counsellors not make assumptions about their clients based exclusively on nationality and Indigeneity. Being Blackfoot will not guarantee that a person shares the views portrayed in this dissertation, and some Blackfoot clients may align more with a Western worldview and approach depending on their own lived experiences (T. Black, personal communication, January 2, 2023). Further, many Indigenous people have multiple ancestries from different nations and/or places in the world, and counsellors should refer to recommendations for engaging with the complexities of Indigenous relationalities in a good way (see Minet, 2021). Care should be thoughtful and individualized in this way.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

In this section I discuss the strengths and limitations of this research project. I consider how this research honoured Blackfoot voices and contributed to narratives of survivance. I also consider limitations such as differences within the group and generalizability. Finally, I reflect on both barriers and accomplishments during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **Honouring Blackfoot Voices**

This research followed a CBR approach, respected traditional protocols as advised by a Blackfoot Elder, and honoured Blackfoot voices. By collaborating with Blackfoot community members through every stage of the research process, this dissertation contributes to a necessary body of research that has been done *with* rather than *on* Indigenous communities, centring a perspective that has historically been excluded from research (Halseth et al., 2016).

## **Contributing to a Narrative of Survivance**

The content of this dissertation is intended to contribute to the greater body of survivance literature that emphasizes Indigenous stories of resilience, wellness, balance, and trauma wisdom (Fellner, 2019; Tipple, 2021). It is an example of intentionally shifting away from a deficit narrative toward one that recognizes the power, strength, resistance, and resilience of Blackfoot people and Indigenous peoples more broadly (Vizenor, 2008). The concept maps that came from this work offer visual stories of triumph when faced with the threats of Covid-19 and highlight the culturally rooted personal strengths of Blackfoot people that contribute to their ongoing survivance.

## **Within Group Differences and Generalizability**

It is important to acknowledge that the generalizability of the findings presented in this dissertation are limited as the methods used were not designed to produce generalizable results. The concept maps presented are unlikely to represent all Blackfoot people equally, as each person will have their own experiences that influence their perspective on art, culture, survivance, and Covid-19. Within group differences were evident even among the group of Blackfoot storytellers I engaged with. Such differences influenced how each storyteller viewed their relationship with art and art's relationship with survivance through the Covid-19 pandemic,

each emphasizing different factors of survivance and strengths as being most relevant to them. These storytellers had different lived experiences. Among them were a residential school survivor, a child of the 60s scoop, people who experienced homelessness, some who overcame addictions, and some living with chronic illness. There were storytellers living on-reserve and others off-reserve, some rural, some urban, some above the imaginary line between Canada and the United States, and some below it. This speaks to the vastness of diversity that exists not just between Indigenous groups across Canada, but even within a single confederacy (Minet, 2021). The conceptualizations and recommendations made in this dissertation may still have some relevance to other Indigenous communities, as many traditionally share similar relational worldviews (Wilson, 2008); however, this should be considered with caution.

While generalizability is limited, it is also important to acknowledge the ideas shared in this dissertation as only one possible truth. In conversation with Elder Perry Day Chief, he told me that if I asked five people the same question, I would get five different correct answers (personal communication, September 17, 2022). What one individual experiences as truth will not be the same as another, but this does not make any perspective invalid. Thus, although viewed as a limitation in some research, generalizability is neither desirable nor possible from an Indigenous perspective, and therefore this fits the community-based nature of this work.

### **Barriers and Opportunities of the Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Covid-19 pandemic proved to be an obstacle to this research project that temporarily paused progress. This led to a necessary shift in research question and changed the way research conversations were conducted. Research conversations were initially intended to be completed in person on Blackfoot land, but most were moved to a virtual setting. While this allowed for people who were physically far away to participate and allowed for more flexible meeting times,

it also created limitations for vital research conversations. It is possible that some meaning behind each story was lost due to the distance, lack of visible body language, or the absence of human-to-human connection of energy.

While the Covid-19 pandemic presented many challenges and altered this research, it is important to note that this exact project would not have happened without it. The findings about survivance here emerged in the context of this global pandemic and may not have been the same outside of it. This pandemic encouraged many people to reflect on their needs, values, and wellness, which may have enriched these findings.

### **Considerations for Future Research**

This dissertation contributes to a larger body of literature that focuses on the historical and ongoing survivance of Indigenous people and communities. Additional research that considers this same goal is necessary for shifting the narrative from one of deficit toward one of survivance of Indigenous people in Canada. There are many directions for future research that could contribute to this overarching goal.

First, it might be beneficial to further explore factors that contribute to the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot and other Indigenous communities. While the factors outlined in Figure 6 offer a conceptualization of the factors of survivance, this was a byproduct of the research question rather than the initial aim. Further research should seek to clarify these factors in collaboration with more Blackfoot storytellers, not exclusively artists. Ideally, several Blackfoot Elders and knowledge holders should be consulted to determine the accuracy and utility of the proposed model of factors of survivance. Reaching beyond the Blackfoot community, it could also be beneficial to explore these factors of survivance among other Indigenous people and communities. Keeping in mind that the current study took place in the context of the Covid-19

pandemic, it would also be worthwhile to explore whether these factors of survivance are relevant when faced with other threats.

Further, it may be worthwhile to consider other factors that contribute to survivance in addition to art. Considering other activities could better inform recommendations for how to support the ongoing survivance of Blackfoot and other Indigenous people. It is also essential to explore the role that counselling may have in supporting Indigenous survivance. Additionally, it would be beneficial to conduct research on the concept of Blackfoot Warrior Spirit, and whether and how such a spirit contributes to survivance. Finally, I propose that future research assess the utility of the recommendations made in this dissertation.

### **Dissemination**

Beyond sharing this dissertation with the academic community via submission to the University of Calgary vault for electronic theses and dissertations, it is important that this work be distributed among the communities of the Blackfoot Confederacy. To this end, I intend to co-host a community event with the storytellers who engaged in this research. This event will include the creation of a mural on Blackfoot territory that will represent the findings of this study, demonstrating Blackfoot stories of survivance via an art display that will be accessible to all community members. Further, with the support of my supervisor, Dr. Karlee Fellner, we will create a brief community report highlighting the concept maps that were developed in this research process. This will be distributed to Blackfoot community members as well as to stakeholders and students within the counselling related graduate programs in education at the University of Calgary.

## **Final Reflection**

As a student, researcher, teacher, and practitioner of counselling psychology I am concerned with the process of healing and wellness. I have come to learn the importance of alternatives to the conventional Eurocentric therapeutic perspective and processes, so that I might best serve my future clients and promote health among the communities in which I work. Engaging in community-based research with members of the Blackfoot confederacy over the past 7 years of my masters and doctoral degrees has shaped my perspectives and my practice. This experience has opened my eyes to multiple ways of seeing the world and I am so grateful for that learning. I intend to bring this forward in my future work as well as in my personal life.

This experience has heightened my awareness of that which I do not know. It has humbled me and taught me to ask before assuming and to recognize where I am not an expert. It has shaped my conceptual framework as a psychologist, having led me to strive toward two-eyed seeing (Aikenhead & Michell, 2011), valuing and always trying to better understand Western, Indigenous, and other worldviews. Further, the stories shared with me have contributed to my own healing from the damages of colonialism. Each story heard and relationship built has shifted my perspective and helped me to better understand the meaning of reconciliation, decolonization, and resurgence beyond what I can read in a textbook.

I am hopeful that the collaborative research I have engaged in with Blackfoot communities will contribute to decolonizing psychology's approach to counselling and wellness in Indigenous communities. I hope that my intentions in combination with listening and an openness to and valuing of Indigenous knowledge systems has led to useful research that benefits the Blackfoot communities with whom I engaged. Further, I hope that this dissertation might support others on their own journeys toward increased awareness, openness, and flexibility in

understanding and working with Indigenous people and communities. Finally, I hope that the recommendations made in this dissertation serve to inform practice and contribute to improved counselling services for Blackfoot and other Indigenous people.

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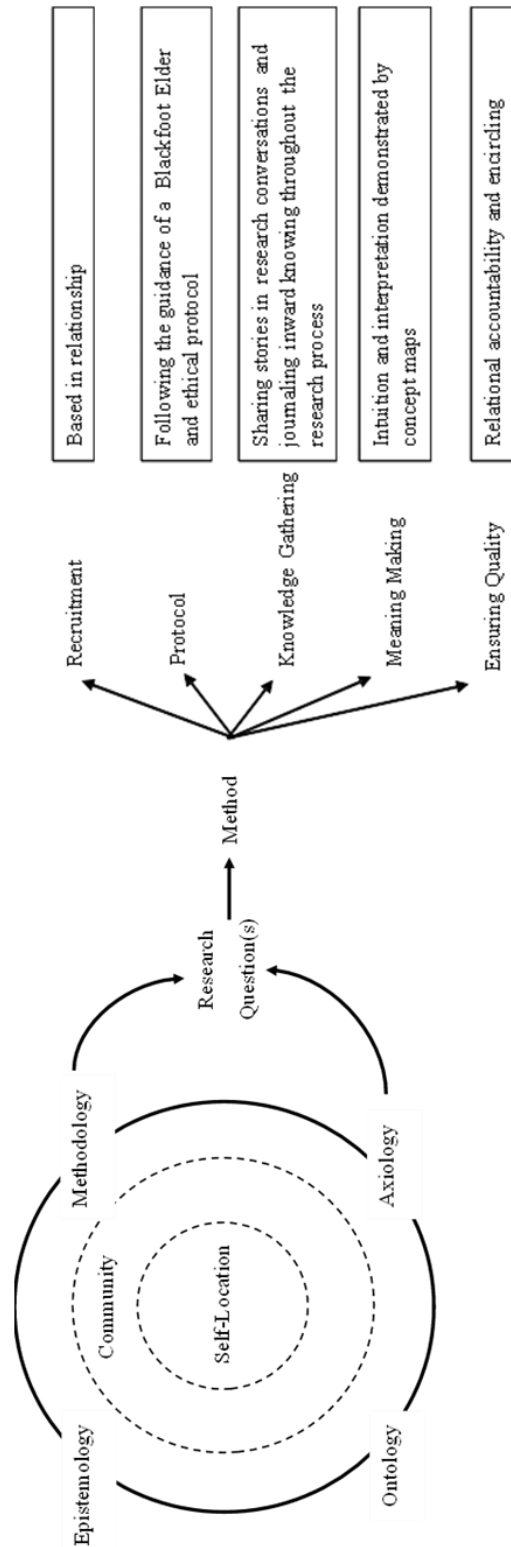
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## Appendix A

### *Map of Research Paradigm and Process*



## Appendix B

### *Research Conversation Guidelines*

1. Elder Perry Day Chief will provide information on following cultural protocol in all interactions with participants. All recommendations will be followed by the researcher.
2. Research conversations are a flexible and unstructured method of collecting information congruent with Indigenous cultural protocols. Not to be mistaken with a typical research interview, research conversations are open-ended and involve reciprocity in a conversation where both parties engage rather than simply having the participant answer the researcher's questions. Research conversations emphasize the importance of story and the storyteller's reflection and dialog with the researcher.
3. In the research conversations, storytellers' stories will not be interrupted, as this is not appropriate in research with Indigenous communities.
4. Due to the conversational and storying nature of research conversations, no specific prompts or questions will be used.
5. After going through informed consent, each conversation will begin with an offering of tobacco, to request a knowledge transfer, with a brief description of what is being asked of the participants. For example, the researcher might begin with:

*Thank you for agreeing to participate in this conversation with me today. I would like to offer you tobacco for the knowledge you are about to share with me. I am hoping to learn about how Blackfoot art is connected to the ongoing survivance of you and your community through the Covid-19 pandemic. Survivance if you recall refers to the strength, resistance, resilience, and courage of the Blackfoot community. I am interest in stories that demonstrate strength and resistance.*