



**Native Women's  
Association of Canada**

**CULTURALLY RELEVANT  
GENDER BASED  
MODELS OF RECONCILIATION**

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# CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER BASED MODELS OF RECONCILIATION

## INTRODUCTION

Reconciliation is increasingly understood as both a process and an outcome. The ‘process’ refers to activities undertaken as a means toward building new relations of respect and equality in the aftermath of state sanctioned human rights violations and genocide, while the ‘outcome’ speaks to creation of a shared vision for a new future based on reparations for the harm done, including restoration of rights and responsibilities (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003). The ongoing violation of Indigenous women through systemic subjugation, marginalization and violence is a legacy of colonialism in Canada. In this context, gender balance and equality are fundamental aspects of both the process and outcomes for authentic reconciliation; not merely an option for consideration or an add-on. Gender-responsive reconciliation addresses historical and contemporary harms impacting Indigenous women as well as men. Truth telling and reconciliation must represent a reparative process that promotes restoration of Indigenous women’s dignity, safety, authority and agency.

This paper explores three aspects of a culturally relevant gender based approach to reconciliation, beginning with a brief overview of human rights milestones and an exploration of gender in the context of Indigenous worldviews, colonialism, and truth and reconciliation. Then, four promising models are outlined which provide practical, encouraging examples of progress toward gender responsive reconciliation in a variety of contexts. The paper concludes with promising practices derived from these models and recommendations toward culturally relevant, gender responsive truth and reconciliation.

## A NOTE ON TERMINOLOGY

Throughout this report the terms ‘Indigenous,’ ‘Aboriginal,’ ‘Native’ and First Nations are used interchangeably. Although the term ‘Aboriginal’ as it is used in *Section 35* of Canada’s Constitution refers to three groups, Inuit, Métis and First Nations it has been broadly criticized both in Canada and internationally as yet another colonial construct that promotes divisiveness and ‘Pan-Indianism’ (Alfred, 2005; LaRocque, 2009; Maracle, 2003; Sinclair, Anthony and Bruyere, 2009). In all cultures, linguistic concepts are the tools for describing the meaning beneath culture-based values and behaviours; therefore Indigenous languages are the foundation for culture-based understanding. Some writers and editors have attempted to decolonize the terminology by using words from Indigenous languages. For example, Alfred suggests the term *Onkwehonwe* connects the common experiences of ‘Original’ peoples globally

under colonial powers (Alfred, 2005). Others opt for flexibility in the use of one or more of the existing terms, supplementing them by referencing distinct Nations such as Cree, Métis, Inuit, Sto:lo or Mohawk and so on, as appropriate (Anderson and Lawrence, 2003; Lavell-Harvard and Lavell, 2006; Sinclair, Anthony and Bruyere, 2009; Valaskakis, Stout and Guimond, 2009), which is the preferred option for this paper.

## CONTEXT AND MILESTONES

The past three decades have seen considerable progress at international levels toward developing a gendered approach within a human rights framework as the basis for understanding gendered impacts of human rights violations. As well, the central roles and activities of women in rebuilding their families, communities and nations in the aftermath of such violations whether through healing, community development or formal reconciliation processes is gaining increased attention. (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003; de la Ray and McKay, 2006; Dyck, 2003; Goldblatt and Meintjes, 1998; Marin, 2006; Matthews and Aberdeen, 2008; McKay, 2000; Pankhurst, 2008; Ross, 2003; and Smith, 2003).

A gendered analysis has also ended centuries of global silence concerning genocidal crimes specifically targeting women. Violence against women and sexual violence, including sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy and enforced sterilization are increasingly understood to be human rights violations, genocidal strategies and crimes against humanity (Boyer, 2006; Pankhurst, 2008; Smith, 2005).

In 1992 the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women adopted *Recommendation 19* declaring violence against women a form of discrimination. In 1993 the World Conference on Human Rights called for an end to all forms of violence against women. The Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 expressed the determination of global women collectively to prevent and eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls and to protect all human rights of women and girls. In 2000 the United Nations Security Council *Resolution 1325* reaffirmed the important role of women in prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, stressing the importance of equal participation, full involvement, and the need to increase women's role in decision-making. In 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples; *Article 21* specifically refers to improvement of economic and social conditions for women; *Article 22(2)* refers to full protection for women and children against all forms of violence and discrimination; and *Article 44* of the declaration guarantees all of the rights detailed in the document, equally to male and female Indigenous individuals.

Amnesty International prioritized violence against Indigenous women and girls through human rights campaigns and the *Stolen Sisters* and *Maze of Injustice* reports (Amnesty International 2009 and 2007 respectively). Both of these reports link disproportionately high levels of violence and murder of Indigenous girls and women with social conditions that are the legacy of

colonialism in Canada and the United States. These social conditions include marginalization, dispossession, poverty, and discriminatory social institutions, especially in justice and health, as well as consistent denial of these realities by mainstream societal and government bodies.

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) through the *Sisters in Spirit* initiative has taken a leadership role in raising awareness of disproportionately high rates of murdered and missing Indigenous women. NWAC also argues that a mainstream gender analysis excludes the gendered impacts of colonialism resulting from forced imposition of a Eurocentric, patriarchal worldview based not just on gender inequality, dominance, hierarchy and state control but also on de-humanizing Indigeneity. As a result, mainstream gender analyses do not take into account or value Indigenous worldviews, in which relations between men and women and all of creation are conceptualized in terms of balance, reciprocity, interdependence and respect. Neither do mainstream analyses conceptualize gender as inclusive of Two-Spirit<sup>1</sup> people.

Applying mainstream gender based analysis tools in an Indigenous context runs the risk of simply reinforcing and advancing neo-colonial structures to the continued detriment of Indigenous women and their families, communities and Nations (Fleras, 2009; Smith, 2005).

*...the analysis of and strategies for addressing gender violence have failed to address the manner in which gender violence is not simply a tool of patriarchal control, but also serves as a tool of racism and colonialism. That is, colonial relationships are themselves gendered and sexualized (Smith, 2005:1)*

In Canada and internationally, attempts to understand and articulate historical and contemporary colonial harms are focusing more frequently on Indigenous knowledge as the means for moving forward in a ways that are strength-based versus deficit-based. As well, a shift toward recognizing and building on community capacity and cultural strengths is helping to increase awareness of the unique value of Indigenous women's leadership in creating new, more just, equitable and life-sustaining societies (Atkin, 2005; Allen, 1986; Armstrong, 1996; Anderson, 2000; Gonzales, 2007; Gray, 2009; Kershaw and Harkey, 2009; Maracle, 2003; Valaskakis, Stout and Guimond, 2009).

There are important lessons to be drawn from the work, experiences and ideas of Indigenous women in relation to reconciliation. The past three decades of women's leadership in community development and healing demonstrate relationally-based ways of being and doing that reaffirm Indigenous knowledge and worldviews. By reconnecting cultural revitalization to community healing and creating culturally safe spaces through Indigenous-driven programs and services, women have been active in 'on-the-ground' decolonization efforts.

Yet ongoing colonialism continues to be expressed through gender relations at all levels,

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<sup>1</sup> Two-Spirit is the term used by some Aboriginal People in Canada to describe lesbian, gay, transgendered, and bisexual individuals.

personally, socially and politically. If the formal process of reconciliation is to assist women as well as men in addressing contemporary colonialism, governments, agencies and the truth commission must take into account the knowledge and pedagogical work of Indigenous women (Atkin, 2005; Anderson, 2009; Gray, 2009; Maracle, 2003; Matthews and Aberdeen, 2008).

The models for reconciliation and promising practices outlined in this paper are a contribution to thoughtful deliberation and ongoing dialogue enabled by the continued growth of literature in this field.

## CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

*The TRC hopes to guide and inspire Aboriginal peoples and Canadians in a process of reconciliation and renewed relationships that are based on mutual understanding and respect (TRC website).*

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a component of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. Its five-year mandate is to inform Canadians about what happened in Indian Residential Schools (IRS) by documenting the truth of Survivors, families, communities and anyone personally affected by the IRS experience. This includes First Nations, Inuit and Métis former students of these schools, their families, communities, the Churches, former school employees, Government and other Canadians.

To promote awareness and public education about the IRS system and its impacts, the Commission plans to host seven national events across Canada. A national research centre will be established by the end of the TRC mandate that will be a permanent resource for all Canadians. The TRC will also support local events designed by individual communities to meet their unique needs and a Commemoration Initiative will provide funding for activities that honour and pay tribute in a permanent and lasting manner to IRS Survivors.

*We will move towards achieving reconciliation through activities such as public education and engagement, commemoration and recommendations to the parties. (Ibid.)*

As Canada's TRC begins these tasks, the importance of a gender framework that puts into practice and promotes Indigenous knowledge and an Indigenous approach to gender balance is crucially relevant. Indigenous women can and must be part of every aspect of Canada's formal truth and reconciliation process. A culturally relevant gender based analysis can and must guide the process of reconciliation in Canada.

## CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER BASED ANALYSIS

Historically Indigenous women commanded the highest respect in their communities as the keepers of traditions, practices and customs of the Nations; women and girls embodied the sacred through their capacity to create and nourish life. Every community member, even the youngest had the responsibility to enter into all relationships – with self, family, the community, Nation and Creation - in a “good way.” Women made important decisions concerning internal and external affairs including about family, property rights, resource allocation, trade/economics and education. For millennia Indigenous societies thrived on a solid foundation of balanced, interdependent gender roles and responsibilities in all aspects of life, socially, economically, politically and spiritually (Woloski, 2008).

The Native Women’s Association of Canada believes in, practices, and promotes an Indigenous worldview that emphasizes the interconnectedness among all things: individuals, organizations, communities, Nations, and all of Creation. Within this belief system, constructs such as race, culture, and gender cannot be compartmentalized and separated. Mainstream anti-oppression and gender equality conceptual frameworks are not relevant in an Indigenous context as this type of disconnected silo-thinking is not part of the worldviews. Mainstream theoretical constructs about oppression have been developed for and are conceptually relevant in the context of a colonial worldview that divides and dominates through the creation of socially constructed, hierarchal differences based on race, class, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, physical/mental ability, age, income, and education.

*First Nations women have long struggled for cultural continuity and community development, trying to reconcile the numerous disconnects between their holistic world view and the Western world view that is so often atomistic, mechanistic, and antagonistic (Valaskakis, Stout and Guimond, 2009:1).*

Indigenous women have strongly resisted changes to their agency and authority enforced by colonization and have struggled to maintain a central place in the work of their communities and Nations. Despite over two centuries of comprehensive and strategic efforts to undermine their role and despite social conditions putting them at risk of their lives, a growing number of women are demonstrating self-determination, resilience and adaptability. Conceptually, NWACs culturally relevant gender-based analysis positions women as agents of change through persistent, collective efforts to revitalize their traditional roles and responsibilities in accordance with their Indigenous worldviews. NWAC acknowledges and honours Indigenous women’s efforts to rebuild relationships in ways that reflect their traditional values of mutual respect, interdependence and connectivity. Whether through their nurturing roles as mothers or as leaders in community replenishment/development and community healing, as academics, policy makers or leaders of provincial, national and international organizations, Indigenous women’s contributions to contemporary society are significant.

## INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE AND WORLDVIEWS

*Whether or not it has been acknowledged by the Eurocentric mainstream, Indigenous knowledge has always existed. The recognition and intellectual activation of Indigenous knowledge today is an act of empowerment by Indigenous people. The task for Indigenous academics has been to affirm and activate the holistic paradigm of Indigenous knowledge to reveal the wealth and richness of Indigenous languages, worldviews, teachings, and experiences, all of which have been systematically excluded from contemporary educational institutions and from Eurocentric knowledge systems (Battiste, 2005).*

Although there is considerable breadth and diversity in the cultural ways and protocols of Indigenous Peoples of North America, there are also many commonalities that differ profoundly from a Eurocentric worldview. Most significant are shared beliefs in holism, collectivism, kinship, cooperation, reciprocity and the absolute dependence of humans on each other, the land, and their environment. These core beliefs are evident in all spheres of life whether culturally, socially, economically or spiritually (Battiste, 2009; Sinclair, Hart and Bruyere, 2009).

Indigenous ways of knowing are rooted in a holistic paradigm that reflects this relational understanding of the world. The foundational premises of Indigenous worldviews as summarized by Cajete are: 1) that natural democracy must prevail - the Earth is alive and everything on it has its own intelligence and right to exist; 2) that everything is related – all things being of the Earth are necessarily interrelated and interdependent; 3) all relationships have a natural history within their place or environment on the Earth; 4) Native science or Indigenous knowledge orients itself to a ‘space and a place’ meaning the relationship of people to their environment is sacred and the purpose of science/knowledge is to honour the other lives they are bound to and the forces that sustain that life; and 5) everything has a time and an evolutionary path evidenced by the natural cycles of life - each entity has a part of play in the creation of the future (Cajete, 2000:77).

Within Indigenous worldviews, no hierarchal division exists between animal or plant and human, between male or female, between spirituality and knowledge. Every act, element, plant, animal, and natural process is considered to be animated by its own spirit, with which humans continually communicate (Cajete, 2000:69). Life is premised on the interdependence and interconnection of everything in the universe; Indigenous knowledge is the process of understanding these connections, and renewing and strengthening these relations.

In the worldview of the Siksikaitstapi (Blackfoot), the acquisition of knowledge, experience and skills throughout life is itself a sacred process (Bastien, 2004:170-171). ‘Traditional’ learning is coming to know one’s basic ontological responsibilities arising from the fundamental principles of life. Those who have learned these responsibilities well become the keepers of that knowledge, responsible for passing it on to the next generation. These ways of knowing and transmitting knowledge represent an Indigenous epistemology and pedagogy, an ethical and



moral responsibility to produce knowledge that renews and restores balance to life on Earth (Bastien, 2004:182). This responsibility is shared equally by women and men.

*Indigenous knowledge is an adaptable, dynamic system based on skills, abilities, and problem-solving techniques that change over time depending on environmental conditions..." (Battiste, 2005:6).*

Indigenous knowledge is integrated with spirituality in practices related to governance, health and healing, acquisition and distribution of resources through agriculture, hunting and trade, child development, and art making; each has its attendant ceremonial practice for the purpose of animating the spirit of that activity. Rites of passage provide ceremonial initiation into evolving responsibilities throughout the lifespan, generating deeper understanding of an individual's developmental process while intensifying the sense of sacred connection with a larger whole. In these belief systems, life is not separate from ceremony; it *is* ceremony and within the ceremony of life women as well as men are sacred beings, animated by their own spirit and carrying their own ontological responsibilities (Bastien, 2004).

According to Hart, "knowledge is that which helps people to move forward in their lives" (as quoted in Kovach, 2009:72). Indigenous knowledge or ways of knowing and being have enabled Indigenous Peoples to adapt, resist, survive and flourish despite centuries of deliberate, comprehensive and prolonged strategies of colonization.

## **GENDER WITHIN INDIGENOUS WORLDVIEWS**

*Mothers are seen as keepers of the culture, the nation, and the future. Women are responsible for cultural and community continuity and they watch over present and future generations. There is an authority that comes with this role, which translates into political responsibility where women work in balance with men. This is exemplified in nations that have clan mothers or in more informal governance structures where grandmothers are recognized as authority figures (Anderson, 2009:104).*

Indigenous creation stories, ceremonies, teachings and practices affirm a relational paradigm and the fundamental principle of balanced equilibrium. For example, a commonly held belief is that the Eagle, one of the most sacred of Earth's creatures, flies with one female wing and one male wing. This belief illustrates the absolute necessity of balance between the masculine and feminine and the interdependence of individuals, families, communities and Nations on the power and capacity of both women and men (Valaskakis, Stout and Guimond, 2009:9). Pipe teachings of the Anishnabe from Algonquin territory describe their ceremonial pipe as having two parts: the bowl and the stem. The pipe bowl symbolizes female power and it is derived from stone, which represents the ancestors; the pipe stem symbolizes male power and is derived from the wood of trees, representing the standing people. Joining the bowl and stem, the female and male, together ignites the life or sacred spirit of the pipe; the smoke is its breath

(Bailey, 2000:55). The Midewiwin Society of the Ojibway (Anishnabe) provides another example of male-female balanced interdependence.

*There's nothing that you can do that is completely female, nor completely male. Even in the way that the Midewiwin society operates, the teaching lodge, the sweat lodge – I mean, the men can bend as many poles as they want; if the women are not there to tie the poles together, they will not have a lodge. It's a very simple but very profound teaching tool; that each of them plays a role, and they can't complete their work without each other (Gertie Beaucage, quoted in Anderson, 2000:175).*

Many Indigenous creation stories feature female power and agency; a Cree creation story teaches that the universe and everything in it came into being “as the result of the efforts of a female force of energy known as *O-ma-ma*, a miraculous entity eventually to be known as Mother Earth” (Highway, 2002:39). Another teaching that emphasizes the notion of a ‘femalized insurmountable power shared by all of us’ is in the Rotinoshonni (Mohawk) creation story of ‘Sky Woman’ who jumped to earth out of a ‘passionate commitment to help the people survive and indomitable compassion for other human beings’ (Alfred, 2005:254-6). Kim Anderson relays a Saulteaux creation story told to her by Elder Danny Musqua that was told to him by his late Grandfather.

*The womb is the woman, not the rib. And the womb was within the Creator. And our mother in God had a womb. And she became physical. And the womb was the heavens up there. And the life that she gave was the stars. The stars. And within the stars, she put physical life, because she was physical. And she became the first human being. She took on this body, and she roamed the heavens, and gave life. Even much more so, in four corners of universe, she gave life (Danny Musqua in Anderson, 2010: 202:203).*

Elder Danny Musqua goes on to repeat his Grandfather’s cautionary words about the outcome of replacing their Saulteaux creation story with the story of ‘the rib’; a story that devalues the female role in creation, and therefore all women. “[T]he next thing you know, you are going to be treating your mother bad, treating your grandmother bad. You’ll be treating the women bad if you start putting your mother in that subverted position, a position less than yourself. If you are going to put her down, step on top of her, make her look like that blanket over there, [as if] you could move it here and there – *when the blanket of life is her*. You are going to start disrespecting. Next thing you know, you will be slapping your mother, you’ll be slapping your wife, and the next thing, you’ll be arguing with your mother. You don’t argue with your mother!” (Ibid.)

At the time of contact with Europeans, the *Iroquois Confederacy* had long been a matriarchal society. It’s *Constitution* (Gayanerekowa) organized society by kinship groups or clans headed by clan-mothers. Although decision-making was a responsibility of both male and female councils

within each clan, the constitution also gave women the right to hold their own councils and act independently when necessary. Women held property and hereditary title, and through their clan families, held the titles of Chieftainship and War Chief. As well, women were privileged through clan membership with the power to depose and bestow chieftainship (NWAC, undated).

Indigenous worldviews are neither hierarchal nor patriarchal; therefore the sacredness of life and the ontological responsibilities of men and women are not separated out and devalued through comparison. Although traditionally tasks were often gender-specific many Indigenous societies ensured both boys and girls were taught the knowledge and skills necessary for basic survival so they had the ability to look after themselves and others as required (Anderson, 2000; Jaimes\*Guerrero, 2003; Simpson, 2008).

Women as well as men had clear roles and responsibilities for generating and transmitting knowledge, including significant ceremonial roles in the spiritual life, annual festivals and medicine societies of their communities and Nations. Raising children was a collective responsibility. Interdependency and flexibility of gender roles was essential for survival before and after contact with Europeans; the fur trade relied heavily on women's work whether as trappers, or in preparing animal hides and food. (Hill, 2003; Anderson, 2000; LaRocque, 2009; NWAC, undated; Simpson, 2008).

Traditional Indigenous worldviews value women's wisdom, voices and work equally with that of men as well as those of Two-Spirit people; therefore a gender-equal approach is embedded within Indigenous epistemologies. Such belief systems based on the sacred interconnectedness and interdependency of all things provide the framework for building new relationships based on mutual responsibility, reciprocity and respect.

## **GENDERED OUTCOMES OF COLONIZATION**

*In order to create and define clear models as well as best practices for First Nations women, and to continue strengthening and reinforcing First Nations women's capacity for social resolution and transformative social action, it is necessary first to understand the impact of mechanisms put in place by colonizers that led to the marginalization and devaluation of First Nations roles and lifeways (Wesley-Esquimaux, 2009:18).*

Strategies of colonization were gendered purposefully to undermine and remove Indigenous women's traditional authority and agency. The *Indian Act* and residential school education were designed to destroy women's traditional roles within clan, kinship and governance systems, preparing them instead to become the 'property' of individual men as good 'Christian' wives and mothers, dependent upon and submissive to male authority, and isolated within nuclear families. The sacredness of women's bodies, honoured through ceremonies celebrating menstruation and the capacity to create life were replaced with the belief that the bodies of

women and girls are inherently savage, dirty, impure and sinful; therefore violable (Allen, 1992; Anderson, 2000; Hill, 2003; Jamieson\*Guerre, 2003; Smith, 2005). Women's traditional birthing ceremonies were replaced with male medical control, substandard formula replaced breast feeding, disconnection replaced attachment and mothering was replaced by physical, sexual, emotional and spiritual abuse in the residential school system (Lavell-Harvard and Lavell, 2006).

The *Indian Act* of 1876 was created as the mechanism for taking and maintaining control over the lives of First Nations people and their lands, determining every aspect of their conduct and behavior, and even their status as 'Indians.' Until this legislation was amended in 1985, many generations of women who married non-Native men lost their status as well as that of their children, while Native men not only kept theirs but extended it to their wives and children. Another piece of legislation that had devastating effects on Native women was the *Sexual Sterilization Act* created to prevent 'mental defectives' from having children. This act was amended in 1937 to include 'individuals incapable of intelligent parenthood' a change that targeted Native women. Although many of the files maintained by the Alberta Eugenics Board were destroyed, those remaining showed "most noticeably over-represented were Aboriginals" (Boyer, 2009:76).

The Canadian government made spiritual practices that had sustained the lives of the people illegal and punishable by imprisonment. Taking away ceremonies such as the Potlatch and the Sun Dance "meant taking away the ideas, values, and principles basic to community mental health. With the ceremonies went security, identity, ideology, rituals, belonging, reciprocity, and beliefs, along with responsibility for actions, access to resources, time together, healing, and justice" (Hodgson, 2008: 363-364). This attack on spiritual practices was a direct attack on the belief system underlying those practices: which is that everyone has responsibilities; that all of these responsibilities are equally valued; and that all contribute to restoring and maintaining the balance of the universe (Anderson, 2000). In residential schools, children were strictly separated by gender to reinforce colonial beliefs of female inferiority and male/female disconnection.

These strategies of colonization systematically devalued, undermined and subjugated Indigenous women in every way: mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually, economically and politically. Women who resisted were put in their place or punished through ridicule, exclusion and violence (Anderson, 2000; Hill, 2003; Smith, 2006, Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Anderson notes that "Among the "discoveries" made by settler-invaders were the facts that violence against women was relatively rare and that it was swiftly dealt with when it occurred. These liberties made Indigenous women what Andrea Smith has called 'bearers of a counter-imperial order'; as such, they were a threat (Smith, 2005: 19-20). The response to this threat was to subjugate Indigenous women and introduce an order of violence" (Anderson, 2010: 189).

Recent reports link tragically high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada and globally to these gendered impacts of colonialism (Amnesty, 2004, 2007, 2009; NWAC, 2010). In 2004 when Amnesty International released the first *Stolen Sisters* report, widespread, entrenched racism and marginalization, along with deep inequalities in living

conditions were associated with increased risk of violence against Aboriginal women. Such inequalities deny women access to the services and support needed to escape violence. A five-year follow-up report showed very little has changed. According to Amnesty's most recent report, "The scale and severity of human rights violations faced by Indigenous women requires a coordinated and comprehensive national response to ensure the safety of Indigenous women, to bring those responsible for violence against them to justice, and to address the deeper problems of marginalization and poverty that place Indigenous women in harm's way" (Amnesty International, 2009).

In March 2010 NWAC released its research results from a five-year study of more than 580 murdered and missing Aboriginal women and girls across Canada. Findings from demographic and statistical evidence identify "intergenerational impacts and resulting vulnerabilities of colonization and state policies – such as the residential school system, the 60s Scoop<sup>2</sup>, and the child welfare system<sup>3</sup>" as underlying factors in the high rates of murdered and missing women and girls. Selected findings show: a majority of the women are young, under the age of 31; most were mothers who left behind children and grandchildren; the majority of deaths and disappearances occur in the western provinces of Canada, and in urban areas; nearly half of the murder cases remain unsolved; and 115 girls and women are still missing (NWAC, 2010).

Colonialism has profoundly altered traditional Indigenous beliefs and practices; both Indigenous women and men have internalized colonial beliefs about female inferiority and male authority. Contemporary gendered descriptions of the 'traditional woman' reflect this colonialist legacy whenever an Indigenous woman is encouraged to remain unobtrusive, soft spoken and quiet, silent and obedient to male authority, walking behind the man, not assuming elected leadership or in any way 'acting like a man'; or whenever her actions or attire are judged to endanger cultural safety, spirituality or ceremony (Hill, 2003; LaRocque, 1997). Nor are these neocolonial attitudes gender specific; some Indigenous women as well as men, including Elders have internalized these Eurocentric beliefs just as conversely, some Indigenous men as well as women, including Elders are actively resisting them and persevere in the traditional belief that gender balance, equality and respect strengthen societal relations (Anderson and Lawrence, 2003; Alfred, 2005; Highway, 2003, Simpson, 2008). Even so, Eurocentric beliefs and ideas about gender, hierarchy and power have been remarkably persistent in shaping policies, protocols and practices to ensure the colonialist worldview remains dominant.

*The process of en-gendering descriptions of the other has had very real consequences for indigenous women in that the ways in which indigenous*

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<sup>2</sup> The "60's Scoop" refers to the accelerated removal of Aboriginal children from their families into non-Aboriginal adoptive homes, in most cases far from their home communities and Nations.

<sup>3</sup> There are presently more Aboriginal children in the care of Children's Aid Societies than at any other period in Canada's history including the height of residential schooling.

women were described, objectified and represented by Europeans in the nineteenth century has left a **legacy of marginalization within indigenous societies as much as within the colonizing society** (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999:46. *Emphasis added*).

## TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

*Politics is a process to deal with the **issues** that have divided us in the past. Reconciliation is a parallel process that redesigns the **relationships** between us* (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003:12).

Reconciliation is described as the process of “restoring good will in relations that have been disrupted” in the mandate for the second component of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Castellano, Archibald and DeGagné, 2008:3). It has also been said that at the core of any reconciliation process is a...’preparedness of people to anticipate a shared future’ which entails not only a forgiveness of the past but shared strategies for moving forward collectively to decolonize existing relationships (Corntassel and Holder, 2008:469). As well as revealing the truth of past injustices and the full scope of human rights violations, truth telling and reconciliation contribute to accountability by identifying and dispelling myths and stereotypes, and cutting through social indifference and collective denial ((Dal Secco, 2008; Sutherland, 1998). Collective reconciliation also requires a return to ceremony whether through commemoration, or as personal and community healing or through national days of reconciliation. Ceremony must be integrated with the work of reconciliation in ways that respect a diversity of traditions and customs (Hodgson, 2008).

*The process of reconciliation relies on the foundation laid by the person, the group, and the community to bring our spirits to a place of readiness to be willing to reconcile* (Hodgson, 2008:368).

Over the past thirty-five years truth and reconciliation commissions (TRC) have become the preferred process for states to address wrong-doing in order to move forward with a sense of social cohesion and justice in the aftermath of state-driven human rights violations and violence. Haynor identified six main purposes of truth commissions as follows (cited in Pankhurst, 2008:11).

- To clarify and acknowledge truth.
- To respond to the needs and interests of victims/survivors.
- To contribute to justice and accountability.
- To outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms.
- To promote reconciliation and reduce tensions resulting from past violence.
- To meet the rights of victims/survivors and society to the truth.

## GENDERED OUTCOMES OF TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

Gender is increasingly recognized as an indisputable dimension of reconciliation at official and institutional levels. Yet, experience globally demonstrates that because women have little or no representation in government or other formal decision-making bodies, the opportunity to voice their concerns and interests and ensure that these are recognized as political concerns are negligible. It is increasingly apparent that for women, neither the outcomes of truth and reconciliation processes nor the methodologies used to elicit them are able to do justice to the range of women's experiences of harm or address the changes required to end prejudicial attitudes and practices of dispossession that gave rise to the harm (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003).

While much of the literature on gendered outcomes of reconciliation describes political transitional contexts outside of Canada, many of the principles and practices of reconciliation and truth telling are clearly applicable in the Canadian context. For example, research on reconciliation through the lens of South African grassroots community groups reflects and informs Canadian reconciliation challenges in various ways. Most importantly, it echoes literature emerging in the Canadian context which asserts that healing for victims is not reconciliation; personal healing alone does not address the fundamental need for the broader structural changes required for true reconciliation. And, while gendered outcomes of reconciliation need to be realized *within* oppressed communities to address the violence, poverty and various forms of imbalance resulting from centuries of oppression, the colonial beliefs and ideas about gender relations and individualism that continue to shape policies, protocols and practices must also be challenged and transformed (Colvin, 2000; Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003; Pankhurst, 2008).

*Seeking for accuracy about the past is a vital step in the reconciliation process...as is allowing victims to tell their stories. But "truth" in itself will not bring reconciliation. Truth-seeking is a key ingredient, but only one ingredient in reconciliation. In the same way justice is a vital requirement for healing wounds, making offenders accountable and re-establishing relations of equity and respect. But justice alone does not bring reconciliation. Truth and justice are not separate to reconciliation; they are key parts of it. (Bloomfield, Barnes and Huyse, 2003:14)*

Research from South Africa attests to the importance of a TRC process that considers women's needs in its conceptualizations, its legislative mandate, its composition, and its functioning. In order to successfully make visible and legitimize women's experiences, women must have full access to information about the mandate, structure, functioning and safety measures available. Manjoo points out that justice and healing require certain pre-conditions which include but are not limited to, an enabling environment for both disclosure and testimony by victims, and appropriate support services (Manjoo, 2008). Unfortunately because of the narrow mandate and gender-neutral/gender-blind approach adopted by the TRC in South Africa, the outcomes

have had limited value and impact for black women. In South Africa, “the lack of participation of women, the lack of consultation of women, the discussions and drafting process which was led by men who were not necessarily gender-sensitive” contributed to “development of a gender and race neutral piece of legislation, which then resulted in the TRC not dealing with the violations that really affected black women the most” (Manjoo, 2008:143).

Research findings about the impacts on women of the truth telling process in Rwanda echo that of South Africa; in one study, women witnesses complained that their contact with the tribunal ‘is minimal and lacks follow-up’ that women who testify are treated like blinkered horses, only brought in when it is time to testify. The lack of information and a caring and respectful process resulted in women feeling ‘used’ and contributed to a sense of alienation (Nowrojee, 2008: 126).

Some truth and reconciliation commissions have made serious efforts to reflect gendered dimensions of conflict and its aftermath within the human rights framework of international humanitarian law. A recent comparative analysis of three such examples from Peru, East Timor and Sierra Leone shows remarkable advancements in engendering truth-telling processes through formal mechanisms. These findings underscore the importance of establishing a gender responsive framework right from the beginning of a TRC process rather than an add-on mid-way or toward the end. The report concludes that “...where a gender perspective was established from the onset in the mandate, the process and outcomes especially related to sexual violence were more effective” and “favoured more sensitive reparation and reform proposals” (Dal Secco, 2008:95).

The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) through its *Sisters in Spirit* (SIS) research initiative has much to offer in terms of lessons learned about gathering sensitive information in a research context. Their methodology developed for the ‘Voices’ initiative has particular relevance for Canada’s TRC, especially in its caring and respectful protocol for interviewing the families of missing and murdered women and girls. For example, the SIS family interview protocol facilitates linkages with local community supports as part of the research process and these supports are made available to interviewees before, during and after telling their family stories. As well, careful attention is paid to selecting the sites for family interviews in order to maximize safety and comfort for participants. The SIS methodology further recognizes and addresses the impacts on researchers of hearing such stories as part of their research activities. Empathic, holistic listening is a vitally important skill for researchers who are recording stories of pain, grief, and injustice. Yet they are often unprepared for the symptoms of vicarious trauma they may experience in the aftermath of hearing so many intense stories of trauma and loss (NWAC, 2009).

The stated vision of truth and reconciliation in Canada is to restore good will in relations that have been disrupted; this inherently requires recognition of engendered harms and injustices experienced by Indigenous women. If recommendations are to be put forward for redress that enable full realization of rights to self-determination, the urgent issues of marginalization and



violence against women must also be addressed. A gender responsive reconciliation model based on Indigenous knowledge requires the shared efforts and commitment of both women and men in order to end the invisibility of harms suffered by Indigenous women.

## PROMISING MODELS FOR GENDER RESPONSIVE RECONCILIATION

Increasingly the path to authentic reconciliation is understood as a parallel process of personal and political transformation from systems of domination to relationships of mutuality (Sutherland, 1998:ii). The following four models illustrate broadly diverse reconciliation processes at local and national levels that promote and reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Although very different from each other, they all have achieved some degree of success in addressing the gendered impacts of colonialism. Consideration was given to models that either implicitly or explicitly address gender impacts through an approach that reflects traditional Indigenous principles of gender balance, cultural respect, shared responsibility, community engagement and community replenishment/capacity building.

1. The Aboriginal Healing Foundation
2. Reconciliation Australia
3. The Board School Healing Project
4. The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa

## ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION

*A principle means by which institutions develop legitimacy is by achieving a good match between institutions and the society's culture. (DeGagné in Graham and Mitchell, 2009).*

The *Aboriginal Healing Foundation (AHF)* was established in 1998 with a one-time funding grant of \$350 million from the Government of Canada as part of its commitment to healing and reconciliation from the impacts of residential school abuse. The stated goal of the AHF was to strengthen Aboriginal people, address their healing needs and prevent further abuse. The model for residential school resolution adopted by the *AHF* is based on a four-phase process of 1) *acknowledgement*, naming the harmful acts and admitting wrong-doing; 2) *redress* by taking action to compensate for harms inflicted; 3) *healing* by restoring physical, mental, emotional and spiritual balance in individuals, families and communities; and 4) *reconciliation* through development of acceptance and mutual trust (Brant Castellano, 2008).

The Board of Directors of the AHF stated its commitment from the onset, to “establishing an organization that belonged to the people and that would listen to them” (Castellano, 2008:19). At a governance level, the Board's committee structure included a forum for women's issues to be identified and addressed.

The AHF affirmed that “women have a crucial role to play in the healing of individuals, families and communities affected by the Legacy of Sexual Abuse and Physical Abuse in Residential Schools including Intergenerational impacts” and that “Healing projects for and by women, as givers of life, are essential in the healing of Aboriginal people in Canada (AHF, 1999:11). The AHF Logic Model prioritized two long term goals, one of which was to break the cycle of physical and sexual abuse. From the proposal application process to monitoring and final reporting, projects were asked to consider the “needs of all people, including Elders, young people, women, two-spirited people and disabled people” (AHF, 1999:22). Quarterly and final reporting templates were designed to ensure information gathered for application, monitoring and evaluation methods was inclusive; data was collected on the participation of women, men, Elders, Survivors, and Two-Spirit people in healing activities. As a direct result of the AHF taking a stand in support of Two-Spirit people, opportunities for them to heal and reclaim a meaningful role in their communities and Nations increased.

The AHFs stated commitment to ownership by the people, to listening, and to gender balance helped promote nation-wide, an approach to healing and reconciliation that empowered communities to begin to address issues of violence and inequality. Information from monitoring and evaluation reports of AHF funded healing projects has implications for truth and reconciliation, especially the importance of establishing policies and protocols to ensure the safety of women and girls throughout the process. By enabling communities to strive for relations of respect and equality, healing projects administered through the AHF have helped lay the groundwork at community levels, for gender responsive reconciliation.

## **WHY THE ABORIGINAL HEALING FOUNDATION MODEL MATTERS**

1. Through its stated belief that healing projects for and by women, as givers of life, are essential in the healing of Aboriginal people, and through structures and mechanisms that ensured inclusive participation in its activities, the AHF advanced gender equality for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people.
2. Projects funded through the AHF were required to demonstrate mechanisms for accountability to the communities, to the Survivors, and to the target groups they served.
3. A strong role for Elders and traditional healers, and a ‘culture as healing’ approach promoted cultural revitalization and cultural continuity.
4. The reach and scope of AHFs impact is significant: through its grants the AHF supported the development of 1346 community healing projects in every province and territory of Canada; it has also produced more than 25 publications on a range of topics related to the impacts and legacy of residential schooling and colonization.

## RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA

The formal 10-year process of reconciliation undertaken in Australia from 1991 to 2000 was unable to achieve its stated goals by the end of the decade. Because the focus for reconciliation was on nationalism and a single national identity for all Australians, unity was emphasized over truth; issues of sovereignty, land title and self-determination were not part of the discussions (Gunstone, 2004).

*This discourse failed to recognize that historical factors, such as the invasion, colonization, massacres, genocide and theft of land and children, and their continuing contemporary repercussions, ensure that there will continue to be conflicts and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people...This failure to incorporate a number of key Indigenous demands ensured that the reconciliation process could not adequately address its goals of educating the wider community about Indigenous issues and consulting with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people about a document of reconciliation. (2004:14).*

A national quantitative survey commissioned by the government to investigate Australia's attitudes toward Indigenous peoples revealed that the reconciliation process had not achieved success in addressing the 'racist and ignorant attitudes' of Australians toward Indigenous people (Gunstone, 2006:149).

*Reconciliation Australia (RA)* was established as an independent non-profit organization whose purpose is to foster tangible outcomes for reconciliation in Australia including: 1) achieving social and economic equity for Indigenous Australians; 2) strengthening the people's movement for reconciliation; and 3) acknowledging the past and building a framework for a shared future. From the onset, *Reconciliation Australia* took a strong stand against domestic and sexual violence, outlining the first steps in the development of a national strategy to address these issues.

RA defines reconciliation as "building mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and other Australians that allow us to work together to solve problems and generate success that is in everyone's best interests". To further this vision, significant opportunities are provided for learning about Indigenous history and culture, for dismantling myths and misunderstandings, and for encouraging everyone to take their part in building better relationships. The primary citizen engagement and communications tool is a website, called *Share Our Pride* which provides ten categories of information: Welcome to Share Our Pride, Indigenous Australians, Culture, Our shared history, Beyond the myths, Respectful relationships, Success stories, Indigenous movies, Indigenous festivals, and Indigenous books.

Information featured on the RA website celebrates the achievements of Indigenous men and women historically as well as in all aspects of modern life. It promotes individual responsibility and accountability toward effecting social change, emphasizing that "Most Australians do not know how to relate to Aboriginal people. They relate to stories told by former colonists."

RA has also developed *Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP)* to provide a framework for organizations to make changes from their own area of interest and expertise. RAP projects are based on building good relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 'showing respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures', and through career and other opportunities. By posting their RAPs on the website, organizations are made accountable for their commitments through public scrutiny, as well as through timelines and performance indicators. New RAPs posted in March 2010 feature *Family Relationship Services Australia*, and a cluster of four schools which is featured as the *RAP of the Month*. These four schools have collaborated on an action plan aimed at providing cultural awareness training to 100 percent of their teachers and staff; as well as actively participating in important anniversaries such as the *Apology Anniversary, National Reconciliation Week and NAIDOC Week*<sup>4</sup>. These events are held across Australia annually to showcase the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

RA has identified strategies to: enhance Indigenous governance; improve Indigenous peoples' access to banking and financial services; progress the issue of a treaty; and implement a national strategy to address the issue of sexual and family violence. This national strategy includes a systemic audit of family and sexual violence services to assess the range, availability and gaps in services provided by police, child protection agencies, and family and community services as well as partnerships to identify best-practice models that are already working in communities.

RA's position paper posted on their website states:

*Reconciliation Australia acknowledges the traditional owners of country throughout Australia and their continuing connection to land and community. We pay our respect to them, and their cultures, and to the Elders both past and present. Our office is located on the traditional lands of the Ngunnawal people.*

## **WHY THE RECONCILIATION AUSTRALIA MODEL MATTERS**

1. In the aftermath of disappointing results from the 10-year formal process of reconciliation, this model has had significant success directly engaging non-Indigenous Australians in an intercultural peace-making process and changing their attitudes toward Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. One aspect of its success is that it provides opportunities for Australians to take personal responsibility for decolonization.
2. The reach and scope of this initiative is remarkable and its use of contemporary information technology is innovative. Evidence of success: 15,000 copies of Reconciliation Australia's documentary 'The Apology' distributed on request; 100,000 copies of RA News circulated annually; 32,000 visitors to online cultural awareness site

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<sup>4</sup> Acronym of National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

- since 2008; 333 RAPs implemented or in development; 1,460,000 Australians employed in organizations implementing RAPs; organizations participating in RAPs represent all sectors from large corporations to small business, government agencies, schools and universities, hospitals and health organizations, community-based and non-profit organizations, industry associations, faith groups, festivals, bands, sporting and creative arts, and Indigenous organizations and enterprises.
3. Although the Australian government has long resisted acknowledging Indigenous land rights, RA has promoted development of a treaty and formal recognition of the inherent rights of Indigenous people.
  4. Information on the RA website highlights the roles and achievements of Indigenous women as well as men; its strategic plan sets out a national strategy toward ending violence against Indigenous women and girls.

## THE BOARDING SCHOOL HEALING PROJECT (BSHP)

The BSHP is a grassroots coalition of Native organizations and their allies in the United States. Its purpose is to document boarding school abuses so that Native communities can begin the process of healing and demand justice from the U.S. government and churches responsible for the abuse (Smith, 2005:44).

There are four components of the BSHP: *healing, education, documentation and accountability*. Healing is promoted by providing resources to survivors; education is aimed at informing communities about the project and organizing annual '*Boarding School Days of Remembrance*' to educate the larger public about the issue; documentation applies a research-action model to record boarding school abuses; and accountability is furthered by appealing to international bodies of justice toward an apology and reparation from the United States government. A key feature of communications for the project is that both the education and documentation strategies utilize a website and Facebook to engage survivors and the general public in the project.

The BSHP approach to reparations frames gender-based violence against Indigenous women in the US as one aspect of a continuing, state-sanctioned strategy of ethnocide and genocide. The project aims to identify alternatives to domination, coercion and control that are the legacy of patriarchy, colonialism and white supremacy. It rearticulates violence within Native communities as the continuing effect of human rights violations perpetrated by state policy; therefore ending gender violence is considered an anticolonial strategy.

In 2004, the BSHP initiated a joint session with prominent members of the African American reparations movement toward ending their historical divisions and exploring the potential for collaborative strategies. Through the *United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Affairs*, the BSHP is developing links with reparations movements in other countries to increase international pressure on the U.S.

One of the key contributions of the BSHP is to provide a women’s rights perspective in the international dialogue on human rights violations. By making the connections between state violence and interpersonal violence, the BSHP is a model that utilizes a two-pronged approach to ending violence against women by identifying internalized oppression and violence against women at individual and community levels as well advocating for decolonization of institutionalized structures of the state.

In the absence of a formal U.S. government apology or a government funded plan for healing and reconciliation, The Boarding School Healing Project illustrates the power of grassroots women’s leadership by “taking their lives and the lives of their communities into their own hands, into their own *healing hands*” (Highway, 2003:48).

## **WHY THE BSHP TRUTH TELLING MODEL MATTERS**

1. The United States lags significantly further behind countries such as Canada, New Zealand and Australia in acknowledging, documenting, apologizing for and addressing the harms of its colonial history. Without a formal method or infrastructure for recording the stories of the survivors of state-sponsored residential schools, their stories risk being lost and their voices silenced. The documentation strategy employed by BSHP ensures the voices and experiences of survivors are heard.
2. This model illustrates that when Indigenous women take leadership on an issue such as justice and healing from the impacts of colonization and boarding school abuses, the needs of all members of the community are taken into account.
3. By creating strategic alliances locally, nationally and internationally toward ethical collective action, among groups formerly isolationist or in conflict, the BSHP is laying the groundwork for a broader concept of reconciliation.

## **THE CHILDREN’S AID SOCIETY OF OTTAWA: TOWARD POST COLONIAL CHILD WELFARE SERVICES**

*One of the most harmful gaps in human rights protection for Indigenous Peoples in Canada is in the area of child welfare. A government committee has established that Indigenous children are four to six times more likely than non-Indigenous children to be removed from their families and placed in the care of the state. While some of these children are victims of abuse, the majority are being removed from their families because of inadequate care and living conditions. These children may never be reunited with their families and may never connect with their culture and traditions (Amnesty International, 2009:16).*

This case study provides an example of a smaller model for reconciliation on a local social service scale. It was undertaken by a mainstream Children’s Aid Society in collaboration with a culturally diverse urban Inuit, Métis and First Nations community toward improving child

protection outcomes. Prior to this reconciliation process, attitudes toward the CAS were marked by deeply-rooted hostility and mistrust. Child welfare practices imposed on Indigenous peoples in Canada have long reinforced the process of colonial domination marked by a comprehensive, strategic attack on all aspects of Indigenous family life including formal creation of residential schools and abolition of the fundamental human right to parent and raise their own children. The multi-generational trauma as a result of these violations continues to reverberate in Indigenous families and communities while the child welfare system continues its colonial practice.

*It is time that those of us in child welfare acknowledge the uncomfortable truth that, notwithstanding the existence of legislative prescriptions in Ontario since at least 1984, we have essentially continued to play the same role as did the residential schools, that is to remove First Nations, Inuit and Métis children from their families and communities. And in many cases, again notwithstanding those prescriptions to the contrary, we are still not giving them back (Engelking, 2009:1)*

The Children's Aid Society of Ottawa is mandated by the Ontario *Child and Family Services Act* to provide child welfare services in the City of Ottawa. Governed by a volunteer Board of Directors the Ottawa CAS employs a full time staff of 415 and a part time staff of 45, none of whom are First Nations, Métis or Inuit.

The structure and mechanisms developed by the CAS to promote organizational change included a clear, meaningful role for Indigenous service partners. From its onset, the reconciliation process was guided by the principles of self-determination and cultural continuity: it is a basic human right of Inuit, Métis and First Nation families and communities to provide, care for and transmit their cultural values to their children. It is understood that for many thousands of years prior to colonization Indigenous women gave birth to healthy infants who were welcomed into caring communities which provided for their optimal physical, emotional, mental and spiritual well-being throughout the lifespan.

The reconciliation process undertaken by the CAS to enable organizational change was informed by Blackstock's four-phase model for reconciliation in child welfare: *truth-telling, affirming, restoring, and relating* (Blackstock, Brown and Bennett, 2006). Urban Indigenous women with long-standing leadership roles in the network of community-based services were actively involved at every step of this reconciliation process. As members of a community *Liaison Group* they were instrumental in guiding each step, from development to implementation, monitoring and evaluation. There were also key roles for Elders and cultural educators who provided training and preparation for CAS employees in worldview and communications differences, especially respectful listening (Chansonneuve, 2010).

The first phase involved two *truth telling* processes; one event for over fifty Indigenous service providers and a second event for over one hundred community and family members, which

included mothers, fathers, and grandparents whose families had been CAS involved. The painful intensity of the one-day family truth-telling was balanced through a traditional communal feast over the lunch hour and performances of children from the Inuit and Aboriginal Head Starts. The inclusion of child care for the event in a separate part of the building and the cultural performances by their children was a vibrant, joyful reminder that children are at the centre of community life. The capacity of both women and men to express their views openly and honestly during this full day of truth-telling was a testament to effective, culturally-based planning and preparation.

A significant factor in this model's success was to allow much more time. Reconciliation was recognized as a relational process; therefore time was structured-in for communal eating, talking and laughter which are the central activities around which healthy relationships are built. Providing refreshments and sharing food creates a human bond and sustains energy levels during times of emotionality. Ensuring safe, comfortable, life-sustaining environments has long been associated with women's roles; women's caring influence and ethical leadership was significant in shaping the success of the Ottawa CAS reconciliation model.

To *affirm* and underscore the value of what they had heard, the CAS acknowledged the need for immediate changes based on priority issues and recommendations generated through the truth telling process. Visible changes were made to the environment of the CAS making it more comfortable and welcoming for Indigenous families. To *restore* decision making back to the community and families, changes were made to reduce the negative impact of apprehension and supervised access visits through partnerships with Indigenous service providers. A *Lifecycle Service Chart* for children and families was produced as a tool for increasing referrals from the CAS to local Indigenous services that strengthen and support families. A collaborative planning and decision-making model based on circle process was introduced and is in a pilot phase. *Relating* respectfully with Indigenous service providers and the community is an ongoing priority for CAS staff members who are encouraged to seek out opportunities for continuing cultural education and relationship-building (Engelking, 2009).

The reconciliation process undertaken by the Ottawa CAS laid the groundwork for strengthening local agency-to-agency relationships as well as among frontline workers. Trust in the process grew incrementally as changes in practice began to be evidenced at the frontline. The impacts of attitudinal changes within the CAS, as well as among Inuit, Métis and First Nation service providers and in the wider community became marked. With the gradual shift from a punitive, authoritarian, deficit-based approach to strength-based, collaborative child welfare practice, hostility, mistrust and anger began to diminish and levels of cooperation increased.

Much has been achieved toward improving child welfare outcomes for Indigenous children in Ottawa as a result of this reconciliation process. Recruitment of Indigenous foster and adoptive families has improved significantly; the number of cases proceeding into the court system has been reduced; and inter-agency cooperation has increased toward strengthening families and reducing CAS involvement. Even so, the capacity of Indigenous families and communities to



have input into the decision-making process that determines control over their children remains at the discretion of a mainstream CAS. It is understood that these short-term successes are only the first steps of a long journey toward post-colonial child welfare practice.

*It is a daunting task to take an institution, such as child welfare, that has left behind such a deplorable legacy, and turn it into something healthy and appropriate for Indigenous individuals, families and communities. Though perhaps helpful for some service providers and users, merely adding a few cultural practices here and there is clearly not enough. What is needed is a framework that addresses the negative impacts of colonization on Indigenous peoples and emphasizes our strengths (Sinclair, Hart and Bruyere, 2009: 147).*

## **WHY THE OTTAWA CHILDREN'S AID RECONCILIATION MODEL MATTERS**

1. This reconciliation model illustrates the leadership of urban Inuit, Métis and First Nation women in developing a relational process that is grounded in their Indigenous knowledge and worldviews; women's commitment to a holistic gender inclusion is evidenced in a truth telling process that encompassed the needs and contributions of all community and family members; women, men, and children.
2. The way a reconciliation process is planned and organized is equally as important as the content. Creating safe, welcoming and trustworthy spaces for people to tell their stories and ensuring safety before, during and after the truth telling process is an essential part of the planning framework. This model utilized a comprehensive, ethical planning process concerned with prevention of revictimization through use of familiar, local supports, and restoring dignity and respect to those who have been harmed through colonial child welfare practice.
3. The process acknowledged and built on cultural strengths and capacity by a) engaging local Elders and cultural educators with child protection experience at every step of the process; and b) through development of practical resources such as the Lifecycle referral tool.
4. The model reflects a two-pronged process of education and relationship-building toward both personal and systemic transformation at the local level.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION IN CANADA**

The four reconciliation models outlined in this report illuminate promising practices derived from a very diverse range of initiatives aimed at strengthening and repairing relationships disrupted through colonization. All four address the need for change at personal, community, institutional, and systemic levels. All four demonstrate at least in some aspects: 1) that substantively different results can be achieved where Indigenous women play strong roles in the

process; 2) that the process should derive from Indigenous knowledge, values and ways of relating; and 3) that truth and reconciliation is a personal, profoundly relational process. Although none of these models are truth commissions they nonetheless reflect at least in some of their aspects, the six main purposes of TRCs identified by Haynor: to clarify and acknowledge truth; respond to the needs and interests of victims/survivors; contribute to justice and accountability; outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms; promote reconciliation and reduce tensions resulting from past violence; and meet the rights of victims/survivors and society to the truth. These six dimensions provide a useful framework for developing a gender responsive approach to reconciliation that addresses historical and contemporary harms impacting Indigenous women through colonization.

**Chart I: Indicators of a Gender Responsive TRC Process Aligned with Haynor’s Six Purposes of TRCs**

<b>PURPOSE OF TRCs</b>	<b>GENDER RESPONSIVE TRCs</b>
Clarify and acknowledge truth.	Clarify and acknowledge the gendered impacts of colonialism and residential schooling.
Respond to the needs and interests of victims/survivors.	Create an enabling environment for truth telling through inclusion of ceremony, gendered safety protocols; adequately trained staff; engagement of community supports; and the promotion of healing.
Contribute to justice and accountability.	Recognize ways in which women are marginalized and dispossessed within their communities <i>and</i> in the broader society as a result of colonialism while also recognizing their achievements and gender-specific approach to cultural continuity, healing, leadership, community development, and legislative reform.
Outline institutional responsibility and recommend reforms.	Recommendations for culturally relevant institutional and systemic change must address gendered impacts especially in governance and justice.
Promote reconciliation and reduce tensions resulting from past violence.	Prioritize ending violence against Indigenous women and girls as a key element in healing and reconciliation; recognize the leadership role of women in politicizing this issue and their expertise in addressing it.
Meet the rights of victims/survivors and society to the truth.	Education and communications strategies must promote mass public engagement in reconciliation.

## PROMISING PRACTICES ARE DECOLONIZING PRACTICES: A CHECKLIST OF INDICATORS TOWARD CULTURALLY RELEVANT GENDER RESPONSIVE RECONCILIATION

Five promising practices have been drawn from the reconciliation models and the literature search. They are presented for consideration toward development of gender responsive, culturally relevant reconciliation in Canada. In this context, ‘gender’ refers to gender roles and identities that people *live*, meaning that this term is inclusive of Two-Spirit people; respectful gender relations must also address how effectively Two-Spirit people are welcomed and treated in the process of reconciliation. The following chart provides questions to guide the discussion.

1. Restore and respect Indigenous women’s agency, authority, leadership and decision-making capacity.
2. Restore safety and the human right to security of the person for Indigenous women and girls – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically.
3. Reclaim and revitalize Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and traditions of gender balance in ways that are relevant to the contemporary context.
4. Share the truth about the gendered impacts of colonization, human rights violations, and ethnocide/genocide such as tragically high levels of violence against Indigenous women and girls, and exclusion of women from leadership and decision-making.
5. Promote personal and social responsibility for ending neocolonial attitudes and practices that devalue Indigenous women and create social conditions that put women and girls in harms way.

### CHART 2: CHECKLIST OF PROMISING PRACTICES AND INDICATORS

Promising Practice	Questions for Reflection and Action
1. Restore and respect Indigenous women’s agency, authority, leadership and decision-making capacity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Does the vision statement or Guiding Principles acknowledge the value and importance of Indigenous women?</li> <li>√ Do the mandate and guiding principles include statements about the value of women’s leadership and the commitment to gender inclusion and gender equilibrium?</li> <li>√ Does each step of the reconciliation process provide opportunities in leadership and decision-making for Indigenous women?</li> <li>√ Are mechanisms in place to identify and remove attitudinal or structural barriers to Indigenous women serving in this capacity?</li> </ul>
2. Restore safety and the human right to security of the person for Indigenous women and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Is there a statement reflecting a commitment to equality and human rights improvements as outcomes for Indigenous women?</li> <li>√ Is there awareness of the unique risks facing Indigenous girls and</li> </ul>

<p>girls – physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually, politically and economically.</p>	<p>women and does the reconciliation model address those risks in terms of identified outcomes?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Is there a policy and implementation plan to ensure safety and prevent feelings of re-victimization before, during and after a truth-telling process?</li> <li>√ Does the truth telling environment ‘enable full disclosure’; it is culturally safe, visibly welcoming and respectful of women as well as men and Two-Spirit people?</li> <li>√ Have the listeners received training in culturally sensitive, empathic listening and vicarious trauma to prepare them for the experience?</li> <li>√ Are women directly involved?</li> </ul>
<p>3. Reclaim and revitalize Indigenous knowledge, worldviews, and traditions of gender balance in ways that are relevant to the contemporary context.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Is there a key role for Elders and traditional people who are committed to and knowledgeable of gender equality and reconciliation?</li> <li>√ Are opportunities provided for ceremony and traditional practices with strong roles for women?</li> <li>√ Does the truth telling process encompass a range of options for expressing personal experience (visual art, story telling, dance or song)?</li> <li>√ Is language /cultural adaptation provided?</li> <li>√ Is the communications strategy and communications materials gender inclusive, i.e. reflect women’s and Two-Spirit people’s concerns and is the language inclusive?</li> <li>√ Is the staff hired to implement the TRC model reflective of gender balance and respect for women’s leadership?</li> <li>√ Do attitudes of Commissioners and staff demonstrate respect for women’s leadership?</li> <li>√ Is there a Code of Ethics that promotes respectful gender relations in practice through prevention of gender discrimination, exclusion and harassment?</li> </ul>
<p>4. Share the truth about the gendered impacts of colonization, human rights violations, and ethnocide/genocide.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Is the documentation methodology designed to illuminate and address gendered impacts in the truth telling process?</li> <li>√ Does the reconciliation process include a public education and community engagement component that increases awareness of the gendered impacts of colonialism such as levels of violence and exclusion from decision-making?</li> </ul>
<p>5. Promote personal and social responsibility for ending neocolonial attitudes and practices that devalue Indigenous women and create social conditions that put women and girls in harms way.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>√ Does the reconciliation process promote change in social attitudes and behaviours toward Indigenous women and girls?</li> <li>√ Does the monitoring and evaluation plan identify gender specific goals, outcomes and strategies to achieve them?</li> <li>√ Does the reconciliation model provide opportunities for ceremonial acts of remembrance and commemoration that honour women’s leadership roles in community building and healing?</li> <li>√ Are there opportunities for Canadians to engage in a process of reflection and action for change?</li> </ul>

## THE ROLE OF PUBLIC EDUCATION AND PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

All Canadians have received the same colonialist education that permitted gross human rights violations such as the *Indian Act* and residential schooling to occur. This education continues to shape contemporary perceptions, attitudes and behaviors; therefore a decolonizing approach to public education is a crucial element in the process of reconciliation. All four of the models described in this report feature cultural education and decolonization as a means for effecting change at personal, community and systemic levels. Education strategies for truth and reconciliation in Canada should take the following into consideration.

1. Reconciliation requires Canadians to become aware that Indigenous Peoples are the original inhabitants of these lands and have constitutionally protected rights, including Aboriginal title and the right to self-determination.
2. Education must challenge and correct the assumptions, lies, myths and stereotypes that sustain colonialist attitudes and practices and which perpetuate social conditions that put Indigenous women and girls in harms way; reconciliation must prioritize strategies to end the tragically high levels of violence.
3. Education must promote awareness of Indigenous cultures, history, knowledge and self-determination to dispel the prevailing belief that colonization or residential school abuse is the only relevant experience of Indigenous Peoples; reconciliation is a strength-based, relational process.
4. Education that promotes awareness of gender justice must draw upon Indigenous knowledge and worldviews, underscoring their contemporary relevance toward a healthier, more sustainable and equitable future, not only for relationships between women and men but for the planet.
5. Communications strategies should be *accessible* to mass audiences by utilizing information technology such as interactive websites and Facebook to maximize engagement, especially among youth.
6. Education strategies should promote positively centered, action-oriented opportunities for Canadians to take responsibility for truth, reconciliation and decolonization at personal, community and systemic levels.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE PROJECTS

Truth and reconciliation is a process of forging new relationships. The information presented in this paper affirms that reconciliation is a relational process meant to restore dignity, respect and

equality in the aftermath of human rights violations. Some recommendations for future action through pilot projects that further gender responsive reconciliation are as follows.

- Bring Elders and youth together for a national round table dialogue about creation stories and Indigenous knowledge in the context of contemporary gender relations and reconciliation.
- Develop and implement interactive, reflective in-service training for Canada's TRC commissioners and staff on gendered impacts of colonialism and strategies to promote and reflect gender balance and reconciliation throughout all mandated activities.

## CONCLUSION

Indigenous women have long borne the gendered injustices of marginalization, dispossession and violence within their own communities as well as in the larger Canadian society. Traditional Indigenous gender roles and relations have been profoundly disrupted by colonialism and the residential school experience; contemporary relations are shaped by this legacy.

The reconciliation models presented in this report provide compelling evidence that revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and ways of relating can provide a substantive alternative to oppressive gender relations. Just as dismantling and destroying traditional gender balance was an essential strategy of colonization, gender justice must be an essential element in both the process and outcomes of reconciliation.

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada marks an unprecedented opportunity to demonstrate within Canada and to the global community, a culturally relevant, gender responsive model for reconciliation that is truly capable of healing the wounds of colonialism. To miss this opportunity is to perpetuate injustice.

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