

## Tia Stanley

Cote First Nation,  
Saulteaux-Chinese-Settler  
Bachelor of Social Work

*“To me, Indigenous research has given me the opportunity to connect with my identity. I found my voice and the strength to show who I am. I am strong, resilient and I honour those who came before me and those who will come after me.”*

## BUILDING MY TIPI

### Land Acknowledgement

It is necessary to acknowledge that this paper has been researched, written, and presented upon the traditional and unceded territory of Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc, within Secwépemcul'ecw. As we share knowledge, teaching, learning, and research here, I recognize that this territory has always been a place of knowledge, teaching, learning, and research.

I acknowledge the many Indigenous peoples from across this land.

### Introduction

This paper will explore how I had to unravel European assimilation attempts on my journey to becoming a Knowledge Maker (KM). This is a journey to discover my identity and how I may walk in two worlds: the Indigenous world and the settler-colonial world. A deep and meaningful understanding of who I am has been hindered due to the ongoing colonization of Indigenous people in Canada. Indigenous nations have been self-determining, self-sustaining and self-governing nations since time immemorial (S. Johnson, personal communication, February 26, 2020; Hick & Stokes, 2017). Today, we are oppressed by colonialism. The project of colonialism set about “civilizing” Indigenous people whom European settlers believed could benefit from their western worldview. Colonization is the imposition of another culture upon an

Indigenous population, as a way to control and assimilate (Hick & Stokes, 2017; Metcalfe-Chenail, 2016).

Despite being born with Indigenous ancestry, this did not privilege me with understanding of what that meant, nor does it provide access to language, culture, or ceremony. The genocidal tactics the Canadian government employed to disrupt Indigenous cultures in order to assimilate us disconnected us from our identity. The implementation of the *Indian Act*, residential schools, and the child welfare system paved the way for the current crisis many Indigenous communities face (Hick & Stokes, 2017). This left me and others feeling lost; as a past Knowledge Maker said, “I am currently on a journey to reconnect to my past,” which she discovered meant “reconnecting to all” (Bandura, 2019, p. 10).

This research will show who I am today, and where I want to go. I want to honour my community and culture: a home I have not seen yet. Colonialism tore us apart; this paper will show how I have walked in one world, and now I want to walk with my people, the Saulteaux people of the Cote First Nation. Other Knowledge Makers have felt the same; Glass (2016) observed that “since childhood I have wanted to be part of a community, especially one I shared an identity within; out of this absence, I have felt a lack of true identity” (p. 14). Remembering his words, this research is

not just for me. It is an act of decolonizing and creating space for Indigenous ways of knowing and being. By becoming a Knowledge Maker, I am creating space for others to come after me, so we can continue “rewriting and rerighting the Indigenous position in history and society” (Lavallée, 2009, p.23). By learning who I am, I can participate in “decolonizing the academy by incorporating Indigenous knowledge into the research rather than relying on Western theories” (Lavallée, 2009, p.23).

### Circles and Tipis

The circle is in all that is meaningful in this world: mother earth, the moon cycle, the rising of the sun, and the seasons; even our lives move in a circle. There is abundant diversity amongst Indigenous people yet we share an ideology that frames a holistic approach to life and a relationality to the world around us (Royal Saskatchewan Museum, n.d; Lavallée, 2009). Through my journey, circles were present and prevalent and as such, circles occur throughout this paper. Two occurrences worth mentioning are tipis and sharing circles. Like birds with circular nests, the Indigenous people living on the Plains of North America had circular homes called tipis (Royal Saskatchewan Museum, n.d.). Recently, I learned that the tipi is the traditional house of the Saulteaux people, my people. The Creator intended our children to grow within a home that was portable and comfortable. Tipis were more than a shelter, as each pole represented a moral principle held by the family and community (Royal Saskatchewan Museum, n.d.). As a tipi was built, what the family valued and honoured was woven in (Verniest, 2006).

Sharing circles have been fundamental to my journey. These sacred circles are healing, creating an energy that allows information to travel freely while healing us emotionally and spiritually. The circle invites the Creator and our ancestors to find us, for them to wrap around us (Lavallée, 2009), creating space for silenced voices.

This research is how I will discover who I am, and I will use the tipi framework to reclaim my Saulteaux identity and reconnect to my people. By reflecting on my past, family, education, and teachers, I can look at the current environment and decide if it is a suitable place

to build. These reflections will help me prepare, looking at what I already have and determining what I need. Once I have collected the material, I can begin to build. First, I must reflect on why I want to build a tipi in the first place. The first pole in my tipi creation is my intuition and it must be understood before I begin.

### First Pole: Intuition

*Can you know something without having the knowledge of it?* There is a feeling, a gut-feeling that Davis-Floyd & Arvidson (2016) call intuition and describe as the sense that “we are in the world and the world is in us” (foreword). Intuition is personal and unexplainable but inside we know it is the truth. Grounding us and connecting us to the world around us, intuition implores us to trust ourselves and lean in. Indigenous academics “include intuitive understanding as part of their research method” (Davis-Floyd & Arvidson, 2016, p. 13); I will do the same, recognizing intuition as a valid source of knowledge. Colonial institutions acknowledge intuition but do not value it. Lavallée (2009) reveals that intuition is sometimes known as a blood memory, a spiritual connection to one’s ancestors. In this way, ancestors present us with “thoughts, beliefs and actions” through our physical bodies (Lavallée, 2009, p. 22). What they knew, we shall know too. I may not understand the knowledge, yet I have always known there was more of me to discover; perhaps this was my ancestors imploring me to look deeper. While I walk in two worlds, I honour my intuition as a valid source of information and knowledge, acknowledging the past to share with future generations. Airini (2016) personified intuition when she wrote in a previous KM publication that “we use knowledge-making skills to overcome obstacles. It feels like we’re called to do so” (p. 34).

### Second Pole: Current Environment

*Where am I now and how did I get here?* The current environment is not ready for me to build, but with hard work, I can create space. The air around me is heavy with fog; I am waiting for the haze to lift. Hopefully, the ground underneath is stable enough. I will build on what I have always known: my environment as shaped by my past.

My mother's father immigrated from China. In Canada, he met her mother. Raised in BC, my mother and her two brothers lived in Vancouver, then Abbotsford. My father's mother, my Kokum, was Indigenous and my father was her only child. Kokum is the term that Saulteaux and Cree people use for Grandmother. My father's father is an unknown to me; a missing piece, just like my Kokum's past was for so long. I know my Kokum married a white man with many children and they were raised in Abbotsford, but her passing into the spirit world left me with more questions than answers. There are also questions about my father. He left when I was a child; I do not know his whereabouts. My relationship with my mother is nearly non-existent; I left our family home at 15 to discover the woman I am meant to be. Through research I found my experience is similar to many other Indigenous people as "many families are dispersed and disconnected" (Linklater, 204 p. 90).

My Indigeneity has been a way to explain my appearance, not my identity. In university, I discovered the beautiful diversity of First Nations people across Canada. Fellow KM Dionne describes this beautifully, saying, "there is great diversity

among Aboriginal people, yet there are commonalities woven throughout" (Mohammad, 2016, p. 20). Discovering I am a Saulteaux woman with roots in Saskatchewan should have brought comfort. Instead, I felt more confused and once again, I questioned my identity as an Indigenous woman.

As a Knowledge Maker, we must do research in service to our communities. *Where is my community?* Right now, it is with Knowledge Makers. I am at the beginning of my journey and Knowledge Makers is a safe place for sharing what I know and do not know. As Elder Uncle Mike Arnouse said, "If we are going in the same direction, let's walk together" (personal communication, October 2019). This

quest for my identity is with this community. My healing and spiritual journey started long before Knowledge Makers, but it was there that I realised I already had some of the material needed to build my tipi.

### Third Pole: Gathering Misplaced Material

Unbeknownst to me, I had material for building my tipi. My recent education gave me space to decolonize myself. Being Indigenous, I believed I had permission to all Indigenous cultures. With no one to ask about our ceremonies or regalia, I learned to name it, recognize it, and highlight it in the only way I knew how. I now understand there are many Indigenous communities that have specific teachings

and relationships with the land, yet there is a worldview that many communities value. This worldview takes a holistic approach with an emphasis on family and community; many find strength and unity in this. Each community has its own unique culture that is reflected in "language, ceremonies, governance, clan systems and yes, food" and this includes the Saulteaux people of the Cote First Nation (Baskin, 2016, p.17).

**"As a Knowledge Maker, we must do research in service to our communities."**

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During my initial research and material gathering, I was connected to my father's family. A message arrived from a cousin asking if my father was Ryan Stanley and my Kokum was Lorraine. Instantly, I had a connection to family and a community I did not know was mine. Her grandfather was my Kokum's brother, Joseph Whitehawk (P. Whitehawk, personal communication, March 2019); the name Whitehawk always had meaning to my father, but he never said why. Now, I knew.

Another significant experience that provided material was a sacred hoop ceremony at a Wellbriety Celebration at Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc. I was there as a student, learning to work alongside the community. I felt

out of place, but Dave Manuel told me to “trust the process” (personal communication, May 2019). So, I went into the circle with an open heart and mind. Like the medicine wheel, it was divided in four sections: emotional, physical, spiritual and mental (Verniest, 2006; Rountree & Smith, 2016). Once in the circle, we were told that some of us sat in special seats. My intuition told me I was in a special seat, meaning I would be asked to share. *Would they care what I had to say?* I felt terrified, as I was an outsider. Yet, when I was given a braid of sweetgrass, I was grounded and I told my story. Surprisingly, I no longer felt like an outsider.

As a social work student, I have dedicated my learning to Indigenous history, knowledge, and ways of being. My education led me to sacred sharing circles which allowed me to find my voice, giving me the strength and desire to move forward. By trusting the process and my intuition, I continued this journey unintentionally and received essential elements for my tipi. Being in circle with the Secwépémc people and my KM community helped connect me to communities and my identity. It is a sentiment former Secwépémc KM Marie Sandy (2017) shares: “we all connect, get tangled, break apart, come together, and are all interwoven to create a greater range of knowledge” (p. 106). Now that I know where I am and have discovered material that I already possessed, I must gather the rest of the supplies needed for my tipi. I need to continue on, looking for ways to learn more while maintaining my relationship with my new and distant cousins and all my new knowledge.

### Fourth Pole: Gathering New Material

Along this journey, information has come to me from the most unexpected places. I read Tanya Talaga’s (2017) *Seven Fallen Feathers: Racism, Death and Hard Truths in a Northern City*. Talaga is of mixed Polish and Indigenous descent. She is Anishinaabe-Canadian, and I was amazed to learn that the Saulteaux people are part of a larger group of related people called the Anishinaabe. Anishinaabe means person, or the Original Person (S. Johnson, personal communication, October 20, 2019;

Talaga, 2017). The Cote First Nation, where my Kókum is from, are Saulteaux people. I have desperately wanted to find an Indigenous name that can be mine. I clung to the way Talaga wrote her identity because I have struggled to locate myself. Talaga’s words have given me a foundation to begin my search to identify as a Saulteaux woman of mixed heritage. My biggest struggle of identity is understanding how I can live as a Saulteaux woman while being a visitor on another Nation’s land. I hope to better understand how I can be a part of my community while also being part of the community I have made for myself. I need to trust the process, trust myself, and trust the Creator that all of this is according to the plan.

Meeting another Saulteaux woman, Dr. Shelly Johnson, was a gift from the Creator. Her community is Keeseekoose First Nation, less than 10 kilometres from Cote First Nation; she gave me a glimpse into our collective history and demonstrated how to walk in two worlds in academia and as a visitor on Secwépémc territory. I learned near Sault Ste. Marie, in northern Ontario; near the falls is where our Saulteaux name, “People of the Falls,” originates (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, 2020). At first contact, we called ourselves Anishinaabe, the French called us Saulteaux, and the English called us Ojibway; we still use all of these names (Saskatchewan Indigenous Cultural Centre, 2020). She shared stories of the early settlers, like how we ran from them because they brought diseases for which we had no natural immunity. She shared stories about the great westerly migration of our people and our connection with the Cree and Ojibway, the loss of the buffalo, and how settlers pushed our people off our land. I was in awe when Shelly shared that she saw the original treaties signed by our people in September of 1874 and the intense emotion from seeing the marks of our chiefs. Marks of hope. Hope that signing could provide food, clothing, and shelter for our people. That did not happen. Her grandmother said that the treaties were signed at the point of the gun, because winter was coming, and people were starving (S. Johnson, personal communication, November 28, 2019).

That winter and many winters afterwards brought death to many; our people wanted the Treaties respected in the ways in which we believed were agreed to. Instead of reserve-based schools, Canada implemented a system of Indian Residential School and forced children's attendance. These institutions "sought to fulfill assimilationist policies of the federal government" (Hick & Stokes, 2017, p. 281). By taking our children, Canada and the Christian churches destroyed families, communities, culture and took the ability to rebel against injustices and oppression. Fighting to keep their children would have led to jail. Many from Shelly's family and community were sent to The Lebret (Qu'Appelle) Residential school; she believes that people from Cote were sent there or to Elkhorn residential school (S. Johnson, personal communication, November 28, 2019). Indian agents were in our communities controlling and enforcing every aspect of the Indian Act, including food, housing, and passes to leave the reserve. Hick and Stokes (2017) note that Indian Agents "were to displace traditional Indigenous leaders so as to institute a new way of living consistent with the intentions of the Canadian government of the time" (p. 278).

Shelly told me our people are known to be the kindest and most welcoming. She spoke about our strength, even though many are impacted by colonialism. Like me, many people still want to go home; many were separated due to family dynamics or child welfare practices, and some chose to leave (Linklater, 2014). She explained that wanting to reconnect is to be met with precious teachings. She shared that she knows people from Cote, and I come from good people (S. Johnson, personal communication, November 28, 2019). I hope that my research will create a foundation so that when I meet my family, I will have a better understanding of what it means to be Saulteaux. She advised me to not let fear hold me back and trust I will know when I am ready (S. Johnson, personal communication, November 28, 2019). Having cousins who say, "We know you" shows me that people have missed me. *But how do I reach back 30 years and make that connection?* This is not just about me, it is about helping other people, my people, feel whole in their families again. My healing can

be a part of the collective healing, as so much trauma and hurt has befallen us; when one can heal, we all may heal.

Recently, I have devoured words written by Terese Marie Mailhot, in order to learn about what it means to be a modern Indigenous woman. Terese Marie Mailhot is from Seabird Island Band, in the Fraser Valley of BC. She graduated with an MFA from the Institute of American Indian Arts. She serves as faculty at the institute of American Indian Arts and she's a Tecumseh Postdoctoral Fellow at Purdue University (H. MacLeod, personal communication, September 17, 2019). Mailhot has given me a glimpse of what it means to be a modern Indigenous woman who is walking in the academic world. Recently, I have written academic papers using Indigenous epistemologies and relationality in order to decolonize higher education. All of my learning was valuable but speaking with Shelly helped me to assess if I was ready to build. There is much more for me to discover before I can call my tipi home, but I have enough to start. The area has been cleared away, the material is gathered; now it is time to prepare to build.

### Fifth Pole: Preparing to Build

The most important thing to know before starting anything is intention. My ancestors built their tipis to create shelter from what Mother Earth offered them and to create a safe, warm space for children to grow (Royal Saskatchewan Museum, n.d.). This is my intention when building my tipi, but this tipi will mean so much more. I learned about colonization as the destruction of culture, language, communities, families, and ways of being (Hick & Stokes, 2017). I saw this as an outsider looking in, not realizing colonization was happening to me. In this way, I am a product of colonization; I am what the federal government wanted. This helped and hurt me. Being on the outside, I have been able to dissociate myself from the cultural genocide that Canada has inflicted upon its Indigenous people. I wanted to help, and I saw education as the way. However, being an outsider meant that I was not a part of anything; I did not know my ancestors, I did not know myself. I was alone, but that was fine because the destruction of land and communities was not happening to me. But it was. It is. I

hope my search for my identity will heal me, so that I can help others to heal. Erin Chillihitzia (2016), a former KM, speaks of our collective trauma: “Indigenous people hurt together, as brothers and sisters, so I cannot sit in the chair and pretend your story doesn’t impact me as we work together in the journey” (p. 64). Now that I have learned about our collective trauma, I cannot be an outsider any longer.

As I prepare to build my tipi, I must acknowledge where I am today. I am a grateful, yet uninvited guest here on the traditional and unceded territory of Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc, within Secwépemcul’ecw. Many have wel-

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comed me onto this land, including and especially Dave Manuel. Dave was the first person to welcome me here, but he also told me that learning Secwépemc ways was not the way to discover who I am. He said I could sit in ceremony, learn the language, and explore the land, but they were not mine (D. Manuel, personal communication, May 2019). I struggled to sit with this new piece of information; I thought, “*Was I not welcome here?*” As a Knowledge Maker before me aptly put it, “it can be difficult for Indigenous students not already very involved in their communities to become part of one, even making connections with other

Indigenous students” (Dirksen, 2016, p. 77). I have never been to my community, the Cote First Nation, and took an opportunity to begin exploring my Indigenous identity where I currently live. Dave knew what I was looking for and he also knew that I was not going to find it here. I knew the diversity of First Nations across these lands, yet I thought I could find who I was on another Nation’s land. While I am honoured to learn the language and customs of the Secwépemc people, I need

to engage in a relationship with the land we Saulteaux people call home. I need to learn the language and how the land was used for medicine, for ceremony and survival. Another former KM knew this when she said “working with the spiritual and cultural traditions of the Aboriginal women’s heritage, women can heal the whole person” (Casey, 2016, p. 53).

## The Next Poles

As I honour where I am in the process of tipi building, I honour where I came from. I have struggled to find my identity because no one told me who I was. The social worker I am becoming understands that people are shaped by lived experiences and trauma. Perhaps not talking about being Chinese or Indigenous was easier for my parents. Perhaps they did not know either. Maybe they have gone through a similar identity quest as mine, but never quite found the answer. A previous KM Alma Charlene Casey (2016) said it best when she stated, “how tragic, to take away what was rightfully the Aboriginal woman’s birthright, her own heritage. Young Aboriginal women need to find their voices and speak up to change this cycle of abuse that has taken place” (p. 53). I want to find my voice so that I can tell my children one day: this is who I am, this who came before you, and this is who you are. I want to be the last one in my family to question her identity. I want to walk confidently in both worlds, not for me, but for the ones who will come after me. We have survived and resisted as a collective and it is up to us to ensure we do not forget who and where we came from. We must ensure that our children know exactly who we are so they can tell their children who they are. We must break the cycle. These are the next poles that I need to put up, but I need to go back out on the land and gather more material.

## Conclusion

Indigenous research is like beadwork. You start big, break it apart, and see what is missing. You look for what is missing and that becomes the important research. This is what Knowledge Makers is about: looking at something that is not there, a voice or story, and weaving it into what is known (S. Naepi, personal communication, October 19, 2019). That is how we create

knowledge and power and that is how we walk in two worlds. Airini (2016) speaks to the importance of knowledge creation when she said that “research is a form of service; in a brave kind of way” (p. 34). It is a way to give back. Saulteaux teachings include respect and reciprocity as foundational pieces (S. Johnson, personal communication, February 26, 2020) My research is how I will attempt to give back to my Saulteaux people; a way to adhere to our principles of respect and reciprocity. Indigenous research must be defined by our Elders and children. I do not have the privilege of knowing an Elder from Cote First Nation, nor do I have children of my own, yet. However, this research helped me discover more of who I am as an Indigenous woman in preparations for my return to the land of my ancestors, and the teaching for my children. It may have also cleared space for my healing and reconnection to my relatives and all my relations. Sereana Naepi (2016) said that “research is a way that I can serve my community” and that “it is my ancestors whose call I answer when I sit down at a computer and write” (p. 55). I have kept this in my mind throughout this entire process. The knowledge I have created is my resistance; it is how I will walk in two worlds and how I will come to know myself. One Knowledge Maker helped me feel safe in my journey when she wrote,

*Indigenous people are everywhere. We are social workers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, politicians, teachers, anything and everything. We are everywhere and we want better for our land, and all people. We know that the path of the colonizers is destruction, and we may be the only ones to lead this world out. Our journey will be led by those of us who are exploring our identity. There is safety in numbers. (Bandura, 2019, p. 11)*

I wanted to know who I was so that I could see myself inside of something, but I did not know the way in. With this research, I have started to build my tipi, my way in. This is how I am healing. If I can know myself better, I will be better able to serve others. I have the privilege of gaining knowledge, so I must be able to give it away. Knowledge belongs to everyone and it is up to us, the Knowledge Makers, to ensure it is shared. Airini (2016) tells us that “Indigenous peoples

are knowledge-makers who take action, transcend, and imagine. We are researchers who are strong, intelligent and bold. We were this way generations ago; we are still today. We are being who we were called to be” (p. 35).

*So, who am I? I am many things: Saulteaux woman, Chinese woman, sister, best friend, survivor, Arthur’s fur-mom, Mimi, social worker, community member, guest on this land, forever student, and Knowledge Maker. I walk in two worlds as a form of resistance and acceptance. This is who I am. I am building my tipi, but it is not finished yet. But I have started, and that is the most important step. I have learned that the tipi in Saulteaux communities belonged to the women so that the children would always have a place to sleep if their parents were to separate (Anaquod, n.d.). I want to build my tipi so that the child in me knows that I will always have somewhere that is home. I want to build my tipi so that my children will always know what home is.*

All My Relations.

Miigwech. Kukwstsétsemc. Maarsii. Thank you.

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