The Trickiness of Settler Colonialism: Indigenous Women Administrators’ Experiences of Policy in Canadian Universities

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in Education

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Abstract

Since the release in 2015 of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a plethora of new administrative policies has emerged in universities. A variety of interconnecting Indigenous administrative roles has also arisen, many of which have been taken up by Indigenous women who find themselves working in challenging and complex contexts steeped in settler colonialism. Studies of the challenges these women face—indeed of Indigenous educational leadership and policies in higher education in general—are, however, sorely lacking. The present study is a qualitative exploration of the embodied experiences of twelve Indigenous women administrators (including the primary researcher) working in Canadian universities. The purpose of the study is to address gaps in the research literature and end the “deafening silence” (Fitzgerald, 2003) of Indigenous women’s voices in educational leadership and policy research. Drawing on an Indigenous storying methodology combined with an arts-informed approach to Indigenous storytelling using Cree Weesakechahk dramatic trickster form, the study tells the stories of Indigenous women leaders who are expected to implement the promises of Indigenizing policies. The research questions center on understanding (a) how Indigenous women experience their leadership work amidst increasing pressures and debates; (b) how they experience policy enactment processes; and (c) how they resist the limits of the settler colonial academy in their leadership work. Situated within an Indigenous feminist decolonial theoretical framework and drawing on Indigenous story as theory, the findings suggest that Indigenous women who are working in settler colonial academic structures, leading in male dominated leadership contexts, and working on the borderland between Euro-Western institutions and Indigenous communities often feel trapped in a “triple bind” (Fitzgerald 2006). While findings suggest that Indigenous women face triple binds and struggle at the intersections of tricky policy
enactment processes, I argue that, because settler colonialism is pervasive in university structures and power dynamics, Indigenous women enact “Indigenous refusals” (Grande, 2019) as part of their leadership and policy work. Through these Indigenous refusals, they resist settler colonial attempts to erase and assimilate Indigenous peoples and knowledges, and contribute to deeper levels of change in universities.

Keywords
Summary for Lay Audience

Since the release in 2015 of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a plethora of new administrative policies has emerged in universities. A variety of interconnecting Indigenous administrative roles has also arisen, many of which have been taken up by Indigenous women who find themselves working in challenging and complex contexts steeped in settler colonialism. Studies of the challenges these women face—indeed of Indigenous educational leadership and policies in higher education in general—are, however, sorely lacking.

The present study is a qualitative exploration of the experiences of twelve Indigenous women administrators (including the primary researcher) working in Canadian universities. The purpose of the study is to address gaps in educational leadership and policy research. Drawing on an Indigenous storytelling using Cree Weesakechahk dramatic trickster form, the study tells the stories of Indigenous women leaders who are expected to implement the promises of Indigenizing policies. The research questions center on understanding (a) how Indigenous women experience their leadership work amidst increasing pressures and debates; (b) how they experience policy enactment processes; and (c) how they resist the limits of the settler colonial academy in their leadership work. Situated within an Indigenous theoretical framework and drawing on Indigenous story as theory, the findings suggest that Indigenous women who are working in academic structures, leading in male dominated leadership contexts, and working between Euro-Western institutions and Indigenous communities often feel trapped in a bind.

While findings suggest that Indigenous women struggle with policy processes, I argue that, because settler colonialism is so pervasive, Indigenous women must resist taken for granted norms, as part of their leadership and policy work which I argue contributes to deeper levels of change in universities.
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Dedication

To my nokum, Daisy.
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Prologue

There are many different stories among the Original Peoples of Turtle Island. Many of these stories embody Trickster figures such as Nanabozoo, Coyote, Raven, Glooscap, and, most relevant to my research, Weesakechahk. I am Mushkego Cree, so Cree Weesakechahk stories resonate deeply for me. I have searched out these stories from my home Territory, and listened and reflected on them for insights in this research.

Among the Mushkegowuk, many good stories are told about Weesakechahk. Yet storytelling traditions have also been shattered by colonialism, which has sought to actively fragment and silence Indigenous voices and knowledge. I have searched out fragments of Cree stories, listened to pieces of them from Elders, read others in colonial archives. Louis Bird, Omushkego Cree storyteller from Peawanuk, has, thankfully, documented some Cree stories that explain how Weesakechahk offers a map of Cree worldview and the origins of the land including animal and rock formations, a map created as “Weesakechahk journeyed from the East to the West, interacting with various peoples and animals along the way” (2005, p. 60).

What I have learned is that Weesakechahk never shows up when you want them to, but does so unexpectedly in different forms, teaching me lessons about life’s many contradictions, teaching me about navigating the unpredictableness of foreign places and how to do so drawing on Cree ethics, laws, and spirituality. The following story is a Weesakechahk story that for me speaks to my own journey of traveling from North to South in search of my place in the world of education and academic administration. This particular story, originally entitled “Weesakechahk flies south with the waveys,” was first told by Xavier Sutherland but is retold here through my humble and forever growing Mushkego iskwew lens. Coming to an understanding of Weesakechahk stories has been a twenty-year journey for me and continues to unfold. As a
Mushkego Cree woman with mixed Cree and French lineage, I am an intergenerational survivor of Canada’s residential schools. My family has been severed from the Cree narrative tradition, and I have spent much of my adult life searching for reconnection. During my search, I found a small, vibrant, yet marginalized space in the academy in Indigenous Studies, an intellectual and spiritual hub where I first returned to Indigenous stories. Here I was introduced to the notion that Indigenous stories are our theories. Indigenous theatre and Cree and Anishnawbe ceremonial sites of learning deepened my connections and understandings of this Indigenous truth. In my mid-twenties, I became involved in Indigenous community-based theatre, where I worked with an artistic team to travel home to engage 13 Elders (including my nokum) and gather Cree stories to put on the contemporary stage. Weesakechahk never showed up explicitly in the stories the Elders shared with us. Through our artistic research, we uncovered and worked with other historical stories about the river system, and we gathered sacred stories about Ehep and Chacabesh from Louis Bird’s oral accounts. As a collector of Mushkego Cree oral archives, a Weesakechahk story showed up in this research years later when I read the book entitled Átalôhkââna nesta tipâcimowina: Cree legends and narratives from the West Coast of James Bay published by the University of Manitoba. Unlike previous historical archives dating back to the early 1800s, it was clear to me that the stories embodied in this collection were gathered with care and respect. The researchers worked with Cree translators to make stories accessible in both Cree, English, and syllabics, and the Cree storytellers both consented and were acknowledged in the text. Xavier Sutherland, the storyteller who told the “Weesakechahk flies south with the wavey” story that I draw on in this dissertation, hailed from Fort Albany, the First Nation community with which I am affiliated.
As an off-reserve First Nation woman, I did not grow up in Fort Albany. The discovery of the story was a directional moment for me because I had been grappling with how to elevate Cree stories as theory in my doctoral research. In this finding, I felt as if Weesakechahk found me and that my late grandmother was somehow guiding me, too. Since then, I can only assume that Xavier Sutherland shared his stories with researchers to document them publicly, with the hope that one day Cree people such as I would search for them, draw meaning, and make them relevant in our contemporary lives. This dissertation is my attempt at doing so.

I am not a traditional storyteller; I am an emerging Cree scholar and artist who is picking up the pieces of our Cree stories and positioning them as our teachers and our theories today. Through my journeying, I have come to understand Cree stories as part of my living birthright, part of a collective ancestral knowledge that I have a responsibility to pass on to my children. Accompanying this responsibility is a duty to be transparent about who I am in terms of both connections and disconnections. In respecting this birthright, I accept responsibility to learn Cree stories and tell them respectfully to people in this generation. In that process, I also recognize that Weesakechahk stories are often told within the complex ethical and linguistic practices of storytellers and their families. There are many different versions of this Weesakechahk story within both Cree and Anishnawbe communities, depending on geographic and linguistic ties and interrelations. Among some storytellers, it is critical to respect the tradition that Weesakechahk (and other sacred stories) be uttered out loud only during the winter storytelling months when the stars are highest and brightest in the night sky.

*There are stories* about being in formation, and there are stories about dropping out, into the dark unknown, free-falling past sparkling lights, behind a constellation of stars.
One day, Weesakechahk found themself walking along the muskeg waterline near the sipi (river) in the early ta-kwa-kin (fall), about that time in the Cree cyclical calendar when the niskak (geese) fly south.

Unbeknownst to the niskak, Weesakechahk was watching them working away, visiting, and gathering in the Bay, getting ready to take their long flight South. And so, like Weesakechahk often did, Weesakechahk thought, “Wouldn’t it be great if I went along? Maybe even led the flock this time? Surely it can’t be that hard.”

So off Weesakechahk went to find the okimaw (leader) of the geese. Weesakechahk came across a couple of niskak feeding along the Bay and started asking all sorts of questions:

“What are you doing?”

“Where are you going?”

“Who is the leader?”

“What are you eating?”

“Can I come?”

The niskak just ignored Weesakechahk. They didn’t say anything; they tolerated all Weesakechahk’s bold questions, and kept on munching away just thinking to themselves, “Just watch and listen, will you?”

The niskak kept on eating. Chomp, chomp, chomp. Crunch, crunch, crunch, on all the yummy plants. Mmm, another niska said; cattails, pondweed, and horsetail. Mmm.

No one paid attention to poor Weesakechahk.

Weesakechahk did not like being ignored, not one little bit, and that got Weesakechahk thinking, “How can I get these niskaks’ attention?”
Then, suddenly, one of the niska chirped up and said, “We’re leaving tonight; pepoon (winter) is coming, and it’s going to get real cold—freezing temperatures. We’ve got to fatten up. We need energy for our long flight!”

And so, the niskak continued to eat. Chomp, chomp, chomp. Crunch, crunch, crunch, on all the yummy plants. Cattails, pondweed, and horsetail galore.

Now Weesakechahk had a little bit of information—and a little information can be a dangerous thing. Weesakechahk thought this was the moment to join in. So Weesakechahk inched in, blending in with the others. After all, Weesakechahk always loved a good feast followed by a nice long nap.

After everyone was done the feast and just before Weesakechahk was starting to doze off into a deep, heavy slumber inside a fluffy, comfy nest, the Okimaw Niska shouted out, “We leave at sundown sharp!” All the niskak started cleaning themselves feverishly. One by one, diving into the water, shaking off beads of water, and plucking all their loose feathers. Feathers flying everywhere.

But Weesakechahk just kept on sleeping. Every once in a while, Weesakechahk opened one eye, to see what was going on. Weesakechahk was so comfortable, and kept on dozing in and out of dreamland.

After a good long time of plucking and cleaning, the niskak started gathering in the Bay. Stretching their wings and widening their beaks, warming up their throats. Suddenly, Weesakechahk woke up to a loud “Honk!” Startled, Weesakechahk got up quickly and jumped into the Bay.

The Okimaw Niska was standing there along the shoreline giving a pep talk. Okimaw reminded everyone about the long journey ahead, and all the responsibilities about flying
together. The Okimaw reminded everyone, “Stay focused and, whatever you do, don’t look
down!”

Suddenly a smaller, less assuming Okimaw iskwew niska came forward and took the
head position. Weesakechahk chuckled under their breath as the small unassuming bird got into
position at the front of the line. Little did Weesakechahk realize, the head position is but a
temporary position.

There was some commotion, and suddenly the flock started to take off, one by one.
Honking to support each other until they had all joined in a cacophony of honking that echoed
through the evening air. The niskak were soon up in the sky taking formation. Weesakechahk
was among them, and it felt good to be in relation in flight.

After a little while, Weesakechahk thought, “Surely I can relax a bit and enjoy the
flight?” Weesakechahk started looking around. Noticing niskak in front, and others beside.
Looking to the East and West. Even behind to the North. Weesaagechahk was getting very
distracted and didn’t notice that they were slowly drifting further and further away from the flock
out of formation.

All of sudden, bang!!! Weesaakechahk was shot. Wing injured. Tumbling from the sky,
Weesakechahk watched the flock of niskak get smaller and smaller until they were the size of a
speck of dust in the sky, and Weesakechahk was on the ground. Bird down.
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Self-Location

Waban Geesis nintishnikaas. Peetabeck nintonchi. Muskego-ininew-iskwew. My Cree name is Morning Star Light. My English name is Candace Brunette-Debassige. I am a cisgender, mixed-blood Mushkego Cree woman with Cree and French lineage. My Cree lineage arises from place called Peetabeck (Water in the bay), also known as Fort Albany, located in Treaty 9 Territory in Northeastern Ontario along the Winipek (James Bay). I became registered with Albany under the Indian Act Bill C-3 in 2011. My maternal grandmother, Daisy Brunette (nee Rueben), was born in (Old Post) Albany in 1925. She met my grandfather, Wilfred Brunette, a Frenchman, in Moose Factory, Ontario, in 1942. My grandparents married at St. Thomas Anglican Church in Moose Factory in 1943 at which time my grandmother lost her Indian Status. My grandparents relocated to Moose River Crossing and then Clute Township on the outskirts of Cochrane. Many of my relatives relocated from Old Post to Kashechewan in 1960’s. In 1986, my grandmother, my mother, and all her 15 living siblings (re)gained their Indian Status under Bill C31—a law that reinstated Status to Indigenous women and their children who had lost their Indian Status through sexist exclusions in the Indian Act. My sister Holly and I gained our Indian Status in 2011 after a longstanding legal battle that resulted in gender equity changes to the Indian Act. Consequently, my own sense of Indigeneity, and my connection to my Cree First Nation community and Territory, is complexly and inter-generationally shaped by ongoing hetero-patriarchal and colonial forces.

I did not grow up in Peetabeck; I was raised just south of there in the small town of Cochrane in northern Ontario, another place I call home. In this small town environment, my
mother worked at the Ininew Friendship Centre and my father worked as a skilled laborer. Growing up, I struggled to find a safe place to express my complex Cree identity; in school and the community it was often safer to blend in in order to survive. For a long time, I did not understand the pressures that I faced to assimilate; I just experienced and struggled with them. Despite the pressures, however, I have always identified as Cree, albeit of mixed Cree and French ancestry, and, more importantly, have always been connected to Indigenous communities wherever I have lived. Like many urban Indigenous people, my sense of Indigeneity and (dis)connections to land and place are complex, intersectional, and have strengthened through decolonizing my understandings, connecting with community, and reclaiming my Cree identity and culture with the support of teachers and mentors both inside and outside the academy.

I begin this dissertation by recognizing the complex nature of my self-location; self-location, after all, is a critical starting point in Indigenous research (Absolon & Willett, 2005), one that has been used in the context of academic research for some time (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). By locating myself, I am grounding myself within my Cree Nation and a Cree epistemology (Absolon & Willett, 2005; Kovach, 2009). Both my self-location and professional experiences working in Indigenous education are deeply implicated in the topic of my research, which focuses on Indigenous women administrators’ experiences enacting Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities.

When it came to choosing a research methodology, my deep desire to make my research epistemologically and pedagogically relevant to my Cree sensibilities led me to an Indigenous storying approach, an approach which would be accessible to diverse Indigenous audiences who tend to have a deep respect for storytelling. From my earliest childhood memories, storytelling has been an integral way of coming to know myself-in-relation to the world. My mother often
reminds me that from a young age she recognized in me a deep desire and passion for storytelling. I believe that I learned this way of knowing and being from spending time with my nokum (grandmother) who was an animated and gifted orator in our family. My nokum had a contagious way of bringing people into her world through stories; moving them through laughter and tears, inspiring them to listen with all their beings. As a child, I would listen to her tell stories as I played underneath the kitchen table where she would sit, drinking Red Rose tea while visiting with family members. Here, nestled by her feet and soothed by the scent of her smoked moose-hide moccasins with their intricate beadwork patterns, I would listen to her tell stories centered on the dramas of her childhood life in the bush up north. Often, she would share vivid accounts about my grandparents’ experiences living on the muskeg trap line, encountering animals, and of familial ties connected to our Cree historic lineage along the James Bay. She would also sometimes share her childhood experiences as a student at Bishop Horton Residential School in Moose Factory, Ontario, which she attended from the ages of seven to sixteen. I can still hear how she would repeat certain words. I also remember how the patterns of her breath and inflections in her voice would change in shades when she told certain stories. I noticed the silences. I felt her pain. *I still hear my nokum’s stories; I hear them as an echo.*

For me, choosing an Indigenous storying methodology is undoubtedly tied to Indigenous storytelling traditions including my grandmother’s teachings. When I look back at the stories that my grandmother shared with me, I can now see how they were the early seeds of my own research training and development, teaching me to see the world and share knowledge through an Indigenous lens. In reflecting on this realization, I have also come to understand that my nokum’s stories were not simply stories. They were powerful acts of survivance - “an active
sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction . . . a spirited resistance, a life force, a force of nature” (Vizenor, 1999, p. vii). *I hear her; I hear her as an echo.*

As I reflect carefully upon them, I see that my grandmother’s stories, Indigenous theatre, and my Indigenous Studies training have not only shaped my methodological approach to research, but have also taught me to look critically at the ways that settler colonial power appears in the stories Indigenous women administrators shared with me in this research. Grounded in my own Indigenous view of the world, I draw on a critical Indigenous theoretical framework to understand how settler colonial relations of power map Indigenous women administrators’ experiences, often organizing and subjugating them in gendered, colonial, and racialized ways. Most importantly, my grandmother’s insistence on telling her stories has inspired me to *refuse* the erasure of Indigenous women’s voices in research and in life. My nokum has deeply influenced my life and my research; it is because of her that I focus on the embodied, lived experiences of Indigenous women administrators striving to change the university. *I hear her; I hear her as an echo.*

Like my grandmother’s stories, my opening story about Weesakechahk offers another bridge into Indigenous Cree epistemological understanding. I draw upon this Weesakechahk story as part of my theoretical framework; Weesakechahk also becomes a pedagogical figure in my storytelling approach. While the opening Weesakechahk story is retold from my own point of view, Weesakechahk and other mythological figures in Cree stories reflect Indigenous Cree consciousness (Archibald, 2009); they situate the storyteller and listeners in a relational ontology. Among the Cree, Weesakechahk is the great transformer, always in the making, often wreaking havoc and making a mess, but at the same time also teaching humans through their failures and follies about how to live in relation to family, community, the land, and the cosmos.
When I discovered the ‘Weesakechahk flies south with the waveys’ story originally told by Xavier Sutherland, I immediately saw parallels with some of the experiences Indigenous women administrators shared with me. I draw on Weesakechahk to help me drive the storytelling process and share some of the experiences of Indigenous women administrators. In Chapter 5, Weesakechahk becomes a central character and narrator in a performance text that includes 10 dramatic scenes.

Growing up, I never heard Weesakechahk stories or stories like my nokum’s in school. Over the years, I have reflected on this marked absence in our educational system, and come to realize that the disjuncture between what I heard around my family’s kitchen table and what was shared in school has shaped my life’s work in education and leadership. In turn, I have focused much of my career on actively creating space for Indigenous stories and voices to be shared in educational settings. As the first generation in my family to go to university, I struggled to access education and to find culturally safe and relevant spaces to learn and thrive in postsecondary settings. In the late 1990s, I found a sense of refuge from the white settler Euro-Western dominance of education in Indigenous student services and Indigenous Studies at my university where I met and became surrounded by a nurturing community vested in recovering and telling Indigenous stories.

Under the tutelage and mentorship of countless Indigenous leaders and scholars, I began working in the field of Indigenous education, and eventually found myself being called by my own inner voice and through the encouragement of others to take on Indigenous leadership roles in universities. I have worked in Indigenous education in Ontario at the K-12 and postsecondary levels for nearly twenty years. For five years, I served as the Director of an Indigenous student services unit at a large research-intensive university in southwestern Ontario, Canada, where I
was later appointed Special Advisor to the Provost (Indigenous Initiatives), a role purposed to advise the university in the creation of an Indigenous senior administrative position. The call to create senior administrative roles heightened after the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s 94 Calls to Action (TRC, 2015) were released in 2015. I served in the Acting Vice Provost (Indigenous Initiatives) position at my university for nearly one year.

In Canada, the TRC began its process in 2008 by listening to Indigenous survivors of Indian Residential Schools. The Indian Residential School system was a colonial network of boarding schools for Indigenous children that operated for over 150 years in Canada. The schools were funded by the Canadian settler nation state and given legislative authority to forcefully remove Indigenous children from their families. The schools were run by various churches with the mandate to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the Canadian consciousness and ‘remove the Indian from the child’. The TRC’s work centered on documenting survivors’ experiences for historical memory with the purpose of understanding the harm the colonial education system did to Indigenous people, families, and communities, and to make recommendations for structural and societal change. The Commission arose from the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history, a suit in which 86,000 residential school survivors, one of whom was my nokum, took the Government of Canada to the Supreme Court in a legal challenge that resulted in the 2005 Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA). As part of that Settlement Agreement, the survivors then funded the TRC. The TRC was chaired by Anishinawbe Justice Murray Sinclair.

The leadership roles that I was called to take on following the release of the report of the TRC focused on advancing Indigenization and decolonization of the academy and implementing the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action. Because residential schools and the academy are both considered
key sites of colonialism and have both played instrumental roles in the settler nation state’s assimilation and cultural genocide project, postsecondary institutions including universities are among the primary institutions called to take action. Of the 94 Calls to Action, 13 focus on educational institutions specifically, with five calls centering on postsecondary institutions. These include calls to create mandatory courses in health, education, medicine, law, media, and Indigenous languages.

Like many Indigenous people laboring in the academy, I have been working to change the education system since long before the TRC Calls to Action were released. I understand Indigenous work in the university as an intervention against the hegemonic nature of the Euro-Western settler colonial academy – an interruption that strives to redirect the aims of the educational system, to make them more inclusive of Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing, and, more importantly, to advance “Indigenous educational sovereignty” (Aguilera-Black Bear & Tippecnonic, 2015) by increasing the ability of Indigenous peoples to exercise greater control over their educational lives and futures. As one of a handful of Indigenous people working in a leadership position at my university, I found myself, post-TRC, called to take on Indigenous policy work aimed at driving institutional reform. Through the collective efforts of an Indigenous education council, our university was called to create a broad-based Indigenous strategic plan. While initially I had high hopes for the potential of this policy to shift the university, I witnessed and experienced both advantages and disadvantages of policy enactment. I also witnessed and endured the insidious ways in which settler colonialism is operationalized in policy, ways that do not necessarily benefit Indigenous people and Indigenous educational sovereignty. Thus, my own leadership struggles as an Indigenous woman leader enacting Indigenizing policies post-TRC have greatly shaped and informed my decision to explore the experiences of other
Indigenous women administrators who have been involved in similar leadership and policy efforts.

**Problem Statement**

Undeniably, the TRC has been a powerful driving force in mobilizing Indigenous educational voices and priorities, and moving them to the top of university administrators’ minds (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). At the same time, it is clear that the Indigenizing policy movement is accompanied by a certain number of challenges for Indigenous people who are often expected to implement the policy movement’s promises (Greenwood et al, 2008; Pidgeon, 2016; Sasakamoose & Pete, 2015). Amidst increasing debates about the performative nature and rhetoric around Indigenizing policies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), new Indigenous senior administrative positions have been instituted in many Canadian universities (Cote-Meek, 2020; Lavalée, 2020; Pidgeon, 2016; Smith, 2019). Moreover, many of these new leadership roles are occupied by Indigenous women (Smith, 2019), who find themselves working in administrative settings that are largely white male settler dominated (Lavalée, 2020). That being the case, the increasing number of Indigenous women administrators in universities does not speak to the challenges they face, and media reports have begun to shine a light on some of the negative experiences some Indigenous women leaders are facing when taking on these administrative roles (Kay 2019; Lavalée, 2019; Prokopchuk, 2018). Research on Indigenous women administrators’ experiences in Canadian universities is, thus, not only timely and relevant, but desperately needed in order to undo the “deafening silence” (Fitzgerald, 2003, 2006, 2010) of Indigenous women’s voices in educational leadership research and practice.
Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this study is to understand the experiences and challenges that Indigenous women administrators face in enacting Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities, and to do so in order to inform more transformative, decolonial approaches to Indigenous leadership and policy practices. I aim to amplify Indigenous women administrators’ voices in higher education—because Indigenous women’s perspectives have been chronically silenced, omitted from, and marginalized in Western research, leadership, and policy discourses to date, and because their voices can provide critical insights into understanding the limits of the settler colonial academy. I also strive to go beyond quantitative approaches to measuring the success of Indigenization policy implementation through representational data (Smith, 2019), and instead to privilege Indigenous women administrators’ lived and embodied experiences through a qualitative Indigenous storying approaches to research.

There are undeniable gaps in the educational leadership literature relating to Indigenous women leaders in general, and little academic literature that actually focuses on Indigenous women administrators in universities (Faircloth, 2017; Santamaria, 2013; Warner, 1995) and in Canada specifically (Cote-Meek, 2020; Lavallee, 2020). I build on prior research that has linked Indigenous women educational leaders’ experiences of marginalization to the intersections of their Indigeneity and gender (Faircloth, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2014; Johnson, 1997; Lajimodiere, 2013; Tippeconnic-Fox et al., 2015; Warner 1995). I corroborate previous research that demonstrates that Indigenous women leaders face “cultural dissonance” (Warner, 1995) because they occupy intermediary positions in-between Euro-Western educational systems and Indigenous communities (Ah Nee Benham & Cooper, 1998; D’Abron et al., 2009; Faircloth, 2017; Fitzgerald, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2014; Johnson, 1997; Johnson, et al., 2003; Khalifa et al,
I also make new contributions to the field of educational leadership by examining the ways in which Indigenous women experience, talk about, and respond to settler colonialism through their leadership and policy work, and how they often negotiate intersectional power by enacting Indigenous refusals in order to effect institutional change and assert Indigenous education sovereignty.

As more Indigenous women find their way into university administrative positions, leaders are increasingly drawing on policies to incite deeper levels of reform. From a critical policy perspective, however, I argue that Indigenizing policies are not simply developed and implemented; they are complexly enacted (Ball et al., 2012) by various actors with different understandings and competing agendas. To date, there are gaps in the research focusing on Indigenizing policy enactments in educational contexts. There is also a lack of research on the topic of Indigenizing policies from critical Indigenous standpoints (Andreotti et al. 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Pete & Sasakomoose, 2015) and using Indigenous methodological frameworks. The present qualitative study strives to address some of these gaps by exploring, through an Indigenous storying methodological approach, Indigenous women administrators’ experiences of enacting Indigenizing policies.

**Scope of the Study**

For the present study, I conducted conversational interviews (Kovach, 2010) with eleven Indigenous women participants who have worked in Indigenous-specific administrative roles within Canadian universities in the last five years. From within an Indigenous storying paradigm, I examine their experiences of responding to increasing calls to Indigenize and decolonize the academy, and guide broad based university change. I answer the following four overarching research questions:
• How do Indigenous women administrators experience their leadership work amidst increasing pressures to Indigenize and decolonize the academy?

• What challenges do Indigenous women administrators face when enacting Indigenizing policies within Canadian universities?

• How do Indigenous women administrators encounter the settler colonial academy in their leadership and policy work?

• How can Indigenous women administrators contest and resist settler colonialism in their educational leadership work?

**Organization of the Dissertation**

I organize this dissertation into ten chapters plus a prologue. Following this introductory chapter, I begin Chapter 2 by offering a comprehensive literature review focusing on the history of the Euro-Westernized university and its ties to the larger projects of global imperialism and settler colonialism. I provide a brief outline of Indigenous peoples’ participation in Canadian universities, and introduce some of the scholarly debates around key terms such as Indigenization, decolonization, reconciliation, and resurgence in the growing movement to Indigenize the academy. I then offer a short literature review focusing on educational leadership and Indigenous leadership experiences in education with a special focus on Indigenous women leaders. In Chapter 3, I provide an overview of my theoretical framework, which centers on several interconnecting concepts based in Indigenous feminist and decolonial thought; here I also locate my usage of Weesakechahk story and trickster as theory. In Chapter 4, I review my methodology as reflected in a Cree floral research design that includes a) my Indigenous qualitative paradigm, b) my Indigenous storying methodological approach, c) my theoretical interpretive framework, d) my methods for gathering stories, e) my approaches to analyzing
stories, and, finally, f) an outline of my Indigenous arts-informed approach to sharing Indigenous women’s experiences through creating dramatic scenes and drawing on Weesakechahk as a storyteller. In Chapter 5, I share a short play entitled Flight: Journeying for Change that includes 10 scenes. In Chapter 6, I focus on answering questions related to the embodied experiences of the Indigenous women administrators who informed this study. In Chapter 7, I focus on presenting the tricky nature of policy enactment by outlining some of the limitations of Indigenizing policies in practice. In Chapter 8, I outline findings related to how Indigenous women administrators resist and refuse the academy in their leadership roles and policy work. In Chapter 9, I offer an extended discussion of my overall findings and their interconnections. I conclude in Chapter 10 with a summary of the overall dissertation where I outline some areas for future research.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The Roots of the Euro-Westernized University

The origin story of the “Westernized university” (Grosfoguel, 2016) is a significant place to begin in addressing the topic of Indigenous women leaders’ experiences in Canadian universities. Puerto Rican Chicano/Latino scholar Ramon Grosfoguel describes the Westernized university as having a geographic, political, and linguistic allegiance to European lands, Euro-Western ways of knowing, and the English language. Examining the lineage of the Westernized university, Grosfoguel, Hernandez, and Valasquez (2016) find that the academy was exported from Europe to many places in the world, including Canada, where it was transplanted onto stolen Indigenous lands. The transplanted university was then positioned as the authority in the production of knowledge and the manufacturing of exclusive forms of social capital that advanced broader imperial and colonial projects; it functioned to serve nation-building, advance economic development, and train civil servants in colonial ideologies. Scholars such as Grosfoguel see the genealogies of Westernized universities as part of a massive global imperial project of domination that established a network responsible for advancing Euro-Western epistemic male perspectives, memories, and histories in educational systems around the world (Grosfoguel, 2016; Grosfoguel & Cupples, 2018). The Westernized university thus came to act “as a key site through which [patriarchal] colonialism – and [patriarchal] colonial knowledge in particular – is produced, consecrated, institutionalized and naturalized” (Bhambra et al, 2018, p. 5). An international network of universities has entrenched in Western societies a “Eurocentric fundamentalism” (Grofoguel, 2016) that has propagated the notion of universal knowledges and thereby concealed epistemological geo-historical and biographical origins. Consequently, an
empire of epistemologies was advanced that continues to undermine non-European ways of knowing—including Indigenous ways of knowing. To highlight Euro-Western academic hierarchy and hegemony, Walter Mignolo (2009) poignantly reminds us that “the first world has knowledge, the third world has culture; Native Americans have wisdom and Anglo-Americans have science” (p.160). Marie Battiste (1986, 1998), Mikmaq professor and education scholar, has long made similar arguments that Eurocentric dominance within education systems is a form of “cognitive imperialism” (p. 161)—the taken-for-granted way in which universities privilege Euro-Western knowledges, ideologies, norms, and values as not only universal but superior. Battiste further asserts that as a result of Euro-Western domination in education, relatively little is known about or valued in most universities in relation to Indigenous ways of knowing (Battiste, 2019; Smith & Smith, 2018). Other scholars have also asserted that Westernized universities, by reducing and overlooking Indigenous ways of knowing in the academy, have contributed to forms of “epistemicide” (Grosfoguel, 2016) and “linguisticide” (Hall, 2018)—the near obliteration of Indigenous ways of knowing and languages in education.

While Indigenous knowledges have long been ignored by the academy, Indigenous people as subjects of research have captivated the interest of Western scholars in their efforts to use knowledge production as a mechanism to assert power over Indigenous lands and lives. Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) watershed scholarship uncovered the devastating impacts that Western research has had on Indigenous peoples around the world. Yet when Western researchers have taken up Indigenous people in their scholarship, they have historically done so through their Eurocentric white male colonial lenses, thereby contributing to an “Other[ing]” (Said, 1978) and a silencing in Western research. Othering is a longstanding colonial technique that refers to the viewing of Indigenous people through colonial and racist lenses that tend to
position Indigenous peoples and Indigenous ways of knowing as inferior to Europeans and Western ways of knowing. The underlying motivation for ignoring and/or Othering Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing in Euro-Westernized universities can be attributed to the colonial project, and the need for early colonists to undermine Indigenous peoples by casting them as sub-human, uncivilized, and inferior to Europeans in order to legitimize European claims to Indigenous lands. Othering in the academy has also contributed to an “epistemic violence” (Spivak, 1998) and the silencing and racialization of Indigenous people in academic discourses across disciplines. Othering has further fueled a number of problematic theories in the areas of eugenics, intelligence, and human development (Smith, 1998). More relevant to Indigenous women, Othering has not only been a colonial tactic but a gendered one, which has marginalized and silenced Indigenous women’s voices in colonial archives and early Western research.

In examining Indigenous education, I argue that it is also necessary to trace the colonial lineage of “Indian policies” and uncover the myth of the “Indian problem” (Dyke, 1991; Episkenew, 2009) in educational policy work (Maxwell et al, 2018). The “Indian problem” has been widely used in colonial contexts as a way to impose the category of “Other” (Said, 1978) on Indigenous peoples, as a way to position Europeans (‘us’) as superior and in need of controlling Indigenous peoples, positioning (‘them/Other’) as inferior. ‘Other’ is a common deficit category grounded in the false colonial belief that “Indians” are “backwards, malevolent, inferior, infantile, deficit, savage, illiterate, primitive, uncivilized, and incapable of governing themselves.” Settler colonial educational policy narratives have long drawn on deficit approaches (Cherubini, 2012) that are based on and propagate the “Indian problem” (Maxwell et al, 2018) as a justification for educational authorities attempting to control and “fix” Indigenous peoples and assimilate Indigenous populations into dominant Euro-Western educational systems and aims.
The colonial myth of the “Indian problem” is based on two prevailing falsehoods: (a) Indians are the problem (not the settler colonial government or the Euro-Western education system); and (b) Euro-Western ways of knowing (and Christianity) can solve the “Indian problem” (Dyke, 1991). More disturbingly, these underlying colonial assumptions have fueled many colonial projects including the Indian residential school system, the boarding school system, involuntary/voluntary enfranchisement laws, the pass system, the reservation system, the ban of Potlatch and Sun Dance, the elimination of the Buffalo, Métis removal, the overlooking of Treaty making, forced sterilization of Indigenous women, and military and police controls over Indigenous lives and lands. Moreover, these interrelated colonial projects are all tethered to the Indian Act, the master settler colonial policy based on the greatest myth of all, the doctrine of discovery and terra nullius – a Latin expression referred to as ‘no man’s land’ that has been used in international law to justify colonialization and the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty on Indigenous lands. The doctrine of discovery has served to legitimize European settler governments’ title and control over Indigenous lands, and governments’ paternalistic relationship with Indigenous people. More troublingly, universities have long served to maintain these complex and interrelated colonial systems and to act as an “arm of the settler state” in reproducing and disseminating false colonial ideologies (Grande, 2015; Tuck, 2015).

**The Contemporary Settler Colonial Academy**

Despite the well established imperial and colonial roots of the Euro-Westernized academy, contemporary universities across Canada are situated within unique political, temporal, and geographic locations. In Canada, special attention must be paid to settler colonialism as an ongoing structure (Wolfe, 2006) and to how it takes on new formations such as neo-liberalism and neo-colonialism (Smith & Smith, 2018). For example, within a neo-liberal and neo-colonial
educational context, there are grand moves toward the corporatization of the university in response to chronic government underfunding and increasing competition within global markets. Through these processes, a mass commodification of education and knowledge proliferates in universities in Canada and around the world. Beyond enduring these larger global economic pressures under neo-liberal market logics, institutional performatives such as “knowledge prospecting, controlling intellectual and cultural property rights, and defining Indigenous research in narrow and standardized (i.e., universalized) ways (Smith & Smith, 2018, p. 9) have emerged; they present unique challenges for Indigenous people who are attempting to assert their sovereignty over research and knowledge (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014). Furthermore, guided by the dominance of rationalism and managerialist logics in university administration (Spooner & Finch, 2018), neoliberalization has tended to further marginalize Indigenous voices, needs, and control in education decision-making (Smith & Smith, 2018). As a result of these complex systemic issues, some Indigenous scholars argue that “there are parts of the higher education project that are too invested in settler colonialism to be rescued” (Tuck, 2018, p.149). Within such decolonial critiques, scholars like Sandy Grande (2018) warn that the modern Euro-Western academy is so deeply entrenched within settler colonialism that it automatically reproduces settler relations anddomesticates Indigenous people and ways of knowing.

**Indigenous People in Canadian Universities**

Despite these critiques, Indigenous people have been talked about in Euro-Westernized universities in North America (Turtle Island) since the inception of those universities in the 17th century. The inclusion of Indigenous people in universities, however, and their access to universities is a relatively recent phenomenon; historically, generations of Indigenous people
have been denied full participation in the Euro-Westernized university. Here, I organize the history of Indigenous people’s participation in Canadian universities into a four-part timeline (Table 1.1), expanding on previous work in which I outlined a three-phase timeline: (a) forced assimilation, from 1867 to 1950; (b) assumed acculturation, from about 1951 to the 1970s; and (c) Indigenous equity and inclusion, from the 1970s to present (Brunette & Richmond, 2018). I expand on this previous work by adding a fourth phase that begins in 2015 in response to the TRC work in Canada; I entitle this phase “Indigenization-reconciliation” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). In the following section I describe each phase, identifying general themes relating to Indigenous people’s relationship with the academy and to larger policies impacting Indigenous people during each time period.
Table 1 Four-Part Timeline for Indigenous Education

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<td><strong>Institutional approaches</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous peoples are not considered in institutional policy approaches.</td>
<td>Indigenous student services are established in western provinces by the 1970s and in Ontario by the 1990s. By the 1990’s many Ontario universities institute Indigenous advisory councils (consultation mechanism).</td>
<td>Land acknowledgements are widely used in policy and practice but limited by recognition policies. Indigenous strategic/action/TRC plans emerge in many universities after 2015. Universities start to consider institution-wide approaches to Indigenous educational change in areas such as curriculum, policy and leadership. Many universities appoint Indigenous senior administrators or leads.</td>
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<td><strong>Indigenous peoples’ participation</strong></td>
<td>Indigenous people are legally prohibited and excluded from attending universities unless they enfranchise (relinquish Treaty rights). Indigenous students are permitted to attend universities but are expected to assimilate into dominant institutional norms. First wave of Indigenous scholars enter the academy in small numbers.</td>
<td>Indigenous students continue to enter the academy some spaces exist to help them acculurate A small number of Indigenous scholars begin working in universities as a faculty members.</td>
<td>Indigenous student representation is rising at all levels. Indigenous senior administrators begin working in universities in Indigenous roles.</td>
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<td><strong>Teaching agendas</strong></td>
<td>Academic disciplines are imported from Europe and represented as universal. When Indigenous peoples are taken up in university teaching, their voices are subjugated and silenced across academic disciplines.</td>
<td>Scholarship about Indigenous people is often written using Eurocentric and colonial lenses.</td>
<td>Indigenous access pathways emerge opening doors for some Indigenous people. Specific Indigenous academic programs emerge in the areas of Indigenous Studies, Education, and Law (but are underfunded). Indigenous Studies asserts itself as a discipline in some places. Indigenization movements expand Indigenous voices across disciplines. Indigenous scholars are writing from their own standpoints and epistemological perspectives.</td>
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Indigenous people are subjected to harmful Euro-Western research practices. Research is done on Indigenous people without consent or accountability. Research does not benefit Indigenous people.

While some early Indigenous scholars are entering the academy, many are forced to align with Euro-Western disciplines and research practices in order to survive.

Indigenous paradigms and research methodologies begin to be articulated and used by Indigenous scholars to assert needs.

Indigenous paradigms in research are asserted. Indigenous ethical considerations in research are more widely taken up in policy and practice. Indigenous communities are beginning to assert their own research needs and agendas.

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<td>Forced Assimilation (1800s-1950)</td>
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Early approaches to Indigenous people in universities focused on their forced assimilation into Euro-Westernized settler societies. Canada’s earliest universities were based on European models of education with deep roots in European religious institutions. The earliest universities in Canada often focused mainly on training clergy, lawyers, and doctors in Western traditional disciplines and doctrines of religion, law, and medicine. While Canada’s Indian residential schools were government-sponsored schools run by churches, early universities, because they trained clergy, were often closely linked to the residential school system. Moreover, universities educated the political leaders, policymakers, and administrators of the nation state and its associated institutions. The Royal Society of Canada, an affiliated organization, was created in 1882 to recognize scholarly excellence. The 39th President of the Society was the infamous Duncan Campbell Scott – a notorious architect of the residential school system in Canada (Quinn, forthcoming).

More troublingly, early postsecondary institutions often used Indigenous people as key motivators in fundraising and founding their institutions. Settler scholar and historian Thomas

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Peace (2016) has shed light on the formation of the University of Toronto and Huron University College at Western University. Peace writes:

The Bishop of Huron [Isaac Hellmuth] . . . applied for a grant in aid of the fund being raised by him for the foundation of a university at London, to be called the Western University of London, and [this funding was granted based on his intention of focusing on the] training of both Indian and white students for the ministry of the Church of England in Canada. (Peace, 2016, cited in 1879 summary of New England Company)

Other institutions, Peace asserts, have similar deep-seated colonial ties, appropriating Indigenous names (e.g., Huron, Nipissing, Mohawk) and being built on unceded Indigenous lands. Because of these disturbing associations, many Canadian university presidents—those of the University of British Columbia and the University of Manitoba are two—have, since the release of the TRC, apologized for their university’s roles in perpetuating colonial ideologies and assisting in Canada’s Indigenous assimilation project.

Given that the deep religious and political roots of many early universities fueled the larger colonial project and the residential school system, Indigenous people who attended early universities were forced to assimilate in troubling ways. For example, First Nations people, a group within the larger Indigenous population of Canada, were until 1921 legally barred from attending universities by the Gradual Civilization Act of 1857. In 1880, the settler nation state increased its efforts to assimilate Indigenous people under the Indian Act 1876 by imposing involuntary enfranchisement laws for any Indigenous male who attended a university. This law was amended in 1920 to include Indigenous women (Joseph, 2019). Enfranchisement was a settler colonial legal process that forced First Nations people who were admitted to university to surrender their Treaty rights and terminate their Indigenous legal status and connections to Indigenous reserve lands (Stonechild, 2006). While enfranchisement was an assimilation tactic presented by government as an ‘opportunity’ to join the dominant white settler society, it
involved eradicating Indigenous rights to land and abandoning special status as Indigenous, thereby ‘getting rid of the Indian problem’ and of the government’s obfuscating fiduciary responsibilities enshrined in Treaty agreements.

**Assumed Assimilation (1951-1970s)**

By 1951, Indigenous people in Canada were permitted to enter universities without losing their Indigenous legal status (Joseph, 2019; Stonechild, 2006). Euro-Western academic structures and colonial ideologies about Indigenous people, however, continued to prevail; it was assumed that Indigenous students would simply assimilate into dominant white settler colonial disciplinary norms. During this period, however, owing to complex access issues, many Indigenous people did not attend universities. One report indicated that by 1967 only about 200 of a potential 60,000 Indigenous students had enrolled in Canadian universities (McCue, 2011). Moreover, most postsecondary institutions in Canada did not include Indigenous voices in the curriculum or offer any specialized Indigenous student services or academic programs. Although most enfranchisement laws were abandoned by the 1960s, most universities continued woefully to neglect Indigenous people and systemically exclude them through the maintenance of the Euro-Western university system. During this assumed assimilation period, the first wave and handful of Indigenous and First Nations women—which included Freda Ahenakew, Marlene Brant Castellano, Olive Dickason, Verna K. Kirkness, and Gail Valaskakis—began working in faculty positions in Canadian universities (Archibald, 2009, p. 127). While many early Indigenous scholars were courageous trailblazers, they often aligned their early scholarly work within dominant disciplines in order to earn their degrees and survive in the academy (Steinhauer, 2001). After they entered the academy, however, the first wave of Indigenous scholars began to challenge the dominant Euro-Westernized institutional curriculum and
policies, and used their agency to influence deeper levels of institutional and disciplinary change. Undoubtedly, Indigenous people’s presence as both students and faculty members in Canadian universities during the assumed assimilation period often came at great cost; without their presence and refusal to conform completely, however, the changes witnessed and experienced in academia today would likely not have happened.

_Inclusion and Equity (1970s-2015)_

The changes that took place in universities beginning in the 1970s were largely a result of broader political resistance movements in Canada and the United States, movements that first emerged in the 1960s when the National Indian Brotherhood (now the Assembly of First Nations) in Canada and the American Indian Movement (AIM) in the United States fomented political unrest to advance Indigenous rights. In Canada, Indigenous political resistance rapidly increased after the release of the liberal government’s White Paper of 1969, which attempted to terminate the federal government’s special responsibility to First Nations peoples. These larger political moves galvanised Indigenous peoples to create the National Indian Brotherhood compelling the federal government to recognize First Nations postsecondary educational needs. Soon after, the federal government began creating Indigenous educational policies as a social responsibility rather than a Treaty right (Fallon & Paquette, 2011; Stonechild, 2006). Despite disagreements between the Canadian government and Indigenous nations which have continuously asserted education as a lifelong right tied to nation-to-nation agreements (National Indian Brotherhood, 1972), the federal government, starting in the 1970s, began to provide funding to First Nations to create financial, academic, and student access programs (Malatest & Associates Ltd., 2004; Stonechild, 2006; Paquette & Fallon, 2010; Walters et al, 2004). The federal government’s allocation of Post-Secondary Student Support Program (PSSSP) funding,
however, has not kept pace with inflation costs or with growing First Nation student populations, creating a chronic backlog in postsecondary funding (AFN, 2012; Ottmann, 2017). While education at K-12 and postsecondary levels is a provincial mandate, First Nations educational policies are federally mandated and during this period were increasingly becoming administered and controlled by First Nations directly.

Between the 1970s and 2015, many federal policies followed up with provincial educational policies and programs aimed at helping postsecondary institutions establish Indigenous student services and Indigenous academic programs. Consequently, postsecondary policy initiatives beginning in the 1970s started to open doors to Indigenous students and some Indigenous faculty members (Pidgeon, 2016). By the 1970s, through the advocacy and activism of Indigenous people, Indigenous student services centers emerged in the provinces of Alberta, Saskatchewan, and British Columbia (Pidgeon, 2001) as a way to help create a welcoming environment for Indigenous students transitioning into the university culture. By the 1990s, Ontario universities had also begun developing Indigenous student services units, which often started as small, under-resourced units within the larger student affairs or equity departments of the universities. As a result of valiant first efforts, over 86% of Canadian postsecondary institutions offer some form of Indigenous student services on their campuses today (Universities Canada, n.d., website). Moreover, a professionalization of Indigenous student affairs has occurred in higher education (Pidgeon, 2001, 2016). The National Aboriginal Student Services Association (NASSA) was founded in 2002 as part of the Canadian Association of Colleges and Universities Student Services (CAUCUS). The Association aims to “empower institutions of higher learning to become welcoming environments where Aboriginal People can successfully pursue educational goals while maintaining their cultural identities” (NASSA, 2020, August 15).
In the beginning, provincial governments incentivised postsecondary institutions through temporary funding envelopes to support development of Indigenous student services roles and units, often with the expectation that universities would eventually take over fiscal responsibility. Despite provincial Indigenous educational policy advances, some scholars have critiqued policy discourses for falling prey to colonial vestiges including deficit approaches to positioning Indigenous students (Cherubini, 2012). For example, Ontario’s Aboriginal postsecondary policies leaned toward ‘closing the gap’ discourses which tend to compare Indigenous to non-Indigenous students, often stigmatizing Indigenous students for underperforming while not recognizing the systemically embedded unfair advantages built into postsecondary policies which privilege non-Indigenous learners. Furthermore, Indigenous postsecondary policy discourses tend to measure success in neo-liberal ways that reinforce individualism and competition, notions entrenched in meritocratic assumptions—meritocracy being the dominant value system that rewards individuals (rather than groups) based on individual performance without recognizing systemic barriers that block certain groups from accessing and fully participating in educational contexts. In other words, Indigenous students in many liberal policy frameworks have been commonly misrepresented as underachieving, disengaging, and resisting learning (Maxwell, et al, 2018). In many ways, early efforts to include Indigenous students in universities have leaned (perhaps unintentionally) toward assimilating Indigenous students into the dominant university culture rather than toward changing the university system.

Despite growth in Indigenous student affairs practices, however, research indicates that many Indigenous student services units within the larger university system continued to face fiscal constraints including structural, financial, and under-staffing issues (Pidgeon, 2001, 2016). Other research outlines how mainstream student success, development, and learning approaches
have tended to disregard Indigenous, culturally unique approaches to student affairs, thereby marginalizing Indigenous students’ needs (Shotton et al, 2013; Waterman et al, 2019).

The *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* released in 1996 called for the Government of Canada to take long-term, broad-based policy approaches to education and to responding to Canada’s residential school legacy. RCAP made a number of recommendations to public postsecondary institutions including the following: developing stronger recruitment transition and admission support mechanisms for Aboriginal students; offering Aboriginal courses across disciplines; instituting Aboriginal Studies programs; creating Aboriginal advisory councils; appointing Aboriginal people to the Board of Governors; creating Aboriginal admission policies; instituting Aboriginal student unions; recruiting Aboriginal faculty members; and, offering cross-cultural training to all employees (RCAP, 1996). In 2007, the Indigenous Residential Schools Settlement Agreement came into effect establishing funds for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which was founded in 2008. The Government of Canada publicly apologized to former residential school survivors in 2008. The federal government also endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2010 but reserved objector status.

During the equity and inclusion period (1970-2015), the field of Indigenous Studies emerged and flourished in many Canadian universities. While the first Indigenous Studies programs in Canada were instituted in the late 1960s (beginning at Trent University in Peterborough, Ontario), they, like Indigenous student services, grew out of Indigenous political unrest spurred on by Indigenous activist movements in Canada and the United States (Taner, 1999). Since 1969, Indigenous Studies programs have multiplied across the university sector in Canada, taking on many different names that accord to the geographic and linguistic specificities
of the day and location of the university: Native Studies, Aboriginal Studies, First Nations Studies, and, most recently, Indigenous Studies (Andersen & O’Brien, 2017). By 2015, nearly half of all Canadian universities offered an Indigenous Studies undergraduate program, and at least three Canadian universities have raised these programs to department or disciplinary status (University of Alberta, Trent University, University of Winnipeg). Arguably, these institutional advances contributed to including Indigenous peoples and perspectives in academic disciplinary discourses in much deeper ways.

Despite academic shifts, however, much debate pervades the field of Indigenous Studies. Some scholars see the elevation of Indigenous Studies from programs to departments as an indication of a university’s commitment to Indigenous education (Henry et al, 2017). Some argue that Indigenous Studies should aspire to be interdisciplinary—a borderless discourse that links Indigenous perspectives, peoples, and communities across disciplines and fields of study (Weaver, 2007). Other scholars argue against interdisciplinary approaches to Indigenizing the academy, maintaining that such approaches undermine the possibility of establishing Indigenous intellectual sovereignty (FitzMaurice, 2011). Most Indigenous Studies programs maintain that the field must center on exposing colonialism and advancing decolonization. As such, many scholars, as do I, assert the significance of privileging local Indigenous languages, Indigenous ways of knowing, and land-based knowledges, and of advancing Indigenous nationhood, as critical to the practice of Indigenous Studies (Kidwell, 2009; Innes, 2014), while others emphasize the importance of studying global Indigenous matters (Champagne, 2007). Because of ongoing debate about the nature and purposes of Indigenous Studies, many scholars have argued that, sadly, the field is not yet widely recognized as an emerging discipline (Andersen & O’Brien, 2017). More troublingly, Indigenous Studies undergraduate programs continue to face
constraints operating within dominant Euro-Western academic, disciplinary, and budgetary structures (Henry, et al, 2017), which I argue needs to be addressed as part of deeper institutional Indigenization efforts.

**Indigenization-Reconciliation (2015 to Present)**

In 2015, the TRC concluded its work with a report outlining 94 Calls to Action that have been a major catalyst for national change. The report led to a movement that has, arguably, contributed to deeper relationships between Indigenous and settler Canadians, and brought hope to many Indigenous people (including me) who have been fighting for change in the education system since the RCAP was released in 1996. Among the 94 TRC calls to action, 13 calls focus on postsecondary education, specifically calling for mandatory courses in health, law, education, and media as well as for a commitment to advancing Indigenous languages. TRC articles 43 and 44 call for specific attention to the disavowal of the doctrine discovery and the full implementation of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP). For the second time, in 2016, the liberal Government of Canada responded to the TRC by publicly supporting UNDRIP and removing the objector status previously enforced by the Conservative government; however, this public endorsement has yet to be fully recognized in Canadian law.

Since the release of the TRC, Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities have risen dramatically in number. These include policy statements released by several national higher education organizations: in 2015, Universities Canada released Principles for Indigenous Education; in 2016, the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT) released Indigenizing the Academy; in 2018, the Federation for the Humanities and Social Science released Reconciliation and the Academy; in 2018, the Social Science and Humanities Research
Council released Guidelines for Merit Review of Indigenous Research; and in 2020, the Association of University Teachers (CAUT) released Academic Bargaining and Indigenization.

Along with the rise of new policies in the higher education sector, significant growth has occurred in the number of Indigenizing policy documents within universities themselves. Academic literature to date has documented Indigenous strategic planning processes (Pete, 2016; Pidgeon, 2016), the release of land acknowledgements (CAUT, 2016b; Wilkes, et al, 2017), institutional residential school public apologies (Baker, 2018), and Indigenous faculty cluster hiring processes (Louie, 2019). I expand the scope of this documentation and organize the influx of Indigenizing policies in universities into seven broad categories: (a) academic, (b) operational, (c) employee relations, (d) organizational plans, (e) councils and committees, (f) data and research, and (g) public statements including land acknowledgements.

In short, Indigenous educational policies in Canadian higher education compelled by the TRC calls to action have pushed postsecondary institutions to move from student affairs approaches to Indigenous education to institution-wide approaches that focus on Indigenous inclusion across curriculum, governance, operations, research, and student affairs (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Pidgeon, 2016; Rigney, 2017). While broad policy categories are useful as a typology, they do not necessarily capture the challenging ways in which Indigenizing policies get enacted and constrained within ongoing settler colonial academic systems. The lived and embodied experiences of the Indigenous women administrator participants in the present study, however, highlight how these different types of Indigenizing policies are challenging to put into practice. Centering participants’ experiences illuminates how Indigenizing policies are deeply contested and messy political processes that are not easy to implement, are complex to enact, and are limited by patriarchal white sovereignty.
Since the TRC was released, Indigenous student services units have broadened in their mandates, and Indigenous Studies scholarship has proliferated across disciplines growing a large number of Indigenous Studies scholars in the areas of law, education, and social work. Consequently, since the TRC, universities have taken on broader approaches to Indigenizing the curriculum by involving multiple sites of intellectual leadership across several programs and disciplines in the university. Diverse approaches to Indigenizing the university curriculum, however, have generated increasing debate in more recent years (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b).

Moreover, shifts in higher education have moved universities from an inclusion and equity approach to Indigenization toward an “Indigenization-reconciliation” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) approach to system change. Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) offer important scholarly contributions about the prevalence of Indigenization discourses in Canadian university policies. Like Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), I argue that Indigenization practices on different campuses are not necessarily congruent with each other even though universities commonly, since the TRC, assert that their policies fall under the same discursive banner. To help distinguish different Indigenizing policy rhetorics, Gaudry and Lorenz divide Indigenization policy approaches in practice into three broad categories: 1) Indigenization-inclusion, 2) Indigenization-reconciliation, and 3) decolonial-Indigenization. Their first category includes approaches that universities use when they recognize the need to change but are only prepared to include Indigenous people at superficial levels. Gaudry and Lorenz argue that this level of Indigenization subscribes to notions of a liberal “politics of recognition” (Coulthard, 2014) that rely on a form of “conditional inclusion” (Stein, 2019) and does not hinge on substantial and systemic change. “Indigenous inclusion policies expect Indigenous peoples to bear the burden of change . . . . and naturalizes the status quo of academic culture” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, p. 220).
Gaudry and Lorenz’s second category of Indigenization approaches, Indigenization-reconciliation, involves universities attempting to change at deeper structural and epistemic levels by hiring Indigenous senior leaders to drive systemic change, and making room for Indigenous epistemologies in curriculum and research. While an increasing number of universities are moving in this direction since the release of the TRC in 2015, Gaudry and Lorenz assert that this level of change is not a decolonial level of transformation.

Finally, Gaudry and Lorenz propose a third and more radical category of approaches to Indigenization which they term decolonial-Indigenization. Approaches in this category involve attempts to move universities away from conventional hierarchies of governance and knowledge production and toward a realization of Indigenous resurgence and educational sovereignty. Gaudry and Lorenz and others, and I, too, argue that no universities are currently achieving this level of decolonial change. Scholars assert that this level of change calls, more challengingly, for a new and dramatically different vision of university educational governance that will make it possible for Treaties to be observed and Indigenous resurgence and futurity to be advanced at multiple levels (Elson, 2019).

Focusing on decolonial reform, Andreotti et al. (2015) sketch a social cartographic map for evaluating decolonial reform approaches in higher education, a map which offers deeper analysis of the epistemological limits of existing approaches to policies. Andreotti et al. (2015) focus on the toxic and dependent relationship between modernistic thinking and the Euro-Westernized university. They argue that modernity is an assemblage of Euro-Western norms and ideologies that reproduce assumptions about ideas of progress, industrialization, democracy, linear time, scientific reasoning, and nation-states, ideas that precondition and order universities around universal reasoning and that limit decolonial possibilities (Andreotti et al., 2015).
Andreotti et al. thereby assert that people must disavow their allegiance to the notion of changing the university, and instead take different approaches to decolonization including witnessing or hospicing the dying modern university, or both (Grande, 2018; Tuck, 2018), and participate in system walkouts and system hacking (Andreotti et al., 2015). While not necessarily arguing for the complete abandonment of Euro-Westernized universities, Andreotti et al. are certainly interrogating complex positionalities and complicities under current decolonial policy frameworks that continue to reproduce dominant Euro-Western systems of power.

**Indigenizing the Academy**

While the TRC has played an incredibly powerful role in recent years, it is important to note that Indigenous people in academic institutions have been calling on universities to “Indigenize” for well over two decades (Barnhardt, 2002; Battiste & Youngblood-Henderson, 2009; Battiste et al, 2002; Heath-Justice, 2004; Kirkness & Barnhart, 2001; Kuokannen, 2007, 2008; Mihesuah, 2003; Mihesuah & Wilson, 2004). The topic of Indigenizing the academy was the subject of a coedited book published by Choctaw scholar Devon Abbott-Mihesuah and Dakota professor Angela Cavender-Wilson in 2004. These authors presented Indigenization as part of a larger decolonizing movement led by Indigenous people that reclaims dominant Euro-Westernized educational spaces to ensure that “Indigenous values and knowledge are respected; to create an environment that supports research and methodologies useful to Indigenous nation-building; to support one another as institutional foundations are shaken; and to compel institutional responsiveness to Indigenous issues, concerns and communities” (p. 2). Since 2004, similar Indigenous rights-based positions have advanced Indigenous educational self-determination (Heath-Justice, 2004) and Indigenous educational sovereignty in higher education (Aguilera-Black Bear & Tippeconnic, 2015; Battiste, 2018; Deer, 2015; RCAP, 1996; TRC,
2015; United Nations, 2007). While there is a growing recognition of Indigenous constitutional and global human rights in higher education (Battiste, 2018), some scholars have outlined the limits of using settler colonial legal frameworks to assert Indigenous sovereignty (Coulthard, 2009).

Since the TRC, Indigenization, decolonization, and reconciliation discourses have proliferated in Canadian university policy discussions and organizational change processes (Anderson & Hanrahan, 2013; Cote-Mee, 2020b; de Leeux et al., 2013; Davidson & Jamieson, 2018; Elson, 2019; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Hanrahan, 2013; Ottmann 2017, 2013; Pete, 2016, 2018; Pete & Sasakamoose, 2015; Pidgeon, 2016; Rigney, 2017). Mi’kmaq scholar Michelle Pidgeon (2016) defines institutional Indigenization as “meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge into the everyday institutional policies and practices across all levels, not just in curriculum” (p. 79). Torres Strait scholar Lester-Irabinna Rigney (2017) describes Indigenization as “institutionalized change efforts towards Indigenous inclusion that uses a whole-of-university approach underpinned by principles of recognition and respect for Indigenous peoples, knowledges and cultures” (p. 45). In the university context, institutional Indigenization approaches are intended to transform universities, to go beyond the universities’ early Indigenous student affairs approaches (Pidgeon, 2008) that focused on increasing Indigenous students’ access and acculturation (i.e., assimilation), and to move toward the reform of universities at a broader system level (Cote-Mee, 2020b; Ottmann 2013; Pidgeon, 2016; Rigney, 2017). As such, Indigenization, as a system-wide organizational change process, is intended to transform the university across broad areas including academics; student affairs; personnel, planning and policy; structural development; relational strategies; and approaches and philosophies (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Ottmann, 2013, 2017; Pidgeon, 2016).
Academic literature is rich with discussion of Indigenization in universities in the areas of policy (Axworthy et al, 2016; Battiste, 2018; Cote-Meek, 2020b; de Leeux et al, 2013; Elson, 2019; FitzMaurice, 2011; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018, 2018b; Johnson, 2016; Marker, 2017; Mawhiney, 2018; Ottmann, 2013, 2017; Pidgeon, 2016; Sasakamoose & Pete, 2015; Smith, 2017); curriculum and teaching (FitzMaurice, 2010; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b; Pete, 2015, 2018; Tanchuk et al, 2018); student affairs (Pidgeon, 2008; Shotton, Lowe, & Waterman, 2013; Waterman, Lowe, & Shotton, 2019); and research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014, 2018; FNIGC, 2014; Stiegman et al, 2015). While few studies have focused specifically on approaches to Indigenization, an increasing amount of academic writing (Bopp et al, 2017; Cote-Meek, 2018a, 2018b, 2020b; Debassige & Brunette, 2018; Newhouse, 2016; Greenwood et al, 2008; Lavallee, 2020b), policy briefs (CAUT, 2016a, 2016b; 2018,b, 2018b; Davidson & Jamieson, 2018; Mawhiney, 2018; Universities Canada, 2015a, 2015b, 2018), and media and social media coverage (Gaudry, 2016; Kuokkanen, 2016; Lavallee, 2019; MacDonald, 2016; Sterritt, 2019) has surfaced in the Canadian context in recent years.

**Indigenous Representation in Universities**

Over the four-part time period outlined above, Indigenous people’s participation in universities has grown. Forced assimilation gave way to assumed acculturation which has given way to inclusion and equity. Despite a steady increase in Indigenous participation, however, Indigenous people continue to be chronically underrepresented when compared to non-Indigenous people in universities, and are thereby continuously marginalized at every level of the university—as students, staff, faculty, and administrators. Moreover, Indigenous people in the academy often struggle with negative experiences shaped by the ongoing and violent nature of colonialism.
Indigenous Students

Although Indigenous representation varies by institution and geographic region, Indigenous undergraduate students now comprise on average approximately 5% of all students attending Canadian universities (CUSC, 2017). While their numbers are increasing, the gap between the proportion of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students who attain university degrees is large and widening in Canada. In 2011, for example, only 10% of Indigenous university students attain a degree compared to 27% of non-Indigenous university students, a startling 17% gap (Statistic Canada, 2011).

Indigenous students at both undergraduate and graduate levels face unique and often compounded barriers related to access, childcare, relocation, transportation, family responsibilities, health, employment, and financial needs (Mendelson, 2006; Paquette & Fallon, 2010; Restoule et al, 2013). These complex and compounded barriers often require Indigenous students to “stop out” and take a break in their studies, an interruption which interferes with typical transition and graduation rates (Pidgeon, 2014). As well, Indigenous students often report negative experiences in their classrooms linked to anti-Indigenous racism and colonial biases (Clark et al, 2014; Cote-Meek, 2014; Gallop & Bastien, 2016).

Indigenous women are underrepresented in universities compared to non-Indigenous women: only 12% of Indigenous women are reported to possess a university education compared to 28% of non-Indigenous women—a 16% gap (Statistics Canada, 2011). At the same time, important differences also exist between Indigenous male and Indigenous female student groups. Indigenous women are 5% more likely than Indigenous men to earn a degree (Statistics Canada, 2011). But while Indigenous women represent a higher percentage of university students than do Indigenous men, they also tend to face unique financial needs connected to family
responsibilities. Little research focuses on the gendered differences between Indigenous women and men attending Canadian university, especially in terms of understanding Indigenous men’s low participation (McKinley Jones Brayboy, 2006).

**Indigenous Faculty Members**

Indigenous faculty members make up on average only 1.4% of the professoriate across universities in Canada (CAUT, 2018). While the overall rate of Indigenous faculty members has increased 4.0 percentage points since 2006, Indigenous faculty members overall continue to be chronically underrepresented, and experience higher rates of underemployment and lower earnings than non-Indigenous faculty members (CAUT, 2018). When it comes to equitable earnings, Indigenous women professors earn 26.7% less than non-Indigenous women in the academy, and Indigenous male professors earn 26.3% less than non-Indigenous male professors (CAUT, 2018). Moreover, important differences exist between Indigenous faculty member sub-groups: Inuit are the least represented among Indigenous faculty at only 0.03%; Métis representation is 0.54% and First Nations is 0.76%. While important distinctions were made between Indigenous sub-groups in prominent reports on Indigenous faculty members, these reports did not distinguish between Indigenous men and women faculty members (CAUT, 2018).

Beyond chronic underrepresentation of Indigenous faculty members, some literature has begun to identify unique challenges that universities face in attracting, hiring, and retaining Indigenous faculty members (Deer, 2020) and, in particular, challenges that Indigenous professors face in the hiring process (Sensoy & Diangelo, 2017) and in the promotion and tenure process (Louie, 2019).
**Indigenous Staff Members**

Indigenous staff members are neither faculty members nor students, but they are indeed vital contributors to the implementation of Indigenization policies within Canadian universities. This employee group’s representation, however, remains startlingly low at many universities. Under Canada’s Federal Contractors Program released in the 1990s, all publicly funded institutions were mandated to collect workforce data on four designated groups: women, visible minorities, Aboriginal people, and people with disabilities. While most Canadian universities participated in the Federal Contractors Program, and approximately 3.8% of the general workforce (which includes staff and faculty members) were reported to be Indigenous (CAUT, 2018), there is currently no university-specific Indigenous staff member data that can be used to compare Indigenous staff member representation rates in the higher education context specifically. This lack of adequate comparable Indigenous staff member workforce data in Canadian universities contributes to making invisible the representation and labour of this group.

**Indigenous Administrators**

The number of Indigenous administrators in Canadian universities is on the rise. Nevertheless, a survey conducted on the diversity gap in Canadian universities in 2019 reported a notable absence of Indigenous people in leadership roles in universities (Smith, 2019). This intersectional diversity study examined the representation of Indigenous men, Indigenous women, and Indigenous non-binary people working in leadership positions in U15 institutions (15 top research-intensive universities) at the levels of senior executive, dean, associate dean, departmental chair and director, and program chair and director. Malinda S. Smith (2019), a Black scholar and equity leader, reported that Indigenous people face chronic underrepresentation in leadership overall, although Indigenous women were represented at much
higher levels than Indigenous men. For example, 1.2% of senior executives identified as Indigenous women, whereas the numbers of Indigenous men and non-binary Indigenous people at this level were so low that they were unreported. Representation of Indigenous men, women, and non-binary groups was noted as nearly absent at the decanal level. Indigenous men and women were both represented at 0.7% at the associate dean level. At the departmental chair level, Indigenous women comprised 1.9% of administrators and Indigenous men, 1.1%. At the program chair level, Indigenous women were reported to make up 0.3% of administrators and Indigenous men, 0.1%, while the non-binary proportion was unreported. Overall, it is undeniable that Indigenous people are abysmally represented at all levels in Canadian universities—as students, staff, faculty, and administrators.

**Limits of Representation**

While Indigenous representation is one important indicator of the equity and inclusion of Indigenous people in Canadian universities, several issues persist concerning the use of representational data alone to measure levels of Indigenization. Beyond lack of institutional standards for gathering and reporting on Indigenous representational data, Indigenous numbers, when collected, are often so low they go unreported. Not reporting low numbers is common practice in quantitative studies in order to avoid the possibility of compromising individual identities, but it contributes to the “asterisk phenomenon” (Shotton et al, 2013)—and thereby reinforces Indigenous people’s invisibility, essentially often erasing them from representational data altogether. Other limits of Indigenous representation data include a lack of intersectional approaches to data analysis, a lack of Indigenous staff member comparative data across the Canadian university sector, and a lack of non-binary gendered data and reporting for Indigenous faculty members across the university sector.
In addition to gaps in the statistics describing Indigenous representation, it is important to recognize that Indigenous representation alone does not capture the full story of the experiences of Indigenous people navigating the academy. Nor does representational data alone equate to deeper levels of Indigenization such as structural changes and epistemological shifts in curriculum, which put the focus back on educational systems rather than simply individuals. As Gaudry & Lorenz (2018) suggest, a three-part continuum to Indigenization work exists in Canadian universities, and Indigenization-inclusion, the first step, often focuses on “merely including more Indigenous peoples [where] it is believed that universities can indigenize without substantial structural change” (p. 219). Research in other settler colonial contexts has called for broad and culturally-relevant approaches to evaluating Indigenous policies in higher education (Smith, 2016).

**Indigenous Experiences of Laboring in the Academy**

Beyond representational studies, very little academic literature focuses on Indigenous people’s work experiences in universities. Some scholars have documented the ways in which Indigenous people face anti-Indigenous racism in the academy (Bedard, 2018; Brayboy et al, 2015; Brayboy, 2005; de Leeuw et al, 2013; Henry et al, 2017; Henry, 2012; Henry & Tator, 2009; Louie, 2019; Mohamed & Beagan, 2018; Monture, 2009; Pete-Willett, 2001). Anishnawbe scholar Renee Mzinewgiizhiigo-kwe Bedard reports on her own experiences of racism in the Euro-Western academy which, she argues, attempts to make Indigenous people into “Indians in the cupboard” to be brought out and displayed on settler colonial tokenistic terms. Other scholarship, in Canada (de Leeu et al, 2013; Greenwood et al, 2008; Henry 2012; Louie, 2019; Yahia, 2016), the United States (Almeida, 2015; Brayboy, 2005; Brayboy et al, 2015; Waterman, 2007), and Australia (Bunda et al, 2012), focuses on how Indigenous people experience ongoing
racism in the academy and deal with additional expectations placed on them, expectations which often result in inequitable workloads and poor working conditions.

Yahia (2016) reported that Indigenous and racialized senior administrators in Canadian universities face continual racial micro-aggressions which complicate their leadership experiences and practices. Micro-aggressions are “the daily verbal, behavioural, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults toward people of color” (Sue et al, 2007, p. 278).

In another U.S. based study on Native American staff members working in higher education, Deirdre Almeida (2015) documents five common expectations: (a) to overcommit in their positions and respond to all Indigenous-related matters; (b) to conform to predominantly white institutional cultures and ideologies despite cultural conflicts this may cause workers; (c) not to speak out or challenge policies, decisions, or mandates from their supervisors or senior administrators; (d) to live up to the dominant colonial biases placed on Indigenous people; and (e) to fulfill all the above without institutional willingness to understand systemic barriers and/or recognize leaders contributions (p. 163). Almeida links these five expectations to “racial battle fatigue” and burnout which she argues is exacerbated for Indigenous people as it intertwines with their intergenerational experiences of historical trauma.

In an analysis of the additional expectations often placed on Indigenous workers in the academy, Canadian settler scholar Sharon Stein (2019) argues that these expectations are connected to deeper forms of colonialism. “Conditional inclusion” places the burden of responsibility for changing the university on Indigenous people themselves, implying that Indigenous people are still the problem. Stein suggests that the premise for this conditional form of inclusion is
not to change the system, but [to] change individuals to ensure that the system runs more fairly and efficiently. This also includes individualistic interventions at the institutional level such as cultural competency training as a means to combat racism, hiring more counsellors as a means of addressing declining mental health, and offering more workshops and training at careers centres as a means to prepare students to face the competitive job market. (p. 9)

Settler colonial conditional inclusion imposes change on Indigenous people through individualistic rather than structural or radical transformation. Scholars have described these types of inclusion-based approaches as “exploitative inclusivity” (Greenwood, et al, 2008). I further connect them to the reproduction of “emotional labour,” an affective economy (Hochschild, 1983) in which Indigenous people are expected to manage their feelings and expressions to fulfill settler colonial work expectations. This form of emotional labour for Indigenous and racialized people working within the settler colonial academy has been documented in literature and associated with a sense of “fatigue” (Ahmed, 2017), “racial battle fatigue” (Almeida, 2015), and “reconciliation fatigue” (Anderson et al., 2019).

**Discourses in Higher Education**

In Canadian universities, the discourses of Indigenization, decolonization, reconciliation, and, more recently, Indigenous resurgence, are often used interchangeably, even though vitally important distinctions exist between these key concepts and their specific lineages, goals, and intentions.

**Decolonization**

Calls to decolonize the academy can be linked to broader global political decolonization movements that have emerged in areas of the world impacted by Eurocentric dominance including the Americas, Africa, Australia, and New Zealand where Indigenous peoples have long been fighting colonial subordination and oppression. The term decolonization is often used in the academy to describe institutional transformative change processes that challenge the dominance
of Euro-Western ways of knowing in educational settings—in the disciplines, in research, and, more recently, in institutional structures and policies.

Decolonization is, therefore, considered a transformative praxis in education—a combination of theory and practice that decenters and deconstructs the supremacy of Euro-Western knowledge and ideologies in academia (Battiste, 2013) and, most importantly, attempts to divest the academy of colonial domination (Smith, 2017, p. 101). The decolonizing movement emerged in academic contexts in Canada well over 20 years ago (Battiste, 2002, 2010) in relation to broader global Indigenous movements (Smith, 1999). While some scholars have attributed decolonization to a postcolonial theory grounded within a critical paradigm (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008), other scholars recognize that there are important distinctions between postcolonial theory and decolonial praxis (Smith, 1999, Smith, 2003). In particular, decolonization recognizes that (a) colonization is an ongoing structure and ideology pervasive in settler colonial contexts and that (b) decolonization is not merely a theory but a praxis-centered methodological approach intended to destabilize the dominance of Euro-Western white colonial supremacy through transformative action (Smith, 1999).

While decolonizing the university does not necessarily require the total rejection of Euro-Western knowledge and structures (Battiste, 2013; Smith, 1999), it does involve a process of unsettling the dominance of Euro-Western knowledge forms. Moreover, there are many debates around decolonial approaches in education including strong critiques of discursive tendencies toward a metaphorization of decolonization that acts as a “settler move toward innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Within these criticisms of decolonization, scholars argue against the common disassociation of the term decolonization from its meaning: the repatriation of Indigenous peoples’ lands and life. Moreover scholars such as Tuck and Yang (2012) assert that
when metaphorization of decolonization occurs in education, Indigenous educational projects get trapped within dominant white liberal frameworks of education, which are complicit in reproducing settler colonial power. In the context of education, some scholars have argued, however, that decolonizing our thinking and curriculum in universities must often occur first, before Indigenization work can emerge (George, 2019). The political purpose of decolonizing the academy in this sense is to transform the education system, to centre colonial ideologies, structures, and systems of power, and to create space that not only elevates Indigenous voices and agency but that advances Indigenous languages and ways of knowing (Battiste, 2000; Smith, 1999) and asserts Indigenous educational sovereignty (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018).

Indigenous leadership and policies in universities can play a powerful role in advancing decolonial and Indigenizing agendas; however, they are constrained by the structurally embedded nature of ongoing settler colonialism within universities and nation states. Considering these constraints, scholars like Lynn Lavallee (2020b) and others (Andreotti et al, 2015; Grande, 2018; Tuck, 2018) have questioned whether decolonization as an institutional transformative reform process in universities is even possible. Lavallee argues that decolonization is an “overly ambitious and unrealistic” institutional project (p.120). Nonetheless, calls to decolonize the university have been used by many scholars, leaders, and activists alike to demand change and more equitable space and resources for Indigenous people and Indigenous ways of knowing in higher education.

**Indigenization**

Indigenization in the university refers to the naturalization of Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing (Battiste, 2003). Unlike decolonization, which is grounded in a critical paradigm, Indigenization emerges within an Indigenous paradigm—within Indigenous
epistemology, ontology, and axiology (Absolon, 2011; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Wilson (2001) defines an Indigenous paradigm as a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that is in stark contrast to Western ways of knowing. Although some scholars have problematized structuralist and essentialist tendencies by positioning Indigenous and Western ways of knowing in blunt opposition to each other, others have argued for asserting a poststructural dialogue that permits fluidity between these ways of knowing (FitzMaurice, 2011; Nakata et al, 2012). Still other scholars have asserted the need for “strategic essentialism” in order to understand the rationale for transformative change (Spivak, 1998)—for temporarily advancing simple, static notions of, for example, Indigenous and Western knowledges, in order to demonstrate how distinctly these overarching paradigms operate, how dominant colonial power privileges Western understandings over Indigenous, and, more importantly, how Western colonial ideologies continue to Other (Said, 1978) Indigenous people and ways of knowing in higher education.

In deepening Indigenizing approaches to education, some scholars have taken Nation-specific centered approaches to theorizing Indigenization (Battiste, 2018; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999), mapping out complexities and multiple diversities across Indigenous ways of knowing, nations, and languages, and thereby pushing back against essentializing and pan-Indian understandings. Other scholars have outlined common relational ontologies across Indigenous epistemologies that counter Western anthropocentric ways of knowing (Battiste, 2002). I argue that Indigenizing approaches to education assert that Indigenous ways of knowing exist under distinct ontologies, and university change approaches must strive to privilege local Indigenous knowledge and advance Indigenous educational sovereignty in academic organizing, theorizing, research methodologies, and pedagogies.
Reconciliation

Since the TRC in Canada began its work in 2008, reconciliation discourses have been on the rise in Canadian institutions. Truth and reconciliation processes, however, have broader global connections in movements that aim to undo damage enforced by colonial governments. In Canada, the TRC defines reconciliation as a process of “establishing and maintaining a mutual respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples” (TRC, 2015, p.1). The National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation affiliated with the University of Manitoba aims to document the history of, and educate Canadians about, this country’s ongoing colonial relationship with Indigenous peoples. Through processes of education, establishing safe spaces, and working toward respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, reconciliation, as Métis scholar and leader Ry Moran (2016) argues, must be more than conversations; it must accompany significant action and the assertion of an Indigenous rights-based framework. According to Calls to Action Accountability: A 2020 Status Update on Reconciliation, a report published by Anishnawbe scholar Eva Jewell and settler scholar Ian Mosby (Yellowhead, 2020), three barriers remain to implementing the TRC calls to action. They are: (a) a vision among policy makers of the “public interest” as generally excluding Indigenous peoples; (b) the deep paternalistic attitudes of politicians, bureaucrats, and other policy makers; and, (c) the ongoing legacy and reality of structural racism.

Like decolonization discourses, reconciliation discourses are rife with conceptual ambiguity, generate much debate, and are widely contested by scholars and activists alike. The concept of reconciliation has been critiqued for its roots in Christianity and the project of atonement (Lavallee, 2020), which centers on healing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people without necessarily attending to power inequities and shifting ongoing
colonial structures. By far the most pervasive critique of reconciliation is that the settler colonial state continues intact, and reconciliation discourses get misused by political actors to advance white liberal settler and assimilationist agendas. As Tuck and Yang (2012) assert, “reconciliation rescues settler normalcy.” Thus, scholars have critiqued reconciliation in Indigenizing policies in universities for falling prey to performative approaches and “reconciliation rhetoric” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Some scholars have attributed reconciliation to a “politics of recognition” that do not grapple with the impossibility of separating policies from the ongoing structures of settler colonialism (Coulthard, 2009; Daigle, 2009; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Indeed, Mushkego Cree scholar Michelle Daigle has argued that reconciliation in universities is often just a performance—a spectacle where “public, large-scale and visually striking performances of Indigenous suffering and trauma [occur] alongside white settler mourning and recognition” (Daigle, 2019, p. 706).

Despite widespread contention, some leaders and scholars have also recognized that polarizing dichotomous views associated with reconciliation often hinge on problematic binaries between the colonizer and colonized, and, according to Asch, Burrows, and Tully (2018), sometimes justify a totalizing rejectionist stance based on the idea that all approaches fall prey to cooptation and recolonization. These scholars argue against a rejectionist stand on the usage of reconciliation, as this stand does not nuance reconciliation in practice, nor does it complicate different approaches, different actor positions, or the complex interdependences that Indigenous people have with settler systems.

**Resurgence**

More recently, academic discourses emerging around Indigenous resurgence have focused on revitalizing Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous languages, land-based
education, and Indigenous nation-building (Corntassel, 2012; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Simpson, 2014). In this educational context, Indigenous resurgence work in universities actively resists Indigenous people’s and nation’s dependencies upon the settler colonial state’s education system. According to Gaudry and Lorenz (2018), decolonization and resurgence can work in parallel to re-center Indigenous ways of knowing and rebuild political orders through education. Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel (2012) agrees that decolonization and resurgence can be intimately interconnected.

Like Indigenization, resurgence in education strives to revitalize Indigenous ways of knowing as well as Indigenous nation building projects. Two powerful examples of Indigenous resurgence work are happening within the Dechinta Bush University and the Yellowhead Institute. The Dechinta Bush University is a partnership between Yellowknives Dene First Nation and the University of British Columbia. It is dedicated to supporting self-determining and sustainable Indigenous communities rooted in Indigenous knowledge by offering an array of university accredited and non-accredited programs on the land. The Yellowhead Institute is a First Nations-led research centre supported through Ryerson University that focuses on policies related to First Nations lands and governance. Both initiatives, while housed in and supported through universities, ensure that Indigenous communities govern the educational priorities.

While resurgence work offers some powerful ways to redirect university educational aims and research agendas, Indigenous resurgence work, like decolonization work, is not immune to settler colonial structural challenges and a “politics of distraction” (Smith, 2003) - the ways in which settler colonial agendas infiltrate and constrain Indigenous educational priorities. Thus, Corntassel calls for Indigenous resurgence as an everyday practice, which calls for Indigenous people to be vigilant and be willing to assert acts of resistance to the settler colonial
expectation and status quo. He further warns Indigenous people to be continuously aware of how settler cooptation can become a distraction that occurs when Indigenous people become overly consumed with settler priorities that do not serve Indigenous educational priorities and needs. I, too, assert that Indigenous resistance as a refusal is a necessary leadership and policy disposition that is useful in guarding against ongoing settler dynamics and politics of distraction.

**Educational Leadership**

Considering the history and ongoing nature of settler colonialism in Euro-Western universities in general, it is unsurprising that Eurocentric conceptions of leadership and policy are not only embedded in academic structures but are taken for granted in daily administrative practices and norms. The field of educational leadership is widely known for its deep roots in administrative science, which grounds the field within an “ontology of hierarchy” (Malott, 2010). An ontology of hierarchy favours scientific management, behaviourism, and systems theory approaches to leadership, all of which are entrenched within taken-for-granted approaches to managerialism and bureaucracies. Dominant leadership discourses rooted in administrative science have long defined leadership as individualistic, and associated with masculinist assumptions presumed to represent a natural, rational, and objective approach to good leadership. Overall, educational leadership scholarship has done little to disentangle and critically complicate the underlying forces of these dominant leadership assumptions. In the context of higher education, an increasing “managerialist creep” (Spooner & McNinch, 2018) and the rise of “managerialism as an ideology” (Klikauer, 2013) has been widely accepted as pervasive and is criticized for its relationship to neoliberal and neocolonial agendas tied to the corporatization of education (Giroux, 2014; Lincoln, 2018). Within the rising neoliberal university, Indigenous peoples have been widely accepted under categories of difference (Kymlicka, 2015) a mode of
neoliberal multiculturalism (Smith, 2018) that opens up access but often continues to measure Indigenous people and leadership work in normative and standardized administrative ways.

As a result of its complex lineage, dominant educational leadership theories and practices tend to privilege scientific and instrumentalist positions over critical positions (Gunter, 2001). Gunter outlines four main positions prevalent in educational leadership practices: scientific, instrumentalist, humanistic, and critical. She argues that scientific and instrumentalist approaches dominated by positivist ontology and epistemology are widespread in educational leadership research and practices. Scientific and instrumentalist approaches tend to be invested in meeting standardized organizational outcomes, whereas critical positions prioritize addressing power imbalances and advancing emancipatory aims for marginalized groups. Similar research in the fields of organizational change and educational leadership assert that structural functionalist and interpretativist epistemologies dominate over critical paradigms, forming what Colleen Capper (2019) has described as a critical “epistemological unconsciousness” in social justice leadership research. I have discovered few critical studies of educational leadership based in decolonial theoretical approaches (Bird et al, 2013; Khalifa et al, 2019; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). Even fewer studies focus on Indigenous leadership in higher education or on leadership from an Indigenous epistemological perspective (Bird et al, 2013; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). The gaps in critical Indigenous decolonial approaches to educational leadership are strikingly pronounced when considering the colonial roots of education, and the ways that educational administrators have acted as instrumental tools in the colonizing process.

**Indigenous Educational Leadership**

While the concept of “leadership” has proliferated in academic discourses across many disciplines over the last forty years, Indigenous epistemic perspectives on leadership across
disciplines and in the context of educational leadership are vastly under-represented and even silenced. Researchers have thus called for an increase in Indigenous leadership perspectives in education overall (Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Fallon & Paquette 2014; Hohepa, 2013). In the broader context, scholars have examined Indigenous educational leadership in various colonial contexts—Canada, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand—and in different educational contexts—the mainstream K-12 level (Bird et al, 2013; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012): within First Nations, Métis, or Inuit community settings (Blakesley, 2008; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Goddard & Foster, 2002; Ottmann, 2009; Robinson et al, 2019; Santamaria et al, 2014; Umpleby, 2007): in tribal college settings in the U.S. (Ambler, 1992; Bull et al, 2015; Johnson et al, 2003; Krumm & Johnson, 2011); and in mainstream higher educational environments (Brower, 2016; Cote-Meek, 2020; Faircloth, 2017; Ford et al, 2018; Gomes, 2016; Gunstone, 2013; Hardison-Steven, 2014; Lavallee, 2020; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Ottmann, 2013, 2017; Pidgeon, 2008; Santamaria, 2014; Smith, 2010; Warner, 1995; Yahia, 2016).

Six recurring themes concerning Indigenous people taking on leadership roles within dominant educational settings are evident in the literature: (a) the value of Indigenous leaders drawing on their Indigeneity and experiences in colonial educational environments; (b) Indigenous leaders’ gendered, racialized, and colonial leadership experiences; (c) expectations of Indigenous leaders to navigate different worlds; (d) expectations of Indigenous leaders to work toward Indigenous educational sovereignty within an inherently colonial educational context; (e) expectations of Indigenous leaders to be relationally accountable to Indigenous people (past, present, and future) and their ways of knowing; and, finally, (f) the call for Indigenous leaders to critically “Indigenize” their leadership.
Indigeneity and Educational Experiences

The value of Indigenous leaders drawing on their Indigeneity is a critical, strength-based factor in Indigenous educational leadership research (Chavez & Sanlo, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2020; Faircloth, 2017; Hohepa, 2013; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Moeke-Pickering, 2020; Tippeconnic, 2006; Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). “Identity-based leadership” fosters congruence between leaders’ values and beliefs and organizational missions, visions, and activities (Tippeconnic, 2006). Some scholars point to the need to take an intersectional approach to identity-based leadership that complicates the multifaceted nature of identities (Chavez & Sanlo, 2013). Chavez and Sanlo assert that it is important for educational leaders to reflect on their various identities across interlocking systems of power that create compounded barriers, in order to make conscious efforts to challenge leaders’ internalized assumptions, and to learn to understand and relate across complex differences in order to influence emancipatory change.

Literature also affirms that Indigenous leaders find storytelling an effective way to share their identities and experiences in educational settings (AhNee Benham & Cooper 1998; Chavez & Sanlo, 2013; Cote-Meek, 2020; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). The sharing of stories often helps Indigenous leaders develop relationships and lead equitable change to improve outcomes for Indigenous students and communities (Santamaria & Jean-Marie, 2014; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012; Ah-Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998). Indigenous leaders’ identities and associated stories often become a powerful pedagogical tool that enables them to reclaim their Indigeneity in colonizing educational contexts and transform their Indigeneity from a misperceived deficit to a source of strength.
Gendered and Colonial Experiences in Leadership


Settler scholar Tanya Fitzgerald (2014), in a study that focused on Indigenous women educational leaders in settler colonial contexts including Canada, reported two ongoing myths associated with women’s leadership in higher education: (a) that women’s increasing representation has resolved inequities; and (b) that women’s presence in leadership has solved the gender problem in leadership. Fitzgerald argues that despite women’s access and participation in educational leadership contexts, ongoing organizational practices and cultures persist, and continue to have a negative impact on women’s experiences. In other words, while women may be given access to leadership roles in higher education, they are still expected to lead in dominant white masculinist ways and conform to Euro-Western administrative norms and
expectations. Métis scholar Lynn Lavallee (2020) concurs with the existence of gendered
dynamics in administration in Canadian universities, and explicitly adds colonial dimensions of
leadership among the experiences of Indigenous women in the academy. Lavallee argues that
universities are eager to promote Indigenous women into senior leadership roles but argues that
in practice they often position women as “exotic puppets” to be manipulated and pressured under
dominant colonial and gendered norms. Lavallee explains:

There is an expectation that [Indigenous women leaders] socialize and mould other
Indigenous people who do not fall in line. You are meant to deal with what is often
perceived as the Indian problem on your own. (p. 27)

In other studies, Indigenous women leaders often talked about the gender-related forms
of oppression they experience in educational leadership roles (AhNee-Benham & Cooper, 1998;
Johnson, 1997; Lajomodiere, 2013, 2011; Lavallee, 2020; Tippeconnic et al., 2015; Santamaria,
face connected to their race, gender, and the two worlds they occupy. Anishnawbe scholar
Denise Lajmodiere (2011) uncovered gender biases, including resistance from Indigenous men in
relation to patriarchal male discomfort and from other Indigenous women, identifying the latter
as a form of lateral violence. Scholars associate these experiences of Indigenous women leaders
with the hetero-patriarchal nature of colonialism that is omnipresent within dominant educational
environments and Indigenous communities.

Aside from reports of the gendered and colonial experiences of oppression among
Indigenous women educational leaders, a growing body of work has deliberately shifted away
from a deficit way of thinking about gender and Indigeneity to acknowledging Indigenous
women’s epistemic strengths and resilience in the face of colonialism (Ah Nee-Benham, 2003;
Ah Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Cote-Meek, 2020; Faircloth, 2017; Lajimodiere, 2013; Lavallee, 2020; Krumm & Johnson, 2011; Maracle et al, 2020; Santamaria, 2013; Sunseri, 2010; Thomas, 2018; Tippeconnic et al., 2015). These strengths are associated with Indigenous women’s epistemic-informed gender identities and Indigenous epistemologies (Ah-Nee-Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Ah-Nee-Benham, 2003; Maracle et al, 2020; Santamaria, 2013), and with the reclamation by Indigenous women of traditional leadership roles and responsibilities (Ambler, 1992; Lajomodiere, 2011; Krumm & Johnson, 2011; Tippeconnic et al., 2015). Krumm & Johnson (2011) explored Indigenous women presidencies in tribal colleges in Canada and the United States. They connected Indigenous women’s leadership to their traditional roles as matriarchs, caregivers, and nurturers, and found that gender barriers related to leadership often found in mainstream educational environments are not as prevalent in tribal educational institutions.

**Navigating Different Worlds**

While the literature testifies to strengths and barriers related to leading with one’s Indigeneity, it also points to the tenuous position that Indigenous leaders occupy when enacting their leadership within dominant Westernized educational settings. As such, much literature in educational leadership addresses the need for leaders to walk in more than one world (Ah-Nee-Benham, 2003; Barkdull, 2009; D’Arbon et al., 2009; Fitzgerald, 2010; Goddard & Foster, 2002; Johnson et al., 2003; Kenny & Fraser, 2012; Muller 1998; Ottmann et al., 2010; Santamaria, 2013; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012; Warner, 1995). Walking in different worlds requires Indigenous leaders to “code switch,” a practice of alternating between two or more cultural contexts, such as between the dominant Westernized educational context with its policies and norms, and an Indigenous community context with its protocols. This ability has been described
in academic literature as an important factor in Indigenous educational leaders’ success (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). The notion of different worlds, however, enhances the culturally disparate contexts between Westernized universities and Indigenous communities, and points to the differing ways in which Indigenous and Westernized leadership is often conceptualized and assigned (Bryant, 1998; Cajete, 2016; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1996; Turner & Simpson, 2008; Warner & Grint, 2006).

The experience of walking in multiple cultures and contexts has not just been reported in literature, it has been fully recognized as a challenge for leaders, a challenge that creates ambivalence, isolation, and alienation, reinforcing “insider and outsider” (Goddard & Foster, 2002) role expectations, and creating conflicts between worlds and within leaders themselves (Ah-Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998; Faircloth, 2017; Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). One Indigenous educational leader shared the pain she experienced as a result of being perceived by some Indigenous community members as a ‘traitor’ because she worked within the non-Indigenous school system (Santamaria & Santamaria, 2012). Other researchers have identified intermediary roles that call on Indigenous leaders to act as cultural interpreters—to translate dominant educational policies for Indigenous communities (Goddard & Foster, 2002), and translate Indigenous worlds for dominant institutional communities. The experience of being “caught” in the middle of two often competing and unequal worlds is a common narrative in the literature (Aguilera-Black Bear & Tippeconnic III, 2015; Fitzgerald, 2003; Kenny & Fraser, 2012; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). In an academic context, Jeff Corntassel (2011) asserts that Indigenous people doing resurgence work must avoid mediating between worlds, must challenge Euro-Western domination in academic settings, and must be willing to become warriors of Indigenous truth and ways of knowing.
Indigenous Educational Sovereignty

Considering the enduring nature of settler colonialism in Westernized educational settings, and the history of schooling in terms of eliminating Indigeneity, Indigenous educational leadership research often focuses on advancing Indigenous rights in education (Aguilera-Black Bear & Tippeconnic III, 2015; Hohepa, 2013; Smith & Smith, 2018), and on achieving educational sovereignty and self-determination (AhNee-Benham, 2003; Bird et al, 2013; Johnson, 1997; Kenny & Fraser, 2012; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). Aguilera-Black Bear and Tippeconnic III (2015) defined Indigenous educational sovereignty as decolonizing the system of a solely Western educational worldview and specifically developing culturally responsive educational systems to replace assimilationist models of education. It is considered imperative to the cultural sovereignty and survival of Indigenous communities. (p. 5)

Indigenous educational sovereignty highlights the problems with the historical and enduring nature of colonial education; it aims to counter explicit and implicit assimilationist approaches through resistance and reaffirm Indigenous rights, perspectives, languages, and knowledges in educational institutions (Minthorn & Chavez, 2015). Sovereignty for Indigenous people is often defined within Indigenous intellectual and legal traditions, which are inconsistent with the nation state of Canada’s tendency to locate Indigenous educational aims within a settler colonial white liberal framework (Coulthard, 2014). According to Leanne Simpson (2014), Indigenous sovereignty should advance Indigenous ways of knowing through stories and a pedagogy of the land. For Simpson, a pedagogy of the land privileges Nishnaabeg stories as theory and as a process of generating Nishnaabeg thought. Because of the inherently colonial and racist nature of Euro-Western universities, however, enacting Indigenous sovereignty is an ongoing struggle steeped in the unequal settler colonial structures of power and relations rampant in the structures and practices of universities.
Some tensions emerge in the academic literature between Indigenous educational sovereignty work and equity and diversity work in higher education. While Indigenous work in the academy shares many common objectives with equity and diversity initiatives (e.g., removing barriers, increasing access, addressing underrepresentation), Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2018) argue that Indigenous work in the academy is unique on several important self-determination fronts: (a) implementing a unique constitutional and global Indigenous rights framework across many areas; (b) including leadership, curriculum, and research among those areas; (c) implementing longstanding treaty agreements; (d) responding to reconciliation agendas across various disciplines; (e) supporting Indigenous community and nation building efforts in various forms; and, (f) advancing Indigenous languages and knowledges in curriculum and research priorities (2018, p. 13).

**Relational Accountability**

In the context of Indigenous educational leadership, the need to be relationally and ethically accountable to Indigenous communities and ways of knowing also surfaces in the literature. Researchers increasingly call for more localized approaches to working with Indigenous communities through community-engaged processes (Ah-Nee-Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Marker, 2007) that are both relational and accountable to the land and political locality of the university (Cote-Meek, 2020; Kirkness & Barnhart, 2001; Ottmann 2013, 2017; Pidgeon, 2008). In higher educational settings, relationship-building is highlighted as key to institutional leadership approaches (Ottmann, White, & Fasoli, 2010; Pidgeon, 2008). Community engagement and relationships with Indigenous communities informed how leaders in one study understood Indigenous knowledge and improved their abilities to work respectfully with Indigenous communities (Pidgeon, 2008). Several publications focus on moving
accountability beyond anthropocentric values toward the valuing of relationships between humans and non-humans, including land and place (Ah-Nee-Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Kenny & Fraser, 2012; Marker, 2015; Ottmann, 1995; Warner & Grint, 2006), with Elders (Jules, 1999; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Ottmann, 1995; Young, 2012), and spiritually (Ah-Nee-Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Johnson, 1997; Marker, 2015; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Ottmann, 1995).

**Call for Indigenizing Leadership**

Finally, much literature addresses the significance of the privileging of Indigenous conceptions of leadership (Aguilera-Black Bear & Tippeconnic III, 2015; Ah Nee-Benham, 2003; Ah Nee-Benham & Murakami-Ramalho, 2010; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2010; Johnson et al., 2003; Hohepa, 2013; Lajimodiere, 2011; Minthorn & Chavez, 2015; Santamaria 2013). This literature often distinguishes between Western and Indigenous concepts of leadership in which Western models are described as privileging hierarchical structures rooted in positional power and formal bureaucracies, while Indigenous models are described as heterarchical or non-hierarchical, situational, connected to community needs, and driven by different types of leaders and their persuasive techniques (Warner & Grint, 2006). Many times Western and Indigenous conceptions of leadership are described as at odds with each other, pointing to a troubling binary depiction that places Indigenous leaders in impossible positions (Hohepa, 2013).

While many scholars underscore problems with the dominance of Westernized, individualistic, and hierarchical conceptions of educational leadership (Blakesley, 2008; Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2010, 2006, 2004, 2003; Goddard & Foster, 2002; Hohepa, 2013), they also sometimes argue against creating a unitary Indigenous leadership approach or style (Fallon & Paquette, 2014; Fitzgerald, 2014; Hohepa, 2013) as this would obscure the diversity...
that exists across Indigenous nations and languages. Maori scholar Margie Hohepa (2013) in particular has warned that creating a unitary approach would be a trap; she argues that Indigenous leaders should be able “to do things the same but differently.” Hohepa further cautions scholars against falling prey to essentialist and authenticity discourses in Indigenous educational leadership, discourses that place added constraints on Indigenous leaders. She instead asserts the need for Indigenous leaders to draw from a range of different leadership methods—different theories and approaches—but to do so critically and cautiously and from within their Indigeneity—through an Indigenous epistemic and political lens. In asserting this position, Hohepa argues for the need to “Indigenize leadership” carefully using an ongoing, critical self-reflexivity in relation to ongoing forms of colonialism. She also suggests that leaders draw on a broad base of leadership tools and technologies in order to avoid uncritically adopting hegemonic colonial administrative norms and reducing Indigenous ways of knowing in leadership settings. Hohepa advocates for the complicated and layered work of engaging in ongoing critical reflexivity about various leadership practices from within an Indigenous decolonial lens.

Through this literature review, I have contextualized the challenges that Indigenous women administrators may face when enacting their leadership in Canadian university contexts. In the next chapter, I outline the theoretical framework for my research.
CHAPTER 3
Theoretical Framework

Indigenous Feminism

In the present study, I use Indigenous feminist scholarship to frame Indigenous women administrators’ embodied and intersectional experiences of oppression within the administrative academy. With an increasing focus on research on Indigenous women in general in North America, an emerging Indigenous feminist theoretical lens has surfaced in the last fifteen years (Arwin et al., 2013; Barker, 2017; Goeman, 2009; Goeman et al., 2009; Green, 2007, 2017; Suzack, Huhndorf, Perreault, & Barman, 2010). Positioned in stark contrast to white liberal modes of feminisms that focus on gender and sex within settler colonial and imperial constructs, Indigenous feminisms, while diverse, generally center on a critique of settler colonialism and its hetero-patriarchal nature (Arwin, Tuck & Morril, 2013). They focus on decolonization as a “politically self-conscious activism” (Green, 2007, p. 25, 2017) with an allegiance toward advancing Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination (Barker, 2008, 2017).

Acknowledging the complex interconnections between heteropatriarchy, racism, and colonialism, my Indigenous feminist lens recognizes that associated ideologies are pervasive in both Indigenous communities and in dominant institutions such as the academy. I draw on the scholarship of Torres Strait scholar Eileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) to put forth the notion of “patriarchal white sovereignty” as an overarching “regime of power, operat[ing] ideologically, materially, and discursively to reproduce and maintain its investment in the nation,” a regime which positions Indigenous peoples as a white possession and which “operationalize[s] as a discourse of pathology that legitimates the subjugation and disciplining of Indigenous subjects” (p. xxiii). Moreover, patriarchal white sovereignty, according to Moreton-Robinson (2015), operates on a possessive logic founded on the continuous desire of the nation state (and all its
public institutions including universities) to own, control, and dominate Indigenous people, and thereby undermine Indigenous educational sovereignty.

Despite important theoretical contributions, ongoing tensions remain in the area of Indigenous feminist thought, including a “caution about claiming the [feminist] label” (Green, 2017) among many Indigenous scholars (Anderson, 2010; Arvin, Tuck & Morril, 2013; Grande, 2015; Lindberg, 2004; St Denis, 2007). Indigenous scholarly distancing from white liberal feminism can be traced back to the historical exclusion of Indigenous women in early feminist research along with white liberal feminist tendencies to ignore the intersections of whiteness and colonialism (Grande, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2006; Arvin et al, 2013). Consequently, universalizing discourses in feminism have not only obscured colonial histories and ongoing political structures, they have silenced Indigenous women and Indigenous epistemologies and have helped to motivate many Indigenous women to avoid associating their scholarship with feminist activism and alliances. While I respectfully recognize these positions and tensions in the Indigenous scholarly field, I position my work within an Indigenous feminist lens. In doing so, I explicitly interrogate the co-constituted nature of hetero-patriarchal, settler colonial, global-capitalistic, and racial ideologies pervasive in Euro-Western academic administrative contexts and Indigenous communities. After all, hetero-patriarchal and settler colonial policies such as those of the Indian Act have long permeated Indigenous communities and eroded Indigenous women’s political, religious/spiritual, and economic positions of power inside and outside Indigenous communities (Anderson, 2007; Lajimodiere, 2013; Sunseri, 2010; Thomas, 2018; Voyageur, 2008).

Eurocentric colonial and masculinist ideas of leadership have also infiltrated Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, perpetuating false notions that Indigenous men not Indigenous
women can be leaders. For example, under the patriarchal *Indian Act* legislation, Indigenous men were automatically placed as heads of households, thereby displacing Indigenous women’s traditional roles in many families, communities, and nations (Lajimodiere, 2013). This displacement had particularly devastating impacts on matriarchal Indigenous societies in which Indigenous women held prominent governing positions such as that of Clan Mother (Sunseri, 2011; Thomas, 2018). Moreover, when Indigenous women married non-Indigenous men, they lost their Indigenous legal status, and they and their children were systemically removed from Indigenous communities, denied access to Treaty land, and forced to relocate into settler dominated contexts where they often struggled to survive (Thomas, 2018). Indigenous women were further disenfranchised under settler colonial laws through the denial of their participation in political governance and formal leadership positions in both First Nation community contexts from 1869-1951 and in non-Indigenous societies until 1960s (Thomas, 2018). Such sexist colonial policies have long eroded Indigenous women’s political voices and leadership positions. Indeed, such notions of Indigenous women are still prevalent today, and still reinforcing false beliefs that Indigenous women are not capable, deserving, or effective in formal leadership positions.

In the context of women in academic leadership, white feminist scholar Jill Blackmore’s (1999) research has been helpful in terms of highlighting the gendered ways in which women in general are often troubled in educational leadership. Blackmore traces this troubling back to masculinist ideologies of leadership that are connected to larger structures of patriarchy embedded in administrative theory and to practices that tend to place men in leadership roles. In educational leadership research, the “double bind” has been associated with and build upon with respect to Indigenous women’s leadership experiences (Fitzgerald, 2003). Indigenous and other
racialized women become marked as “Other-within” (Blackmore, 2010), a notion which draws on an original concept put forth by Black feminist scholar Patricia Hill-Collins (1986). Settler scholar Tanya Fitzgerald (2006) elaborates on the double bind to propose a “triple bind” related to three intersecting barriers experienced by Indigenous women leaders working in (a) a “predominantly white world, b) an educational system that values patriarchal leadership, and c) a context where Indigenous women tend to be Othered. Fitzgerald argues that the triple bind places Indigenous women educational leaders at the margins in educational leadership contexts, and in impossible dichotomous positions (i.e., they are themselves when working with Indigenous communities and Other when working within institutions). The experience of being Othered in academic spaces has been similarly theorized by Sara Ahmed (2000) in her articulation of “embodying strangers,” the Othering experience of racialized women when confronting the “phenomenology of whiteness” (Ahmed, 2007) which is pervasive in academic spaces and which causes racialized bodies to feel ‘out of place’ (Puwar, 2004). Ahmed argues that the experience of non-white bodies encountering a phenomenology of whiteness sometimes has no words, but is felt by the way the non-white body is received, questioned, marked, obstructed, and disciplined in academic spaces.

For Indigenous women, Othering can conjure up complex racial, colonial, and gendered stereotypes such as the infamous “princess/squaw” binary linked to early colonists’ depictions of Indigenous women (Green, 1975; Lajimodiere, 2013). The princess stereotype tends to portray Indigenous women as good, seeking alliance with white men and institutions, and generally supportive in the settling process. The princess stereotype, however, makes Indigenous women traitors to Indigenous communities, and paints them as white and assimilated (Green, 1975). On the other hand, the squaw stereotype is associated with notions of Indigenous savagery (as
opposed to civility); the squaw is depicted as resisting change and standing in the way of progress. Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson (2016) writes about perceptions of Indigenous women leaders in settler colonial contexts today, affirming that “when you are an Indigenous woman, your flesh is received differently” (p. 22). To argue this point, Simpson exposes the violent mistreatment of Mushkego Cree Chief Theresa Spence by the mainstream media during her six-week hunger strike as part of the Idle No More movement in Ontario, Canada, in the winter of 2012-13. During this time, Chief Spence fasted on the doorstep at Parliament Hill to bring attention to deplorable housing conditions in her far northern Attawapiskat First Nation community. During Spence’s fast, the mainstream media often criticized and objectified her body, accusing her of ‘cheating’ because she drank fish broth during the hunger strike. The media comments that followed often centered on Spence’s heavier-set body, in violent, gendered, and racialized ways. Her leadership was further questioned in terms of the “crooked Indian” stereotype (Palmater, 2014), a common myth based on notions of corrupt band governance that is often used as a settler colonial tactic of distraction and a way to pathologize Indigenous leaders. With Spence’s life on the line, the online discourses clearly surfaced deeply engrained, anti-Indigenous racism and sexism which reaffirmed settler colonialism’s pervasive and often hidden pathological desire to disappear Indigenous women (MMIWG, 2019).

Damaging racial, colonial, and gendered stereotypes have long been imposed on Indigenous women generally; they also surfaced in the present study. The imposition of these ongoing settler colonial ideologies on Indigenous women in the present study, I argue, infringed upon women’s “embodied sovereignty” (Simpson, 2013). Embodied sovereignty within Indigenous epistemology is a relation and collective ontology rooted in Indigenous storytelling and one’s relationship to land and a holistic way of knowing. As Leanne Simpson asserts, it is
the freedom to take control of our bodies, to feel at home in our skin, to express our embodied experiences and to find a sense of belonging and presence in our bodies in colonial institutions, and, moreover, to have agency over our experiences in and out of academic spaces.

In the present study, I draw on the Indigenous feminist concept of a “red intersectional framework” (Clark, 2016) to understand Indigenous participants’ complex positionalities within interconnected systems of power. As Métis scholar Natalie Clark (2016, 2012) describes it, a red intersectional framework moves beyond the ways in which intersectional frameworks are often used today. The concept of intersectionality was first conceived by Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) as a mode of analysis to use in understanding how multiple forms of oppression—most importantly, gender and racism—intersect to disadvantage Black women engaging in the legal system in the United States. A red intersectional framework draws inspiration from the concept of intersectionality but privileges the intersectional realities of Indigenous people at micro (individual) levels, and how they embody multiple, converging, and interwoven identities (i.e., non-binary genders, sexual orientations, races, connections to land, historical trauma, socioeconomic statuses, abilities etc.). These micro realities intersect with macro structural systems (i.e., hetero-patriarchy, global capitalism, settler colonialism) to create complex experiences of privilege and oppression. Further, Clark’s (2016, 2012) red intersectional framework centers the ongoing settler colonial relationship that Indigenous people have with the settler nation state. That relationship shapes unique experiences of disadvantage—disconnections from Indigenous communities, dispossession from Indigenous lands, languages, and ways of knowing, and experiences of intergenerational trauma—which Clark asserts often get obscured and overlooked within mainstream understandings of intersectionality. Beyond recognizing how colonialism has historically and currently affected—and effected—Indigenous
women, a red intersectional framework recognizes how Indigenous women resist such oppressions, and uphold the role and responsibilities of reclaiming Indigenous ways of knowing and asserting Indigenous sovereignty (CRIAW, 2020).

Intersectional Indigeneity is more than a theoretical concept; it is a “lived, practiced and relational” embodied and space-specific ontology (Hunt, 2013, p. 29). Through this embodied practice, Indigenous women leaders navigate dominant masculinist administrative and white settler colonial academic spaces where they confront norms and are often forced to participate in ontological shifting (Hunt, 2013) between their intersectional identities (i.e., as Indigenous community members and as university members) and ways of relating to the world (i.e., through Western epistemic frames as well as Indigenous epistemic frames). In doing so, Indigenous women’s bodies navigate dominant institutional norms and negotiate ontological limits that can create an internal sense of dissonance and ambivalence. I argue that this dissonance contributes to a “dual consciousness” (also known as the double bind) which can be linked back to the seminal work of W.E.B. Du Bois (1903), a Black male sociologist who first described the sense of dividedness and dissonance experienced by Black people operating within white dominated contexts.

To explain the ontological shifting that Indigenous women administrators contend with when navigating predominantly white settler spaces, I draw on border theory. Border theory can help us understand the complex, in-between space that Indigenous women administrators navigate in the intermediate areas between Indigenous communities and ways of knowing and Euro-Western institutions and knowledges. Borderland theory was originally put forth by Chicana lesbian scholar Gloria Anzaldúa (1999, 1987) as a spatial boundary imposed on Latina people living along the US-Mexico border. While some of Anzaldúa’s theories (mestizaje in
particular) have received some scholarly criticism, specifically over the romantic representation of an Indigenous past and silencing of contemporary Indigenous realities (Saldana-Portilla, 2001 cited in Ortega, 2016), Anzaldua’s contributions to establishing borderland theory as a field of its own is undeniable. Moreover, borderland theory has expanded across “geographic, ideological, sociological and identity borders” (Aldamma & Gonzalez, 2018, p. 25), demonstrating how people are placed in-between different worlds where they are often forced to negotiate processes of transformation, exchange, and resistance (Aldamma & Gonzalez, 2018). While Anzaldua’s theory emanates from her own complex identity and mestiza consciousness specific to living in the United States on the US/Mexico borders, the notion of working on a type of borderland, I argue, can be applied to the complex space upon which Indigenous women administrators in this study operate in-between Indigenous communities and the Euro-Western academy. Latina feminist scholar Mariana Ortega (2016) describes the borderland as an in-between space where racialized women experience multiplicitous selves including contradictions, ambiguities, and a thick sense of “not-being-at-ease” (p. 12). Walter Mignolo (2000) similarly draws on border thinking to assert that the academy is underpinned by both geographic and epistemic borders marked by imperial/colonialism and Eurocentric thinking. I draw on Mignolo’s epistemic border theory to assert that Indigenous women leading Indigenizing work in the academy confront and negotiate complex spatial and epistemic borders in their leadership work.

**Trickster (Weesakechahk) Theory**

Another central theory that is part of my larger theoretical framework is Cree story, in particular the Weesakechahk story—a type of trickster theory—which I included in a prologue. The positioning and privileging of Indigenous stories as theory has been well articulated in academic research (Barker 2017; Burrows, 2013; Goeman, 2013; Maracle, 2018; Simpson, 2013
Indigenous stories contain Indigenous knowledge (Archibald, 2009; Kovach, 2009) which often structures and guides human relationships and responsibilities to Indigenous worlds (Snyder, Napoleon, & Burrows, 2015). Among Mushkego Cree, two general types of stories are often told: atalohkan (sacred stories related to mythological figures) and tipacimowin (historical life events related to humans) (Bird, 2007; Ellis, 1995). Robert Alexander Innes (2014), a Plains Cree Nehiyaw scholar, has further complicated these two overarching categories asserting their complexities and interconnections across time and memory. Nonetheless, among the Mushkegowuk Cree, atalohkan stories have centered on mythological figures, including Weesakechahk (and others) as a teacher. Jo-ann Archibald Q’um Q’um Xiiem (2009) has written extensively about Trickster as a teacher in both research and education in her foundational book *Indigenous Storywork*. Archibald has also asserted that every Indigenous nation has their own Trickster figures including Coyote, Glooscap, Raven, and Weesakechahk.

In the field of Indigenous Studies, several Cree scholars have drawn on Weesakechahk (also known as Elder Brother) to assert a Cree theoretical framework (Innes 2017, 2014; McLeod, 2007; Wilson, 2016). Innes has offered an in-depth look at Elder Brother as a means for teaching theory and as a source of Cree kinship knowledges. Ininew two-spirited scholar Alex Wilson (2016) and Cree two-spirited playwright Tomson Highway have both critiqued the ways in which Weesakechahk has been taken up in Eurocentric and hetero-patriarchal ways which reinforce the gender binary, which they associate with mistranslations of Weesakeechahk from the Cree into English that are marked by Anglophone and Eurocentric male bias. Wilson (2016) suggests that Weesakechahk in Cree most accurately means Wandering Star, and is best understood as an “ongoing creator of the world,” one who comes into being in various shapes to
teach humans about life through a Cree cosmology. Highway’s (2003) use of Trickster has been
directed at subverting dominant colonial thinking using humor and irony in his playwriting.

In the context of Indigenizing the academy, some Indigenous scholars have drawn on
Trickster characters like Coyote to tell uncomfortable truths about university administration
(Ottmann, 2017; Pete, 2018). For example, Saulteaux scholar and administrator Jacqueline
Ottmann (2017) describes Trickster in Indigenizing work as a transformative figure who shows
up to “draw people to truth” (p.96-97). I draw on Trickster humour, in particular Weesakechahk,
in similar ways to expose the paradoxical nature of policy enactment processes and to share
Indigenous women administrators’ embodied stories in an Indigenous (Cree) way. Like
Anishnawbe scholar and artist Leanne Simpson (2013a), I position the role of cultural figures
such as Weesakechahk as a pedagogical tool for advancing critical Indigenous thought in the
academy.

While several intellectuals have drawn on Trickster in their research, scholars have also
warned against the “trickster trope” (Fagan, 2010). The trickster trope among researchers has
been linked to early anthropological researchers (Womack, 2008) and an increasing number of
poststructuralist scholars who coopted and overgeneralized trickster discourses in literary studies
throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Reder & Morra, 2010). During the later decades, many non-
Indigenous scholars drew heavily on trickster theory to analyze Indigenous literatures in pan-
Indigenous ways that obscured linguistic and cultural distinctiveness, ignoring underlying social,
political, and cultural dimensions of Indigenous storytelling and research in their analysis. The
‘spot the trickster’ movement has therefore been heavily criticized for overlooking Indigenous
peoples’ epistemologies (Fee, 2010) and Indigenous storytellers’ intellectual sovereignty (Baldy,
2015), in turn contributing to an intellectual colonialism. In the present study, I draw on my own
location as a Cree woman, and on the specificity of Weesakechakh among the Cree Nation of which I am a member. In so doing, I avoid settler cooptation, pan-Indigenous archetypes, and the metaphorization of trickster (Baldy, 2015).

**Tricky Nature of Power of Policy Enactment**

While drawing on Weesakechakh as a character to help tell participants’ stories, I also apply the notion of “tricky” as it has been put forward by Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2005) to describe the invisible yet powerful ways in which colonial power operationalizes in research. In my research, the notion of trickiness is used to expose the deceptive ways in which settler colonialism functions in policy enactment processes, policy documents, and policy actor’s diverse positionalities. Stephen Ball (1994) first developed the concept of “policy enactment” as involving discursive practices that “embody claims to speak with authority, [that] legitimate and initiate practices in the world and . . . privilege certain visions and interests” (Ball, 1990, p. 22). Similarly, Taylor, Rizvi, and Henry (1997) have added that “there is always a political struggle over whose voices will be heard and whose values will be reflected in policies” (p. 27). Unlike rationalist and instrumentalist approaches to policy that assume policies are politically neutral and can be implemented in straightforward and unproblematic ways, Ball (1990) asserts that “policy enactment” is complex, contested, and messy in practice, and, furthermore, linked to policy actors’ diverse positionalities, assumptions, and biases.

I take the typical critical policy enactment understanding a step further by explicating the historical and ongoing ways that settler colonialism shapes Indigenizing policy practices. For example, I expose the colonial lineage of educational policies in relation to Indigenous people, policies which have acted as tools to control, dominate, and dispossess Indigenous people of their lands in order to naturalize settler colonial authority over Indigenous people. I also argue
that universities as public institutions and arms of the settler colonial state (Tuck, 2019) continue to reproduce settler colonial dynamics in often not very explicit ways that conceal colonial violence, naturalize settler authority, advance settler economies, misappropriate Indigenous knowledges and land, and deny decolonial possibilities (Steinman, 2015, p.222).

To help explain the stealthy ways that settler colonial dynamics are operationalized in university policy enactment processes, I point to the critique of “policy rhetoric” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) and the tendencies of universities to embrace “recognition politics” (Coulthard, 2014). Through my proposed critical decolonial policy enactment lens, I strive to make visible the underlying settler colonial dynamics at play in university policy enactment, and interrogate whether a “colonial fantasy” is perpetuated—a fantasy based on the underlying assumption that with the “right policy approach, the right funding arrangements, the right set of sanctions and incentives, Indigenous [educational] lives will somehow improve” (Maddison, 2019, p. xvii). From this settler dreamland, policy actors obfuscate the need for settler colonial structures and underlying ideologies to change. While Indigenous people are sometimes included in Indigenizing university policy work, their inclusion is often “conditional” (Stein, 2019): Indigenous people remain the ones in need of changing; they remain the ‘Indian problem.’ Settler colonialism as a structure remains intact, and Indigenous administrators continue to struggle, operating within tricky, messy, and contradictory policy enactment spaces that inevitably surface the incommensurability of decolonizing the academy (Tuck & Yang, 2012).

Within an ongoing settler colonial context, university policies tend to “metaphorize decolonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). This is an evasive practice that proclaims decolonial commitments to Indigenous people and to reconciliation, but which does not necessarily attend to the issues of Indigenous repatriation of land and Indigenous futurity. Policies become
discursively performed as symbolic gestures that disguise ongoing colonial erasures and violence. Sara Ahmed’s (2004) work on university equity policies in the United Kingdom describe these types of tendencies as “politics of declarations” which she asserts are “performativ” — a discursive practice that strives to produce the impression (the tricky illusion) it names (Ahmed, 2004). Ahmed (2009) argues that diversity policies act as “institutional speech acts” which are non-performative because, although they give the impression that universities are committed to equity and diversity (in this research in Indigenizing and reconciliation policies), they do not necessarily achieve the change they claim to embody. Instead, Ahmed (2004) argues, “institutional speech acts” operate as a brand, a corporate image of organizational pride that exudes good performance but which in reality, in practice, puts the bodies of the very people doing diversity work at odds with institutional performative narratives.

Beyond her contributions to the non-performative nature of diversity policies in universities, Ahmed (2009) also offers important understandings of the e/affects of “embodying diversity” policies for marginalized groups, understandings which some Indigenous scholars have also identified (de Leeux, 2013). Ahmed (2009) has described the tension that racialized diversity workers experience when doing diversity work—when they are expected to smile and show gratitude for having been received by the academy. In Living a Feminist Life, Ahmed (2017) describes how racialized bodies become used as evidence of good institutional performance. She further argues that when racialized women resist this positioning and do not play the institutional game of “being diversity,” they become problematized, labelled as “killjoys,” and are heard to be angry, disruptive, and even self-motivated. Anishnawbe scholar
Lynn Lavallee (2020b) also describes ways in which Indigenous administrators have been perceived as angry when they challenge the settler colonial status quo.

**Indigenous Refusal**

To explain how Indigenous women administrators in the present study negotiate the political messiness of policy enactment and embody the non-performative tendencies of reconciliation, I draw on the concept of “Indigenous refusal” (Simpson, 2007; Tuck & Yang, 2014; Grande, 2018). Indigenous refusal is used to explain how, as part of their leadership work within universities, Indigenous women administrators often resist the settler colonial academy. Tuck and Yang (2014) describe Indigenous refusal as

> the stance that pushes us to limit settler territorialization of Indigenous/Native community knowledge, and expand the space for other forms of knowledge, thought-worlds to live. Refusal makes space for recognition, and for reciprocity. Refusal turns the gaze back upon power, specifically colonial modalities of knowing persons as bodies to be differentially counted, violated, saved and put to work. It makes transparent the metanarrative of knowledge production – its spectatorship for pain and its preoccupations for documenting and ruling over racial difference. Refusal generates, expands, champions representational territories that colonial knowledge endeavors to settle, enclose, domesticate. We again insist that refusal is not just a no, but a generative, analytical practice. (p. 817)

Tuck and Yang assert that Indigenous refusals are a useful part of decolonial research praxis that is both related to the ongoing settler colonial project and the inter-subjective nature of settler colonial power dynamics at play within academic environments. I use the concept of Indigenous refusals to help expose Indigenous women administrators’ agency in their intermediary positions—in-between the Euro-Western university and their Indigenous communities—where they are often forced to speak uncomfortable truths and challenge Euro-Western hegemonic norms. In the present study, Indigenous women participants shared diverse and complex stories about leading and refusing in the settler colonial university. Such stories emerged as participants talked about the nuanced ways in which they lead in the academy. At times they shared stories...
about rejecting normative administrative activities that contributed to their own oppression, and about disputing hegemonic leadership practices and refusing to be neutral or less political in their leadership approaches.

Participants also enacted refusals when they exposed and deconstructed the hegemonic nature of the settler colonial academy and its underlying structures, ideologies, and norms, which tended to operate in invisible, normalized, and rationalist ways. Though participants described how hegemonic norms were labelled by some settlers in the academy as “the way things are done,” participants did not always accept those rationales, and sometimes described “stepping up,” “speaking out,” and “taking a stand” as a necessary aspect of their leadership work. In my findings chapters, I have drawn upon Weesakechahk as a storyteller and teacher to help expose the invisible ways in which Euro-Western hegemony operates in academic leadership, and how an Indigenous ontology often informs Indigenous women’s acts of refusal.

When Indigenous women administrators reported refusing to adhere to norms of the university, they often reported being cast by some white settlers in anti-Indigenous and stereotypical ways reminiscent of Ahmed’s concept of the feminist killjoy. They faced racialized and colonial stereotypes and were often labelled as “too political” and “uncollegial.” By being stereotyped in this way, these Indigenous women administrators were portrayed as problematic, political, and divisive in their leadership, a portrayal intended to silence and discredit them and naturalize settler colonial authority and norms. Like Tuck and Yang (2014), I refuse to accept this blanket misrepresentation of Indigenous women’s leadership, and instead position their refusals as courageous, generative, and even productive in advancing decolonial aims and interrupting white settler colonial common sense in the academy.
While I privilege the concept of Indigenous refusal, I also acknowledge similar concepts put forward by feminist scholar Sara Ahmed (2006), specifically in *On Being Included* (2012) and *Willful Subjects* (2014) which focus on equity workers in universities in the United Kingdom. Ahmed employs “willfulness” to describe how diversity workers resist the dominant white norms of the academy in their equity work. Ahmed connects willfulness to the paternalistic ways in which children have been historically marked as unruly under Euro-Christian, heteropatriarchal, and paternalistic frameworks and applies its usage to diversity workers in universities. Anishnawbe scholar Brent Debassige and I drew on the notion of willfulness to describe Indigenous people’s Indigenizing work in Canadian universities as a “reaction to and against unquestioned biases inherent within white colonial systems of power, which do not serve the goals of Indigenous educational sovereignty” (Debassige & Brunette, 2018, p. 123). In the present study, I privilege Indigenous refusal over willfulness because it both centres settler colonialism as an ongoing invasive structure and logic that consolidates whiteness in universities and, more importantly, provides support for the resurgence of Indigenous ways of knowing in education (Simpson, 2014).

In examining refusal, I also draw on the scholarship of African-American United States based historian Robin D. G. Kelley (2016) who describes refusal in nuanced ways as complexly situated and occurring within, against, and outside the university. Kelley’s ideas are useful because they challenge simplistic binary ways of thinking that tend to position Indigenous refusal as an all or nothing orientation, and as occurring in single spaces such as in or out of the university. This anti-binary and anti-simplistic orientation is worthwhile not only when thinking about Indigenous administrators who enact Indigenous refusals in their Indigenizing policy work
in universities, but also when thinking about Indigenous women’s work in-between worlds on the borderland.

Finally, I draw on the concept of the “politics of distraction,” first described by Maori scholar Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2003) as a tricky process that involves settler colonizers continuing to control activities and priorities, and to keep Indigenous people busy with tasks that tend to serve and reproduce settler privilege rather than Indigenous peoples’ educational needs and priorities. The politics of distraction is a deceptive, co-optative process that surfaces in policy enactment processes, and is something with which Indigenous people must identify and at times refuse as part of an ongoing struggle to exercise collective voice and agency in higher education and to assert Indigenous educational sovereignty.

In the next chapter, I offer an overview of my methodology and the six key elements of my research illustrated in a Cree floral design which includes my epistemology, qualitative research paradigm, storying methodology, methods of gathering and making meaning of stories, and the ethical considerations that surfaced during the research process.
CHAPTER 4

Methodology

Mushkego Cree people have been making meaning and sharing Indigenous ways of knowing through atalohkan and tipacimowin stories for as long as we can remember. Weesakechahk has played a central role in Cree storytelling traditions. Through storytelling, Indigenous people learn about “the good power of interconnections within family, community, nation, culture and land. If we become disconnected, we lose the ability to make meaning from Indigenous stories” (Archibald, 2008). As a Cree iskwew and scholar, I have sought out Weesakechahk stories as theories to make meaning of the experiences of Indigenous women in this study. For me, the Weesakechahk stories carry profound meaning and tether me to Cree collective consciousness and responsibilities. In the prologue (pp. xiii – xviii), I take an old Weesakechahk story and retell it, offering it up in the context of Indigenous women’s work in the administrative academy.

Research Design

Figure 1 Research Design Floral

I begin this chapter by sharing a Cree floral research design (Figure 1). This design outlines and makes visible epistemological and theoretical underpinnings associated with my research. I have chosen to use Cree floral beadwork because beadworking is deeply rooted in
Indigenous, and particularly Cree, ways of knowing. Moreover, a “fluidity exists between the practices of beading and storytelling because patterns cannot be distinguished from stories” (Ray, 2015, p. 368). Prior to the colonization of Turtle Island, beads were made of shell, bone, and stone, but glass beads were quickly embraced by Indigenous people, and traded between Indigenous and settler groups. Glass beads thus symbolize, for me, complex intercultural exchanges between settlers and Indigenous people, and the preservation of Indigenous people’s agency and ways of knowing and being in the intercultural exchange process. In the context of the ongoing violent imposition of settler colonialism on Indigenous people, and its incessant pressure on them to assimilate into dominant Euro-Western ways of knowing, the adoption of glass beads reminds me of the ways that Indigenous people, particularly but not exclusively women, simultaneously resist and adapt new technologies that have sustained Indigenous storytelling traditions. Among the Cree, glass beads have been embraced; they have been embedded into our designs and adorn our mukluks, mitts, coats, hoods, and bags. The designs often pass on familial, land-based, and community stories that tether Cree people to our cultural identities, sense of responsibility, and connections to land. Beadworking, therefore, for me, reflects how Indigenous women have remained open, adaptive, creative, and resilient in the face of ongoing settler colonial domination.

According to Cree/Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach (2009), frameworks such as my research floral design (Figure 1) are useful in Indigenous inquiry as they illustrate the holistic structural symbolism contained within one’s research, and make visible the complex interrelationships that formulate a researcher’s inquiry process. My research design comprises seven interrelated parts that come together to form the flower design:
1. The yellow seeds in the centre of the design represent my subjective role as the primary researcher; these include my Mushkego iskwew (Cree woman) epistemological, ontological, and axiological lenses (expanded on in Figure 2).

2. Petal 1 at the top represents my theoretical framework, which combines critical Indigenous feminist decolonizing theories and Indigenous stories.

3. Petal 2 on the upper right represents my qualitative Indigenous research paradigm.

4. Petal 3 on the lower right represents my methodological approach which draws on Indigenous storying.

5. Petal 4 on the bottom left represents four open-ended ways of gathering stories: through conversational interviews, field notes, object data, and documents.

6. Petal 5 on the upper left represents my methods of analyzing stories using a combination of thematic, storying, and collaborative approaches.

7. Petal 6 on the upper left represents the arts-informed approach to sharing stories through performance writing. The new knowledge co-created in this process is also represented through twelve leaves, one for each of the participants in this study.

**My Mushkego Iskwew Epistemological Lens**

*Figure 2 Mushkego Epistemological Lens Design*
Within my research design, the yellow centre of the Cree floral beadwork design references my subjective lens as the primary researcher. The centre contains another integrated design—Figure 2, which is too small to see in Figure 1—that I created at the beginning of my research project and that stories my own Mushkego Cree epistemology. I first created this design when I was writing the proposal for the present study; it was a way of reclaiming my culture and representing important tenets of my Cree Indigeneity and epistemology. Later, while I was collecting data, I delivered a presentation on my research in which I shared this design with my *Becoming Educational Leaders* graduate class during a course I have taught for several years as part of an Indigenous community-based professional educational leadership program. Later that year, the Indigenous graduate students who had been part of that class unexpectedly presented me with the beaded design as a medallion necklace—a gift to me at their year-end symposium. Beyond the meaningful and powerful tradition of gifting within Indigenous communities, the medallion represents not only my Cree identity but, reinforced through the act of gifting, my responsibility to work with Indigenous students and communities to nurture the next generation of Indigenous educational leaders.

Within the design appear several important symbols: a goose, the moon, the waterways, and the bush. The goose symbolizes the roles and responsibilities geese play in sustaining Cree ways of life; geese remind me of the ways that people (and all creation) need to work together to travel far distances, and of the value of gathering and visiting amongst each other. Such social acts build relationships and mutual understanding. Moreover, geese inevitably remind me of Weesakechahk, and that Cree stories can be one of our greatest teachers when we pay attention to them. The moon reminds me of the unique gifts of iskwewak - Cree women. Within Mushkegowuk and Nishnawbe epistemologies, women are intimately tied to the moon and water
cycles through our childbearing capacities. In undeniable ways, these responsibilities shape my own interest in focusing on the lived experiences of Indigenous women leaders laboring in universities. The waterways illustrated in the goose’s wing symbolize my ancestral northern homeland, and where I come from. The bush line portrayed inside the goose’s belly signifies Cree people’s relationship to the bush and our intimate reliance on the land and communion with animals. As a researcher, therefore, my own epistemology (beliefs about the nature of thinking or thought), ontology (beliefs about the nature of reality), and axiology (beliefs about morals and ethics), are tethered to my Cree epistemology, and are integral components of my methodology that need to be made visible as part of this research process (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008).

**A Theoretical Framework**

The first petal of the Cree floral research design includes my theoretical framework which I presented earlier in Chapter 3 as comprising a combination of complementary theories including Indigenous feminist theory, Weesakechahk trickster theory, and Indigenous refusal as a core concept useful in understanding Indigenous women administrators’ experiences.

**A Qualitative Indigenous Paradigm**

The second petal of my research design refers to my research paradigm – an Indigenous qualitative research paradigm. According to Anishnawbe scholar Kathy Absolon (2011), “paradigms are frameworks, perspectives, or models from which we see, interpret, and understand the world” (p. 53). Cree scholar Shawn Wilson (2001) uses the term ‘paradigm’ to talk about the researcher’s worldview and beliefs. Wilson (2008) and Kovach (2009) argue that an Indigenous research paradigm is based in Indigenous ways of knowing. The academic project of articulating an Indigenous paradigm has led to the emergence of Indigenous methodologies in
research, methodologies which are distinguished from dominant academic research paradigms such as positivist/post-positivist, interpretivist/constructivist, critical, post-structural, and pragmatic paradigms. Indeed, an Indigenous research paradigm is epistemically distinctive (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008; Smith, 2012/1999). It is grounded in an Indigenous ontology and epistemology in which reality and knowledge are understood as relational and the researcher’s responsibilities to the Indigenous collective is recognized. It is vested in gathering and sharing knowledges in ways that are consistent with Indigenous epistemologies (Kovach, 2009). As Shawn Wilson (2008) posits, there is no one definitive or objective reality; instead, sets of relationships make up an Indigenous ontology. Stories are an integral entry point into an Indigenous relational ontology.

A Storying Methodological Approach

Beyond grounding this study in an Indigenous paradigm, I take an Indigenous methodological storying approach to research. Narrative inquiry is a way to understand experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). I am interested in understanding the embodied experiences of Indigenous women administrators. I draw on narrative research because it offers distinct approaches to understanding experience, composing research texts, and sharing knowledge, approaches which I believe are congruent with Indigenous epistemologies and ways of knowing. Aligning my thinking with that of Hawaiian scholar Maenette K. Benham (2007), I also assert the need to Indigenize narrative inquiry in order to attend to issues of Indigenous ethics and sovereignty. Thus, I do not define my research approach as a narrative inquiry approach, but as an Indigenous storying approach. Storying is “the act of making and remaking meaning through stories” (Phillips & Bunda, 2018). The Indigenous distinction observes the unique ethical and political significances of attending to Indigenous issues of colonial power in
terms of asking who is telling and retelling Indigenous stories, how they are telling Indigenous stories, and for whom they are telling Indigenous stories (Benham, 2007). From my Indigenous (Mushkego Cree) standpoint, I respond: Indigenous women administrators are telling each other Indigenous stories; I am an Indigenous (Cree) woman researcher taking responsibility to retell our stories in a Cree way; I am telling our stories drawing on Weesakechahk; and I am telling them primarily, but not exclusively, for Indigenous peoples.

**Participant Selection Process**

My study centres on the stories of twelve Indigenous women administrators, of whom I am one. As part of the participant selection process, each participant self-identified as an Indigenous woman who had worked in an administrative appointment in either a student affairs office or academic unit in a Canadian university in the last five years. Their administrative positions included a range of senior executives (Vice Provosts, Vice Presidents, Senior Executive Directors, etc.) and departmental and program chairs as well as interim leadership positions including Special Advisors.

I emphasised quality over quantity in selecting participants, focusing on depth to achieve richness of data (Kim, 2016). To ensure the trustworthiness of the study, I aimed to obtain a broad representation of participants who worked in universities across Canada, including the western provinces as well as central areas of Ontario and Quebec, until I reached saturation (Merriam, 2009). Saturation on the number of participants was attained after reaching eleven participants because there are few Indigenous women working in senior leadership roles in universities in Canada.

As part of my recruitment process, I employed purposeful sampling, which involved isolating and selecting known, information-rich cases (Patton, 1990). Drawing on my own
professional networks as well as public university website information, I reached out to potential participants via email, introducing myself and inviting them to participate in the study. As an Indigenous administrator myself, I had pre-existing relationships with some of my participants (i.e., we had sat on committees together). Kovach (2009) indicates that pre-existing relationships with Indigenous participants in Indigenous research is common, and supports relational approaches to research.

**Protecting Anonymity**

Despite the common practice of naming participants in Indigenous research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014), maintaining participants’ anonymity in this study was a priority for two reasons: (a) the study focused on Indigenous women’s resistance in their leadership; identifying them, therefore, could have negative impacts on their careers; (b) Indigenous women working in administration comprise a relatively small yet high profile population in Canada; certain information such as their geographic region, nation, education background, etc., could make them traceable and lead to their identification. In order to protect their anonymity, therefore, I use pseudonyms and, instead of preparing individual profiles, offer a composite description of the group, identifying diverse characteristics observed across the twelve participants. When quoting participants, I use selected pseudonyms from the Mushkego Cree twelve moon calendar cycle: Opawahcikanasis (frost exploding moon); Kisi-Pisim (the great moon), Mikisiwi-Pisim (eagle moon), Niski-Pisim (goose moon), Athiki-Pisim (frog moon), Opiniyawiwi-Pisim (egg laying moon) Opaskowi-Pisim (feather moulting moon), Ohpahowi-Pisim (flying up moon), Nimitahamowi-Pisim (rutting moon), Pimahamowi-Pisim (migrating moon), Kaskatinowi-Pisim (freeze-up moon), Thithikopiwi-Pisim (hoar frost moon).
Participant Group Profile

While the Indigenous women participants all identified as Indigenous women, they also expressed diverse Indigenous intersectional positionalities across diverse nations and cultures. They differed in age, stage in life, tribal background, educational background, sexual orientation, and career progression. Many of them held various responsibilities both inside and outside the academy—as mothers/grandmothers/aunties in their families, and community leaders in various contexts including on-reserve, in ceremonies, and in urban contexts. While all participants located themselves within a particular nation, they came from diverse cultural backgrounds, and often (but not always) worked in universities outside their home territory.

As a result of background variations, Indigenous women administrators often expressed their Indigeneity in multiple and complex ways. For example, some had strong relationships with their cultures, families, and ways of knowing, while others were painfully disenfranchised by settler colonialism and reconnected with their families and communities as adults. As a result of land dispossession connected to colonialism, some participants had grown up in urban centers, disenfranchised from their Territories and home communities, while others had been born and raised in First Nations, Métis, or Inuit community contexts. All participants had completed university graduate degrees, and thereby benefited from the privileges that higher educational social status offers. Despite their educational attainment, however, several participants shared negative stories about their early experiences in public education (K-12) and the challenges they faced accessing and navigating the dominant Euro-Western postsecondary education system. Several participants testified that their own earlier negative experiences in K-12 and higher educational settings had precipitated or strengthened their desire to want to change the education system.
Nearly all participants in the present study reported being among an influx of Indigenous leaders hired into leadership positions in Canadian universities since the report of the TRC was released in 2015. The types of leadership positions that participants were nearly equally distributed across three main categories: (a) academic administrators (i.e., Associate Vice Provost), (b) staff administrators (i.e., Executive Director), and in some cases (c) interim administrators (i.e., Special Advisors). Although academic administrative structures and institutional titles varied across universities and may therefore be difficult to compare, all the participants carried specific and focused roles and responsibilities in the area of Indigenous education. While the majority held permanent administrative appointments that oversaw broad academic support across the university (i.e., Vice Provost), some participants held temporary roles (i.e., Special Advisors) and still others held roles focused solely on Indigenous student affairs and Indigenous community engagement.

**Methods of Gathering Stories**

I drew on four main methods for gathering stories: (a) conversational interviews (Kovach, 2010); (b) personal journals and field notes; (c) objects; and (d) documents. My primary sources of data (stories) were interviews, field/texts/personal journals, and object related data. I gathered documents to use as a secondary source of data for triangulation purposes.

**Conversational Interviews**

I completed two interviews with each of the eleven participants. I sent all participants interview questions via email prior to meeting with them. Questions were open-ended. I approached the interviews as semi-structured, in-depth conversations (Kovach, 2010). The interviews sometimes went beyond the pre-planned questions. The first in-person interviews allowed me to build and strengthen relationships with participants. These interviews, conducted
at a location of each participant’s choice, focused on the participant’s journey to becoming an administrator and their experiences in the Indigenizing movement in the academy. When participants wished to be interviewed at their office on a university campus, I obtained a confidential ethical approval from their home institution to conduct research at that location. The second interviews focused on participants’ use of policy in their leadership work, and on their experiences related to resistance. I completed the second interviews with nine of the eleven participants by telephone, and with the tenth participant in person. After several failed attempts at scheduling, I was unable to complete a second interview with the eleventh participant.

During the interviews, I occasionally shared my own stories because Indigenous conversational approaches recognize that sharing supports validity and authority (Kovach, 2010). I encouraged participants to talk about their experiences and feelings through holistic, felt-sense sharing. I also asked each participant questions related to metaphoric knowledge. Chilisa (2012) outlines the value of metaphors in Indigenous research “In traditional oral societies, some forms of language are proverbs and metaphorical sayings, which uphold and legitimize the value system of a society (p.131). In my research, I asked, “If you were to use a metaphor to describe your leadership work in universities, what would it be?” The purpose of this question was to invite participants to share holistic, embodied and Indigenous knowledge. I audio-recorded all interviews, and hired a professional, confidential transcription company to transcribe all interviews verbatim, including silences and laughter when possible.

Personal Journals and Field Notes

Congruent with Indigenous storying as a methodological approach (Kovach, 2009; Phillips & Bunda, 2018), I drew on autobiographical elements of my own stories as an Indigenous woman and university administrator. Over the time during which the present study
was conducted, I experienced many professional changes including being appointed Special Advisor to the Provost (Indigenous Initiatives) and later Acting Vice Provost/Associate Vice President (Indigenous Initiatives). These experiences were relevant to my research, and important for me to reflect on, so, as the twelfth participant in the present study, I answered many of the research questions in my own personal research journals and used these as field texts during my analysis of data. Beyond my research journals, I used a field book to document and reflect on some of my interviews and on methodological considerations. Journals provided me with opportunities to reflect on my own interconnected stories, and think about methodological tensions that I was working through as part of the research process.

Object Data

Recognizing that Indigenous stories come in various shapes and forms, I invited all participants via email, prior to the first interview, to think about and share an object that told a story about their leadership experiences in universities. This request was based on the notion that collecting field texts in narrative research happens through various forms including personal journals, letters, interviews, photographs, and even artifacts (Connelly and Clandinin, 2000). My motivation for inviting object data into the interview process was to open up unique modes of storytelling related to Indigenous storying approaches. While most participants did not bring specific objects to their interviews, some participants talked at length about their chosen objects. One participant, for example, shared her experiences of purchasing a painting from a student; another shared the story of receiving her spirit name and how she carried that gift (while not an object but a story about a gift) with her in her leadership.
Document Data

Because the present study focused on policies and Indigenous women’s experiences in Canadian universities, I also gathered policy documents, news articles, and participants’ professional biographies (which were available online) throughout the research process. I did not analyze these documents as primary sources, but used them as secondary sources of data in the triangulation process. In many cases, these secondary sources of data validated participants’ stories such as their accounts of how certain universities made declarations and portrayed women leaders in troubling tokenistic ways in their communications.

Meaning Making and Arts-Informed Restorying

To make meaning from the stories and other data I gathered, I applied an overlapping and complimentary hybrid approach to analysis that drew on both an Indigenous storying approach to analysis and a thematic approach to analysis. I was, in this study, a participant, an embodied observer, and interpreter of Indigenous women’s stories. This was a complex role that required me to engage in critical, ongoing self-reflexivity within both approaches. To complete this hybrid mode of analysis, I relied on my subjective, epistemological/relational, and theoretical lenses to make meaning.

Indigenous Storying Approach

“Storying is the act of making and remaking through stories” (Phillips & Bunda, 2018, p.7). For Phillips and Bunda, stories are alive and in continuous movement as humans story with them. Influenced by narrative inquiry methodologists D. Jean Clandinin and F. Michael Connelly (2010), I drew in the present study on a “three dimensional space of inquiry” to explore Indigenous women’s experiences—their experiences of being in the three dimensions of social and cultural context, place, and time. I examined stories as units of specific experience, using an
inductive, interpretive, meaning-making, iterative process. I Indigenized the meaning-making process by applying Hawaiian scholar Maenette Benham’s (2007) three-pronged approach to analysis. Reflecting on how Indigenous women’s experiences reflected embodied tensions between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing and doing, I uncovered ecological features (physical and organic aspects of place), socio-cultural features (familial, cultural, political, economic, educational and spiritual dimensions of experience), and institutional features (school systems, communication systems, political and judicial systems including policies) that were important to understanding their experiences. During this stage of meaning making, I deliberately attended to the uniqueness of different participant’s stories, the characters and scenarios they encountered, and the tensions they endured so that I could later draw upon these experiences as sources of inspiration in creating fictional dramatic texts.

**Thematic Analysis**

As part of my hybrid approach to analysis, I used a coding process to identify common experiences shared across several participants. This type of analysis identifies the complex contextual and structural factors that shape experiences rather than simply showing that the experiences occur. To complete thematic analysis, I undertook four phases of open coding of the stories shared in interviews.

**Open Coding Process**

To begin my open coding process, I read my interview transcripts aloud—over 500 pages of text. This first round of “open coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) required reading each transcript up to three times, and making notes in the margins about ideas and topics that surfaced during my reading. At this stage, I noted policy tensions and personal/cultural dissonances, and
reflected on consistencies I heard across participants, including shared words, values, and patterns of thinking, feeling, and (re)action.

After doing several cycles of open coding, I applied a second, phased, “axial coding process” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which involved organizing texts, including direct quotes and references, under larger categories in a separate document. At this stage, I uncovered some early themes across participants’ experiences, themes related to policy messiness including structural limitations; categories for experience included dangerous work, and Indigenous resistance.

After another couple of rounds of axial coding, I applied a third and final phase of coding that involved returning to the academic literature and to key theoretical concepts to discover whether any specific concepts could explain the larger themes that characterized participants’ experience. At this point, concepts such as Indigenous refusal came to the fore.

**Arts-Informed Restorying**

After completing preliminary storying and thematic analysis, and identifying salient experiences and recurring themes across participants’ experiences, I began composing interim texts and writing fictional scenes to show how Indigenous women experienced challenges of leadership and policy enactment. While I decided to organize some of the findings in thematic order, I also applied an “arts-informed approach” (Cole & Knowles, 2008) to representing experiences by developing several dramatic scenes. Drawing on my previous playwriting experiences in Indigenous community-based theater, and fueled by my unwavering passion for Indigenous stories as theories, I also explored restorying (Phillips & Bunda, 2018) Indigenous women’s experiences drawing on Weesakechahk storytelling traditions. Arts-informed research is “a mode and form of qualitative research in the social sciences that is influenced but not based in the arts broadly conceived” (Cole & Knowles, 2008, p. 59). The purpose of arts-informed
research is to embrace new understandings of experience and reach diverse audiences (Cole & Knowles, 2008). With arts-informed research goals in mind, I created fictional characters and a performance text or ethnodramatic script. Ethnodramatic scripts have been used in qualitative research (Denzin, 2018; Saladana, 2003) and are arguably complimentary to Indigenous ways of representing knowledge through storytelling (King, 2008). In my arts-informed restorying process, I created four fictional characters including two women, Maria and Heather; Weesaakeehchak and Nokomis. As an Indigenous storyteller and researcher, it was important for me to develop research texts that were not only meaningful, culturally-relevant, and respectful of Indigenous ways of knowing and sharing knowledge through stories, but that also embodied and captured the metaphysical nature of Indigenous ways of knowing, including mythological teachers such as Weesakechahk. In the performance text, Weesakechahk is a narrator and character in the metaphysical space of Indigenous storying dropping Indigenous truth bombs, poking fun of settler normativity, and reminding Indigenous women characters in subtle ways about their responsibilities to the Indigenous collective.

**Collaborative Restorying**

I strived in this study to engage in what Maori scholar Russell Bishop (1999) calls “collaborative storying,” following principles that increase participants’ agency in how they are represented in the research process. I did this by informing participants at the beginning of the study that I would invite them to review and provide feedback on interim texts. While Bishop (1999) writes about collaborative storying in comprehensive ways, involving working with participants from early conceptualization of research questions all the way to dissemination of findings, I strived to embody his principles in the ways in which I engaged the other Indigenous participants in reviewing interim texts. Admittedly, I initially planned to work with participants
in more comprehensive and collaborative ways throughout the analysis process, but I quickly realized that this was an unrealistic expectation—they were all extremely busy professionals living at distance across the country. Furthermore, the COVID19 pandemic that broke during the present study further complicated and constrained my initial plans to share interim dramatic texts in person. After considering the ethical implications of not engaging participants in collaborative analysis processes in person, I invited them independently to review seven fictionalized performance texts and to answer and expand on two questions: 1) Are aspects of your experiences reflected in these performance texts? 2) Do the fictionalized characters (i.e., Weesakechahk and two women) and dramatic scenarios resonate with your experiences or with the experiences you know of other Indigenous women administrators? Eight of eleven participants responded with generally favourable feedback that the dramatic scenes resonated with their professional experiences. The purpose of obtaining their feedback acted as a combination of collaborative restorying and verisimilitude checks. In narrative research, verisimilitude checks are commonly used as a way to assess the authenticity of narrative texts. This approach involves checking in with participants on whether they have a vicarious experience when reading the interim texts. Employing verisimilitude checks helped me observe a collaborative storying process and reduce any risk of misrepresentation and danger of conflating my own experiences and interpretations in the restorying process.

**Indigenous Ethics**

An Indigenous storying approach to qualitative research surfaced many ethical considerations and tensions for me as the primary researcher and as a participant in this study. In retrospect, I recognize that my conversational approach to interviews (Kovach, 2010) along with my pre-existing relationships with some participants positively contributed to trust-building and
their sharing stories more candidly with me. Correspondingly, I confronted anxiety and tensions as I restoried our conversations and operated in the tricky space of interim texts; I did not want to violate my participants’ trust, or inadvertently misrepresent Indigenous women leaders in stereotypical ways. My collaborative restorying approach helped me avoid any inadvertent harm or harmful outcomes. At times, I also grappled with my own desire to centre on my own experiences and stories, and to write about my findings in overly generalized and reductionist terms that made definitive claims about the world. Throughout the research process, I turned to ongoing critical self-reflexivity to unpack my ethical role as the primary researcher and as a participant, and to confront my power over the representation of participants’ stories. I reflected on the danger of abusing my narrative power in ways that could have unforeseen negative implications for Indigenous women administrators and for my ongoing relationships with participants. I also contended with the unanticipated risks for me as the only named participant in this study. Further, as a mixed-blood Cree woman with French ancestry who was born and raised outside of my Cree language and narrative tradition, I struggled with my ethical rights and responsibilities with using Weesakechahk as a narrative force and theoretical framework in my research.

To deal with some of the ethical questions surrounding using Indigenous stories, I turned to Salish education scholar Q’um Q’um Xiiem, Joanne Archibald, and her seven principles of Indigenous storywork: (a) respect for cultural knowledge; (b) responsibility to carry out the roles of teacher and learner; (c) reciprocity to give to each other and continue the cycle of knowledge from generation to generation; (d) reverence to honour spiritual knowledge and one’s spirit being; (e) holism to recognize the four mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual realms of learning and situating one’s self in relation to family, community, and Nation knowledge; (f)
interrelatedness to all of creation; and (g) a synergistic call that maintains the relationship between the storyteller and listener (2008). Applying Archibald’s seven storywork principles to my research has meant that I have had to take care to reflect on these principles in relation to using Weesakechahk stories in ongoing ways. In an effort to respect the words of the opening story’s original storyteller, Xavier Sutherland, I decided, when retelling the original story, to reference this source of inspiration explicitly. As a way to honour Indigenous stories as teachers, I also invite readers in my conclusion chapter to reflect for themselves on what the Weesakechahk stories mean to them. As Leanne Simpson (2013) reminds us in *The Gift is in the Making*, “As Nishnaabeg, we are taught to see ourselves as part of these narratives” (p. 3).

Archibald emphasizes that this relational learning happens in the context of our holistic lives in relation to family, community, and nation. And to honour cultural protocols for telling Weesakechahk stories, I recognize in my prologue how some Elders warn against telling Weesakechahk stories during the winter. These various efforts are aimed to respect traditional storytelling and cultural protocols in storytelling.

Hawaiian scholar Meanette Benham’s scholarship (2007) has also provided me great insight and direction in the ethical handling of Indigenous oral narratives. Both Benham and Archibald warn of the dangers of taking Indigenous sacred stories out of their contexts and writing about them in ways that may be appropriative and recolonizing. Both scholars call on researchers to take greater accountability, responsibility, and ethical care throughout the research process. They call on researchers such as I to be attentive to Indigenous cultural protocols and avoid falling victim to Western approaches to storytelling that tend to misrepresent, other, stereotype, and even harm Indigenous peoples. To attend to Archibald’s and Benham’s concerns, I incorporated a number of critical and culturally responsive activities into my research process.
in my effort to safeguard against the inadvertent surfacing of harmful colonial dimensions of power. My activities included engaging in an ongoing, critical self-reflexivity that examined my own rights and responsibilities around using a Weesakechahk story, retelling Cree stories in my own ways, and using Cree stories as a theoretical frame. At one point in the research process, I initiated contact with a Cree member of the current Fort Albany community who helped me identify some of Xavier Sutherland’s living descendants. My hope was to meet them in person to establish a relationship and learn about Xavier and the Weesakechahk story; unfortunately, I was unable to speak directly with any of his descendants, and the COVID19 pandemic made any plans to meet in person increasingly more challenging. Alternatively, I invited Nishnawbe scholar and storyteller Leanne Simpson to review my retelling of the opening story. I shared my cultural background, the original story source upon which I was drawing on, and my version of the story. I also shared my journey in recovering Cree stories over my lifetime including my earlier graduate and artistic work with Cree community. Simpson’s feedback helped me more critically and explicitly locate myself in relation to the Weesakechahk story and think through some of the ethics concerning how to attend responsibly to power dynamics. Throughout this research process, I have maintained ongoing critical reflexivity and engagements with Indigenous community members, scholars, and participants on these matters, and through this difficult work I have refined my approach and deepened the way I locate myself in this research. I am deliberately transparent with my learning journey, and my connections to and disconnections from my Indigenous (Cree) community, language, land, and knowledge.

When it comes to representing Indigenous women’s stories, I strived to combat misrepresentation by being explicit about my interpretative role and by inviting participants to review and offer feedback on interim performance texts, thus employing more collaborative
approaches to Indigenous restorying. My attention to these ethical concerns emanates from my Indigenous methodological framework, which requires me to be relationally accountable when working with Indigenous people and ways of knowing. Relational accountability aims to maintain a sense of responsibility and answerability to Indigenous people and communities (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). From this axiological stance, I take full responsibility for the choices and consequences of my actions and inactions, whether intentional or unintentional. I also explicitly outline the ways in which I have tried to mitigate any risk of doing harm or misrepresenting Indigenous experiences and knowledge.

**Maintaining Confidentiality**

Considering the small number of Indigenous women administrators in Canada, and my focus on centering on their experiences and stories of resistance, I have been careful to maintain participants’ anonymity. To protect participants, including myself, I have used pseudonyms when sharing direct quotes, and created fictionalized characters and universities for the dramatic texts. In both cases, I have taken great care when writing about experiences to remove identifying information.

**Safeguarding Data**

In documenting information for this study, I used four open-ended confidential strategies: a codebook, a field log, personal journals, and document data (Merriam, 1998). All research documents were shared with participants via Western’s secure content management platform. All documents were filed in a personal, locked filing cabinet and within password-protected computer systems. I strived to protect participants’ anonymity by giving each a pseudonym in all transcribed interviews, field logs, and field journals. I used a codebook to
document these changes. I stored transcripts, field logs, and field journals separately from the codebook to reduce the possibility of anyone finding the materials and reconstructing identities.

**Trustworthiness**

In qualitative narrative methods, criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalisability are used to determine trustworthiness (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990). I used four different methods to increase the trustworthiness of the present study:

**Triangulation:** The triangulation of various sources of data is commonly used to increase credibility in Indigenous research (Chilisa, 2012). To strengthen the credibility of the present study, I sent all transcribed documents and fictional performance writing to participants for checking of accuracy. Such a step is part of a collaborative restorying approach (Bishop, 1999).

**Member Checking:** I attempted to conduct member checking for both interviews with all participants. I sent interview transcripts to participants via a secure university, password-protected platform and gave participants up to two weeks to respond. Several participants, because of their busy schedules, reported challenges accessing the site and reviewing transcripts. As a result, only two participants confirmed member checking of the first set of interviews, and no participants confirmed member checking of the second interviews. As secondary forms of member checking in the analysis process, I shared by email a set of four preliminary research findings with participants. Seven of eleven participants responded quickly with enthusiasm.

**Verisimilitude:** I checked for verisimilitude by sharing fictionalized performance writing with participants and asking specific questions (listed earlier in this chapter). In narrative approaches, verisimilitude is often used to determine trustworthiness of data (Van Manen, 1988). The quality of verisimilitude involves others having a vicarious experience when reading stories and being able to relate to being in a similar situation themselves.
Critical Self-Reflexivity: I engaged in ongoing critical self-reflexivity in my field journals by documenting my feelings, thoughts, concerns, ideas, and problems throughout the research process. According to Chilsa (2012), researchers in Indigenous paradigms must critically reflect on themselves “as knower, redeemer, colonizer and transformative healer” (p.174), and she argues that critical self-reflexivity plays a key role in the research process. In personal journals, I reflected in various ways: I documented many answers to the research questions and reflected on my inner responses to research-related experiences. Ongoing critical reflexivity was an imperative exercise for me as it helped me separate my own experiences from the experiences of participants, and critically interrogate my own biases, perceptions, and interests. Because I came to this study embodying many complex roles and identities, critical self-reflexivity also allowed me to create distance from my role and challenge myself to think more deeply about participants’ stories and my ethical responsibilities for capturing different voices in responsible and respectful ways.

In the next chapter, I present some of my findings in the form of a short dramatic play entitled Flight: Journeying for Change. The play and characters in it, while fictional, are inspired by the experiences of the Indigenous women administrators interviewed in this study.
CHAPTER 5
Flight: Journeying for Change

Characters

HEATHER RICE: An Anishinaewbe woman from Odjig River living in her home territory in Southern Ontario where she works at the University of Manitou as the inaugural Vice Provost of Indigenous Affairs.

MARIA THUNDERCHILD: An Oji-Cree woman with mixed Oji-Cree and French ancestry originally from Caribou Falls in Northern Manitoba but raised in Toronto where she works as an Indigenous Special Advisor at the University of Canada.

NOKOMIS: The moon and female entity that guides Weesakechahk and women.

WEESAKECHAHK: A non-binary, metaphysical being and narrator who appears at the beginning of the play and, unexpectedly, in various scenes (invisible to non-Indigenous people) to guide Indigenous women administrators in their leadership work in the academy.

Setting and Set Description

The play is set at the University of Manitou in Manitoba and the University of Canada in Southern Ontario during the spring of 2017, two years after the release of the report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. Scenes are set on the doorstep under a wooden archway in front of a gothic style building with gargoyle features; in a performance hall on campus; and around a rectangular boardroom table inside a meeting room with an exposed brick wall.

Playwright Notes

The two central characters, Maria and Heather, and the universities at which they work, are fictitious creations inspired by the lived experiences of twelve Indigenous women administrators, including the primary researcher, who participated in the present study. The play draws on the legendary Cree storyteller Weesakechahk, and draws inspiration from an oral story, “Weesakechahk flies south with the waveys,” originally told by Xavier Sutherland.
SCENE 1

Opening music. Sounds of the star world and whistling winds. Night falls, a full moon appears, and soon its shadow transposes a star constellation overhead.

WEESAKECHAHK
Spotlight on the stage reveals Weesakechahk lying on a snowbank wearing snowshoes and looking up at the night sky.
Wow, this never gets old, eh? Looking up at that big old sky. (A dark cloud covers the moon.)
Old lady? You still there?

NOKOMIS
Yah, I’m here. You’re listening, that’s good.

WEESAKECHAHK
Did you say something? Ah, just kidding.

NOKOMIS
Always fooling around, Weesakechahk. Some things never change.

WEESAKECHAK
Who said we can’t have any fun? You’re so serious.

NOKOMIS
You better get going now. You have work to do.
Music starts again. Weesakechahk stands up and starts walking across the hard snow making squeaky, crunchy sounds and slowly transforming into the shadow of a goose.

End of scene.
SCENE 2

The lights come up. Birdsong on a brisk fall morning. It’s not snowing, but it is freezing cold outside and Weesakechahk can see their breath vapour in the air.

WEESAKECHAHK
It’s cold!!! I hate this place. (Kicks a rock, stubs a toe.) Damn it. I can’t wait to get the hell out of this hole.
(Weesakechahk hears honking in the distance.)
Mmmm . . . . I’m hungry. Sagabon, maybe?

(Weesakechahk sniffs their way to a large flock of geese gathering by the Bay. Unbeknownst to the niskak, Weesakechahk watches them working away, visiting and gathering together.)

I wonder where they’re off to next? Wouldn’t it be fabulous if I went along, maybe even led this time? Surely it can’t be that hard.
(Weesakechahk pounces out of nowhere upon a couple of niskak.)
What ya doing?

NISKA 1
Geez, you damn near give me a heart attack.

NISKA 2
What do you . . . want?

WEESAKECHAHK
I was wondering (pointing and circling a toe in the snow), what you’re doing? What you’re eating? Where you’re going? Who is the okimaw? Can I come? I could really get out of this place.

NISKA 2
(Under breath.) Who does this one think they are anyway? (Both niskak look at each other, look away, and ignore poor Weesakechahk by just keeping on eating.)

NISKA 2
This pondweed is delicious, isn’t it?

NISKA 1
OMG, have you tried the cattail stems? They are absolutely delicious with a bit of swamp juice. The earthy tones and fragrant combinations are divine.

NISKA 2
Here, try the horsetail.

NISKA 1 & 2
Mmmmmmmmm!!!!!!!

WEESAKECHAHK
Do you know who I am? How rude?
Mmmm, how can I get these niskak’s attention?
(After a good long while of thinking, hesitating, and thinking again, Weesakechahk is interrupted.)

NISKA 1
Pepoon’s coming! We’re leaving tonight. It’s going to get even colder out here—freezing temperatures. Like -40; with the wind chill it’ll go to at least -55. We’ve got to fatten up. We need an extra layer. We need energy for the flight.

WEESAKECHAHK
The flight!? Right. Well, you should have said something, I’m always in for a trip and a good feast (Weesakechahk gets comfortable and starts gorging on the feast food.) followed by a nice long nap. Did you know that some of the most brilliant minds napped every day? I’m feeling pretty sleepy. Where can a cool cat like myself catch a couple zzz’s around here anyway? (The niskak point with their noses toward a nearby nest. Weesakechahk gets comfortable inside the big comfy nest, starts dozing off, then goes into a heavy slumber, and soon enough starts snoring away.)

NISKA 1
Great, look what we have to put with now. I don’t know why you were nice to them. (Weesakechahk’s snoring rises to new heights. Unexpectedly, Okimaw Niska appears. All the birds straighten up quickly, clear their throats to put on a good show.)

OKIMAW NISKA
What are you doing?

NISKA 1 & 2
Just eating; preparing; you know.

OKIMAW NISKA
We leave at sundown sharp!
(All the niskak start cleaning themselves feverishly, one by one diving into the water.)

NISKA 1
Look out below! (Loud splash.) (Weesakechahk gets all wet but just keeps on sleeping. Meanwhile, the niskak are plucking and cleaning their goose down. Feathers are flying everywhere, all over Weesakechahk who is still sleeping. Then, the niskak break into some yoga stretching, opening their wings and beaks, and warming up their throats.)

NISKA 2
Mama mama mama mama
Nana nana nana nana
Brrrrrrrrrrr brrrrrr brrrrrrr
Lala lala lala lala

NISKA 1
A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump stunk but the stump thunk the skunk stunk.

NISKA 2
Ha ha ha…HONK!
(Weesakechahk is awakened by the loud honk. The Okimaw Niska is standing in front quite unimpressed with Weesakechahk.)

OKIMAW NISKA
Mm. Do you mind?
(Weesakechahk scrambles out of the nest, and up onto their feet with the other niskak who were eagerly waiting to please the Okimaw Niska.)
Okay, everyone. I need us to remember to stay in formation, to stay focused up there, and whatever you do . . .

NISKA (all together)
. . . don’t look down!
(Looks discriminately at Weesakechahk.)

OKIMAW NISKA
I’m not sure about this one. Well, we’ve got little time to waste, so let’s go!
(Adventure music starts, signaling the flock to get into formation. Soon a cacophony of honking fills the evening air and the flock fly up one by one until they are in a V formation in the sky.)

NOKOMIS
Now, there are stories about being in formation, and there are stories about dropping out, into darkness, free falling past sparkling lights. Whatever version of the story is told, every journey has a lesson, every story is worthwhile.

End of scene.
SCENE 3

Band music begins, Weesakechahk is dressed as a goose and enters the performance hall wearing a robe and ridiculous beefeater cap. Weesakechahk walks down the center aisle toward the stage where a podium stands stage left. The music softens once Weesakechahk reaches the podium.

WEESAKECHAHK (narrator)
October 11, 1870, marks the University of Canada’s Founders Day. On this day nearly 150 years ago the University of Canada welcomed its first class of students—(under breath very fast)—of white male students—who would pave the way for this country and breed a generation of Indian policies.

Hello; my name is Weesakechahk. Yes, that’s me, the one and only—Almighty, heroic leader of the Ininewak-Mushkegowuk, also known as Whiskey-jack. Neh. Ayee!!! They’ve made legends about me, you know? Passed them down from generation to generation in oral t-r-a-d-i-o-n.

Truth is, stories about me don’t float around in the ether. They come alive in the telling and retelling of ’em through breath (breathes out and watches it) and body (shakes the booty). Nokum taught me that one. But my stories are not usually told in this stuffy old place. Look around they can’t even see me.

What Nokum told me a long time ago—well, not that long really in the grand scheme of things—was that Mushkegowuk people stopped telling our stories. A lot of our people were told that our stories were just “children’s stories, folklore, myth, fairy tales.” I guess Innewak-Mushkegowuk got tired and beaten down by those black robes. Maybe some just went to sleep, I dunno. (Shrugs shoulders.)

But some people told our stories anyways, sometimes in secret to family during the long cold winter nights through shadows on the tent walls.

Some told ’em to anthropologists, historians, ethnographers who thought Innewak-Mushkegowuk were dying off—a race vanishing. Mushkegowuk stories were often taken and translated into English, put into books; flat, thin, frozen in time. Those books became really powerful. Innew iskwewak were usually ignored in these books, erased from the official record, the colonial archive.

But you know, white storytellers who wrote down our stories got them all twisted up, wrote our stories through their crooked eyes. Some of our stories got turned upside down, mixed up inside out. Interesting places for old Weesakechahk to get into some trouble, eh?

You know what Nokum told me, too? She told me to help Mushkegowuk find those books, read ’em, learn ’em, and start telling our stories again through Mushkegowuk eyes. This next series of stories is inspired by old Weesakechahk style of telling stories, telling iskwewak’s versions of entering the academy finding themselves in the old book stacks, reclaiming what was taken, and left by the side. (Sound of faint drum and singing echo in the distance.)
SCENE 4

On the doorstep of a gothic style university building with gargoyle features, under a wooden archway. Weesakechahk transforms into the gargoyle statue.

MARIA
Sometimes I wonder how a girl like me, Maria Thunderchild, Oji-Cree from Caribou Falls, ever ended up in a place like this.

Okay, I grew up in the city, too, “the Big Smoke.” After Mom met Dad up in Lightning Bay, we moved to Toronto. She was forced to leave ’cause she married a white guy; she married out. I’m one of those “urban Indians,” Bill-C31 half-breeds.

But Mom worked hard as a waitress in a small diner downtown. I still remember how we’d go there every Friday before school for pancakes. (Weesakechak perks up on stage).

WEESAKECHAHK
Did someone say pancakes? Mmmm. I’m hungry. Where’s that fork? (Starts rummaging through a bandolier bag.) It’s gotta be around here somewhere.

MARIA
And mom would drink a lot of coffee.
But I grew up in a time when it was not vogue to be “an Indian” so I learned how to pass in white spaces. I clearly wasn’t white and it was just easier to go along with being Spanish, Italian, or Portuguese, anything but “an Indian” (Sigh.) I guess I learned how to blend in when I could in order to survive.

WEESAKECHAHK
Ah. Here it is. Everyone needs a fork and plate in their bundle.

MARIA
We didn’t have much growing up, but Mom did the best she knew how, and I helped whenever I could. After her and Dad split, we were always going back ’n forth from the city to Caribou Falls. Always on the move. In and out, never in one place. Different schools, apartments. Never fitting in. I dropped out of high school at 16. Got a real job. It paid the bills, put a roof over my head, enough food in my belly. Then I had my son and everything changed. (Sound of a crying baby.) Sh sh sh. (Gesturing as if rocking a baby.)

WEESAKECHAHK
Standing over Maria’s shoulder, Weesakechahk sings a soft Cree hymn lullaby.

MARIA
You know, I wanted more for my kids. So I went back to school in my thirties. It was hard to get in, so I found my way through the back door - a bridging program. Found a place in Native student services and Native Studies. Those were the early days of Indian Control of Indian Education.
WEESAKECHAHK
(Sound of smacking lips.) Hungry for justice. ([Weesakechahk stands up and starts singing the American Indian Movement (AIM) drum song and signaling a Red Power hand gesture.])

MARIA
That’s where I started to learn my language, unravel the secret shame I carried inside. That’s when I started my healing journey, letting go of that lie that we are just stupid dirty welfare Indians. That’s when I returned to my teachings, to Elders, and started finding my voice. My voice was faint and trembling in the beginning. University was terrifying. I still remember the first time I saw a Native professor in class.

WEESAKECHAHK
Ahhhhhh. (Praying gesture.) Neh. Don’t get too full of yourself, eh. Damn professors think they are all-knowing. ([Weesakechahk guides Maria through the doorway, into the building, and into the library stacks.])

MARIA
It was cool, though, ’cause there weren’t a lot of Native professors teaching Native Studies back then. But my professor got it, and just her being there told me I belonged. We belonged. My fire for learning was ignited so strong in her class. I loved learning especially about our people, history, and colonialism. ([Weesakechahk pulls the RCAP 4 part series off the shelf and drops them one by one down on the table.])

The library was so big and daunting. I’d always get lost in the stacks. Sometimes security would stop and question me. I still remember sitting down on the cold concrete floor in some dark row, the smell of old books all around me. I didn’t always understand the coding system, so I’d sometimes pull titles off the shelf, open them up to some serendipitous page. ([Weesakechahk flips the pages of the book and passes it to Maria.])

It was like someone was guiding me. There weren’t a lot of books written by us back in those days. But I read what I could even when it was written by old white guys or girls with twisted tongues. It’s all I had. I took what I could get.

You know, I would never have imagined myself to be an intellectual. Never mind a “leader” sitting here, one day. Me? That girl from the sticks? The call to lead didn’t come right away. After my undergrad, I started working with Chiefs in different communities. Then I went back to do my Masters and then my PhD. I focused on education. Two decades after the RCAP, the TRC hit. Someone approached me from a university down South about an administrative position. I was like, “I don’t want to do that right now; I can’t; I’m not done my PhD yet.” I have so many things that I still want to do. But it was hard for them to find someone to do the job. I’ll confess. No one, like me, dreams of one-day becoming an administrator. ([Maria laughs.]) It’s almost ([Maria starts whispering] tantamount to being . . .

MARIA & WEESAKECHAHK
. . . an Indian agent.
MARIA
But I kept getting this nagging feeling, a deeper sense, you know?
(Weesakechahk poking her shoulder.)

WEESAAKECHAK
Someone’s got to do it for the next generation. You could make a difference; make it easier for
the ones coming after you.
(Faint echoing of the drum and a women’s voice singing in the distance.)

MARIA
So I took on the role; temporarily, of course.

MARIA & WEESAKECHAHK
That was five years ago.

End of scene.
SCENE 5

At the front of the wooden archway on the doorstep of the gothic style building.

WEESAKECHAHK
(Weesakechahk transforms into a photographer taking Maria’s photo for the local press.)
A little to the left, right; no, back to the left. Yes, right there. Smile. A little happier. That’s it.
(Snap.)

Extra, extra, read all about it. (Maria’s walking by a newspaper stand and she grabs the paper.)
The University of Canada appoints Maria Thunderchild as Special Advisor Indigenous Initiatives - a historic moment for the University signalling it’s commitment to reconciliation.

MARIA
Being the Indigenous face of reconciliation is not quite what I bargained for. It’s a surreal feeling to become the epitome of the solution and the problem at the same time. Reconciliation commitments and all sorts of promises, but you still get the feeling like you’re there, but you don’t quite fit in. Maybe it’s the way people look at you, the assumptions they make about how you got the job, what you don’t know, the ways they include you and don’t. Or just forget. The words sometimes start feeling empty. Sometimes you find yourself worrying that someone will just someday walk you to the door, and you’ll vanish into the night. Not a word of how or why. Just erased.

WEESAKECHAHK
Poof. Sound familiar?

MARIA
Embodying reconciliation promises comes at a cost. Daily triggers, emotional loads. It takes a toll on your wellbeing, your relationships with family and community. People don’t treat you the same anymore. Some people think you are just assimilated. The load gets heavy and after a while you find yourself questioning everything, if you’re not careful.

You try different ways to make change to be heard inside the university. Use the facts, reference university policy—develop new policies, revamp old ones, use legislation, Constitution, OCAP, UNDRIP. If you bring in the right evidence, like statistics, quantitative surveys, literature . . . ; but if you weigh in, you get overlooked, dismissed, ignored, labelled a problem, you talk too much or with that tone, you’re too political, don’t do that. What’s this? You start thinking maybe I’m being too sensitive. Maybe I’m just overreacting. Eventually you start getting fed up.

At one point, it became abundantly clear how I was seen heard by one colleague. It all happened when were co-planning this panel on ‘Indigenizing the academy.’ A refreshing change from the regular annual offerings, right? My colleague, the lead organizer, asked me to recommend some panelists. What about so and so, I say. Without skipping a beat they respond, “She’s a bit too activist, don’t you think?” (Long uncomfortable pause.)
WEESAKECHAHK
(Weesakechahk takes a picture, but it sounds faintly like a gun shot.) Nice.

MARIA
I’m stunned. Like I’m floating above my body trying to find the right words to respond. I didn’t see it coming. I’ve since learned to be vigilant, to be better prepared. To be on the defense. What about Donald so and so? She responds.

WEESAKECHAHK
(Weesakechahk takes another picture.)
Come on! White male? (Throws arms up in the air.)

MARIA
By this point, my anger is rising, boiling. My nervous system has been kicked into full throttle. Sitting above myself looking downward, trying to find productive right words, to not overreact. She tries to recover herself. “I heard him speak at a conference. As a President, I think he will have credibility here.”

WEESAKECHAHK
Anger, guilt, shame, denial, dismissal, minimization, and violent rejection = exhaustion.

MARIA
I deal with these kinds of interactions. Every. Day.
(Weesakechahk takes one last picture.)

End of scene.
SCENE 6

Heather is driving in her car heading into work. She turns on the radio. Weesakechahk transforms into the radio host.

WEESAKECHAHK
Welcome to CMH31 It’s a beautiful spring day in Manitou Zibbing. The sun is peeping over the Eastern horizon. It’s going to be great day, folks; and now for the news. The University of Manitou finds itself in hot water this morning, after the administration hired a non-Indigenous person into an Indigenous Director role. Local Indigenous communities are enraged about the appointment, claiming it undermines reconciliation.

HEATHER
(Sigh.) It’s going to be a long day.

WEESAKECHAHK
Good morning. Tim Horton’s. How can I help you?

HEATHER
Extra extra large, double double, please.

WEESAKECHAHK
Mmm. Nothing like a fresh cup of kwaahpii to start the day. (Heather pulls into the campus parking lot. She walks past carefully manicured gardens. As she get closer to Convocation building, she notices a goose standing on the edge of the building, tormenting the gargoyle statue.)

WEESAKECHAHK
Honk, honk, honk. Damn academic administrators. I could tell them a thing or two about organization about biodiversity, astronomy, sustainability, physics. (Heather’s cell phone rings.)

HEATHER
Hello.

SARA
Hi, Heather; it’s me, Sara. I’m calling to let you know I just heard the students are planning a demonstration outside of the Dean’s office tomorrow.
HEATHER
I guess we saw this coming, eh? What did they expect when they hired a non-Nishnawb to run an Indigenous program, I will never know. *(Heather sighs.)* This is going to get messy. Okay, do you know what time they’re gathering?

SARA
11 a.m. Oh, yeah, and I think community members are coming, too. Some students asked if you’ll be there. *(Pause.)* Will you be there?
*(Maria’s cell phone signals a new email. The stage projector highlights her screen and the email subject line: “Emergency meeting re: student protest.”)*

HEATHER
I gotta go.

*End of scene.*
SCENE 7

Heather arrives at the doorway to a room where a meeting is clearly in session. Six administrators are sitting around a rectangular boardroom table; there is a brick wall in the background. Four of the six administrators are visibly white men, one is a white woman, and the last is Heather, a visibly Indigenous woman.

PRESIDENT
Thanks for coming, Heather. Come on in. (Heather sits down.) It’s come to our attention that Indigenous students are planning a protest about the hiring of the Indigenous Studies Director.

VICE PRESIDENT OPERATIONS
Yes, Heather, we are worried about the situation escalating, and other groups co-opting the protest, not to mention the negative publicity this brings to the university. We’d like to get your advice on how to manage the situation.

DEAN
Heather, this hire was such a challenge for us. (Weesakechahk appears outside the meeting room window on a ledge, clearly eavesdropping.) We had a failed search the first round, and we really needed to put someone in place.

WEESAKECHAHK
Even after she warned you. You didn’t listen! Serves you right.

DEAN
Now the media are at my door asking a lot of questions on why we didn’t hire a Native person. It seems it’s becoming a racial issue. I haven’t accepted an interview with the media, but I’d like to get in front of this story, and control the messaging, you know.

WEESAKECHAHK
So let me get this straight: now you want her to clean up your mess? House cleaning never ends. And they thinking my droppings are a problem?

HEATHER
First off, we really need to stop talking about Indigenous people demonstrating as a violent protest.

WEESAKECHAHK
Right!

HEATHER
Indigenous people are too often cast in negative ways. I’d like for us to look at this as an opportunity to build relationships and dialogue with community. Indigenous students are trying to tell us something. They’re engaged in the university.
DEAN
But have you read the online criticism by some of our students and community stakeholders? I don’t think threatening us is ever an effective way to build relationships, to be heard and influence change. The university is about civilized and respectful dialogue.

WEESAKECHAHK
Honk. *(Accidentally honks at the word civilized.)*

PRESIDENT
Can someone close that window? The geese are a real pest this year. This one started a nest on my window ledge; was here when I arrived this morning. I had to call campus security to remove the damn thing.

WEESAKECHAHK
What so-called civilized society removes children from their mothers? Honk, honk. *(Someone closes the window.)* Honk.

HEATHER
I really think political activism is a healthy part of students’ learning. Plus it’s not just students participating in the demonstration; community and faculty members will be there, too, maybe even administrators. *(Awkward silence.)* I think we need to find ways to listen to the students, be responsive to what they are trying to communicate to us.

DEAN
But who’s leading this demonstration anyway? Can we bring them in? What do you think they expect from us?

HEATHER
The Indigenous Students Association seems to be taking a lead role. Let’s see if we can set up a meeting.

DEAN
Their concerns are about the appointment of the Indigenous Studies Director, right? If they want to talk about that, our collective agreement clearly states that we cannot divulge details about that search. I won’t be able to even give many answers. I can assure you, though, we followed the policy, the process. Our appointments committee hired the most qualified person for the job.

WEESAKECHAHK
The book, the policy, ya, ya, the written word. Who wrote those rules anyways?

HEATHER
I think students expect to see an Indigenous person in the role, and more importantly, to be included in the decision process. Being Indigenous brings all sorts of skills and competencies that aren’t defined or understood in typical hiring processes. Community want a voice in the decision. They expect to be part of the process. I understand this is a big issue for people.
PRESIDENT
Okay, I don’t want to get into the hiring process right now. Let’s focus on managing the protest—sorry, demonstration—first. As a next step. (Everyone turns and looks at Heather.) Heather can you talk with the CBC reporter along with Dean Smith? Let’s also bring the Indigenous Student Association in for a meeting to hear them out. (All the administrators close their binders at the same time, agree, shake hands and leave the room.)

End of scene.
SCENE 8

Performance hall. Weesakechahk walks up onto the stage toward the podium, holding a paper, adjusting necktie nervously, clearing throat, looking downward toward the rattling page ready to recite a land acknowledgement verbatim, mispronouncing many words.

WEESAKECHAHK
Welcome to the University of Manitou. My name is Dean Fowl. I am happy that you could be here with us today. The University of Manitou is proud to acknowledge that it sits on the land of the Anashubeeek people, the original stewards of this place. The University is pppppproud of its work in the area of reconciliation. We welcome you. Enjoy the show.

An awkward silence fills the auditorium, Weesakechahk exits backstage right. The stage light dims and flickers. A faint light shines into the audience, searching for someone. It stops at Heather, an Anishnaabe kwe, sitting in the second row. Suddenly she realizes that the light is lingering on her. The sound of a faint drum starts up with a woman’s voice singing softly. Heather stands. She starts talking to the audience from her place in the audience.

HEATHER
The truth is. Any Indian under the Indian Act who may have been admitted to this university with the degree of Doctor of Medicine, or with any other degree by any University of Learning, would be ipso facto enfranchised up until the 1950s. So it’s hard for me to sit here and listen to this hypocrisy that the university is committed when it cannot even admit that they systemically denied me and my relatives from attending for generations. You know this place that we stand on - the earth beneath your feet. Ya. Feel your feet, take a breath. Under this very building are my ancestors’ bones. We have stories about the Odjig River the one that flows right through this campus that older than this building. I bet not one of you, knows any of those stories eh? Yet were a house of learning.

Nimki kwe nintishnikaas. The light shines brighter. My name is Lightning woman. My grandmother named me, because on the day I was born there was a big big storm and lightning hit a maple tree while my mother was in labour. That’s where my name Nimki kwe comes from. I’ve carried the name and story ever since. My mom buried our placenta by the same old tree. Our lineage is tied to this land back generations. I still visit that tree, now and again, especially when I’m tired. I need to go there a lot these days.

I am Anishnawbe. I’ve been working in this university for too long, well over thirty years banging my head against brick walls. I was around when the first Native Student Services office was created back in the 1990s. I started part-time in a small office. We eventually grew into a room in the basement. After 27 years, we finally got our own space, and I got a promotion to Special Advisor, it only took a Commission for that one to happen. I’m still only just “a staff member” and seconded on a 1-year contract.

Since the TRC hit, like a tidal wave, the system has been forced to look at itself. Some administrators are listening stepping up like never before. The TRC, I guess has opened some
eyes. I gotta believe that most Canadians are good people, and when faced with the truth, they want to change. The Liberal federal government’s reconciliation promises have helped make some room, but the provincial Conservative government still controls the postsecondary funding. Short term, insecure funding. First Nations funding backlogs haven’t gone away. Disputes over education as a right vs a social policy linger on. Education is political, and jurisdictional divides are real problems for us “Indians.”

All we know is that this moment won’t last forever; it never does. Up and down. In and out with new governments and their campaign promises. Here on-campus, we realized that we needed to move when the door was open. Some of us have been around long enough to know that much. So we Native folks on-campus, the five of us, got to work. Don’t get me wrong; we were working hard before, but now we went into overdrive you know. We just did it; no more asking. We took the lead ’cause no one else is going to do it for us. So I stepped up as a staff. But us staff aren’t always seen or heard like faculty members are around here.

At one point, I realized that it was unfair I was doing all this extra work and not getting paid. I was burning out. I was getting resentful. So I approached the President and said, “Listen, I think we need another arrangement. The work I’m doing is like another full-time job.” So they created this Advisor role. I guess it’s a start, right?

So the university is trying. Land acknowledgments like Dr. Fowl’s Weesakechahk perks up on stage left, looking proud. The university is about to release an Indigenous action plan, a plan we’ve worked on for over 3 long years. More promises on paper. We spent so much time educating administrators and writing words on pages, I wonder when we’ll start seeing the benefits. We still don’t have structures, full time leadership, or deep understandings of how to interpret the promises. Policies without the right system, the document risk becoming another set of empty words on pages, sitting on some website, giving the appearance that the university has changed. Or, worse yet, getting taken up in bureaucratic ways, by people with good intentions, who just don’t know, don’t understand our world, our needs.

End of scene.
SCENE 9

Heather walk out of the building and down to the river. She passes by Weesakeechahk outside on the window ledge. As she reaches the water, she hears drumming and singing again. She looks back at the campus buildings.

HEATHER
This place has dissected and categorized us, frozen our images onto pages, possessed us archives, cut off our tongues.

As a student, I found myself rummaging through scraps and remnants field books, notes, colonial archives collections. Piecing fragments together, sewing hope.

Today policy promises too easily just become empty words not enough deep understanding and action. Institutional words still authorize power, draw lines between us on sovereign land. It’s like they want to see me tired, angry, worn out. I’ve pretended and performed. Risked losing myself. I’ve lived in the margins. Endured the absence of my reflection on the white brick walls, worked with little resources under parental controls. Tried to change the system from within. Earned their letters, became earnest in their ways, found myself a “credit to my race”.

Yet I’m still all too often not heard, not trusted, doubted, assumed to be unable to manage affairs. On the outside. Put in tokenistic positions. When collisions surface, and I speak up I become “the problem”. I have tolerated listening to suits and ties tell me how to control public images, manage Indian problems, increase efficiencies, measure success, close “the gap”, get into new markets, move globally instead of locally.

I’ve quietly lived in between two worlds, twisted tongue ties, silently fearing that they could invade me from the inside. One day, to my horror, I was mistaken by my own tribe—called a traitor, assumed to be on the wrong side. In hearing this call, they will probably dismiss me, disdain me, debate me, talk about me when I’m not there, but I see their eyes, uneasiness with my cries. So excuse me, I don’t be mean to be “difficult”; I just can’t live with myself if I don’t stand up and use my voice.

Heather stands up and raises her arm up in a power movement, and sings along with the faint women singing and drumming in the background.

End of scene.
HEATHER
The last thing I knew, I was falling, falling from the sky. I had not only dropped out of formation, but when I looked back at the flock, I realized that I had drifted away somehow, got distracted. I don’t know for how long I was on my own. It was at that moment that my oxygen levels dropped, I got distorted, I could hardly breathe, I couldn’t see straight. I lost my equilibrium. Hyperventilation. As I gasped for air, I wondered where it went wrong. Did I float away willingly? Did someone push me? Did I hit another invisible wall? Then my hubris kicked in, reaching for rationales; maybe the atmospheric levels I was moving in were too difficult for the flock to handle. A part of me wanted to try to return, to push my way back into position at the head of the formation. Then I remembered: being at the front cutting the force of the wind is exhausting.

It was at that very moment I hit an air bubble that forced my body into uncontrollable spiraling downward. Whirlwinds. After 30 seconds of free falling, I hit a patch of warm air that held me in suspension and a butterfly appeared, and I knew I had to be close. Close to hitting the ground.

Then I saw another niska, and remembered that we look after each other. I am not alone. The thought of moving back, being a different way, surfaced as a possibility and I could suddenly breathe again. And I remembered what I was taught about flying.

MARIA
I had some stamina to continue on the flight a few more trips anyways. I became good at anticipating what they needed to move along maybe only temporarily and very slowly, but it was movement, it was change. Something in me enjoyed the strategy of it all. I know I can’t do this forever, but I’ll do my part, one flight at a time. Sure the travel is dirty, messy, damn near bloody at times, but we all deserve to fly, right?

WEESAKECHAHK
Aerial collective movement is nothing like you imagine it to be; maneuvering together at atmospheric heights, against unforeseen forces, you realize how really interdependent you are. You’re nothing without the flock. Nothing. It’s a lesson that can be learned the hard way. I know I did. And there’s no doubt that the flight comes at great costs maybe because flying in those conditions is so damn unpredictable. Dangerous.

NOKOMIS
(The theatre turns dark and a star constellation maps on the sky.)
Now, there are stories about being in formation, and there are stories about dropping out, into darkness, free falling past sparkling lights. Whatever version of the story is told, every journey has a lesson, every flight is worthwhile.

Blackout.
CHAPTER 6

Being the Solution and the Problem: Embodied Experiences of Indigenous Women Administrators

This is a story about Nishnaabe iskwew. How she got lured in, twisted up, and snared in a trap, like those wabush (rabbits) on Nokum’s trap line. Sometimes those traps are hidden in plain sight. Sometimes those wabush don’t get stuck at all—they find their way out—but sometimes they get stuck in a bind. Yet this story doesn’t happen on the trap line; it happens inside the brick walls of the academy, inside the university. Don’t be fooled; many of those Nishnaabe iskwew know what they’re doing; they put up a good fight, and they can be slippery, too.

In this chapter, I examine the stories of twelve Indigenous women administrators, and answer the question, how do Indigenous women administrators experience their leadership work amidst increasing pressures to Indigenize and decolonize the academy? I organize my findings in this chapter around their embodied experiences of feeling trapped by the “triple bind” (Fitzgerald, 2006) of their experiences—the triple bind associated with (a) working within a white settler colonial education system, (b) leading in an administrative world dominated by hetero-patriarchal notions of leadership, and (c) leading on the borderland between Euro-Western institutions and Indigenous communities.

Considering that Indigenous women are embodied human beings with lived experiences shaped by complex relations of power that are socially constructed and reinforced by normative approaches in administration and education; their embodied experiences are critical to understanding Indigenous policy enactment. Here, I examine how the Indigenous women administrators who participated in the present study know and sense the administrative world of the university. As Roxana Ng (2011) aptly suggests, “Power plays are both enacted and absorbed by people physically as they assert or challenge authority, and the marks of such confrontations are stored in the body” (p. 236). Not only are power plays embodied experiences stored in the body, they are felt and responded to differently by different bodies. I hope to show that
Indigenous women’s bodies are sentient storehouses of policy enactment stories as an Indigenous embodied reality.

I share their stories through fictionalized dramatic texts based on participants’ experiences and through anonymized direct quotes from participants organized thematically. In Chapter 5, Flight: Journeying for Change, Maria expresses a complex intersectional Indigeneity, recounting her educational experiences and leadership journey in the context of the rising reconciliation movement in Canadian universities. Maria’s narratives raise important issues related to the colonial, gendered, and racialized childhood experiences of Indigenous participants whose embodied experiences, like Maria’s, have been grossly shaped by (dis)connections to land, language, Indigenous ways of knowing, and the community. Specifically, Maria’s story points to the gendered discrimination of the infamous Indian Act (Bill C31) and the ways in which settler state laws forcefully disenfranchised Maria and her family inter-generationally, disconnecting them from their community and land. Many Indigenous women, like Maria’s mother, were forced to relocate to urban centers after marrying out, and struggled in poverty and cultural dislocation in an urban landscape. Maria’s story also contextualizes how she began reclaiming her sense of Indigeneity, and found herself becoming grounded in Indigenous community and Indigenous ways of knowing in Indigenous Studies and Indigenous student services contexts on her university campus. Her story further underscores how, over time and through experience, Maria found herself called to lead Indigenous administrative work in the academy.

**Lured into Administration**

The Indigenous women administrators who participated in the present study shared multiple and diverse stories about their leadership experiences, with many reporting that they felt called, even sometimes pressured, to take on leadership roles within the academy. Many said
they had never imagined themselves doing administration, that leadership was not something
they had aspired to do, but that they felt compelled to do it in order to contribute to Indigenous
communities. Several participants had been actively pursued by university administration and
couraged to apply for their leadership roles. One participant attested:

I got here by accident, totally by accident. After the Truth and Reconciliation Commission
broke, there was a shift suddenly, an increasing interest nationally, and the university asked me if I would take on the role, because they didn’t have anybody else that was, you know, that they were interested in hiring. “Well, will you come in a secondment for a year, to do this?” So it was an accident. I’d never been in an administrative kind of position, and certainly wouldn’t have thought that I’d like it. (Kisi Pisim)

Getting “here by accident” for this participant meant she had not preplanned her leadership
career trajectory; it was not something she desired; leadership was thrust upon her by a
combination of institutional pressures and an underlying sense of responsibility to serve
Indigenous communities. Another participant shared a similar story:

The position [ad] comes out. I was like, ‘I don’t want to do this right now. I can’t. I have so many things that I still want to do, but there’s no-one else here to do it. I thought, ‘crap, this is my responsibility now; I have to do this.’ (Niski Pisim)

Caught in a Quagmire of Positions

Policy demands to hire more Indigenous people has resulted in universities appointing
Indigenous leaders into various types of leadership roles such as interim special advisors,
seconded leads, executive directors, vice provosts, and vice presidents. Consequently,
participants in this study held many different types of leadership positions and were located in
the academic reporting hierarchy in various ways. Several participants reported directly to a
Provost, others reported to the President, and still others reported to an administrator who
reported to the President or Provost. Beyond the quagmire of Indigenous leadership positions,
beyond titles and reporting relationships, the most significant barriers to advancing Indigenous
institutional change reported by participants was whether the units which Indigenous
administrators oversaw were provided with proper scope and authority, adequate personnel, and sufficient budgets to drive Indigenization initiatives.

Another challenge that emerged for some Indigenous women leaders concerned the type of leadership positions they occupied, and especially the differences between staff and academic administrative roles. Some who had been appointed into staff positions had faced challenges simply getting appointed because they did not have academic credentials (PhDs). Those in academic roles recognized the value of academic positions especially in that they can provide the protection of tenure. Within the academy and within Indigenous communities, opinions differed about whether staff Indigenous administrative positions in the academy actually required a candidate with academic credentials.

Participants were not immune to a variety of tensions around their leadership, particularly the perennial tensions between administrators and faculty members which were described by some participants. Some participants reported that, despite their credentials (PhD or not), they were challenged by some faculty members. These challenges were often based in faculty members’ resistance to the corporatization of education and to an increasing administrative bloat in the academy overall. On the other hand, some faculty members spoke to the helpfulness of administrators having the protection of academic freedom especially when resisting academic norms. The role-related tensions between administrators and faculty members can be linked to the different types of work that they tend to focus on, and can be connected to deeper, conflicting paradigms that often shape faculty work, which tends to be characterized by critique, and administrative work, which tends often to succumb to instrumentalist functionalist and interpretivist approaches.
Caught in a Bind

Participants in this study experienced the embodied consequences of the intersectional notion of the “triple bind” (Fitzgerald, 2006)—of working within (a) a predominantly white settler colonial educational context, (b) a profession dominated by [hetero]patriarchal and masculinist notions of leadership, and (c) a settler colonial educational context where Indigenous peoples’ voices and knowledges tend to be subjugated (and Othered on the borderland of disparate worlds). These negative embodied experiences contributed to a feeling of unease and in a bind when working in the academic administrative settings.

Working Within a White Settler Colonial Education System

Several participants shared stories about how, despite their entry into university administration, they continued to face pervasive systemic barriers in their leadership work, barriers related to white settler colonialism embedded in the academic system and norms. The university, they said, is structured in a way that privileges a Eurocentric, androcentric, white notion of leadership that inherently undervalues and marginalizes Indigenous people, particularly Indigenous women, in policies, procedures, and daily norms and practices. One participant, talking about the role of universities, highlighted the need for universities to be a place for mutual exchange of diverse knowledges. Yet she underscored the continued dominance of white men in academic administration, and pointed out that this history is a structural reality that has disadvantaged different groups:

The whole question of administration. Who gets to sit at the big table? And in many universities for many many years, it has been men – white men in particular. It wasn’t women, not even white women. It’s been a lot of people battling at a lot of fronts, not just Indigenous peoples. I mean, Black people, women. I still remember being at [omitted] University and with all the old white guys sitting at the boardroom table and [the tables] were so high, because they were made for men, right? And I said ‘you can really see that you guys haven’t had women around your tables – everything is made for men!’
(Pimahamowi Pisim)
In conversation with this participant, I shared my own experiences of first entering a large banquet hall at my own university and looking around the room at all the portraits of the past Presidents and Chancellors. In the interview, I reflected and shared my observation of the portraits and said, “They were mostly white men only a couple of women, white women.”

Beyond structural and underrepresentation issues, many participants described how they felt pressured to assimilate and take on hegemonic administrative norms and, in turn, code-switch in order to be effective and successful in their leadership within the academy. As one participant described it,

I was told that if you want to be successful in here you have to be like us. And I was like I don’t want to be like you. You’ve got a lot of you running around here already. And if I have to choose between being like you and protecting my own community, you will always lose. It’s just the way it is. (Pimahamowi Pisim)

This participant resisted the expectation to conform to settler administrative norms in leadership because they did not always align with her values and sense of Indigeneity. She challenged the taken-for-granted expectations placed upon her to assimilate. Her refusal challenged unspoken assimilative expectations in administration, and demonstrated how Indigenous women push back and maintain their agency to lead on their own terms. Her resistance does not, however, mean that she never drew on Westernized methods of leadership to achieve particular aims; it does mean that she asserted her right to determine and choose how she leads based on deeper goals, values, and ethics. Other participants also reported challenges navigating and negotiating the explicit and implicit hegemonic administrative norms of the academy. One shared her experiences of learning the dominant culture of power, suggesting that she has had to learn this tacit knowledge over time:

I find the system painstakingly slow. I never quite understand all the protocols of the institution. So in my community, I have Chiefs; I have a couple Chief’s phone numbers
on my cell. And they say, “When you need something, phone me.” But when I want the president [of the university] I have to make sure that I go through this person who then will do this and then will do that and then they go decide. I don’t always understand the protocol and I break them all the time and get in trouble for it. (Athiki Pisim)

Beyond pressures to walk in more than one world, several participants remarked on the challenges of encountering increasing backlash and navigating anti-Indigenous racism in relation to their leadership and the Indigenization movement altogether. Anti-Indigenous racism as an ideology emerges out of settler colonialism to justify and resist Indigenous people’s distinctive rights in higher education. Several participants shared examples of a rise in free speech policy movements on university campuses, which negatively impacted their leadership experiences. These movements were often associated with troubling assumptions that Indigenization and decolonization work were somehow a threat to free speech and academic freedom, assumptions based on a deep denial of the inherent Euro-Western structure of the academy, and of the ways in which Eurocentric whiteness and meritocracy are unfairly embedded in the academy. One participant said:

For me, you know, it’s just a ludicrous notion that universities are the embodiment of free speech, and have ever been. Like, to me that notion is so ridiculous. I just cannot even talk about it. It’s just too like (bomb-like sound effect). I mean, look at us. This is what we’re doing. We’re fighting to be heard here. We’re fighting to have our point of view in institutions. What’s free about that? And free speech for whom in this instance? All of this stuff is about allowing hate mongers to freely speak. (Kisi Pisim)

This participant described the rise of free speech policies in universities across several Canadian provinces, including Ontario (2018) and Alberta (2019), as a conservative political movement that is distracting and that counters her Indigenization policy work. Other participants also maintained that free speech rhetoric is being used as a political device to argue against university reform, but that it maintains structural inequities that privilege Eurocentrism and whiteness. More troublingly, these political movements were described as giving rise to sensationalist
media coverage which incites hate speech against Indigenous peoples and Indigenization work on campuses. Indeed, participants reported that resistance to Indigenization and decolonization under the semblance of protecting academic freedom was on the rise by some faculty members in universities since TRC, and served as a stark reminder of the dominance of the Eurocentric, Westernized, and colonial higher educational system that favoured white liberal rights.

Several participants described explicit and violent experiences of anti-Indigenous racism which they have observed or experienced on university campuses since the release of the TRC. One participant said:

We’ve seen some of the pushback from settler students and faculty since the TRC. We’ve seen a rising up of racism and power and privilege in the classroom. I’ve heard more faculty members talk about the level of the disrespect that they feel from some of their settler students when they try to focus on Indigenous ways of knowing and being. We’ve had graffiti on the Indigenous house. We have a board that lists all our events and we had graffiti on there. We’ve even had to call campus security a couple of times to get them to escort people out. (Athiki Pisim)

Another participant described being confronted by several non-Indigenous faculty members who challenged the Indigenous knowledge sources she referred to in a public presentation in order to discredit her and the university’s approach to Indigenization; the participant felt ambushed. Attacks on Indigenous faculty members’ work often drew on Eurocentric rationales. Some Indigenous women administrator’s work was discredited because it did not reference literature in the European canon, a criticism which reveals the dominance of Euro-Western thought in the academy and the way in which the European canon continues to be used to push out Indigenous perspectives. While many participants acknowledged the value of Western knowledge and the university as a place of critical dialogue and systematic inquiry, they also noted that existing structures based within settler colonial rationales and ideologies often served to silence Indigenous people and prevent them from accessing and fully participating in the dialogue and
inquiries. Thus, participants reported needing to be prepared to be publicly challenged, and to be ready to engage in critical decolonial debates which deconstructed problematic Eurocentric and colonial assumptions. This reality was particularly daunting for participants, many of whom carried their own historical traumas associated with the violent and ongoing nature of settler colonialism within Canada’s educational system.

**Being Not at Ease**

The triple bind was an internalizing, embodied narrative that sometimes played out in participants’ experiences, experiences in which they struggled to find a sense of belonging in predominantly white settler, male-dominated academic administrative spaces. One participant candidly described it this way: “I still walk into a room with all these leaders, who are all white, pretty much, and I still don’t feel like I’m, you know, they’re not going to accept me the way they accept each other” (Kisi Pisim). Another participant shared her struggle with her own internalized beliefs embedded in colonialism, sexism, and racism:

You know, you’re walking in and, you know, you were raised to understand oppression, like to understand that we are the oppressed. So, for us to walk into a room with 16 white people who are very well educated, and us seeming as if we’re well educated, and we still always feeling like “um, you know, maybe I shouldn’t be here.” So we’re carrying a feeling that we aren’t necessarily legitimate, but it’s there. It’s scary stuff. You’re up against people who, you know, look at you; they give you that look. (Opawahckianasis)

The notion of “the look” refers to Indigenous bodies being perceived as Other in dominant white settler spaces such as the academy. Feminist scholar Nirmal Puwar (2004) talks about “the look” as inducing an ontological anxiety informed by the “psychic and physical boundaries that are implicit to the sense of Europeaness, and more specifically the sense of who men of knowledge and leadership are as well as where they are placed” (p. 39). Indigenous women in the present study experienced “the look” as an Othering embodied response to their presence in white settler administrative environments, an Othering which takes place when they are seen and perceived to
be out of place. In this way, participants’ bodies were perceived as “space invaders” (Puwar, 2004); they were marked as strangers (Ahmed, 2007), which contributed to their feeling alien in academic administrative spaces.

**Being Labelled a Radical**

Participants often reported needing to confront colonial and racial stereotypes connected to longstanding ideologies about Indigenous people. In particular, participants encountered Indigenous stereotypes that depicted them as radical, resistant, divisive, and activist in their leadership, activism being seen as a contentious approach to leadership frowned upon by many university administrators. Participants also talked about ways in which they carefully navigated their leadership and monitored their behaviour to avoid being stigmatized with racial and colonial stereotypes, and described how they sometimes resisted the university in less visible, subtler, and subversive ways.

Despite their efforts to counter racial stereotypes, participants described several ways in which their leadership work was dismissed and even problematized and politicized. One participant described being pulled aside by a colleague who advised her that she was being “too political” in her approach and that she “needed to open up to non-Indigenous people” (Thithikopiwi Pisim). Another participant shared her experiences confronting anti-Indigenous bias in her leadership:

> I think we always need to be thinking about what people are thinking based on stereotypes. We have to address those all the time. We’re always on, because it’s so so deeply embedded in the Canadian consciousness . . . . We’re always up against the media, and how badly it portrays Indigenous peoples. (Pimahamowi Pisim)

Several other participants talked explicitly of concerns about being labelled difficult, resistant, militant, and activist in their leadership. One participant described being problematized by a colleague at her university:
I have a colleague. She slips and—I don’t know if she thought I knew, but she made a comment like, ‘You know you’re so great to work with.’ She was praising me, only to come to the fact that – ‘I don’t understand when some people say you’re so difficult to work with.’ And I was like, interesting. (Niski Pisim)

Another participant admitted that she tried to dispel troubling colonial stereotypes by actively creating collaborative relationships: “I try to create trust with certain people who automatically assume that I’m going to be the big militant” (Thithikopiwi Pisim). And yet another participant admitted she had become so concerned about being labelled an activist at her university that she literally changed the way she dressed and avoided wearing camouflage clothes to work to avoid negative associations and messages. The unseen dimension of participants’ worrying about what to wear and how they might be misperceived in racialized ways contributes to an emotional labour – the management of one’s feelings and expressions as requirement of administration work.

*Being Questioned*

While many Indigenous leaders recognized that they had been hired partly because of their Indigeneity, lived experiences, and connections to Indigenous communities, they also acknowledged that their Indigeneity was sometimes carefully scrutinized by Indigenous communities. And, their Indigeneity was sometimes used against them by non-Indigenous people who held assumptions that Indigenous people were not qualified to take on senior academic leadership work. One participant, for example, said:

You’re sitting in a position where they say, “Well, how come ‘she’ got the position? Or, you know, “Oh, you’re only in that position because you’re Native.” And I’m like, “No, I’m actually here because I’m smart. That’s why I’m here.” But that whole, why are you here? You shouldn’t be here, because you’re not the right whatever. (Pimahamowi Pisim)

Despite being questioned about ‘how they got there’ by some people in the academy, Indigenous leaders’ Indigeneity was nevertheless often highlighted in their professional biographies online,
and universities often referenced leaders’ Indigeneity publicly. Documents collected for the present study included press releases from university public affairs offices marking inaugural appointments of Indigenous senior leaders to universities. A typical press release often read something like this: “[University] appoints the first Indigenous woman [administrative title] to help restore relationships with Indigenous peoples.” In these types of celebratory communications, Indigenous women administrators are positioned as the solution to complex and deep systemic problems. The assumption that the presence of an Indigenous women administrator will somehow solve the ‘Indian problem’ is striking.

Beyond the ways in which Indigenous women administrators were often positioned as policy solutions, participants often talked about being questioned about their leadership advice, resulting in paradoxical tensions in their experiences. Their Indigeneity, on one hand, brought them a certain level of credibility in the public’s eye. On the other hand, their Indigeneity was not always well received in administrative practice overall and was, in fact, sometimes explicitly used against them, leading to their being questioned on the assumption that, being Indigenous, they were somehow incapable of making decisions or were biased. As one participant reported, “I’m dismissed when I give advice even on Indigenous matters, like, ‘Well, you are Indigenous; you have bias,’ so therefore my voice can’t be heard on that one” (Thithikopiwi Pisim).

Participants also shared stories about how they were dismissed or ignored when they drew on their experiences. The dismissal of their experience pointed to a prevailing preference for positivist, objectivist, quantitative decision-making approaches over subjective and qualitative approaches. One participant said, “They want to hear from me, but then they don’t believe I’m credible” (Kisi Pisim). Another admitted, “There’s always this angst in me like are people going to look at me and going to think ‘what kind of quack is she, and where’s her numbers?’” (Athiki
Yet another participant recounted, “It’s [like my advice is seen as] biased. It’s not factual. We’re faced with, ‘Well, that’s not really a fact.’ We’re challenged . . . about our own experience” (Opaskowi Pisim). The normative assumption is that Indigenous women administrators should not draw on their experiences to lead, an assumption that created a burden of doubt that constrained and undermined their leadership and created a deep sense of frustration among several participants.

On the other end of the spectrum, some Indigenous women described feeling micro-managed in senior leadership. One participant, commenting on observations she had made about another Indigenous woman administrator, connected the senior administration’s tendency toward micromanaging to an internalized doubting of Indigenous leaders’ capabilities. She said:

They wanted to hire [an Indigenous person] but it was very challenging to actually let them [lead] because they didn’t believe, I don’t think they believed, that she was capable of leading. Because they micro-managed her. That’s why she left. Like every decision she tried to make was second-guessed. (Opawahcikianasis)

**Being Marginalized and Hyper-Visibilized**

Participants reported that the scope of their leadership was often limited to predetermined areas such as Indigenous student services, and that their Indigenizing contributions across academic disciplines and other operational areas of the institution were often overlooked and underestimated. As one participant commented, “So if you’re Indigenous and you’re doing anything Indigenous, you’re actually quite marginalized in the institution. They don’t see you doing anything else except Indigenous issues” (Kisi Pisim). This participant explained that she felt limited in her ability to contribute by the way she was received by other administrators around the leadership table, especially when she gave advice outside of their preconceived notions about her knowledge and expertise: “I always feel like people are startled when I make comments on issues other than Indigenous issues” (Kisi Pisim). Consequently, some participants
reported feeling a sense of being restricted to certain university activities, which not only
segregated and limited their contributions and influence but also constrained their participation in
broad-based institutional change processes. Indigenous women administrators were assumed to
represent Indigenous issues only; they could not speak about the university issues more broadly.

Indigenous-specific senior administrative roles within a university are often highly visible,
often scrutinized, and even politicized. Despite universities often making public announcements
of these new roles, colonial attitudes about Indigenous peoples as “Other” and “lesser than”
persist and often surfaced in participant’s stories. Moreover, leaders’ Indigeneity often generated
a higher degree of scrutiny that created a felt sense of hyper-surveillance and vulnerability
among some participants. One commented on these felt vulnerabilities:

I was a single mom flying across Canada that put me in a position where I didn’t have the
same kind of supports or protective factors so I felt vulnerable. It was like people wanted to
poke holes in my work. (Opahowi Pisim)

The same participant described how she received emails that bordered on hate and impacted her
feeling safe and supported in her leadership role. The marginalization of Indigenous leadership is
likely based on assumptions around Indigenous leadership that are founded in settler colonial,
racial, and hetero-patriarchal notions of Indigenous people and ways of knowing. Good
leadership is assumed to be white, settler, and male. Such notions are normalized, and anyone
challenging them is cast as political and divisive, unable to offer good leadership. Participants,
because of their gender and Indigeneity, were often assumed to be less capable in their leadership
than the white settler male norm. This presumed incompetence often included the assumption
that Indigenous women could not separate their personal interests from Indigenous collective
interests, and therefore could not make good decisions. Such an assumption failed to
acknowledge that the academy itself is not systemically neutral, but built on longstanding
Eurocentric, patriarchal, and settler colonial ways of knowing, and on norms that are inherently political and invisible (Battiste, 2018; Sandy, 2018; Smith & Smith, 2018). Invisibilization of the underlying nature of the university system along with ongoing hetero-patriarchal and colonial administrative norms of leadership has created the illusion that the educational system and non-racialized leaders are neutral. Hyper-visibilized Indigenous women doing Indigenization work, therefore, are seen to be ‘too political’ and problematic in their leadership.

In dramatic text scene 5 (p.142), Maria’s story offers insights into the complicated ways in which Indigenous women administrators encounter the triple bind in their leadership in the academy. Maria’s story highlights the ways in which Indigenous administrative leaders’ Indigeneity is employed in university practices, and celebrated and promoted as part of the university’s public image and reconciliation efforts. In her monologue, the performative nature of the university’s public image is juxtaposed with Maria’s own internal narrative and ambivalence in taking on a leadership role. The story is further complicated by Maria’s attempts to be heard along with her struggle to find credibility in the institution. The monologue concludes with the sharing of a storied interaction between Maria and a colleague that reveals her colleague’s deeply engrained colonial, gendered, and racialized biases about who should speak about reconciliation. The colleague’s biases support the subjugation of Maria’s leadership voice and demonstrates one of the ways in which she experiences micro-aggressions in the workplace.

**Working Within Hetero-Patriarchal Notions of Leadership**

Several participants described their sense that Indigenous women administrators in Canadian universities are often overworked and are less likely than non-Indigenous people and Indigenous men to be frequently and rapidly promoted to leadership. As one participant said,
I think that there’s a sense it’s a little harder and you have to work a bit, you know, you have to work harder to get that space and if you are too strong, you know, we still get cast in the role of warrior. If you’re too weak then you’re too soft, then you’re not regarded with authority or respect. It’s the stereotype that, you know, very deeply in the Canadian consciousness, really the global consciousness, that Indigenous peoples are not that smart, or they are difficult, somehow. (Pimahamowi Pisim)

Another participant shared a similar perception about the undervaluing of Indigenous women’s labour compared to that of Indigenous men in Canadian universities:

I see the way that Indigenous men are treated compared to Indigenous women. Honestly, not to take away from Indigenous men, I think they do work, but I think Indigenous women overwork. We’re the leaders in the home. You look after kids, you look after organizing the home. Indigenous women do a tremendous amount of work compared to Indigenous men moving in the system, and they’re [Indigenous men] rewarded quicker. (Opawahcikianasis)

While participants reported experiencing barriers related to the gendered nature of the Westernized administrative system, barriers often inflicted upon them by non-Indigenous settler colleagues, their negative experiences were not limited to interactions with non-Indigenous colleagues in the academy. One participant expressed frustration around her experiences with an Indigenous male colleague who, she believed, was not contributing to Indigenization at her university. She argued that Indigenization should be “shared labour and shared vision” among all Indigenous people in the academy but, from her perspective, one particular Indigenous male colleague was quite comfortable stepping back and saying, “You go ahead and do that; I’m going to focus on my career. I’ve got a research agenda I’m going to fulfill” (Ohpahowî Pisîm). His attitude highlighted the patriarchal nature of colonization and how some Indigenous men in the academy do not always take on the same level of responsibility for Indigenization as do many Indigenous women.

Additionally, many participants talked about troubling interactions with Indigenous community members both within and outside the academy. Several participants shared
challenging situations they had in encounters with Indigenous women colleagues, Indigenous male students, and Indigenous community members. In telling their stories, participants often associated these negative experiences with forms of lateral violence in Indigenous communities and with the internalization of settler colonialism, sexism, and racism that is alive within Indigenous people’s consciousness. One participant found herself working at a new university outside her ancestral Territory. Coming from a matrilineal culture that honours Indigenous women’s role and voices, she asked an Indigenous staff member at the university to help her invite a local Indigenous grandmother to conduct an opening ceremony at an event she was planning. She was, however, quickly approached by a male Indigenous leader in the local community who said, “You are in [insert nation] Territory, and we don’t have women open our events.” (Niski Pisim) Surprised by this position, the participant accepted the community member’s feedback, apologized, and assumed she simply needed to learn more about the local Territorial context. She found out later, however, that Indigenous women in the local community were highly respected and did indeed conduct ceremonial openings. The participant reflected on her earlier experience with the male community member, linking it back to “patriarchal models of chiefs” and the ways in which patriarchal nature of colonialism has been internalized within Indigenous communities. Perhaps, she thought, the interaction was associated with Indigenous male discomfort with her as an Indigenous woman in a formal leadership position. Indigenous male discomfort can be further traced back to white male patriarchy that tends to disassociate women with formal leadership.

While Indigenous women in this study identified tensions between Indigenous men and women, they also noted that Indigenous women were mistreated in racialized and gendered ways by other administrators. One participant described her president asking her to co-chair an
Indigenous committee with a white male colleague, yet the president often communicated only with the male counterpart, excluding her from important conversations. Such acts of exclusion formed such an ongoing pattern with this president that the participant approached her co-chair to seek support in addressing it. The president, she reported, rationalized his actions by saying that he did not want to overwork her. In interviews, other participants described times when they were excluded from conversations and decisions by colleagues, often under the colleagues’ pretense of not wanting to overwork them. Moreover, the decision by some non-Indigenous peoples to exclude Indigenous women from conversations removed Indigenous women’s agency to decide for themselves.

**Emotional Labour**

Some participants described struggling to operate within dominant Euro-Western leadership norms, feeling that they could not show their emotions. Given the highly personal nature of Indigenization work, and Indigenous people’s intergenerational trauma in colonial educational settings, many participants found this expectation particularly challenging. Some worried that showing emotion would hinder their being taken seriously or discourage others from interacting with them. One participant said, “I think there is an expectation that you are to remove the personalized aspect [in leadership] and that is really hard to disconnect from in our work. It is very personal work” (Opiniyawiwi Pisim). Another participant admitted that at times she regretted showing emotion with some colleagues because it was not respected and was so uncommon in the academy that she feared it could be used against her. The dominant split between the personal and professional is the focus of a longstanding feminist critique of normative leadership approaches. The split can be connected to an emphasis on the management of emotions in the workplace and the bureaucratization of feelings experienced by many women
in leadership (Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). Ironically, however, one participant reported that a show of emotion led to a transformative change in one of her workplace relationships. Trying to advance an Indigenous student admissions policy with the registrar at her university, she was stymied by a colleague who was unwilling to compromise on the dominant institutional practice of prioritizing only grade point average in the admissions process. After several failed attempts to make headway on accessible admission policies, and his indifferent and callous responses, she said, “I started to cry.” As she explained it:

When I get really frustrated sometimes I cry if I can’t find my words. I started to cry and I was mad, but that was the turning for him; my reaction that day made him think about things in a different way. He actually picked up the whole idea of Indigenous admissions and championed [it] across the university. (Mikisiwi Pisim)

The combination of a show of emotion and analysis of how institutional racism becomes embedded in normative admission policies that push Indigenous students out formed a turning point for this male colleague who then shifted his view of admissions practices.

**Working on the Borderland**

Several participants described the conflicting tensions they sensed operating on the borderland—at the intersection of Indigenous communities and the university—tensions which contributed to a feeling of ambivalence around how they saw themselves and how they were seen by others in the academy. On one hand, participants commonly talked about drawing deep cultural meaning from their Indigeneity and Indigenous ways of knowing. They linked Indigenous collective values—the importance of serving Indigenous communities and serving the next generation—to their leadership purpose. They often linked negative colonial experiences in their own education to their desire to advance Indigenization and decolonization. Paradoxically, however, they also felt that their Indigeneity was often used against them, as an excuse to question, undermine, and dismiss their perspectives, and even, at times, to resist their
leadership. Ironically and contrarily, although their Indigeneity played a central role in informing their purpose, their Indigeneity also made them more vulnerable to being Othered in the academy under the colonial gaze. Some participants expressed ambivalence about working within a highly entrenched colonial system that often appeared to be incommensurable with achieving decolonial aims. As a result, many participants, from inside the settler colonial academy, reported a dissonance between leading decolonial change and their Indigeneity. That dissonance was revealed by one participant when asked, “Where do you get inspiration from as a leader?” The participant said:

I grew up in a very small village. One of the things that I remember and made a big impression on me when I was child was the village was kind of run by the women. So the men were, you know, hunting and fishing and doing all that good stuff, and getting the wood, you know. But the women ran the social life of the village, and I guess what we would now call the political life of the village was women’s work. My father got up at 5 a.m. to check his nets. He had his nets laid all summer long. And on the way home he would always—he had stops along the way where he stopped and dropped off fish to people—people who were elderly, couldn’t fish, or whatever. And so everybody got looked after. So I think maybe [my leadership] comes from seeing all of that when I was a kid, you know? It was not taught to me like this conceptual stuff, you know. It was just [life]. (Kisi Pisim)

The same participant described how her leadership position was perceived through the colonial gaze in the academy:

I’ve been told that people [in the university] are scared of me. And so I think, well, you know, here I am, I’m about five feet tall, I’m older and therefore, you know, for me, if they’re scared of me, it must mean that I represent something Other than what is sitting in this chair. (Kisi Pisim)

This participant’s comments juxtapose two disparate ways of seeing Indigenous women leaders, and highlight the embodied dissonance of leading with one’s Indigeneity within the university. In her first comment, the participant reflects on her early childhood experiences, on growing up in a small village where she felt grounded by a sense of family, community, and kinship ties to land. She reflected on the prominent role of Indigenous women in guiding the political life of the
community. In stark contrast, she described in her second comment how non-Indigenous people see her and even fear her as an “Other” in the university. Reflecting on being informed by a colleague that people in the university are scared of her, she associated the fear with an ingrained colonial mindset and an Othering of Indigenous people in the settler academy and in society.

**Epistemic Differences**

Several participants identified both possibilities and limitations that surfaced as they lead Indigenization on the borderland of disparate worlds where they experience “epistemic ignorance” (Kuokkanen, 2007). Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) describes epistemic ignorance as

arising at both institutional and individual levels [and] manifest[ing] itself by excluding and effacing Indigenous issues and materials in curricula, by denying Indigenous contributions and influences, and by showing lack of interest and understanding of Indigenous epistemes or issues (p. 67)

and as “rooted in academic structures that are complicit in colonialism and that reproduce the inferiority of non-Western epistemes in order to protect the interest of those in power” (p. 67).

Participants encountered epistemic ignorance in their leadership in a number of ways, often finding themselves betwixt and between competing epistemic realities. Tensions arose not only when they encountered differing conceptions of leadership, but also when they were expected to behave in particular ways in order to be effective in their roles. One participant described different ways of understanding and organizing leadership that reflect epistemic differences: “[In the university], there is a focus on hierarchy. We [in Indigenous communities] don’t engage in hierarchy with our people; we work in circles, we consult, we, you know, we work more laterally” (Kaskatinowi Pisim). This participant contrasts leadership as conceived and assigned within the academy with leadership in Indigenous community contexts, shedding light on the divergent epistemic centers in which Indigenous women administrators must work. On one hand,
Indigenous women administrators are expected to operate in the highly institutionalized contexts of the academy, a space that recognizes positional authority, credentials, and hierarchy; on the other hand, they are expected to work relationally within Indigenous community contexts that tend to observe a deep respect and reverence for self-in-relation and heterarchical ways of organizing. Indigenous community leadership tends to support emergent and fluid types of leadership based in community needs rather than in positional authority (Cajete, 2016). Because of these differences, Indigenous women administrators operate on a borderland, and must cross borders, which is not easy or even safe to do. Asked how she contended with differing community and university leadership expectations and contexts, she responded:

If you think about Indigenous leadership [in the university], we’re having to negotiate not just the hierarchical relationships, but we’re also having to navigate lateral relationships and so it [conventional leadership training] doesn’t prepare you for the work in Indigenous communities in terms of working with Indigenous faculty, community, and staff. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

This participant alludes to the fact that she did not always adhere to the dominant institutional rules of engagement when working with Indigenous groups. She adheres to relational ontology when working with Indigenous communities rather than to the “ontology of hierarchy” (Malott, 2010) upon which Western institutions are premised. Several participants noted that they do not lead with their roles when approaching Indigenous communities, but instead lead with whom they are (or were) in the context of Indigenous Nationhood, land, and place. One participant put it this way:

When I am around Indigenous people I downplay the position. I mean you have to try to be like everyone else, you know? Like I promise you, when I go home, I guarantee nobody knows what I do at the university, you know. Don’t even talk about that stuff. There’s a word at home, they call it [in their Indigenous language] “big feeling.” You’re a big feeling. It means you think much of yourself and you think you’re better than the rest of us—big feeling. You don’t want to be known as big feeling. (Kisi Pisim)
**Complex Positionalities**

Participants identified the need to be aware when crossing borders, especially in academic institutional contexts. As university employees, participants did not always fit neatly into university contexts or into local Indigenous communities. They were conscious of complex positionalities, often trapped in liminal spaces on the borderland of different epistemic worlds.

To complicate matters, many participants found themselves working in university contexts located outside their own Indigenous territories, which complicated their relationships with local Indigenous people. Some participants realized they were sometimes marked by local Indigenous community members as outsiders because they were not from the local territory. One participant explained:

> My most telling moment was at an Indigenous Council meeting when one of the community members stated quite categorically that we weren’t Indigenous because we worked at the institution. Therefore, we didn’t speak with an Indigenous voice; we were speaking as the institution. And that was really startling. But that’s how she saw us. Well, [inside the institution] we are looked at absolutely as the Other. They don’t see us as the institution. Because that’s the other side of it, when you’re meeting with, you know, like I attend meetings with senior administrators and its all the deans and associate vice presidents, etcetera. I attend those meetings, but I am totally the Native person at the table. And you can see it. It’s tangible. There’s even kind of, you know, if somebody else brings up the word Indigenous and they are talking about something, everyone will turn and look at me, not them. (Kisi Pisim)

From this participant’s perspective, taking on an Indigenous administrative role within a university involved being positioned by certain Indigenous community members as the institution, even an outsider.

**Conflicting Educational Aims**

Beyond Indigenous women’s complex borderland positioning, participants also reported being at the interface of sometimes colliding expectations between the university and Indigenous communities. This conundrum, however, did not denote that Indigenous women administrators
were non-agentic in the process; it did, however, imply that they found themselves at times in complicated positions in which they felt they had to choose sides – the university side or the Indigenous community side. Some participants reported feeling at odds with working on the borderland. One participant explains: “So in my view, I worked for the members of the Aboriginal Advisory Council. In the President’s view, I worked for [them].” For most leaders, integrity with Indigenous communities remained paramount in helping them decipher and navigate these difficult decisions. One participant declared:

My number one principle coming into this position was maintaining my integrity with community. I can’t choose to stand with the institution and stand against community. I listen and meet with community all the time. Then go and try to meet with administration and try to be that negotiator. (Opaskowi Pisim)

While all Indigenous women administrators reported a strong sense of accountability to Indigenous community, their ethical position did not mean they never encountered challenges in their work with Indigenous communities. After all, Indigenous communities are not unified or in agreement on all matters. One participant shared a story about how some community members criticized a decision her unit had made. The criticisms were grounded in assumptions and misinformation, and she was able later to explain, through her relationship with one particular community member, the important missing context around the unit’s decision-making process, and its limitations. The participant also explained how she comes to terms with the inevitable emergence of Indigenous community criticism of her leadership role:

So you know, I get into those spats quite regular, and again, you know, the one thing that I come back to is as long as I think I’ve done my due diligence then I live with it, and I have no qualms about saying, ‘Hey, I’ve got no power here.’ (Athiki Pisim)

While she helped advise in the handling of a decision that was publicly criticized by some Indigenous community members, she emphasized that she did not in the end make the final decision. She also emphasized that Indigenous community members do not always agree and
understand how university decision-making processes occur, and that she does not necessarily have authority on all matters.

**Dangerous Working Conditions**

Several Indigenous women participants talked about the dangers they faced working on the borderland between Indigenous communities and the administrative academy. They experienced the “shaky bridge” of Indigenous equity work in universities, taking on as Bunda et al (2002) describe

> [the] back-breaking burdens of those striving for social spaces within institutions that can serve needs and aspirations of Indigenous peoples. Again and again, Indigenous people crossing into whitestream institutions find themselves on shaky ‘equity’ bridges, in peril of tumbling into rivers of tormented history. The terrors of such risks can bring about paralysed stand-stills arms crossed on the brink. Not to be thrown off stride and balance entails a very different spirit of bridge-building; a pooling of Indigenous resources not just for survival but for ‘hope, love, self-nourishment’. It requires a lighter-stepping labour, with freer agency to move in ways and directions that take up Indigenous needs and aspirations, felt and imagined together in the walking. (p. 943)

Several participants testified that they were expected to “act as bridges” and to remove longstanding colonial divides between the universities and Indigenous communities. Being situated on unequal ground, or on the shaky bridge, was not only exhausting but often dangerous embodied work. One participant described the challenges she faced being a bridge at her university:

> [Sometimes] the community people don’t know how the university works. They have no idea how the structure works; they just think it’s like this faceless, nameless, hard-hearted institution that they have to fight and is up to no good. (Kisi Pisim)

This participant highlights how Indigenous leaders often become trapped at the interface of longstanding conflicts and divisions between Indigenous communities and the university. She describes the embodied experience of trying to bridge historical and ongoing systemic gaps and
patterns as extremely isolating, challenging, and even impossible. Another participant shared the similar impacts of her labour on the shaky bridge:

I ended up going on a leave of absence. I found out that I needed to unplug from the emotional labour of this work and found myself, honestly, just hating my job. So there were three distinct moments that happened this year that were so exhausting to constantly fight for Indigenous peoples, you know, so it was hardly any policy-making but lots of advocacy this year. And it was really exhausting. I mean it was awful in a lot of ways, because it really showed the neutrality [of the university] to us, and their complicity in this type of hateful rhetoric that exists around campus. So, anyway, I went on leave and I am basically wanting to come to a place where I can at least love to go to work again. I just hit a brick wall. (Niski Pisim)

This participant affirms the dangers of falling from the shaky bridge. As Bunda et al. (2012) have asserted, “Those who dare to negotiate the double desire – to remain Indigenous and to participate in often inhospitable institutions for benefits they might provide – can feel tenuous and alienated, even while hoping to forge possibilities for moving forward” (p. 948). This passage along with comments from several other participants in the present study point to experiences of “racial battle fatigue” (Almeida, 2015) that place additional expectations on Indigenous leaders working under white settler, hetero-patriarchal, and borderland conditions, and that have adverse embodied impacts on Indigenous women leaders.

Educational administration has undoubtedly acted as a colonizing tool for the settler colonial state. The history and ongoing structural reality of universities is based on white settler colonial and male-centric norms of leadership. In the present study, Indigenous women administrators grappled with these hegemonic norms in their embodied triple bind experiences. They commonly testified to feeling a sense of dissonance and ambivalence in their leadership work, a dissonance that revealed itself when they compared how they understood and experienced their own leadership responsibilities with how they were often seen and treated by others in the academy. As a result of complex institutional lineages, Indigenous women reported
becoming caught within the triple binds of working within a settler colonial educational system and under dominant male notions of leadership. These predicaments created dissonance, embodied tensions, and ambivalences among Indigenous women leaders as they operated on the borderland between disparate worlds—the university and the Indigenous communities they served. Despite the undeniable privilege and positional power associated with their senior administrative roles, Indigenous women administrators described facing consistent challenges in enacting their leadership within dominant administrative contexts. Many talked explicitly about the multiple and interlocking triple bind barriers they faced when championing institutional change within highly visible and often politically charged roles. Under a normalized administrative culture that espouses hierarchy, neutrality in leadership, positional power, and structural functionalism—the maintenance of the university system—Indigenous women administrators who led Indigenizing policies with their Indigeneity struggled not only to be seen and heard but to guide decolonial change. Consequently, they often talked about bumping up against the “brick walls” of the hegemonic administrative academy. Against the backdrop of these brick walls, participants talked about the danger of borderland work—as they navigated, negotiated, and sometimes challenged dominant settler colonial institutional structures and norms.
CHAPTER 7

“It’s Not as Easy as it Sounds:” Trickiness of Indigenizing Policy Enactments

This is a story about the written word of policies, the promises they make, and the tricks they play when we try to put those words into action. This story unfolds in the slippery crevices between bricks and mortar that structures power in often invisible ways. But if we listen carefully from the margins, we can hear ‘Other’ stories and how policy promises sometimes get questioned by the very group they claim to serve. In this story, I hope you can start to hear beyond the grand institutional narratives carefully curated, and start to listen to the embodied tensions experienced by those who are expected to put words into action.

As part of the national reconciliation movement in Canada, universities were among the first public institutions to take action through increased policy efforts, which I refer to in the present study as Indigenizing policy work. In this chapter, I strive to answer the following overarching research question: What challenges do Indigenous women administrators’ face when enacting Indigenizing policies within Canadian universities? The study has yielded three overarching findings related to Indigenizing policy enactments in Canadian universities:

1) Indigenizing policy enactments are shaped by institutional speech acts.
2) Indigenizing policy enactments are messy and contested processes in practice.
3) Indigenizing policies are constrained by ongoing structures of patriarchal white sovereignty within universities.

In this chapter, I draw on the embodied experiences of the Indigenous women administrator participants who have been hired to champion the implementation of Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities. Through their stories, I assert that Indigenizing policies have inadequately accounted for complexities of “policy enactment” – the unavoidably political and unpredictable ways that policies are taken up in practice (Ball et al, 2012) within ongoing structures of settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, and global capitalism (Grande, 2015).

Moreover, I assert that Indigenizing policies are tricky to enact as they are inevitably taken up
through “possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty” (Moreton-Robinson, 2015) which prevent “decolonial-Indigenization” – the transformative process of moving universities from conventional hierarchies of governance and knowledge production toward realizing Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Torres Strait scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015) puts forth the notion of possessive logics of patriarchal white sovereignty as tied to white settler state laws and their institutional practices, and as often functioning through everyday inter-subjectivities that reinforce and reproduce white settler ownership and control over Indigenous lives and lands. In this chapter, I show how possessive logics emerge and operate through university administrative structures and policy practices in ways that subvert Indigenous people’s educational sovereignty.

To demonstrate the challenges of policy enactment, I work with Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2005) notion of trickiness to describe the invisible yet powerful ways in which colonial power is operationalized in academic contexts to benefit certain groups over others, in particular white settlers over Indigenous peoples. While Smith uses the notion of trickiness to describe the ways in which colonial power plays out in Indigenous research practices, between researchers’ methodological choices, ethics and policies, and research subjects, I use the term trickiness to examine how white settler academic structures, policy documents and processes, and policy actors’ interests converge and diverge in policy enactment practices. Unlike rationalist and instrumentalist approaches to policy that assume policies are apolitical and can be implemented in straightforward and unproblematic ways, the trickiness of policy enactment highlights policies as complex, contested, and messy processes, linked to policy actors’ positionalities within white settler ongoing structures, intersubjective assumptions, and biases tied to intersectional forces of power, most notably to patriarchal white sovereignty. Through this
critical Indigenous policy lens, Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities can be seen as both a product and an interactive, dynamic, and ongoing political process (Ball, 1990; Taylor et al., 1997; Strakosch, 2015), fundamentally taken up within patriarchal white settler colonial institutions in which Indigenous peoples continue to struggle to assert their Indigenous educational sovereignty.

In examining the trickiness of Indigenizing policy enactments in academic contexts, possessive logics embedded in the patriarchal white sovereignty of the university inevitably creep into policy implementation processes in insidious ways that tend to reproduce settler colonial relations of power; these in turn create impossible dilemmas and messy divisions that undermine Indigenous sovereignty. Moreover, the trickiness of white possessive logics operates in policy enactment processes in often invisible and common-sense ways which are connected to a complex regime of power that strives to reproduce settler possession over Indigenous people’s educational decision-making. Thereby, under white settler colonial gaze and control, Indigenizing policies in universities often become severely limited in practice, strangled by interconnecting systems operating at the intersections of macro, meso, and micro levels of power—that is, at macro levels of global capitalism, imperial/colonialism, and settler state government and legislation; meso levels of academic governance systems, policies, and practices embedded in white liberalism; and micro levels of individual ideological and intersubjective relations of power.

**Institutional Speech Acts**

Universities control Indigenizing policy discourses through what Sara Ahmed (2007) calls “institutional speech acts.” Institutional speech acts give the appearance that universities are committed to equity (and reconciliation and Indigenization) but they are non-performative acts, because they do not necessarily accomplish what they claim to commit to or support. Drawing on
similar critiques based on “liberal recognition politics” put forth by Dene scholar Glen Coulthard in the context of Canadian government reconciliation policies, I argue that institutional speech acts operate within Indigenizing policies in universities as a recognition politic, a politic that promotes a “psycho-affective” attachment that often negate redistribution of power and, in the process, serves to eclipse and displace Indigenous educational sovereignty. For example, new Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities have been heavily scrutinized for their symbolic and tokenistic tendencies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) and criticized as a “settler spectacle of reconciliation” (Daigle, 2019). Despite widespread criticisms, however, universities have continued to release a large number of symbolic policy documents including public apologies, land acknowledgments, public condolences, public letters, memoranda of understanding, and press releases as outlined in my literature review chapter.

While public documents are undoubtedly influential in society and a necessary part of institutional policy education and change communication processes, some policy documents I argue contribute to greater levels of change than others, especially those policies that are tied to material resources and institutional systems of authority that redistribute power and increase Indigenous collective sovereignty. For example, broad-based Indigenous strategic plans that are tied to institutional budget planning processes and that have Indigenous senior leadership with institutional authority are much stronger than Indigenous action plans within a single unit (such as student affairs) that does not have budget allocation. In my research, I note that such structural and budgetary advances often did not transpire until after the TRC was released or universities were publicly criticized. For example, the University of Manitoba underwent a structural shift only after their inaugural Vice Provost (Indigenous Initiatives) resigned and went public with her negative experiences in 2019. Since then, the University of Manitoba completed a review of the
Indigenous policy and senior leadership office; the review committee recommended the institution of several associated Indigenous leadership positions along with a budget commensurate to the implementation of their university’s Indigenous strategic plan (University of Manitoba, 2019).

Despite Indigenizing policy debates, many participants in the present study reported troubling ways that Indigenizing policy documents were used symbolically. They were used in performative ways that gave the appearance that the university was Indigenizing or reconciling when, in reality, Indigenous people continued to experience stark discrepancies between the university’s public image and their lived experiences working in the institution. Operating within a white possessive logic, participants often described institutional speech acts as part of deeper neoliberal and neocolonial economic stories shaped by their universities’ desire to improve the competitive brand and raise their profile in the public domain. One participant said, “It’s troublesome for me that universities make public kinds of statements and we don’t back them up with the policies, practices, and resources - all of those things that need to happen to really make meaningful change” (Kaskatinowi Pisim). This participant challenges underlying white liberal recognition politics at play in some university statements, because those statements do not always come with the resources needed to drive the changes they promise. Another participant said, 

Indigenizing is being co-opted by a colonial system that is now using the terminology and saying that they’re Indigenizing and all it is is an assimilation project. If anyone wants to Indigenize, then they need to have their Indigenous team making their own decisions and working, operating alongside, and making their own negotiations with equal authority and power within the organization. (Nimitahamowi Pisim)

In this participant’s view, institutional speech acts were at times deceptively tricky, with the university system coopting the term and twisting the message to serve its institutional needs
rather than Indigenous people’s needs, and thereby reproducing settler colonial relations of power. Several participants reported struggling with the ways that universities used Indigenization as a corporate public affairs opportunity.

One participant described how a public statement made by her university after the trial of the person accused of the murder of a young Cree man, Colten Boushie, in 2016, went wrong:

Monday comes, and in their scramble to try to get something out, their haste, it was wrong, it was a miscalculation. They said something to the effect of, “The university is proud of our work in Indigenization efforts despite the recent court case”—something like that. Really vague. They didn’t even name the family; they didn’t send condolences to the Boushie and Baptiste families; they didn’t. It was just “look at us, we’re doing this work, this work, and this work.” You know, check, check, check, and it pissed me off. It pissed me off, because I was like, “Uh, I work here. I think everyone’s going to say I’m complicit in this erasure.” (Niski Pisim)

This participant questioned the way her university not only used the verdict to make a self-congratulatory claim about the institution’s Indigenization efforts but, more troublingly, ended up erasing Indigenous voices and the larger settler colonial problem that shaped the acquittal process. Another participant talked about her involvement in co-authoring an Indigenizing policy at her university and how, in the process, she had to constantly push back against her settler colleagues’ desire to paint the university’s performance within the public document as positive. “[When we were writing the report],” she said, “I’d say a lot of the time, I was like, no, let’s not start off with the [university] is so great; no, we have a lot of work to do.” Indeed, several participants in the present study found themselves at odds with dominant institutional tendencies toward institutional speech acts as a form of corporate public relations operating within larger global capitalist, neocolonialist, and neoliberalist forces. Another participant questioned the growing university practice of publishing press releases including Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) to celebrate university steps toward achieving reconciliation. She critiqued this practice by saying,
Most of the MOUs I see are kind of actionless. They’re agreements to work together basically but there’s no real direct action linked to it and, as a result, not much has happened in this case anyway. People make a big deal about MOUs and you see them in the paper all the time. So you find an MOU. But then like years later you might go back and start looking at all this and assessing what came out of it. I bet a lot of cases would show you that very little was actually done. (Pimahamowi Pisim)

In many of their stories, participants underscored the deceptive ways in which settler colonialism operated in Indigenizing policy communication practices—practices that often resulted in institutional speech acts that gave the impression that institutions had changed, while in reality they had not undergone deep levels of decolonial reform.

In Chapter 5 scene 8 of the dramatic text (p. 129), Weesakechahk enacts a speech act by reciting a university land acknowledgement, a common and highly critiqued policy practice within Canadian universities. In the scene, Weesakechahk enacts a common possessive refrain, wherein a university administrator welcomes the audience (including local Indigenous people) to the university, thereby assuming a host role. As Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen (2007) argues, “The hosts welcome the arrivants, the guests —reinforcing its guest-master position.” At the same time, the university’s welcoming words are deeply scripted (performative) and full of tensions as white settler administrators mispronounce Indigenous names in Indigenous languages and misplace Indigenous people in a guest position on their own land. Heather, the central Indigenous character of this dramatic scene, interrupts the common sense settler spectacle by reclaiming university space, speaking out of turn, and finding a voice to tell her story.

Heather’s monologue exposes many of the hidden policy truths that surfaced in the present study, truths related to the experiences of Indigenous women administrators enacting Indigenizing policy promises in Canadian universities. Her monologue uncovers the politics behind policies, particularly the ways in which federal and provincial governments and jurisdictions interconnect and coalesce—ways that often structurally limit and marginalize
Indigenous people’s educational sovereignty. In Heather’s monologue, we hear that the TRC policy has acted as a powerful driving force, compelling the university administration to open up and listen to Indigenous people. While Heather’s story highlights how the TRC has contributed to advancing Indigenous people’s agency, the story also points to the challenges of mobilizing change without structural reform and within common sense settler notions of power. Heather’s monologue further raises key issues related to the limitations of Indigenizing policy enactments that occur within existing academic structures and do not take into account the possessive white logics embedded in the academy. The story further sheds light on the complexities of policy enactment experiences among Indigenous people who remain underrepresented in the academy. The story queries how policy norms can fall prey to symbolic approaches that do not adequately shift colonial and institutional power structures and dynamics, thereby foreshadowing the troubling ways in which the very policies intended to liberate Indigenous people can end up, paradoxically, exploiting them.

**Messy and Contested**

In this research, Indigenous women administrators also often described Indigenous policy enactments as messy, contested, and paradoxical in practice—as contradictory—because although policies were claimed to benefit Indigenous people, the lived experiences of many Indigenous people in the enactment process told an opposite story. While participants often talked about Indigenizing policies as advancing institutional change, they also talked about how policy sometimes produced unintended consequences that were messy and even contested by Indigenous people within the academy. One participant said,

> It has placed unprecedented demands on Indigenous scholars, staff, students, and leadership. I think a lot of the responsibility is placed on Indigenous peoples to help people interpret the policies and understand the intent and meaning behind them and how they can respectfully be done and not just a checklist. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)
Another participant outlined challenges she faced enacting Indigenizing policies within a university system that inherently silenced Indigenous voices, because they were marginalized and under-represented in the academic governance system. “We have this policy called collegial governance or shared governance,” she said, which is “where you go out to consult, but [the people we consult are] all non-Indigenous. Our underrepresentation is the hardest thing. Shared decision making its almost impossible” (Thithikopiwi Pisim). In their narratives, the participants highlight how patriarchal white sovereignty dominates and reproduces itself, thereby often interfering with and obstructing Indigenous people’s assertion of their educational sovereignty.

Participants also talked about Indigenizing policies as operating in two contradictory ways - as tools that empower Indigenous people, and as instruments that oppress Indigenous people. Some participants talked explicitly about the strategic use of existing university policies in their leadership (i.e., supporting Indigenous faculty members using existing faculty association policies to make their cases to do Indigenous research in tenure and promotion processes). At the same time, participants also talked about the limits of existing university policies which are highly Westernized and Eurocentric, and about the need to review and amend those policies to make them more congruent with Indigenous ways of knowing. In some cases, participants talked about developing entirely new, Indigenous-specific policies that privilege Indigenous ways of knowing—smudging policies, for example. Participants also talked about advancing university strategic plans and action plans informed by Indigenous interests, and policies in the areas of Indigenous curriculum and Indigenous faculty hiring. Several participants talked about policies as their “friends” and as helping them increase Indigenous access to university resources to meet Indigenous needs. One participant described policy use in her leadership in this way:
We have to have a strong understanding of the policies that are our friends, even though they might not look like it; but we have to look at that policy, understand our Indigenous worldviews, what we’re trying to bring forward and manoeuvre it. I think activism is so linked to policy and when you’re doing activist work and you don’t know policy you’re kind of – sometimes trying to advance something that’s not going to work. (Ohpahowin Pisim)

Another participant described her relationship to policy in universities as “vital”:

. . . because policies help us figure out how to advance Indigenous knowledge within the academy. I think we have to understand the policies, work within the policies that our friends, and then change the policies that are problematic. (Opaskowin Pisim)

Both participants highlight the utility of existing university policies and the need for Indigenous leaders to have policy literacy in order to interpret and use existing policies to benefit Indigenous people and drive decolonial change. Sara Ahmed (2019), in “What’s the use?”, conducts an literature review of the word use to examine how it has functioned historically and continues to operate in university policies as a colonial, gendered, and racialized technique for shaping (and disciplining) certain bodies in dominant white spaces. Ahmed argues that utility operates through university policy as a normative technique. She further posits that diversity workers in the United Kingdom use policy as a technique to disrupt normative discourses in universities, which therefore positions policy work as a mode of surviving in the academy, a way of challenging the normative policy functionalism of universities. Similar adoptions of university policies are occurring among Indigenous women administrators in the context of Indigenization policy movements in Canadian universities.

Participants often talked about how Indigenous university policy discourses have dramatically shifted since the TRC, challenging the colonial positioning of Indigenous people as the “Indian problem” in postsecondary educational policy, and toward recognizing the colonial problem embedded within universities. The discourse of the “Indian problem” (Dyke, 1999) has been an enduring colonial narrative in educational policies that has “Othered” Indigenous people
and ways of knowing, resulting in them being viewed in deficit ways and depicted as uncivilized, illiterate, and incapable. The Indigenizing policy movement in Canada has involved pushing back against these colonial and deficit policy narratives. As one participant explained,

   Our students have asked us, and you’ll notice in there [points to the policy document] that we don’t talk much about student support. Our students say, “We’re not the problem, and we’re not sick. And sometimes we get frustrated but sometimes that’s from your system. Don’t talk about us in the deficit.” (Niski Pisim)

This participant described her university’s Indigenous strategic plan as shifting from focusing on changing Indigenous students toward focusing on changing the system. Other participants also highlighted policy shifts that have moved institutions beyond an Indigenous student services model of education that focused on helping Indigenous students acculturate (i.e., assimilate) into the dominant university system, toward actively changing the university system to be more inclusive of Indigenous people and ways of knowing (Pidgeon, 2016; Rigney, 2017). Another participant explained the change process in this way:

   It’s not that we need to help Indigenous people; its more about what Indigenous peoples bring to the academy, how can Indigenous peoples strengthen the academy, and what contributions that they can make. We need to move away from that deficit kind of thinking that the academy is just there to help Indigenous peoples. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

While the degree of decolonial change occurring in universities is highly contested and debatable, the calls of the TRC for deeper levels of reform have certainly contributed to shifting conversations on university campuses around who changes, for what purposes, and on what terms. While these shifting policy narratives are important, their goals are taken up in practice—in the policy enactment process—in highly contested ways.

   Participants often reported troubling encounters with white settlers in the academy, encounters that silenced their voices. Indigenous people continue to be a minority in academic spaces that privilege the liberal democratic principles of the individual and the majority. As a
result, many Indigenous women administrators found themselves in messy enactment situations where impossible dilemmas emerged. One participant talked about challenges she faced trying to hang flags of local Indigenous Nations on her university campus—because existing university policies limited the types of flags permitted on campus. Only provincial and settler nation state flags were sanctioned. The privileging of settler flags exemplifies the powerful stranglehold of the doctrine of discovery. These longstanding university policies, steeped in settler colonialism and nationalism, thwarted Indigenous sovereignty and languages and in turn created barriers to enacting Indigenizing policies.

Another participant told of a colonial encounter that emerged in the creation of a Smudging policy which became messy and contested after a settler administrator demonstrated “epistemic ignorance” (Kuokkanen, 2007, 2008; Sasakamoose & Pete, 2015), relating smudging practices to the smoking of tobacco. Epistemic ignorance is a violent process of marginalizing, excluding, and discriminating against non-Western epistemic and intellectual traditions, and is based on Eurocentric thought and assumptions (Kuokkanen, 2007). Epistemic ignorance arose in the Smudge policy-making process when an individual sanctioned with institutional power enacted and reproduced existing Eurocentric policies. The settler administrator used Eurocentric biases and assumptions about tobacco as a recreational practice to halt the Smudge policy-making process. Consequently, the process became so painfully divisive, disrespectful, and undermining of Indigenous ways of knowing and protocols that the Indigenous administrator abruptly ended the process. The participant explained how both administrators came back to the process after a first failed attempt:

So I went back in, and I am meeting with the administrator and he just said, “I don’t want a rehash of last time. I don’t want to have to go through that again.” He said, “So if we can just take this policy and rip it up.” And he ripped it up and put it aside. “Can we just start from scratch?” and I said, “Absolutely.” (Ohpahowi Pisim)
The act of ripping up the old smoke free university policy powerfully illustrates the epistemic dominance of Euro-Western ways of knowing, and the need to disrupt white settler dominance in order to make authentic space for Indigenous ways of knowing to emerge in the academy. Many participants told similar stories about having to challenge and deconstruct the epistemic ignorance that formed the basis of longstanding university policies and practices. Several participants reported that their policy work often involved questioning and deconstructing policies and practices that were taken-for-granted and normalized through patriarchal white sovereignty. Participants often described their encounters with these embedded epistemic ignorances, however, as deeply challenging.

Several participants reported that the observance of Indigenous ways of knowing and the practicing of Indigenous ceremonies such as smudging, feasting, and working with Elders and knowledge carriers often revealed epistemic incongruences. One participant said that many of her policy needs arose out of situations in which Indigenous ways of knowing were being disrespected and often countered by dominant Euro-Western policies and practices on campus:

So we couldn’t have a feast because of the [policy] agreements that are in place with catering and food services companies. So you can’t bring your own food on campus, you can’t cook your food there, you can’t do anything. So that policy urgency arose right away. (Ohpahowi Pisim)

The food services policy and practices were reported as particularly challenging for the observation of Indigenous feasting on university campuses. In this and other matters, existing institutional policies, particularly in human resources and finance, limited the conditions upon which Indigenous participants could respectfully observe Indigenous ways of knowing on campus. Moreover, several of these existing policies were controlled under broader nation state legislative requirements imposed by settler colonial governments. For example, human resources
followed the federal government’s Canada Revenue Agency policy, which required Elders to be paid as non-employees. Indeed, participants’ narratives often pointed to larger systemic factors connected to patriarchal white sovereignty, and the ways that meso (university) policies coalesced with macro (global capitalism, imperialism/colonialism and settler nation-state) systems, which did not benefit Indigenous peoples. As a result, creating new Indigenizing policies within universities was limited under settler colonial ethics of incommensurability. Thus, while Indigenizing policies in universities have contributed to institutional change, they are, alone, not a panacea. The Indigenizing policy enactment process within universities often surfaces deeper issues based within ongoing settler colonial and ideological systems.

**Constrained Within Ongoing Structures**

Four recurring dilemmas surfaced in participants’ narratives related to constraints on Indigenizing policy enactment within academic structures shaped by patriarchal white sovereignty: (a) increasing Indigenous workloads and Indigenous underrepresentation, (b) increasing calls for Indigenizing curriculum but without Indigenous faculty, knowledge, and experience, (c) institutionalizing Indigeneity and measuring success, and 4) settler moves toward innocence and cooptation.

**Increased Workload and Underrepresentation**

One of the impacts of Indigenizing policy reform that was most talked about among participants was that new policies have placed increasing pressure on the few Indigenous people working in universities. Several participants reported increasing demands and a growing administrative pressure to take on leadership roles sometimes earlier than they would have preferred. As one participant attested,

[TRC] has placed unprecedented demands on Indigenous scholars, staff, students, and leadership. I think a lot of the responsibility is placed on Indigenous peoples [to] help
people interpret [policies] and understand the intent and meaning behind them and how [that] can . . . respectfully be done not just as a checklist. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

Many participants also talked about how increased demands often involved them chairing and sitting on new committees as well as educating administration and non-Indigenous people about Indigenous perspectives and needs. According to several participants, these expectations often placed them in vulnerable positions that required them to take on additional emotional and invisible labour, which was not always compensated or recognized, and which created inequitable workloads that sometimes negatively impacted their wellbeing and their careers (e.g., by affecting their research productivity).

Positively speaking, several Indigenous administrators in this study reported that TRC and associated Indigenizing policy directives helped them to convince their universities to create more Indigenous-specific staffing positions. While many of these employee advancements were long overdue and tied to chronic underfunding of Indigenous initiatives overall, several participants reported challenges filling certain roles, because the Indigenous employment market was so competitive, and there were few Indigenous people qualified to take on certain positions.

This participant described her experience:

When I came into this office, the majority of the staff were term, a number of them were part-time and we didn’t have enough staff. And so, you know, I’ve really had to push against the system: “You’ve got a strategic framework and this office is where so much of the support comes from, but the majority of the staff are term and many of them are part-time.” Since I’ve come in, we’ve been able to get – all of the one’s that were term are now base funded. We worked with human resources and we went back and re-evaluated every single job description. We added cultural competencies so we really fought hard and we managed to get just about every job in this office to reflect what people are doing. (Athiki Pisim)

As part of shifts in employee relations, participants also reported pushing for an increase in Indigenous faculty cluster hiring—the bringing of several Indigenous faculty members into a university, faculty, or department at one time. While Indigenous faculty cluster hiring was
reported by many participants as a common policy initiative, some participants attested to the challenge of hiring Indigenous staff members as their “#1 challenge.” One participant said,

We are not aggressively hiring enough Indigenous staff in my view. I feel like we should almost have an HR person or recruitment person working with the local reserves, and they’re not doing it; they don’t work that way; that’s not part of their idea of how things should be done. You can’t really shift the culture of the institution without people, and we don’t have enough people. We need more people. (Kisi Pisim)

Therefore, while Indigenizing policies have started to shift institutional hiring practices for senior leaders and faculty members, and have created some stability in much needed Indigenous units, they have not necessarily focused enough, according to participants in this study, on hiring more staff members to work in various units across the university.

**Indigenizing Curriculum Without Expertise**

Another policy dilemma that surfaced in this study relates to calls to Indigenize curriculum despite a lack of expertise among most faculty members. Indigenizing policies have certainly contributed to some positive preliminary shifts in curriculum in Canadian universities (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), but approaches vary across the sector and within institutions. Curriculum policy approaches included instituting mandatory undergraduate courses on Indigenous topics (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018); creating required courses within professional programs such as education, medicine, and law; approving policy directives that required integration of a percentage of Indigenous content into specific programs; incentivized funding envelopes to develop learning opportunities for faculty members; and the hiring of Indigenous curriculum advisors to develop and deliver professional development programs.

Participants in this study corroborated previous research reports that pointed to structural, pedagogical, and ideological challenges that surface when instituting Indigenizing curriculum policies (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018b). While participants did not dispute the need to bring
Indigenous perspectives into university teaching and learning, their concerns arose around policy approaches that focused on Indigenizing for the masses rather than on developing Indigenous community-based programs. Several participants also questioned whether an infusion model for Indigenizing the curriculum across the institution would necessarily positively impact Indigenous academic units such as Indigenous Studies. One participant expressed concerns with the hyper-focus on Indigenizing the curriculum for the masses, arguing that it often took attention away from Indigenous students and Indigenous community-based programs, thus re-centering the needs of the dominant white settler group. She said, “I don’t want to talk about whether we have an Indigenous content requirement within the curriculum across all the Faculties. When we focus on this, we forget about the Indigenous learner. We can’t expect everyone to be an expert with Indigenous content and more harm than good is often the result.” (Opaskowi Pisim) This participant also talked about what she thought Indigenization should focus on:

We need to focus on Indigenous resurgence, gathering our bundles, gathering our ceremony, gathering our traditions, gathering our languages, the land, the knowledge, and us becoming healthier. I want to focus on having Indigenous people be successful within these colonial walls so we focus on supporting Indigenous peoples. (Opaskowi Pisim)

She raised questions about broad-based Indigenizing curriculum policy approaches that often, in her opinion, lost sight of Indigenous students and community needs, and ended up centering too much on dominant white settler needs.

Another participant reported that her university’s curriculum policy approach—which required all undergraduate programs within two years to develop, at a minimum, one Indigenous course equivalent—ended up placing a lot of demands on her small Indigenous team. The participant reported that many Faculties at her university were slow to get started on the Indigenous curriculum planning process, and that their lack of understanding of Indigenous
matters and their initial inaction wreaked havoc in her office as faculty members scrambled at the last minute for support. She said,

Our office has developed a suite of resources for faculty to refer to. We hired a graduate student who spent months resourcing texts and readings so that people in all disciplines can turn to this and say, “Oh, wow, there’s Indigenous authored work in my field.” But they have to do the work; I can’t do it for them and obviously just spoon-feed them. (Niski Pisim)

**Institutionalizing Indigeneity and Measuring Success**

In response to increasing calls to Indigenize the academy, participants in the present study reported a growing administrative desire to track and measure Indigenization efforts. This administrative work often involved tracking Indigenous students and workforce, and defining Indigenization outcomes of success. Part of the process inevitably involved tracking Indigenous bodies, and thereby institutionalizing Indigeneity - an already highly contested process tied to politics of evidence and regimes of surveillance that have not historically served Indigenous people (Walter & Anderson, 2013). While Lynn Lavallee (2020) agrees that metrics attached to reconciliation are needed, she argues that the most important metric should be university budgets. Nonetheless, several participants in this study reported an increasing administrative pressure for them not only to track and report Indigenization outcomes, but also to verify Indigenous people’s ancestry claims. These concerns stemmed from cases of ethnic fraud (Flaherty, 2015; Lawford & Coburn, 2019) in which some faculty and staff members falsely claimed Indigenous ancestry to gain access to academic and leadership positions intended for Indigenous people (Sterrit, 2019). Valid community concerns with appropriative issues of ethnic fraud have placed increasing pressure on participants to develop new policies and practices that verify Indigeneity and applicants’ connections to community in order to safeguard against identify fraud.
While Indigenous identity and ancestry verification practices varied across (and even within) universities, they often precipitated debates around authenticity and community belonging. The comments of some participants suggest that some ancestry verification processes capitulated to colonial definitions that relied on government authentication processes (e.g., Indian Status). While some universities went beyond settler colonial definitions by requiring letters from First Nations, Métis, and Inuit organizations to confirm authenticity, or by asking applicants to make positionality statements, and involving Indigenous people in the hiring processes, many participants attested to the struggles of their universities to define consistent institutional verification processes. One participant described the challenges of authenticating community connections by saying that the process calls into question what are you calling the community? Are the only communities the reserves? That’s the only valid Indigenous community? What about all the non-status communities, which are legitimate places? They exist in reality all over the country. It’s more complicated than any of us are wanting to talk about. (Kisi Pisim)

Beyond tensions related to defining and authenticating Indigenous community in faculty and leadership hiring processes, several participants identified escalating calls for tracking and reporting Indigenous people and evaluating Indigenous initiatives overall. Administrative desire to track, count, surveille, and report on Indigenous people in order to be accountable brings forth administrative power relations and historical and ongoing processes that have defined and controlled Indigenous people in troubling ways. One participant shared the administrative challenge she faced when instituting an Indigenous student self-identification process at her university:

I got right on board with the [student] self-identification process, because I wanted the data to build my case, but it was one of the most challenging things I’ve ever done. I should have realized because I have lived experience and know how contentious identity and policy are. It kept me up many nights, I’ll tell you, because there is no agreement; there
were people that really didn’t agree that self-identification was the best route.
(Thithikopiwi Pisim)

This participant admitted to her own administrative desire to track Indigenous students in order to build a stronger case to obtain more institutional resources to serve growing Indigenous needs. She also described the Indigenous community’s concerns around colonial surveillance that surfaced in the Indigenous student self-identification policy development process, concerns which contributed to several Indigenous people disputing and not participating in the process altogether. Her dilemma revealed how a government bill to gather personal information from institutions raised new Indigenous community concerns that interfered with the participation process.

Other participants expressed concerns with how emerging faculty ancestry verification processes differed from Indigenous student self-identification processes. Many Indigenous student processes rely on self-declaration whereas emerging staff and faculty hiring verification processes are more comprehensive, requiring applicants to provide positionality statements and, sometimes, support documents. One participant questioned the policy inconsistencies and worried about how some institutions were narrowly relying on documents that might exclude vulnerable disenfranchised Indigenous populations. She argued:

You can’t draw those hard and fast lines between faculty, staff, and students when you start talking about self-identification or ancestry. In the end, you are going to involve the students in that. Some of us are saying, “Well, we’re only talking about keeping frauds out of the job.” What I’m most concerned about actually is the injustice I can see happening out of trying to create a rigid hard fast line about this stuff. (Opawahicikianasis)

This participant underscores the unintended and negative consequences of institutionalizing policies around Indigeneity in ways that may not critically interrogate colonial definitions, and may have unintended oppressive impacts. Expanding on what she meant by injustice, she added:
There are thousands and thousands of Indigenous adoptees out there or if they weren’t adopted they went to the foster child system. They truly don’t know anything and they’re the first to admit that. Many have no way of reconnecting even with their own family. They might reconnect to a community and they may not be able to. (Kisi Pisim)

This participant highlighted the violent lineage of colonial Indian policies in Canada—such as the Sixties Scoop—and how the consequences continue to linger and impact Indigenous people’s sense of Indigeneity as well as their connections to and disconnections from Indigenous communities. She also underscored the ways that Indigenous people have been disenfranchised from community, land, and place inter-generationally, and how many Indigenous people are only now reconnecting. She further questioned how institutionalizing Indigeneity too narrowly within the university can inadvertently reproduce patriarchal white sovereignty, ideologies, and racial constructs that reproduce settler colonial systems of power, and negatively impact more vulnerable segments of the Indigenous population such as disenfranchised Indigenous people. Thus, normative administrative ideologies about measuring institutional success using evidence-based approaches emerge as a tension, and point to deeper questions around measuring success in ethical and culturally-relevant ways that observe Indigenous data sovereignty.

**Settler Colonial Desire to Coopt**

On the opposite end of the spectrum, many Indigenizing policy enactments were criticized by participants in this study for being too broad and, thereby, open to settler cooptation. Arguably, the axiom “nothing about us without us” emerged out of an Indigenous push-back against the rise of settler colonial cooptation in the reconciliation movement in Canada. Several participants talked candidly about witnessing Indigenizing policies in their universities being taken up problematically by self-proclaimed non-Indigenous allies who did not have the knowledge, expertise, and networks to enact Indigenizing policy work. They often shared examples of ways in which Indigenous people were cut out of directing Indigenizing
policy solutions, yet they were still often turned to by non-Indigenous policy actors to help implement predetermined and often short-sighted policy initiatives. Some participants attested to an observed influx of non-Indigenous people requesting institutional resources to advance their careers under the semblance of Indigenization and reconciliation. This type of cooptation was a prickly point for many participants, because the policy approaches often infringed on Indigenous educational sovereignty and obstructed the placement of Indigenous people in decision-making positions. Participants reported that these cooptative tendencies sometimes resulted from universities advancing Indigenizing policies without establishing strong systems and structures to place Indigenous units and leaders in positions of power, a move which could prevent settler cooptation. The reported rise of settler cooptation of Indigenizing policies in universities created deep frustration among some Indigenous participants in this study, and a feeling that Indigenizing policies were being taken advantage of and not necessarily benefiting the Indigenous people the policies were meant to serve. One participant said,

Indigenization is being coopted by a colonial system that is now using that terminology and saying that they’re Indigenizing and all it is is an assimilation project. If anybody wants to Indigenize, then they need to have an Indigenous team making their own decisions and working and operating alongside and making their own negotiations with equal authority and power within the organization. (Nimitahomowi Pisim)

Here the participant shares her view of the inequitable power dynamics that emerge when Indigenization policies are taken up without Indigenous people in positions of power, or by non-Indigenous people who lack the cultural knowledge, networks, credibility, and expertise to lead and effectively implement policy aims. Another participant described her office being cut out of an initiative when she questioned the good intentions of a colleague. The incident resulted in a problematic settler cooptation:

How much do they [non-Indigenous peoples] have to work with Indigenous peoples? And there’s never any clear guidelines about what constitutes that work that they can do on their
own. So I’ll give you an example. An equity project was being led by a white woman and so she did all the planning with a small group of people—invited students, faculty and decided amongst that small group. I was never consulted and it was supposed to be [equity]. So I wrote and asked them, where’s the Indigenous piece and all this and so forth, but they contacted some Indigenous students and slid it past my office, with a view that they felt that I’m always burdened by all these requests so they thought they’d just do it themselves. That creates this kind of, oh, so you want them [non-Indigenous peoples] to do that work, but at the same time we tell them that’s not okay. You still need to let me know what you’re doing because I’m still the senior Indigenous lead and this office is trying to coordinate all these things, right. Do you see, so its kind of like they still are able to control, they’re still controlling the talk that happens by excluding some key people and using the people that are more vulnerable and who don’t have much power in the system to say anything. They excluded myself and my office, who are in a much better position to kind of stand up and resist stuff. (Opawahcikianasis)

This participant points out a lack of policy guidelines that could have helped mitigate settler cooptation in Indigenizing policy enactment processes. She also pointed to the powerful role of policy actors’ positionalities in policy enactment processes, and further made important distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous policy actors’ power and privilege, and even between different types of positions that Indigenous policy actors may hold. She distinguished power relations between an Indigenous academic administrator, for example, and an Indigenous student. From her perspective, policy actors’ positionalities in relation to settler colonial and institutional power need to be reflected upon in nuanced and ongoing ways.

Another participant shared an experience of working with a “well intended” non-Indigenous colleague who ended up creating a lot of extra work for her.

So, someone who knows a little bit about Indigenous issues and people and has a genuine interest in the area and sees the need and gaps and wants to do something. So, he sends me an email with this idea and wants to gather all of the people of the university working on anything. Sounds great, right? (laughter) However, it’s not quite as easy as it sounds. First of all, [Indigenous people] didn’t like that it was a non-Indigenous person directing the enterprise. He dropped the whole idea after two quite acrimonious meetings with them. So, let’s just pop out and do this and that it’s just a lot of well-meaning people who are trying to make a difference and to support Indigenous projects and just ends up making a lot of work for us. (Kisi Pisim)
This story highlights the troubling ways that some Indigenous women administrators became engrossed in settler colonial desires to move toward resettlement and reconcile settler guilt and complicity rather than attend to Indigenous educational sovereignty. These moves were often led by well-intentioned non-Indigenous people in ways that advanced a “politics of distraction” (Smith, 2003)—a colonizing process that involves the colonizer keeping Indigenous people busy with trivial things that end up reproducing settler privilege and not serving Indigenous educational needs. While this non-Indigenous policy actor may not have been fully aware of how he or she was resettling settler colonialism and contributing to a politic of distraction, the Indigenous administrator was nevertheless pulled into the messy policy enactment process. In this case, good intentions were riddled with the trickiness of settler colonial power relations that kept settlers in power and reproduced dynamics that placed Indigenous people in subordinate positions. These policy related consequences place extra demands on Indigenous administrators in the academy and take their limited time and attention away from leading more strategic and proactive work based in Indigenous community needs.

The Limits of Policy Enactment

Participants in this study often talked about the inhibitive nature of enacting Indigenizing policy within existing academic systems, including governance structures. One of the most pervasive structures limiting Indigenous educational sovereignty in decision-making is the complex and decentralized bicameral governance system of the university and its ties to the nation state. While there have been calls for decolonial Indigenization in the area of university governance (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Lavallee, 2019; Staples et al, 2018), including calls to increase Indigenous participation on, for example, student councils, Senate, and Boards of Governors, participants reported that universities were slow to make structural changes.
University unwillingness to create seats on Boards of Governors had in some cases been justified because of unwillingness to open up the University Act (a unique piece of provincial legislation that grants universities power to operate as both a public institution that receives government funding and as a corporate enterprise that may generate funding). While many new senior Indigenous administrators had membership on Senate, they were generally non-voting members, a status that was criticized as tokenistic and insufficient (Lavallee, 2019). Thus, under the current academic structure, Indigenous people continued to lack decision-making capacity in academic matters.

A related barrier that participants reported as limiting Indigenous participation in decision-making was the creation of an increasing number of Indigenous advisory committees, including short-term TRC committees put in place to support the implementation of TRC calls to action. In many cases, participants recognized the increase in Indigenous advisory committees as a positive development, because those committees often engaged local Indigenous communities in university affairs. While such groups were recognized for bringing new and diverse perspectives to the table, participants also observed that these committees heavily relied on university leadership to ensure meaningful engagement. Many stressed that advisory committees lacked decision-making authority. As one participant said, Indigenous Advisory Councils “don’t have the authority to really change any of the systems or any of the policies or any of the practices. They’re just advising you as to what’s going on across the country” (Pimahamowi Pisim). Several participants agreed that while universities have been slowly opening up and shifting their practices to become more engaged and answerable to Indigenous communities, Indigenous advisory groups were still seen as limited in their decision-making capacities and not necessarily respected in leadership circles.
Several participants critically questioned Indigenous senior leadership roles and, more specifically, where those roles were located in the university hierarchy. Several participants talked candidly about how organizational structures and their positions within them mattered and impacted their abilities to enact Indigenizing policies. While participants’ titles, positions in the academic hierarchy, and experiences varied, participants often spoke about the complexities of driving decolonial Indigenization within existing academic settings. They talked about how administrative roles were highly structured and how the organizational hierarchy impacted their credibility and experiences navigating the academy. Several participants talked about challenges they faced as Indigenous staff-administrators (e.g., as Executive Directors and Vice Presidents) trying to enact academic-related policies and strategies when they did not have academic credentials or research experience. Some participants who were academics expressed concerns around Indigenous staff-administrative appointments, because they felt that the staff administrators did not have the same security and protection as academic administrators with tenured faculty appointments (e.g., Vice Provosts, Associate Vice Provosts). Finally, several participants questioned the unique challenges and viability of Special Advisors and lead positions in universities. One participant spoke about her experiences as a Special Advisor: “I’m seeing the limitations of the advisor role because I’m not included in the senior meetings. The reason they are saying is [that] I’m not a permanent position. I am being blocked from certain discussions” (Thithikopiwi Pisim). This participant underscores the tricky space of navigating a temporary position such as a Special Advisor, being sometimes excluded from senior meetings and not always accepted by other administrators as “the leader” because she occupied an interim role.
The themes presented in this chapter demonstrate how underlying academic structures continue to constrain the ways in which Indigenizing policies are enacted by Indigenous women administrators within current academic systems. That system is fundamentally a Euro-Westernized structure of disciplines and policies that are taken for granted and invisibilized, but which privilege white settler colonial male-centric ideologies that often leave Indigenous women’s voices on the margins of decision-making processes. While some Indigenous people—some individual administrators and some faculty members—may be gaining access to these spaces, they are not the norm, and access is arguably limited as they continue to struggle to find voice, legitimacy, and credibility. Indigenizing policy enactment processes, therefore, are severely limited within the existing university governance system where structures continue to obstruct Indigenous people in their attempts to assert Indigenous educational sovereignty.

Recognizing the powerful role of policy in universities, participants in this study demonstrated how they strategically claimed policies as tools to Indigenize the academy and pursue a decolonial reform movement in higher education. At the same time, however, participants commonly attested to facing ongoing challenges in putting Indigenizing policy promises into practice. They attested to institutional tendencies toward tokenistic approaches, and how policy implementation was often messy, contested, and political in practice. While participants commonly described Indigenizing policies as useful tools in asserting decolonial aims, they simultaneously highlighted, throughout their stories, the limits of Indigenizing policies as they were often taken up in tricky fields of practice where white possessive logics ensued and crept around many corners. Participants also shared common experiences that resulted in policy dilemmas for Indigenous people such as increased workload and Indigenous underrepresentation, increased calls to Indigenize curriculum without Indigenous people and
expertise, and increased pressure to institutionalize Indigeneity and measure success under colonial administrative conditions. The limitations of Indigenizing policy enactments often pointed back to incommensurabilities in achieving Indigenous educational sovereignty. Indigenizing policies, therefore, are not a panacea. While Indigenizing policies may be a useful tool in shifting toward decolonial aims, Indigenous people continue to struggle in advancing their collectivist values and autonomous decision-making within the white liberal settler colonial academy.
CHAPTER 8

Weesakechahk Draws a Line

Appearing in the interstices, Weesakechahk defies binaries and the colonial boundaries of institutionally demarcated space and power. An infamous mischievous misfit, a willful subject, and a rule bender who disrupts settler colonial common sense and structure, interrupts taken-for-granted truths, and brings old and new ways of thinking into everyday consciousness and practice, Weesakechahk continues to be one of the greatest teachers.

Two overarching research questions remain to be answered: How do Indigenous women administrators encounter the settler colonial academy, and how can Indigenous women administrators contest and resist settler colonialism in their educational leadership and policy work? The concept of “Indigenous refusal” (Grande, 2018; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2019) is used in this chapter to explain the limits of the settler colonial academy, and the needs of Indigenous women administrators in asserting boundaries that advance Indigenous educational sovereignty in higher education.

Dangerous Working Conditions

Literature indicates that Indigenous people working to change the university operate on a “shaky bridge” (Bunda et al, 2012). Several participants in the present study shared accounts of the dangers of working on a bridge as a borderland in between the settler colonial academy and Indigenous communities. Indigenous women administrators in this study operated on a borderland facing dangerous working conditions shaped by the triple bind of settler colonialism, hetero-patriarchy, and borderland work that meet and intersect, often placing Indigenous women administrators in challenging positions, which forced them to resist their own oppression. This resistance often took the form of “Indigenous refusal” (Grande, 2018; Simpson, 2014; Tuck & Yang, 2019), a concept which helps to explain Indigenous resistance to the settler colonial academy. The need to resist calls upon Weesakechahk, trickster consciousness. Fictionalized
stories inspired by the participants’ experiences (Chapter 5) illustrate some of these refusals. In dramatic scene 7 (p.110), Heather gets embroiled in an administrative hiring fiasco that results in university administrators expecting her to help manage Indigenous political unrest (another Indigenous refusal). The situation forces Heather to stand up against the administration’s settler colonial nature and refuse to participate in the management of ‘Indian problems.’ In these scenes, Weesakechahk helps to speak Heather’s inner voice and explicate the dominant Euro-Western norms placed upon her, showing her how these tendencies not only place her in a difficult intermediary position, but how they obstruct Indigenous educational sovereignty. The dramatic scenes in Chapter 5 are intended to illustrate the resonant experiences several participants in this study shared, experiences related to leading Indigenizing policy work within a white settler colonial space—a space that has historically displaced, erased, and strived to eliminate Indigenous people and ways of knowing, replacing those ways of knowing with an imposed settler colonial architecture and intellectual border. Heather’s mere presence in this administrative space interrupts the settler colonial status quo. As the first Indigenous Vice Provost of her university, she is figuratively situated on the borderland in between Indigenous communities and Euro-Western university communities. In other dramatic scenes, characters like Maria are also situated here, celebrated as beacons of their university’s ability to achieve reconciliation. Yet participants commonly testified, as Heather did, to being painfully marked and troubled as out of place, strangers in academic administrative spaces. Heather’s experiences are accentuated by the ominous physicality of the university campus and of Convocation Hall which appears like an invasive structure, both a physical and an intellectual structure that erases Indigenous women’s voices and presence and aims to thwart Indigenous resistance through management logics. Weesakechahk appears in the space in between, in goose form,
foreshadowing a looming Indigenous student protest on administration’s hands—a collective enactment of Indigenous refusal to be silent and accept denial of Indigenous voice and agency in educational decision-making processes. Indeed, Indigenous refusals figured prominently in participants’ stories in multiple and complex thematic ways such as: (a) refusing settler reconciliation discourses; (b) refusing settler notions of leadership; (c) refusing settler co-optation, tokenism, and politics of distraction; and, (d) refusing performative approaches.

Refusing Settler Reconciliation Discourses

Several participants in this study reported on negotiating complex institutional discourses in their leadership, especially around their use of key concepts such as reconciliation, Indigenization, decolonization, and resurgence. Several participants outright refused to use the word ‘reconciliation’ in their leadership communications. For many, the term reconciliation has, like the term decolonization, became metaphorized, abstracted, and co-opted by settler colonial “moves toward innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012) that it effectively dodges the messy and uncomfortable conversations around power, colonialism, and racism which they argue are necessary to enact “decolonial-Indigenization” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018). Co-optation is a colonizing trick that is used, Tuck & Yang (2012) have suggested, to evade decolonial possibilities and alleviate settler guilt and complicity with ongoing settler colonialism systems. As one participant described it,

I question [my use of the term reconciliation] because reconciliation is not my work as I’ve come to understand it. Reconciliation is the work of settlers. My work is the work of resurgence. Resurgence is raising up our ways of knowing and being, our languages, our culture, our traditions, our spirituality, our governance – that’s always been what informs everything I am and everything I do. And in between here, that’s where Indigenization happens in the university; but I also think that’s where decolonization happens. Indigenization cannot happen without decolonization. (Mikisiwi Pisim)
While the use of reconciliation discourse was critiqued by many participants, some confessed to strategically employing it when driving institutional change processes with non-Indigenous settlers in the academy. One participant attested:

There’s lots of critiques of reconciliation at the theoretical level and also at the practice level. But in my own experience of working in the university, reconciliation has opened up spaces, conversations and opportunities in ways that other discourses and frameworks and processes of decolonization have not. My feelings are that reconciliation has been able to mobilize in ways that decolonization has not in the past. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

This participant highlights the powerful nature of reconciliation discourses in inciting institutional change, especially when universities are dominated by white settlers. In the same conversation, however, this participant recognized the pitfalls and limits of reconciliation discourses:

So [reconciliation] could also be a problematic space that some people are coming into and feeling good about themselves, because they can support this, because it’s about reconciliation. So if I invite people into a space of reconciliation, people can come. But when I start to do it through a decolonization framework, and I say you are complicit in the theft of land and colonialism, and I bring that into it, immediately then you can start to see a backing away of people. So I think about these processes of reconciliation, decolonization and Indigenization as related. They can occur together and in different ways and at different times. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

She points to the strategic utility of the word reconciliation for getting settlers to the table even though later she says that she often pivoted her approach to introducing decolonial understandings. Several participants attested to using reconciliation rationales to obtain financial support from institutions. While reconciliation discourses were deliberately used by several Indigenous leaders, many participants still felt ambivalent about using the word, as the term had become increasingly critiqued and dangerously co-opted by many non-Indigenous settlers. As one participant said,

I don’t want to talk about reconciliation. Like reconciliation is not possible for me. Reconciliation has become a distraction and it’s become a bureaucracy within the academy kind of like within the government. So, reconciliation is becoming a checkbox.
Indigenization is a checkbox. So, I think using the terminology Indigenization, reconciliation and decolonization is a distraction. Indigenous resurgence is about us gathering our bundles, gathering our ceremony, gathering our traditions, gathering our languages, the land and becoming healthier. (Opaskowi Pisim)

Sara Ahmed’s (2012) critique of the language of diversity in the context of universities in the United Kingdom can be applied to the discourses of reconciliation, Indigenization, and decolonization in Canadian universities. In this context, these ubiquitous terms have become discursive moves and techniques used by institutions to institute speech acts and manage Indigenous difference. Several participants talked about their refusal to engage with such discourses, and even to use the word reconciliation to describe their approach and institutional work. One talked about the need for more nuanced understandings of terms based on one’s positionality:

I have nothing invested in Indigenizing the academy. I have everything invested in decolonizing the university, and I have everything invested in Indigenizing my classroom, and the spaces that I work in, because I don’t think that everyone can Indigenize, but I think everyone can decolonize. I think only Indigenous people can truly Indigenize and so I struggle a bit with the language, but it’s not a hill I’m going to die on. (Athiki Pisim)

This participant not only underscores the complicated nature of language and concepts and their lineages and discursive uses, she also shows how these terms are understood differently at personal and organizational levels, and how one’s positionality dramatically shapes one’s orientation. She recognizes the limitations to the university Indigenizing at an organizational level.

Refusing Settler Notions of Leadership

While Indigenous women administrators described refusing to use certain terminology in their leadership, they also described refusing to succumb to white settler desires for neutrality in their leadership. One participant said,
I feel more like some administrators are not happy when I am not supporting the ivory tower. But once you are in that role, they have their own club and all of a sudden it’s assumed that your sole allegiance is actually to move their collective agenda forward versus moving an Indigenous agenda forward. They get upset because most of us aren’t operating that way, and they feel we’re traitors. (Nimitahamowi Pisim)

This participant talked about the unspoken expectation of some senior administrators in the academy that Indigenous leaders should advance the overall mission of the university and succumb to the dominant institutional project. Arguably, this norm in leadership emanates from a structural functionalist epistemology in leadership and organizational change that strives toward efficiency and effectiveness (Capper, 2019) and operates within a bureaucratic notion of change.

Another participant shared a story about being challenged for being too political in her leadership:

> So I go into the [senior leadership meeting] and I read off [the Indigenous plan] very slowly and very softly because I already know that as a brown woman I am threatening as hell and I have to curb that as much as I can, otherwise I won’t get buy-in. So I spoke sweetly. So one of my colleagues said, “Don’t you think you would have greater buy-in if you didn’t use such political language?” And I said, “Excuse me, sir, but we are talking about colonialism and oppression and domination and white supremacy. All of these terms are political. There is no nice way to talk about them.” (Ohpahowi Pisim)

Later, this participant called the desire to depoliticize policy language a form of “whitewashing”:

> No matter how we code terms to talk with them—and before we say anything in reference to their questions, we have already decoded it five different ways—we have watered it down. We have softened it up. We have taken the ‘aggression’ out. By the time it comes out, it’s been whitewashed. I find this frustrating ‘cause no matter how much you’ve whitewashed it they still come back and say you are so aggressive. (Ohpahowi Pisim)

She points out that the intersectional power of colonialism, gender, and racism shape the ways she is often heard by other administrators, and she admits that she adjusts her communications by speaking softly in order to not be heard as aggressive. At the same time, when a senior leader questions a policy’s “political language,” she refuses to change certain words such as racism to something less threatening because to do so is to accommodate white dominance. Ahmed (2012)
has noted that the politics of language often play out in diversity policy work in universities because certain words are more acceptable than others—the word diversity, for example, is much less threatening than racism or anti-racism. Ahmed (2007) argues that institutions use the language of diversity over the language of anti-racism to conceal the structurally embedded inequities and evade action as a useful neoliberal technique of government. Participants in the present study attested to preferences in administration for the word reconciliation over decolonization. The term reconciliation is a common institutional buzzword, whereas decolonization is often framed as divisive and questioned by university administration.

While the participant quoted above modified some of her communication to appease a settler common sense desire to be happy and celebratory in leadership, she still confronted attempts to further neutralize the policy language. These institutional tendencies are tied to underlying assumptions based in structural functionalist and interpretivist epistemologies prevalent in organizational change and leadership research, assumptions that power is evenly distributed within white liberal meritocratic systems rather than structured on systemic inequities (Capper, 2019). White settler uneasiness with naming the colonial problem in educational systems, and the politics of disciplinary structures, policies, and norms, create roadblocks for Indigenous leaders trying to change the university system to be more inclusive of Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing. Under such structural functionalist and interpretivist frames, the goal of Indigenizing policy is not to change the system and the underlying ideologies that shape it but to include Indigenous peoples superficially and reproduce apolitical notions of education and maintain Euro-Western dominance. Such a goal to improve the existing educational system’s image and its efficiencies and effectiveness might include Indigenous peoples at a representational level, but only based on conditional forms of inclusion. These hegemonic
administrative norms place Indigenous women administrators who refuse them on dangerous ground. Under such colonial conditions, Indigenous women administrators who push back against norms become problematic – they become a problem when they name and resist the [colonial] problem (Ahmed, 2017, p. 39).

**Refusing Settler Co-Optation**

Indigenous women administrators in this study described white settlers co-opting Indigenizing policies in ways that did not advance Indigenous educational sovereignty or benefit Indigenous people. Through co-optative processes, some white settlers subsumed Indigenizing policy interests into their own work agendas. According to several participants, white settler co-optation was most pervasive in the area of research and curriculum. Many new researchers do not understand their ethical responsibilities to Indigenous communities. One participant reported that she was often expected to automatically open up her networks to help non-Indigenous researchers gain access to Indigenous communities for their own research purposes. She drew on the Tri-Council Policy chapter nine to assert boundaries as an Indigenous refusal:

> The community engagement of chapter nine is there for a reason. I say, “If you don’t have the connections, don’t do the work.” I refuse to do that engagement for somebody and help non-Indigenous peoples get money for their research. (Opaskowi Pisim)

Several participants spoke of times in their careers and in their administrative roles when they felt used by non-Indigenous researchers who invited them to be involved in research in tokenistic ways. They described becoming much warier of getting involved in preplanned research projects led by some non-Indigenous scholars with whom did not have longstanding records or previous working relationships with Indigenous people.

In more nuanced ways, some participants described settler co-optation as an inner struggle to not be overtaken by a “politics of distraction” (Smith, 2003) within their leadership.
Participants expressed a sense of threat that ongoing colonial desires in education could condition them and invade their administrative priorities. For example, some participants reported struggling with a fear of being co-opted under settler colonial institutional tendencies. Their concerns emanated from pressures arising from the academic system itself as well as from non-Indigenous colleagues who pressured them to conform (code switch) to hegemonic ways of leading. One participant attested:

>You have to learn how to talk. If we go into a university and say, “We want to change the whole system to accommodate us,” they’re going to say, “No.” Because it’s not our system, it’s theirs. And so that’s the big argument we’re involved in right now . . . where’s the line? So you know, the western administration, the white administration will put forward a line and say, “This is as far as we are willing to go.” But maybe our line is another couple leagues past that. We’re like, “Well, actually, we would really like to go here.” But they [say], let’s get to this line first, and then, we’ll pitch the rest. Because we can’t – you know just say, “No, okay fine, I’m not doing it.” (Pimahamowi Pisim)

This participant describes her leadership in Indigenizing the university as a ball game - a progression of negotiations and compromises within a system that is not hers and in which she acknowledges she is not in a position of power. Several participants described their leadership as “playing the game”—as sometimes involving what Graham Smith would describe in his conversation with Margaret Kovach as “strategic concessions” (Kovach, 2009). A strategic concession may be finding room to advance Indigenous priorities in the university by fitting into government reconciliation agendas. Under such pretenses, Indigenous women administrators found themselves facing the common “interest convergence dilemma”\(^1\) (Bell, 1980) in which white settler interests still controlled and negated Indigenous initiatives. While fruitful synergisms between Indigenous and university initiatives were sometimes generated, the act of

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\(^1\) Black legal scholar and critical race theorist, Derrick Bell first coined the concept “interest convergence” to demonstrate how only when white and black interests converged, did the civil rights of black people in the United States get recognized in law. I suggest that similar interest convergence issues play out in reconciliation policies between settlers and Indigenous peoples in Canada when observing Indigenous rights.
trying to align within and fit into pre-established academic structures and priorities pointed to troubling ways in which Indigenous initiatives were limited, thus reinforcing problematic and conditional forms of inclusion. One participant attested to the issue:

> Personally, I think a lot of our [Indigenous] students are being lost within the reconciliation movement, because we are not attending to their needs and aspirations. You know, we are not creating a safe learning environment. Consider mandatory courses; we don’t have enough Indigenous people to teach the courses. If we place an Indigenous person in the course, they are going to experience violence, and possibly be traumatized. But if we place a non-Indigenous person, and they don’t critically take up their positionality that can create all sorts of power dynamics in the classroom. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)

The struggle of aligning Indigenous initiatives also often pointed to deeper epistemic tensions and structural inequities that exist for Indigenous people operating within the settler colonial university. For example, pre-determined priority areas were often rooted in Euro-Western thought, positivistic, evidence-based regimes, and neoliberal forces that were not only incongruent with Indigenous ways of knowing but that placed them in asymmetrical power relations. Simply fitting Indigenous initiatives into existing academic structures was not necessarily conducive to achieving Indigenous decolonial aims and advancing Indigenous educational sovereignty.

Several participants talked about large-scale institutional strategies in Indigenizing the academy that often catered to the dominant white settler masses rather than to Indigenous students and community needs. One participant explained:

> When we think about the settler focus that reconciliation has taken, in ways that have shifted the focus away from Indigenous students. I’m going to use teacher education and our required [Indigenous] course as an example, which is really about shifting attitudes and the knowledge of largely settler dominant classrooms. When we need to be thinking about the journey and furthering the journey of our Indigenous students. And furthering that journey is their own resurgence, their own reclamation and self-determination. Their journey for themselves and their communities. (Kaskatinowi Pisim)
Another example was shared by a participant who talked about the resistance she faced from a non-Indigenous administrator concerning an Indigenous project the participant was leading. A Dean at this participant’s university challenged her Indigenous research strategy, because, the Dean felt, it “silenced non-Indigenous faculty members doing Indigenous research.” The Indigenous leader pushed back against the Dean’s framing of the issue by deconstructing the ways in which the Euro-Western university automatically silences and marginalizes Indigenous researchers and Indigenous ways of knowing, and through these structures of inequity disadvantages Indigenous researchers, thus reinforcing the need for some strategies to focus on Indigenous researchers. This example demonstrates that the systemic nature of settler colonialism in the academy remains invisible, that settlers aim to re-center white settler majoritarian needs, and that these issues in turn can quickly undermine privileging Indigenous scholars needs.

Scenes 6 and 7 (p. 108-126) illustrate a similar issue in which the perceived threat of an Indigenous student protest gets administration’s attention and brings particular administrators to the table to manage the situation. The discourse around the table, however, quickly turns to administration’s desire to manage the “Indian problem,” and surfaces troubling colonial and racial ideologies associated with the perceived primitive edge of protest and its misperception of disruption within a white settler lens. The response to a protest as an Indian problem to be managed reflects an administrative tendency to control the situation in order to maintain institutional power, a response in which Heather becomes complexly entangled. Behind closed doors, Heather is expected to advise on how to control Indigenous refusals as problems—how to control the public narrative and defuse and redirect disruption, and to be the token spokesperson with the media. At the same time, however, Indigenous students and communities turn to
Heather to advocate for Indigenous voices and needs. These conflicting expectations place Heather, in different ways, on tricky ground. The tensions created by differing expectations accentuate colonial power and epistemic distances between Indigenous and Westernized worlds; they leave Heather ready to implode, until she stands up, draws a line, and speaks her truth.

Refusing Settler Colonial Tokenism

Several participants in this study reported openly refusing to participate in certain university activities that undermined Indigenous voices and agency. In one example, a participant described being invited to join a committee. Upon arriving at the first meeting, she realized that the committee was led by a corporate industrial entity which had troubling relations with First Nations communities. It appeared to her that the senior leader who had invited her to join the committee was motivated by tokenism. After realizing this, and sensing the decolonial limits of the committee itself, she excused herself, and refused to be part of a photograph for the media. She described the experience as a classic example of colonial tokenism - the desire for Indigenous representation but only for a single marginalized voice with little power. One participant talked about resisting becoming a token because it would be tantamount to becoming a manipulative prop for her supervisor, a senior leader who constantly sought the participant’s advice but never acted on it, yet still presented decisions in a way that left people with the impression that the Indigenous leader supported the decisions. As a way to refuse this problematic tokenism, the participant explained to everyone in one meeting that she was not in agreement with the direction taken by the senior administrator. After she did this, the administrator’s “jaw kind of dropped,” she said, “and that was actually when [my supervisor] stopped talking to me” (Nimitahamowi Pisim).
Other participants shared similar stories about how they refused settler colonial tokenism by refusing to be involved in or support problematic research guided by researchers who did not properly educate themselves about or work authentically to serve and build mutually beneficial partnerships with Indigenous communities. In these cases, participants simply refused to collaborate or actively support these research projects.

**Refusing Performative Approaches**

Several participants in this study talked about refusing to participate in symbolic approaches to Indigenization that were often nested within problematic neoliberal and neocolonial university practices. At least three participants talked explicitly about actively refusing “business as usual” public affairs communications approaches related to Indigenization.

One participant acknowledged that her “talking to the media made [administration] nervous. I let [senior administration] know, and they wanted me to have my messaging vetted through the [President’s office] and I didn’t do that. There was this unwritten rule and I was not playing” (Athiki Pisim). Another participant said she disliked the ways in which her university’s public affairs office operated, explaining that she tried working with her public affairs office to push back against their problematic practices. She explained: “[I said to them] these types [of communication changes] need to happen and, no, we’re not going to praise ourselves, no, we’re not going to say we’re reconciling because that’s impossible until justice can overturn itself from the inside” (Niski Pisim). Another participant recognized the tricky space within which she operated when she talked to the media:

The media contacted me and all of a sudden I started talking about my work but I was talking to the media and I was very aware of how I could be framed, and how my voice was suddenly speaking from this role, and I felt like I was in the twilight zone because I realized that I can’t say the same things, or at least I felt like I couldn’t say the same things. I had to tone it down a little. (Thithikopiwi- Pisim)
This participant highlighted the challenges of navigating her administrative leadership position when talking to the public, and of managing and anticipating potential media misrepresentations. She also touched upon the delicate balance of representing both the university and maintaining her own independent voice as an Indigenous woman and scholar. Several participants shared stories about continuing to assert their own voices as Indigenous leaders by participating in collective public letter writing, policy development and using their political voices to advocate for broader systemic change.

**Strategic Employment**

Indigenous refusals sometimes took on subtler forms which would avoid the negative colonial and racialized stereotypes and discrediting that often accompanied them. Because the ground of the borderland is so contentious, several participants described negotiating their refusals in nuanced ways, an often unseen and underestimated dimension of their leadership work. As part of this negotiation, they carefully and critically assessed each situation and each potential refusal as an infraction with implications, weighing out risks and benefits, and considering whether the issue was a “hill worth dying on.” (Athiki Pisim) As one participant said,

> Initially, I would be offended that I wasn’t drawn into a conversation that I thought was important, or had some relevance to me or my work or my staff. But eventually I just thought – how much fighting should I . . . I mean I’m not afraid of a good fight, if it’s necessary. But I mean assessing things became a natural response. So on a scale of 1 to 10, how significant is this particular issue? Should I say something or hold my peace? (Opawahcikianasis)

Another participant said, “So you have to pick your battles: Okay I’ll let that one go, this one, I’m going to stand. You have to be conscious all the time” (Pimahamowi Pisim). While this participant underscores the process of strategically assessing whether a refusal is necessary, examples of discreet Indigenous refusals commonly involved ignoring bad advice from senior
colleagues, participating in social action but not necessarily taking the lead position, sharing non-confidential information with appropriate people, and giving advice to Indigenous and allied groups who were on the front line of resistance work. One participant shared a story about being discouraged by a senior administrative colleague from proceeding with an Indigenous strategy. He encouraged her to focus on one or two smaller objectives within her “overly ambitious” plan. To justify not taking his advice, the participant talked about her refusal as simply carrying on with her work with the support of the Indigenous Education Council:

So that’s how I pushed back; I just carried on. Sometimes you get advice from senior people above you and you have to make a decision whether you are going to change the plan and only focus on only one or two or carry on, and so sometimes you just carry on because that’s what the Council wants. (Opawahcikianasis)

Another way in which participants enacted more discreet Indigenous refusals was by finding good allies who supported their efforts and were willing to refuse alongside them; refusing collectively was stronger and less risky than refusing individually, and Indigenous women recognized how sometimes non-Indigenous settlers were heard better than them. A more subtle form of refusal involved mentoring Indigenous people and offering them advice about how to navigate their own refusal processes. One participant described this type of work as “softly supporting the fight.” (Opiniyawiwi Pisim) A final example of an implicit type of Indigenous refusal involved strategically inviting outside Indigenous scholars or leaders to the university to give advice on a project and encouraging them to say the difficult things administrators at their university needed to hear. In these instances, participants drew on the collective power of Indigenous voices in the larger movement, including voices of students, faculty members, and community partners, to work together strategically to refuse and call on the university to change. These nuanced understandings of resistance operated at collective levels and start to shift conventional understandings of leadership away from individualized and positional conceptions.
(e.g., one Indigenous administrator responsible for leading and refusing the system alone) toward collective Indigenous conceptions of leadership.

**Refusal as Opting out of Administration**

In some cases, Indigenous women administrators refused the university by leaving their administrative appointments altogether. These cases were often linked to particularly toxic environments where leaders felt they had no other choice. Indeed, one-third of the participants in this study left their administrative positions at some point. While some of these participants stayed in academe and even at their own university as faculty members, others left the academy altogether or moved to other universities.

Several participants referred to two prominent and public cases in Canada in which two Indigenous women senior administrators left their universities and went public with their experiences (Alex, 2018; Kay, 2018; Prokopchuk, 2018). One participant said,

> Those resignations are happening because people are going into an institution with certain expectations. If you look at a [university’s] strategic plan, you think, “Wow, there must be some great non-Indigenous people there driving that.” But you [get there and realize] you can’t be a token. (Opaskowi Pisim)

This participant pointed to discrepancies between what her university displayed in their policy and public affairs statements and what she experienced in her own life as an Indigenous leader at the university. She argued that incongruences between institutional speech acts and Indigenous experiences contributed to her resignation and, she suspected, likely contributed to the resignations of other women at other universities. Another participant described her decision to depart from her administrative appointment in this way:

> I’m okay with walking away from these things, and I think they were stunned. Why would you walk away from this super duper fancy club because this is the best thing since sliced bread? It’s like, no, it’s not. I think it’s partly because at the end of the day I go home. At the end of the day, we go home and there is no difference [in Indigenous communities]. (Nimitahamowi Pisim)
This particular participant’s narrative demonstrates that some Indigenous leaders struggled with the divergence and inequities between Indigenous communities and Westernized university contexts. Another participant insisted that she experienced such a stark contrast between these two worlds that she needed to walk away from the university role altogether. This participant talked similarly about her decision to leave her administrative appointment to return to her First Nations community and lend her leadership to do land-based resurgence work:

I think it was just [that] I had enough. I was ready for a change. I think that was the biggest reason. I just wanted some openness to do something different. I don’t think my heart was in it anymore. I didn’t want to be in an admin role so I left on a high note. (Opiniyawíwi Pisim)

Most participants who left university administration described their decision to leave as based on an incongruence between their Indigenous values or Indigenous community expectations and universities. Indigenous community can be described as “a group of peoples with a shared identity or interest that has the capacity to act or express itself as a collective” (Canadian Institute of Health et al, 2014, p.a). For example, another participant said,

The expectation of [Indigenous] community and the expectation of the institution [are not aligned]. I think if the institution was in more alignment [it would have helped me], because I can’t choose to stand with the institution and stand against community. Sometimes those are decisions that you’re forced to make. Well, I’m being forced to make. I’m going to go stand with community. I don’t even want to talk about being a sell-out; its being authentic to who I am. I think that, in these positions, institutions do not want a social activist. But that’s sometimes what they need to get things done in order for change to occur. (Opaskowi Pisim)

In this account, the participant described a misalignment in goals that contributed to her decision to depart her university. In each departure story, Indigenous women administrators attested that their decisions to leave were not taken lightly. Moreover, it is important not to confuse Indigenous women’s departures with an absolutist sense of Indigenous refusal. After all, most of the participants in this study continued to work in the university in different ways.
Most participants talked about the dangers and consequences they faced in enacting explicit Indigenous refusals in the academy. Indigenous refusals were rife with politics that surfaced the risk of being problematized as unruly, oppositional, and disruptive to the administrative status quo. Participants often saw acts of Indigenous refusal as having the possibility of negatively impacting their credibility, professional reputation, and even, in extreme cases, contributing to a justification for their dismissal or non-reappointment. Therefore, enacting explicit Indigenous refusals placed Indigenous women administrators on dangerous ground, requiring them to negotiate carefully and at times be discreet.

**An Emerging Decolonial Educational Leadership Praxis**

Despite pressures to adopt Westernized administrative norms, several participants reported that they approached their leadership role by drawing on their own Indigeneity and connections to Indigenous communities to redefine dominant leadership approaches in universities. This redefining process at times called on Indigenous women leaders to be more collectivist than individualistic, and more strategic than reactive in their leadership. Such transformative change work also called on leaders to simultaneously dismantle some university structures and policies that did not serve Indigenous goals and needs, and rebuild new structures and policies that would serve Indigenous educational needs. Regardless of the labels they used to describe their work (Indigenization, decolonization, resurgence), all the participants underscored their responsibility as leaders to proactively create space and align resources and people toward achieving Indigenous goals and visions; thus, enacting Indigenous refusals became a part of their institutional leadership change work.
Mushkegowuk Cree stories can be a great teacher of Cree laws and ethical codes for continuing Cree collective consciousness and life. Weesakechahk stories combined with self-reflections offer profound teachings on relationality to land, family, and community, teachings that I believe significantly differ from Euro-Western institutional policies based in structures of settler colonial authority, individual power, and hierarchy.

Reengaging with the overall findings of the present study and drawing on interconnections across chapters, I return here to fourth and final research question: How can Indigenous women administrators contest and resist settler colonialism in their educational leadership and policy work? I organize an answer to that question around key areas: (a) navigating discursive tensions, paradoxes, and ambiguities in Indigenizing the academy; (b) Indigenous education as the buffalo; (c) Indigenous women’s leadership experiences; (d) navigating the limits of policy, leadership and change; e) Indigenous refusals as an intervention; and, finally, f) working in tricky spaces.

Building on the scholarship of Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) who articulated a policy rhetoric associated with Indigenizing the academy, I argue that the disjuncture between policy promises and practices can be tied to the tricky and invisible nature of settler colonialism that occurs in “policy enactment” (Ball et al, 2012) processes occurring in universities. In those processes, settler colonial power dynamics tend to “metaphorize decolonization” and advance “settler colonial moves toward innocence” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). The present study points to embodied tensions that Indigenous leaders face when working in between policy rhetoric and policy practices, especially concerning the varied meanings and discursive usages of key concepts used in the movement to Indigenize the academy, such as Indigenization, decolonization, reconciliation, and resurgence.
Navigating Discursive Tensions, Paradoxes, and Ambiguities

Several participants in the present study attested to conceptual debates and ambiguities in policy practices that produced challenges for them in their leadership work. Most participants underscored troubling ways that policy actors coopted and misused key concepts discursively at micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (nation/global) levels to achieve different political agendas, thus reinforcing the ongoing struggle of Indigenous people in higher educational policy and the inherently political nature of Indigenizing policies in practice.

While participants’ stories often highlighted discursive moves toward a metaphorization that evaded “decolonial-Indigenization” possibilities (Gaudry-Lorenz, 2018), they also underscored separatist discourses at play in Indigenous communities in the ways Indigenizing work was described as occurring either in or out of the academy. This either/or positioning created tensions for leaders doing Indigenizing work. For example, participants identified binary discourses that positioned Indigenizing policy work inside the academy as reformist, and Indigenizing (or resurgence) work outside the academy as revolutionist. Indigenization as reformist tended to be cast simply as supporting the maintenance of universities, and thereby as complicit in reproducing settler authority and power. Indigenization as revolutionist, on the other hand, was often depicted as occurring outside the academy and as more radical, not complicit with colonialism, and about the total rejection of settler power in favour of advancing Indigenous goals. To interrogate these absolutist and binary discourses, I draw on Asch, Burrows, and Tully’s (2018) scholarship on reconciliation and resurgence in legal reform work in Canada, scholarship in which those authors identified similar separatist discourses occurring in their field which they argue polarizes and fosters divisions in Indigenous communities. They argued not only that these positionings contribute to divisions within Indigenous communities, but that
dichotomous and simplistic thinking obscures the nuances of Indigenous people associated with the academy doing Indigenous resurgence work at different levels. I argue that similar dichotomous discourses contour our understandings of Indigenizing leadership and policy work related to the university. Furthermore, the discursive nature of positioning Indigenizing work in dichotomous ways invisibilizes Indigenous women administrators’ labour; it undermines their complex and intersectional positionalities of working in between as well as within, against, and outside the university (Kelley, 2016). Moreover, this simplistic way of framing Indigenous work conceals larger systemic conditions of global capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and settler colonialism at play in all facets of Indigenous life. It is therefore important to recognize the conceptual complexities and complex nature of Indigenous work occurring both within and outside the academy; otherwise, I argue, we risk covering up the complex systems of power, positions, experiences, and work of Indigenous women (and others) who are struggling to transform education.

Beyond simplistic and binary discourses related to Indigenization work in the academy, troubling colonial and gendered authenticity discourses surfaced at times in the present study in the ways in which some participants talked about Indigenous women’s leadership. Some participants talked about the characterization of Indigenous women leaders working in the academy as assimilated and therefore less than Indigenous. There is no doubt that Indigenous women struggled and expressed threats of colonial assimilation and cooptation when leading in the Euro-Western academy; however, automatically positioning all Indigenous women working in the academy as assimilated is to fall prey to troubling colonial authenticity discourses. Such colonial depictions not only undermine Indigenous women who occupy leadership roles (and prevent others from taking on formal leadership roles altogether), they suggest that Indigenous
women are non-agentic. This positioning of Indigenous women in leadership falsely perpetuates distorted colonial and gendered stereotypes based on the infamous princess/squaw binary that positions Indigenous women laboring inside the university as simply princess servants to white male institutions. Furthermore, these placements ignore the possibility that Indigenous women leaders are agentic and can be politically motivated, strategically astute, and independent in their thinking, thereby engaging in various spaces and through various methods of leadership while continuing to be uniquely and authentically Indigenous. Moreover, this simplistic positioning underplays that Indigenous women administrators’ in the academy can be deeply invested in the Indigenous collective project of advancing Indigenous educational sovereignty.

As Maori scholar Margi Hohepa (2013) asserts, Indigenous women in the academy grapple in their leadership practices with tensions between being assimilated and coopted by colonialism. For example, some scholars argue that imposing Euro-Western ways of leading onto Indigenous people is a form of recolonialization (Grande, 2015), whereas other scholars argue that Indigenous people benefit from embracing new technologies and knowledges in order to achieve political aims in a complex global context (Hohepa, 2013; Simpson & Turner, 2008). Hohepa (2013) asserts that Indigenous leaders should be able to do both and, at times, “do things the same but differently” (p. 617). Hohepa argues that Indigenous leaders should be able to “draw on Western approaches to leadership but also be able to adapt them (Indigenize them), guided by Indigenous knowledge, values, and practices, in order to realize Indigenous education priorities” (p. 619). Hohepa therefore cautions scholars about falling into essentialist discourses around Indigeneity in relation to educational leadership. She also asserts that Indigenous people should be able to engage with various spaces and methods but, in doing so, avoid uncritically adopting Euro-Western approaches and priorities that may harm and reduce Indigenous people
and knowledges. Certainly, according to some participants, the struggle to express their Indigeneity in academic leadership practice was stifled and often deemed unsafe within dominant settler colonial academic administrative norms and contexts. Findings from the present study point to the challenges of fully Indigenizing Indigenous women’s leadership in the academy as it is often an unsafe and dangerous act for Indigenous leaders working in predominantly white settler academic spaces.

Many tensions emerged for participants in the present study: conceptual ambiguity, polarizing discourses about situating Indigenizing work inside versus outside the academy, and colonial authenticity discourses in relation to Indigenous women’s leadership. Beneath all these tensions, however, lay simple binary modes of thinking that conceals the dark side of Western modernism and its “violent, unsustainable and exploitative nature” (Andreotti, et al, 2015, p.27) embedded within the Euro-Westernized academy. After all modernistic thinking continues to shape underlying notions of linear time, scientific reasoning, and nation states, which are pervasive in managerialist assumptions dominant in academic administration. While Indigenizing policy work described in this study was shifting former policy practices and increasingly being situated within “Indigenization-reconciliation” approaches (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), Indigenous peoples and epistemologies were still being conditionally included within the “ontological dominance” of the Euro-Westernized academy. After all, the positioning of Indigenous women administrators within complex interrelated systems of power—including settler colonialism, heteropatriarchy, white supremacy, and global capitalism—were inescapable for them in their leadership work.
What is Education as the Buffalo?

Blair Stonechild, Cree-Saulteaux scholar, in a seminal piece on Indigenous postsecondary education titled *The New Buffalo: The Struggle for Aboriginal Post-Secondary Education in Canada* (2006), documented First Nations’ evolving relationship with postsecondary education, describing both its origins as a tool of colonial assimilation and its growing possibilities as an instrument of empowerment within Indigenous communities. Stonechild drew on the words of Plains Elders to position postsecondary education as “the new buffalo”—a way for Indigenous peoples to survive in the modern world. Scholars and leaders have adopted the buffalo metaphor to help promote university education within Indigenous communities.

While Stonechild’s work was not premised on advancing Western colonial educational agendas, some scholars have warned against using the buffalo in education as a metaphor that falls prey to uncritical manipulative Western trappings (Hubbard, 2009). Tuck and Yang (2012) have warned scholars that “when metaphors invade decolonization, it kills the very possibility of decolonization; it recenters whiteness, it resettles theory, it extends innocence to the settler, it entertains a settler future” (p. 3). This criticism points to the ways that settler colonial power is lurking around every corner, waiting to invade, coopt, and manipulate Indigenous understandings to serve its own aims. Anishnawbe storyteller and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in her Indigenous story “Be Careful While Getting Smart” (2013a), reminds Indigenous learners of the tricky dynamics of colonialism in educational settings. Simpson draws on the Anishnawbe storytellers Nokomis and Nanaboozoo to enact an Indigenous pedagogy of the land that reinforces critical Indigenous thinking in the university. Inspired by Simpson’s story and praxis, I argue that Indigenous peoples must be critical when engaging Indigenizing policies in the
academy, proceed with caution, and, more importantly, avoid automatically positioning Western educational policy aims and approaches as the new buffalo.

The experiences of Indigenous women administrators in the present study without doubt support the notion that settler colonialism permeates Canadian university structures and infiltrates Indigenizing policy practices. I am thereby compelled, as are other scholars (Andreotti et al, 2015; Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018; Grande, 2019; Tuck, 2019), to question whether Indigenizing policies can indeed accomplish the radical decolonial change needed in education. Within numerous debates about decolonizing the university, many critical Indigenous abolitionists argue that the academy is beyond reform, that it is unsalvageable and in need of hospicing (Andreotti et al 2015; Grande, 2019; Tuck, 2019). These critiques are based on the assumption that Euro-Western universities are reliant on the ontological dominance of modernity and are so complicit in the imperial colonial enterprise that they inevitably, despite individual best intentions, reproduce ongoing forms of colonialism. Beneath these criticisms loom questions about theories of change which Eve Tuck (2018) has invited scholars to interrogate. She argues that a colonial theory of change continues to locate power and control outside of Indigenous communities. Spooner and McNinch (2018), calling for a change to the colonial, corporate, and managerial university, acknowledge the religious and colonial roots of the academy, and warn against institutional approaches that take a quick fix and do not interrogate the rise of managerialism and narrowly defined forms of accountability, which I argue are embedded within these deeper Western ontological foundations.

While Indigenous women administrators are collectively using policy and academic administrative spaces in universities to resist settler colonial attempts to erase and assimilate Indigenous people and knowledge in education, Indigenizing policies are not immune to threats
of ongoing colonialism, capitalism, and sexism. The stories told by participants in the present study demonstrate that Indigenizing policies do not necessarily always benefit Indigenous people or advance Indigenous educational sovereignty. Rather, Indigenous policy enactments are riddled with challenges stemming from settler colonial dominance in universities, and its tendency to coopt policy for its own purposes. Participants’ stories have underscored that the current university structure, and ideologies dominant within it, present undeniable limitations to the advancement of decolonial-Indigenization and Indigenous educational sovereignty.

**Indigenous Women’s Leadership Experiences**

Indigenous women participants in the present study repeatedly recounted tales of embodying the “triple bind” (Fitzgerald, 2003) of working within a Euro-Westernized and colonial educational setting, within masculinist notions of leadership, and under the dominance of Euro-Western epistemic privilege that often Othered Indigenous people and ways of knowing. Participants commonly testified to struggling and feeling both at odds with and ambivalent about leading Indigenizing work within an inherently settler colonial academic context. Despite these felt and embodied binds, participants also described a sense that the struggle in which they were engaged was denied by the dominant group in universities and underappreciated by Indigenous communities unfamiliar with the university. University colleagues did not understand the unique challenges Indigenous women faced in their leadership work, and did not appreciate the weight of their emotional labour and the reconciliation fatigue they endured trying to transform an inherently colonial institution. Several participants also recounted painful stories of being ostracized by Indigenous people, especially when they worked outside their ancestral Territories. These experiences revealed that internalized colonialism and lateral forms of violence were alive within Indigenous communities. While participants recognized that by holding administrative
positions within the university, they were implicated in a Euro-Westernized way of conceiving and distributing leadership and power, they also recognized that leadership was often understood differently in some Indigenous community contexts (both within and outside the academy), and thereby that their work straddled different epistemic conceptions of leadership. Some participants’ talked about how Elders occupied important leadership roles that were not always well understood or respected in formal educational hierarchies. At the same time, when working within Indigenous community contexts, participants would sometimes downplay their formal leadership roles in universities. Indifference for formal leadership positions in some Indigenous communities can be linked to the lack of trust that many Indigenous people have for Euro-Western institutions and can be associated with differing epistemic values.

**Navigating the Limits of Policy, Leadership, and Change Approaches**

Beyond straddling complex geographic and epistemic borderlands between universities and Indigenous communities, participants in the present study often underscored the limits of the academic governance system and its ongoing ties to the settler colonial nation state as an ongoing invasive structure. For example, the liberal bicameral academic governance system and Indigenous people’s challenges in terms of penetrating the system as a minority population with little power, underscored the academic system’s tendency to reproduce settler colonial dynamics of power. While participants occupied new administrative roles in universities, several participants testified to feeling that their inclusion in university administration was conditional (Stein, 2019), predicated on an unspoken, invisible, yet felt pressure to assimilate into dominant Euro-Western administrative ways of leading. Working within the academy, Indigenous women leaders described struggling to lead with critical decolonial praxis while structural functionalist or interpretivist administrative epistemologies were being tacitly imposed on them. Participants
testified that they were often expected to be neutral and apolitical in their leadership, and to conform to dominant epistemologies of organizational change, which hinged on regulating rather than radically transforming the university system. Colleen Capper (2019) describes dominant structuralist and interpretivist epistemologies of leadership and change as prevalent in educational settings, and as tending to oversaturate how institutions and leaders conceive the nature of knowledge and the nature of change within an organization. According to Capper, structural functionalism is one of the most taken-for-granted ways of leading in educational systems. It is a way of leading that tends to adhere to managerialist approaches that view knowledge within objectivist and rationalist sensibilities focusing on improving measurability and predictability, and operating within bureaucratic assumptions that privilege neoliberal global market economies. These epistemologies are also rooted in administrative science and masculinist norms. Within such a dominant structural functionalist frame, organizational change goals are often based on the need to control the education system and make it more efficient and effective within existing hierarchies (Capper, 2019).

Interpretivist epistemologies, on the other hand, operate differently; they tend to value the individual and subjective lens in knowledge making (Capper, 2019) and to view change as an incremental process that happens over time, often precipitated by growing individual awareness. Within an interpretivist paradigm, institutional change is assumed to be achieved at an individual level through education rather than through radical structural and epistemological change.

Neither structural functionalist nor interpretivist epistemologies, however, focus on power and privilege, nor do they emphasize the redistribution of power that is needed within the educational system if Indigenous rights are to be observed and Indigenous nation-building and Indigenous ways of knowing are educational aims and priorities. Critical Indigenous decolonial
approaches to leadership and organizational change, on the other hand, center first on
deconstructing the invisibilized ways that settler colonialism is structured and operationalized in
the academy, and, more importantly, redistributing power and resources to advance Indigenous
educational aims and sovereignty. Indigenous decolonial approaches, however, are not only
radically different from the dominant educational leadership epistemologies, they are often
perceived as a threat to conventional academic administrative norms.

**Indigenous Refusal as an Intervention**

When operating within dominant epistemic leadership frameworks—structuralism,
functionalism, instrumentalism, interpretivism—Indigenous leaders are assumed to fit into the
system and are expected to assimilate into Euro-Western ways of administering education; when
they do not, Indigenous leaders are labelled as problems; they are outcast and delegitimized.
When participants in this study challenged dominant taken-for-granted epistemologies in their
leadership, they were often positioned in the classic colonial way as ‘the Indian problem.’ When
they did not adhere to dominant epistemologies in leadership and change, they were negatively
stereotyped and discredited as ‘too political,’ ‘divisive,’ and even ‘ineffective’ in their
leadership. As a result, many participants, when they confronted the hegemony of the institution,
were seen to be a threat to the dominant white settler liberal democratic order.

Lynn Lavallee (2020) recounts being “unwittingly put in the position of Indian agent
controlling Indian problems” in her leadership role at the University of Manitoba. As such,
Lavallee argues that “efforts to decolonize academic institutions that are funded by government
are futile but we can bring awareness and transparency to the colonial curtain” (2020, p. 30). She
points to the role of Indigenous administrators in calling out colonial norms in the academy. Her
unwillingness to adopt colonial administrative expectations and remain silent about the colonial
nature of academic administration at her university compelled the institution, after her premature departure, to complete a review of Indigenous senior leadership. The review committee recommended several deeper structural changes including the development of several leadership positions and adequate funding (UofM, 2019).

Indigenous refusals as an act of resistance emerged as a prominent theme in the present study. Participants commonly testified that, as part of their leadership, they needed to contest the taken-for-granted settler colonial hegemonies and the dominant educational leadership norms and ideologies pervasive in the academy. Indeed, being prepared to enact refusals has emerged as a necessary disposition for Indigenous women administrators who strive to advance Indigenous educational aims and priorities. To enact refusal, however, Indigenous women administrators were not necessarily unproductive, adversarial or out on the picket lines protesting explicitly, although these types of activism are worthwhile and often necessary. Instead, participants recounted confronting institutional hegemony through various forms such as not lending their labour to certain projects, proactively creating and changing policies, and addressing colonial assumptions as they arose in their day-to-day encounters.

Participants’ stories reaffirmed the overwhelmingly unsafe nature of the academic environment within which they operated. To combat normative Euro-Western approaches to leadership, they described enacting Indigenous refusals as part of their agency and resistance to ongoing settler colonial dynamics. Their refusals were seen, however, as a contentious aspect of Indigenous leadership and policy work. In response to the ongoing threat of racial, gendered, and colonial stereotypes placed on them for being too political when refusing, some participants drew on more nuanced and subtle forms of refusal as a survival mechanism. These participants enacted refusal in multiple ways—explicitly, discretely, and strategically—demonstrating their
resistance mechanisms to be complex and nuanced. Indeed, participants shared many stories of struggle, resistance, and strategic astuteness in the face of ongoing colonial pressures.

Participants in the present study commonly described a need to engage in ongoing critical self-reflexivity around their use of Indigenous refusals. They described their desire to examine and evaluate, on an ongoing, case-by-case basis, the implications of enacting Indigenous refusal. They also identified a need to reflect on their own intersectional positionalities and relational dynamics, and to examine ethical implications of their leadership practices and decision-making in relation to their reconciliation efforts and attempts to elevate Indigenous voices in education. Their insights offer critical direction for educational leadership training in the context of reconciliation movements in the future.

Further nuances surrounding leadership practice emerged from participants’ experiences with leadership at collective levels where they worked in relationship with different Indigenous and non-Indigenous people and groups—with Indigenous faculty members, with local Indigenous community members, with Elders, with Indigenous students, and with settler allies—and where they worked in different roles with different responsibilities to influence systemic change. In these cases, leadership was portrayed as complex, collective, strategic, and political. At the same time, participants commonly reported that dominant leadership roles and power were often conceived and reinforced in universities at individual levels. They were earned through liberal meritocratic and hierarchal authority systems (Foster, 1986, Mallot, 2010) which often marginalized Indigenous people and conceptions of leadership that rely more heavily on critical, collectivist and relational paradigms.
The Trickiness of Practice

Trickiness emerged strongly in the present study, in the between spaces and in the messiness of leadership and policy enactments; in the paradoxes and complexities of leaders navigating tensions and debates around key concepts and discourses; in the difficulties of putting policy promises into practice; in the divide between rhetoric and reality; in the contradictions of leaders becoming simultaneously a symbol of both the solution and the problem; in the tensions between the liberal academy’s favoring of individualism and Indigenous communities’ affinity for collectivism; in the ambivalence of being the target of policy and media attention and experiencing structural marginalization; and in the disjuncture between being under the gaze of public celebrations and being overly scrutinized under the gaze of colonial surveillance. In reflecting on the trickiness of practice, one is struck by the paradoxically messy, personal, and political nature of both Indigenous educational leadership and policy practices in universities, and by the elusive nature of settler colonialism.

Addressing the trickiness of practice requires attending to the ways in which Weesakechahk as a transformer and truthteller appeared in this study. Trickster stories such as Weesakechahk stories are useful in destabilizing binary thinking, colonizing norms, and static claims to knowing and being that are embedded in Euro-Western ideologies and universities. Despite the present study being located within the settler colonial academy - an inherently Euro-Western intellectual and physical architecture— I found myself continuously pulled to draw upon Indigenous stories as theory. Trickster stories offer a criticism to colonial ways of knowing and doing. This calling to draw on Weesakechahk was fueled by an inner insistence that Weesakechahk could help me understand and explain Indigenous women’s experiences. From this Cree center of knowing, I sat with and reflected deeply and seriously on the Weesakechahk
opening story that revealed itself during my research process. My commitment to privileging Indigenous story as theory is unapologetically rooted in my own positionality as a mixed Cree woman striving to reclaim my Indigenous ways of knowing and foster authentic intellectual space for Indigenous (Cree) thought in academic, leadership, and policy research. In the dramatic script, Weesakechak’s humor-laced approach to storytelling helps to convey difficult and paradoxical embodied experiences of Indigenous women, disrupt hierarchy, and question authority while simultaneously pointing to the deceptive nature of settler colonial power in policy rhetoric and practice.

A Buffalo Jump Cliff?

Trickiness also emerged in the present analysis of Indigenous women’s dangerous and vulnerable positions in university leadership contexts. In one interview, a participant suggested the buffalo jump cliff as an Indigenous explanation for the phenomena of a “glass cliff” (Ryan & Haslam, 2004) occurring among Indigenous women administrators in this study. The buffalo jump is used here to describe the treacherous terrain of academic administration among Indigenous women. The buffalo jump is an ancient herd hunting technique commonly used by Indigenous Plains hunters to trick buffalo into being herded off a high cliff to their deaths. The buffalo jump is a tricky and perilous formation that may describe the nature of settler colonialism in academic administration and university policy work. Are Indigenous women administrators being misled by settler colonialism in universities, somewhat as the buffalo were misled into being herded off a cliff? This question is inspired by the phenomenon of the “glass cliff” (Ryan & Haslam, 2004), first posited during workplace feminization in Britain in the 1990s when scholars observed that women (predominantly white women) were being appointed to leadership roles during highly turbulent times, and that they often ‘fell’ because of the harsh environment
into which they had been placed. The conception of the glass cliff has been associated with Indigenous women administrators working in public institutions, particularly universities since the TRC (Eagle Woman, 2019). In the corporate context, the glass cliff phenomenon became an extension of the earlier feminist concept of the glass ceiling, which focused on the invisible barriers that prohibited many women from moving up the corporate leadership hierarchy. The glass cliff phenomenon involves an opening up of leadership roles for women, although only during risky and stressful periods when men are less likely to take on leadership roles. Consequently, the glass cliff phenomenon places women in vulnerable and dangerous positions where they often become the scapegoat when, because organizational conditions are beyond their control, desired outcomes inevitably fail.

While the experience of Indigenous women in administrative roles in the academy is different from those of white women who experienced the feminization of the corporate workplace during the 1990s, one wonders if duplicitous colonialism embedded in policy rhetoric has lured some Indigenous women toward a metaphorical buffalo jump. Métis scholar and former Vice Provost Indigenous of the University of Manitoba, Lynn Lavallee (2020), courageously exposed the deceptive nature of colonialism in administration when she called out her university. She further criticizes universities for the “staging of performance and exotic puppetry” among Indigenous women administrators. Lavallee underscored the complex, invisible, and interconnected nature of patriarchal colonialism at play in university administration and exposed the ways in which many new Indigenous women senior leaders are being used by the university “to visibly perform on the stage of reconciliation” (p. 24).

Lavallee however was not simply a victim of patriarchal colonialism. Both she and Angelique EagleWoman, a Dakota leader and scholar and the former Dean of Law at Lakehead
University in Ontario, Canada, resigned from their academic administrative posts and went public with their experiences. Both enacting agency and refusing to participate in problematic approaches occurring at their universities. EagleWoman resigned after only two years in her decanal role and went so far as to file a civil suit against Lakehead University in November 2018 (Wikipedia, 2020). EagleWoman has argued that the glass cliff is a reality in universities where Indigenous women become “characterized as incompetent or as not exhibiting a proper leadership style which shifts the blame to the woman who dared to step into her power and lead from and Indigenous perspective.” (2019).

While the inclusion of Indigenous women in academic leadership roles cannot be directly tied to Indigenous men not wanting to take on leadership roles, Indigenizing work in the academy has certainly been found, both in the present study and in other literature, to be dangerous, and to place Indigenous people on tricky or shaky (Bunda et al, 2012) tantamount to a buffalo jump—a glass cliff. Moreover, perhaps the goals of Indigenizing the academy are so seductive in their promissory nature that they lure some Indigenous leaders into believing they are achievable when “decolonization is a messy, dynamic, and contradictory process” (Sium, Desai, and Ritskes, 2012). More troublingly, Indigenous women administrators who dare to work in the academy inherit and struggle within a structural incommensurability that makes achieving “decolonial-Indigenization” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) arguably—one hesitates to say it—impossible.

The challenges and tensions experienced by Indigenous women leaders in this study, however, does not mean that Indigenizing policy work is not worthwhile or that positive changes that benefit Indigenous peoples have not occurred in Canadian universities. Indigenizing policies have indeed shifted many aspects of academia, but the degree, speed, and sustainability of the
reform is highly debatable. The reality that shapes the ongoing limits that Indigenous peoples face in the academy rests in underlying interrelations of settler colonialism, global capitalism, and heteropatriarchy embedded in educational systems. The unique rights of Indigenous people in higher universities is of particular salience as Canadian universities begin to grapple with how to respond to Indigenization in the context of larger equity diversity and inclusion calls in a post-pandemic context. After all, Indigenous education is responding to over 150 years of overt and systematic efforts to erase and assimilate Indigenous peoples and knowledges in order to maintain Indigenous lands in settler colonial contexts. More relevantly, the costs of leading Indigenous transformative change work is, arguably, embodied and gendered. Moreover, the consequences (emotional, physical, and spiritual) for Indigenous leaders working in academic administrative spaces (Indigenous women administrators in particular) are all too often left unexamined and underappreciated. Therefore, the cost of Indigenizing the academy is high and undeniably challenging for Indigenous women administrators operating within the ongoing nature of colonialism. As a result of the inherently Euro-Westernized nature of the administrative academy, coloniality is deeply embedded, constantly shifting and morphing leaving Indigenous administrators vulnerable and Indigenous projects in unsustainable positions susceptible to eradication and cooptation.

The structural reality of universities does not mean that, in and of themselves, universities are not worthwhile places, or that Indigenizing policies do not have the potential to benefit Indigenous people and advance Indigenous educational priorities. The classroom, as bell hooks (1994) suggests, continues to be a radical space of possibility. In the short term, Indigenizing policies have opened up new spaces in the classroom and contributed to elevating Indigenous voices and agency in university leadership and hierarchies, contributing to budget distributions in
the area of Indigenous students, and supported the hiring of Indigenous staff and faculty members, actions that are long overdue. Moreover, policies drive political decisions and affect nearly every facet of Indigenous people’s lives. Therefore, understanding how policies are made and used in universities and society in general is useful and can give Indigenous people a stronger voice and position in asserting educational sovereignty. The degree of Indigenous peoples’ agency within existing university structures relative to settler colonialism however raises ongoing questions about how much the Euro-Western academic system continues to control Indigenous agency. As Graham Hingarora Smith asserts “developing sovereignty and self-determination in an institution where we do not have power just doesn’t ring true. We need to know the terrain on which we are struggling. We need to know the limits and capacities of what can be achieved in particular sites. I think we need to make strategic concessions to win what we can, but the critical understanding is that this is only one site of struggle – we ought to be developing transformation in many sites.” (Kovach, 2009, p.90).

Smith’s words underscore the importance of transformative work in multiple sites including within the university system, but also from outside—from within Indigenous communities, and on the land that sustains Indigenous ways of knowing. Indigenous people seduced by policy promises who labour inside the academy like I do, must however do so cautiously, remaining vigilant of the tricky ways that settler colonial power dynamics play out in the academy, and simultaneously look elsewhere for multiple solutions to complex colonial problems. Moreover, Indigenous people working within the administrative academy must be willing and able to strategically enact Indigenous refusals. Despite Indigenous acts of refusal being casted as a threat, we must rise above and demonstrate how Indigenous refusals are not necessarily violent or destructive, but rather generative and an assertion of Indigenous agency
and Indigenous educational sovereignty. Indigenous refusals are often necessary and can be inherently purposeful.

The notion of ‘education is the new buffalo’ has me questioning: What does this mean from an Indigenous ontological paradigm? How can Indigenous leaders ensure that this notion is not misinterpreting Elder’s teachings from a Euro-Western ontological paradigm? Fully comprehending the meaning of the words requires an understanding what a profound relationship with the buffalo means to Plains Indigenous peoples.

Dr. Leroy Littlebear, renowned Blackfoot scholar and Elder reminds us that the buffalo have acted as a keystone in Indigenous life for as long as the Blackfoot can remember. Providing all the necessities for survival, the buffalo continue to be highly revered and respected among many Indigenous peoples. Highly inter-dependent upon the buffalo, Plains Indigenous societies were careful not to disrespect the buffalo who helped sustain a complex balance in their ecosystem and ontological relationship with the land and cosmos. During the 1800s, however, settler colonists, recognizing the sacred, symbiotic, interdependent buffalo-human relationship, used the buffalo in policies against Plains Indigenous peoples by attempting to kill off the buffalo and, in turn, starve and eliminate ‘Indians’ and the so-called ‘Indian problem.’ In devastating settler colonial attempts to disappear Indigenous peoples, or at least coerce them into complying with government assimilationist policies, settlers intentionally overhunted the buffalo. The Canadian settler government used the killing of the buffalo as a policy tool to pressure Indigenous peoples to comply with land settlement processes. The buffalo was coopted, misused, and deeply disrespected by colonizers. Consequently, buffalo herds estimated to be in the millions at the start of the nineteenth century were decimated throughout Turtle Island. Today, only a few small herds of buffalo survive. Much like Indigenous women and Indigenous peoples
generally, however, the buffalo are resilient and are still here today, and Plains Indigenous peoples are working within their values and ontological relationships to revitalize and restore the herds. Despite attempts to eradicate the buffalo and Indigenous women and peoples, the buffalo continue to be honoured in Indigenous ceremonies such as the Sundance, in the telling of buffalo stories, and in art and creative expression (Hubbard, 2009).

Returning to the deeper meaning of the buffalo also means moving beyond a metaphor—being vigilant against settler metaphorization in educational aims, and reminding ourselves about how “the buffalo embody the struggle against forces of colonialism, colonialism’s subsequent failure to eradicate and erase Indigenous presence from the land, and the return of both Indigenous presence and creative consciousness” (Hubbard, 2009, p. 78). How can the buffalo teachings be embedded in the aims of Indigenous education? The buffalo are powerful teachers. “The buffalo are coming back” says Dr. Leroy Littlebear (University of Lethbridge, 2017). Can you hear them? I hear the herds’ hooves stomping the earth, like an echo.
CHAPTER 10

Conclusion

Since 2015, university policies concerning Indigenizing the academy have proliferated. The TRC has greatly contributed to this expansion, opening new doors for Indigenous people and, in particular, contributing to an influx of Indigenous women to the academy in new administrative positions. The purpose of the present study was to explore the storied experiences of twelve Indigenous women administrators (including myself) laboring in Indigenous leadership roles in the context of reconciliation within the Canadian university sector.

Using an Indigenous storying methodological approach along with my own interpretive lens, I have attempted to answer four overarching questions:

• How do Indigenous women administrators experience their leadership work amidst increasing pressures to Indigenize and decolonize the academy?
• What challenges do Indigenous women administrators face when enacting Indigenizing policies in Canadian universities?
• How do Indigenous women administrators encounter the settler colonial academy in their leadership and policy work?
• How can Indigenous women administrators contest and resist settler colonialism in their educational leadership work?

This study is an attempt, using an Indigenous methodological approach to qualitative research, to fill important gaps in the educational leadership and policy research relating to Indigenous women leaders. The study offers a unique approach to research by sharing knowledge through an Indigenous storying methodology based within an Indigenous paradigm. The study brings into the conversation the fields of Indigenous Studies, educational leadership,
and critical policy, with the intention of contributing, from a critical Indigenous decolonial perspective, to new understandings of Indigenous women educational leaders’ experiences and policy enactment processes.

Findings from the present study provide unique insights into the Indigenous intersectional challenges that Indigenous women face when leading decolonial and Indigenizing change in Euro-Western academic contexts that are dominated by structural functionalist and interpretivist leadership and change epistemologies. Findings suggest that even though many Canadian universities have instituted new Indigenous administrative positions and publicly declared their commitments to Indigenization and reconciliation, they have continued to enact deep colonial patterns that place Indigenous women administrators in challenging, in-between positions on the dangerous borderlands defined and regulated by settler colonial institutions and ongoing power dynamics. Findings support previous research that found that Indigenous women leaders face a triple bind based in colonial, gendered, and knowledge assumptions at play in leadership contexts (Fitzgerald, 2003, 2006, 2010, 2014). Findings point as well to the uniqueness of leading Indigenization work with one’s Indigeneity and gender.

In the present study, I explored the tensions and challenges of enacting Indigenizing policies within Canadian universities dominated by settler colonial structures and administrative logics, and by settlers themselves. Drawing on the notion of “policy enactment” (Ball, 1997), I argued that Indigenizing policies were both messy and tricky in practice, and I connected the trickiness to the ongoing nature of settler colonial power dynamics that is pervasive and often implicit in university structures and norms. Moreover, I asserted that university policies tended toward “institutional speech acts” (Ahmed, 2007) and “moves toward innocence” that “metaphorized decolonization” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). Based within a settler ethic of
incommensurability, I affirmed that current university approaches to Indigenizing policies can “perform reconciliation” (Daigle, 2018) rather than advance deep levels of reform including “decolonial-Indigenization” (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018) thereby advancing Indigenous educational sovereignty. These findings corroborate previous research by Gaudry and Lorenz (2018) and suggest that without more radical change to university governance structures, particularly to the bicameral governance system, hierarchal system, and disciplinary structures, Euro-Westernized universities risk continuing to reproduce settler colonial power that preserves patriarchal white sovereignty over Indigenous educational sovereignty.

In this study, I highlighted the tricky nature of settler colonialism in both leadership and policy enactment processes. Building on prior research that recognizes policy rhetoric (Gaudry & Lorenz, 2018), I found Indigenizing policies to be tricky to put into practice within ongoing settler colonial academic structures, ideologies, and norms that are taken for granted in universities. Furthermore, the present study uncovered some of the dangers of enacting Indigenizing work in that this work often calls on leaders to enact “Indigenous refusals” (Grande, 2018; Simpson, 2007; Tuck, 2018); as part of their leadership praxis—an action that contravenes settler colonial norms that hinge on preserving an “ontology of hierarchy” (Mallot, 2015) in universities. However, when enacted, Indigenous women who refused tended to be problematized, which underscored the inherently unsafe nature of challenging academic and administrative conventions.

I offered some uniquely creative approaches to retelling Indigenous women’s stories through Indigenous collaborative restorying and arts-informed practices drawing on Cree Weesakechahk trickster in the meaning making and retelling process. For example, to bring the invisibility and colonial trickery to life, I drew on the Cree legendary literary figure as part of a
critical Indigenous approach to restorying that provided both a pedagogical tool to interrupt taken for granted settler colonialism and provoke, evoke, and invoke deeper critical thinking.

**What I Have Learned**

In looking back at the research process, I am grateful for all the learning that took place, in particular around the ethical tensions that I grappled with at different stages. While I lost some sleep over many of these tensions, I will take the learning and insights with me into the next phase of my academic and leadership journeys. For example, ethical tensions emerged in this study when I chose to keep participants’ names anonymous. At the proposal stage, my supervisor and I had many conversations around this decision since the topic and questions of my study centered on Indigenous women administrators’ resistance in their leadership practices.

Considering the small and highly visible population with which I was working, it became clear that I needed to protect individual participants’ anonymity should controversial themes emerge that could jeopardize their employment. As I moved on in the research process, I began to recognize the challenges my research design placed on me in terms of protecting my own confidentiality as a named participant in my study. Fortunately, I maintained power to select and deselect certain accounts that might identify me. Nonetheless, I chose to maintain all the participants’ anonymity by not naming them in the study or in quotes, and by fictionalizing narratives for the dramatic scenes. Unsurprisingly, one participant rightfully asked me why I chose to keep participants unnamed since there is a growing practice to name sources of Indigenous knowledge in Indigenous research (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, 2014).

Considering the sensitivity of my research topic and the potential harm naming could bring to certain individuals, I explained my decision. Thankfully, the participant understood my rationale and agreed to continue with the project. As the research continued on, the dangerous grounds
upon which Indigenous women administrators operate became clearer, and I understood more fully the implications and responsibility that I have as the primary researcher to protect individual participants and weigh the risks against the benefits of naming sources of knowledge.

Expectedly, I also experienced ethical tensions in writing the fictionalized dramatic texts. As well, there was a certain level of uncertainty and ethical care needed when taking up Indigenous oral stories and Weesakechahk as a narrator. Engaging my participants in collaborative restorying processes, and a cultural advisor and language expert around the ethics of Indigenous oral storytelling and usage of Cree words, was tremendously helpful to me. Their contributions supported me in clarifying my role and responsibilities and in identifying areas of the writing that I needed to go back to for reflection and/or clarity.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Limitations to the present study include its small sample size of twelve and lack of generalizability. As the primary researcher and also a participant, observer, and interpreter in this study, I recognize that I run the risk of conflating my own stories with the stories the participants shared with me. I have tried to mitigate this possibility by recognizing my self-location explicitly, engaging in collaborative restorying processes, and participating in ongoing critical self-reflexivity.

**Implications for Future Practice**

This study offers some direction for future policy and leadership practice. Because of the unique dimensions of leading Indigenizing work within universities, many participants underscored an urgent need for Indigenous leadership development and training for the current and next generation of Indigenous administrators in universities. Several participants remarked on their sense of isolation and the lack of networks they endured working in predominantly white
settler colonial environments, and several reported that existing leadership programs did not address their leadership needs from Indigenous epistemological perspectives. Moreover, Indigenous women administrators laboring in the white settler academy require culturally safe spaces that attend to Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous presence and wellbeing in order to avoid the threat of burning out.

Future Indigenous leadership training and development should include critical Indigenous decolonial theory and praxis, and a background in Indigenous educational policy and practice, as key ingredients. Feminist scholars have critiqued current educational leadership training program asserting for more critical feminist approaches (Blackmore, 2010; Ngunjiri & Gardiner, 2017). Jill Blackmore (2010) argues that this would “significantly challenge leadership training programs, as most system-wide training tends to be about finances; risk and image management; curriculum and policy implementation; building and grounds; community liaison; marketing and entrepreneurship; health and wellbeing and stress management” (p. 55). Further, the university sector should advance and support a national Indigenous leadership network coalition and create training opportunities to build the next generation of Indigenous leaders—a system that is adequately funded and governed by Indigenous leaders, not white settlers and institutions. Such training should include case learning that takes up specific examples of the politics of distraction (Smith, 2003) and of Indigenous refusals, and that supports ongoing critical self-reflectivity in relation to settler cooptation, misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous leaders’ intersectional Indigeneity, and Indigenous ethics in leadership and policy practice.

To support the work of Indigenous leaders and policy actors in the academy, I offer some critical decolonial questions for leadership and policy practitioners to consider as part of their pedagogical practice. While the questions extend beyond the scope of my research, they offer
some possibilities for future research and practice. The questions are centered on Maori scholars and leaders Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s and Graham Hingangaroa Smith’s (2018) five tests for veracity. The five tests for veracity (Table 2) are:

(a) positionality: the process of locating oneself in relation to Indigenous peoples, intersectional power and privilege, Indigenous lands and communities, and Indigenous knowledges;

(b) criticality: the process of understanding how unequal power relations operationalize to serve certain groups needs over others;

(c) structuralist and culturalist considerations: the recognition that change must occur at social structural and human agential levels:

(d) praxicality: the ongoing cyclical process of reflecting on one’s actions in relation to decolonial theory); and, finally,

(e) transformability (the evaluation of “what changes as a result of what we are doing”) (p. 24).

Table 2 Critical Questions for Veracity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tests for Veracity</th>
<th>Critical Decolonial Questions</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| **Positionality** | • Who is leading Indigenous policy initiatives?  
• Where do policy actors locate themselves intersectionally and in relation to Indigenous communities upon which the university is geographically located?  
• Is there wide diversity and representation in policy development among Indigenous peoples on and off campus?  
• Are policy actors willing, able, and given space to reflect on their intersectional positionalities in ongoing ways? |
| **Criticality**  | • How do Indigenous educational needs drive policy visions and goals?  
• What underlying assumptions underpin policy problems and solutions?  
• Are Indigenous peoples and/or Indigenous knowledges portrayed in deficit ways as problems in the policy assumptions?  
• How do settler colonial authorities, structures, norms, and power dynamics shape Indigenous policy interpretations, enactments, and decision-making processes?  
• Are there structures to elevate Indigenous agency in the policy enactment processes? |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structuralist &amp; Culturalist Considerations</th>
<th>Structuralist</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• How is Indigenous educational sovereignty upheld in academic governance, leadership and accountability structures in the university?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• What structural systems of governance, leadership, and accountability are in place for universities to be answerable to Indigenous communities in their various forms?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What institutional mechanisms are in place to critically challenge settler colonial assumptions, biases, and dominances in policy enactment processes?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culturalist</td>
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<tr>
<td>• How do Indigenous policies and practices advance Indigenous educational and intellectual sovereignty?</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>• How do Indigenous policies and practices advance Indigenous theorizing, epistemologies, methodologies and languages?</td>
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<tr>
<td>• What are unintentional consequences of Indigenous policy enactments for the survivance of Indigenous research, Indigenous ways of knowing, and languages in education?</td>
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| Praxicality | • How are critical Indigenous theories and Indigenous knowledges contributing to new ways of leading, governing and achieving organizational change? |
|            | • How are Indigenous leaders supported in advancing Indigenous decolonial approaches to leadership in the academy? |
|            | • How are all leaders’ taught about the histories and ongoing nature of settler colonialism in the academy and its relationship to Indigenous peoples and ways of knowing? |
|            | • How are all leaders encouraged to reflect on their positionalities and to advance critical decoloniality into their leadership and policy praxis? |

| Transformability | • What changes are advanced because of Indigenous policy work? |
|                 | • What are some unintended consequences of Indigenizing policy work? |
|                 | • Who benefits from Indigenous policies and how do you know they are benefiting? |
|                 | • How do universities measure Indigenous change in holistic, respectful and culturally-relevant ways that balance quantitative and qualitative approaches? |
|                 | • How does the university observe Indigenous data sovereignty in the collection, analysis, and reporting of institutional measures relating to Indigenous policies? |
Implications for Future Research

The findings of the present study underscore the need for further research on Indigenous educational leadership and policy focusing on the experiences of Indigenous men and Indigenous staff members from Indigenous epistemological perspectives. I call on future scholars to engage in deeper and more nuanced explorations of Indigenous educational leadership as it occurs inside, outside, and on the borderland of the academy, in-between Euro-Western institutions and Indigenous communities, and at various levels including intersectional micro levels, institutional meso levels, and national/global macro societal levels. Potential research questions to be explored include: (a) How can educational leaders advance decolonial-Indigenization approaches inside and outside the settler colonial academy? (b) What are Indigenous educational leadership ethics? (c) What existing educational leadership approaches and methods are useful and can be Indigenized to advance decolonial reform within academic settings? (d) How can Indigenous leaders develop new conceptions of educational leadership grounded in Indigenous epistemologies including Indigenous stories? (e) How do Indigenous leaders (broadly) approach Indigenizing their leadership from within their own Indigeneity and through Indigenous pedagogies?

Research findings further suggest new questions for policy researchers including these: (a) What underlying epistemologies underpin existing university governance structures, dominant university policy approaches and assumptions, and conventional ways of measuring policy success? (b) What are the limitations of the current academic administrative system in terms of advancing decolonial-Indigenization and asserting Indigenous educational sovereignty? (c) How can universities transform their governance and organizational structures to advance Indigenous educational sovereignty in governance, leadership and policy enactment?
And finally, this study would be incomplete without asking about the role of Indigenous stories in Indigenizing policy reform in universities. I have been asking myself this question since I began my doctoral journey in the area of Indigenous leadership and educational policy. In the present study, I have drawn on one Weesakechahk story as theory to challenge dominant Euro-Western conceptions of leadership and policy. To conclude, I invite you to reflect on related questions for yourself:

- How can Indigenous stories inform Indigenous leadership and policy frameworks in education?
- What are some lessons you can learn from this Weesakechahk story in relation to leadership and policy?
- What principles of leadership can be drawn from the Weesakechahk opening story and the experiences of Indigenous women administrators shared in this dissertation?
- Can other Indigenous stories offer new frameworks for thinking about university policy and leadership practices in the future?
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