# Building Bridges Online: Young Indigenous Women Using Social Media for Community Building and Identity Representation

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## Abstract

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Mainstream media representations of Indigenous communities overwhelmingly follow a dual oversimplification: dichotomizing Indigenous peoples as "good" or "bad" according to normative settler-colonial constructs, or dismissing them altogether. With regards to Indigenous women, the tendency is toward the latter erasure. In many communities and social spaces, however, Indigenous women are visible and vocal leaders. In this thesis, I explore how young Indigenous women leaders take advantage of social media affordances to revitalize Indigenous communities and reconstruct Indigenous identity. Engaging the concept of Indigenous resurgence, I draw on interviews conducted with nine Indigenous women leaders from Yukon to elucidate what resurgent Indigenous leadership looks like in practice. I argue that the praxes of community building and identity representation that these nine women demonstrate on social media are everyday acts of Indigenous resistance and revitalization. By reclaiming and representing individual identities within the safe communities and contested spaces occupied through social media, I suggest that Indigenous women leaders empower their Indigenous social media audiences to reconstruct their own identities in turn. Moreover, I support the notion that everyday acts of representation have the cumulative power to subtly and slowly provoke profound discursive shifts. While these nine women's social media interventions are primarily intended to empower other Indigenous peoples in determining personal identities, I conclude that they are also challenging mainstream media constructs and reshaping how non-Indigenous observers understand what it means to be Indigenous.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

It's a hot and humid morning in Montréal, and French-speaking voices from the construction crew working and children playing below, plus occasional honks from morning commuters, drift into my living room through the open window. This is the kind of scene – busy, noisy, and taking place in a language that I don't fully understand – that reminds me just how different my current home is from the place I still call home: Whitehorse, Yukon. Feeling a pang of homesickness, I pick up my laptop, open my web browser and log in to Facebook. As I scroll through my newsfeed, I am inundated with reminders of the community that I am missing: pictures of a former colleague participating in the Yukon River Quest, an article posted by the *Yukon News* about a protest over the government's decision to appeal the Yukon Supreme Court ruling on the Peel Watershed Land Use Plan, an update from a friend announcing her excitement about travelling to Juneau, Alaska for the upcoming Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian Celebration with a link to the event web page which welcomes all Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to come and learn about these cultures (Sealaska Heritage, "Celebration 2016 to Kick Off Next Week," 31 May 2016). I post my own status update to tell friends that I have a trip home scheduled in a few weeks, and want to know what events are happening while I am in Whitehorse and a few other communities. Dozens of friends like and comment on my status, excited for my return to the place we all agree is so special, and eager to talk about upcoming social and cultural events. Together, these things represent some of the diversity of the small but passionate and close-knit populace of my home community. Yukoners are proud of the unique place we call home, which in many ways is still isolated from the rest of Canada to the south. Not just geographically, but also socially, culturally, and politically, Yukon remains a distinct region in Canada (Coates and

Poelzer 2010). "Outside"[1] influence is slow to make its way north, and Yukoners embody an ethos of doing things in the relaxed yet thoughtful manner that is affectionately referred to as being "on Yukon time."

Despite the platitudes that define some aspects of the "Yukoner" identity, there are many differences in what daily life is like for residents of Canada's smallest territory. After completing my undergraduate degree, I returned to Whitehorse and began a job in Aboriginal Relations with the Government of Yukon. While working there, I began to truly comprehend that our common self-identification as Yukoners does not mean that my fellow Yukoners and I share the same understanding of the place we call home. I am a first generation Yukoner – my parents were both born in Toronto, as were my grandparents. Several generations prior to that, my mother's ancestors immigrated to Canada from Italy, Wales, and England, and my father's side comprises French, German, and English settlers. My parents are adventurous people who were drawn to Whitehorse in the 1980s due to the small city's thriving arts and cultural scene, opportunities for entrepreneurs, and proximity to nature. Many of the happiest moments of my childhood were set in the Yukon wilderness – skiing, hiking, camping, and exploring. My fondest memories are of summers spent at our family's cabin just outside of Atlin, a tiny town about 60 kilometers south of the border between Yukon and British Columbia. Our cabin does not have electricity, let alone Wi-Fi, so idyllic childhood days were spent reading, canoeing around the bay, catching tadpoles, and playing with my sister in the woods. Such formative experiences led to my great appreciation for the natural beauty, and perhaps even spiritual qualities, of the Yukon landscape; it is an appreciation that I believe I share with most Yukoners.

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[1] As a born and raised Yukoner, I can attest that fellow "sourdoughs" (i.e., people who have weathered a complete winter in Yukon) refer generally to any place that is not within Yukon's borders as "Outside." Similarly, when a Yukoner returns from travels outside of the territory, they are commonly asked how their trip "down South" was. Down South can refer to any place below 60°N latitude, from Edmonton, Alberta to Buenos Aires, Argentina, but is most often used to describe southern Canada.

For some Yukoners, however, the connection to Yukon land runs deeper, and has been passed down for generations. Although I have long had an awareness of Indigenous Yukoners' claims to the lands that are now called Yukon, I did not realize until working in Aboriginal Relations that Indigenous peoples and communities in Yukon are still entangled in constant disputes with the federal and territorial governments, as well as numerous corporations, organizations, and non-Indigenous individuals, over the rights to and management of their traditional territories in Yukon. Similarly, I knew a bit about Indigenous cultures and communities in Yukon from my Indigenous friends, my high school education, and the local media, but did not realize the extent of the variety between these until I did some work to educate myself. Fortunately, the learning process did not take long. As soon as I began to look, dynamic Indigenous cultures, communities, and peoples were all around me in Yukon.

Even from my current post in Montréal, the representations of Indigenous culture, community, and identity that I see on Facebook and Twitter provide a complex and positive counter to those observable in the mainstream media. This thesis provides evidence of the disconnect between dominant settler-colonial media representations of Indigenous people and communities in Canada, and the politics and practices of resurgence that are actually being embodied by many Indigenous people, and particularly, a group of nine young Indigenous women in Yukon (my collaborators). Rather than considering at length how mainstream media representations negatively affect Indigenous peoples, though, I focus on my collaborators' quotidian praxes of Indigenous resurgence on social media. I examine how my collaborators are using social media as a tool for connecting and building Indigenous communities, and as a space where they can practice and promote resurgence among the strong and supportive communities that they have helped to build. My arguments are based on the premise that media representations, including on social media, are part of the process

of identity formation. From that premise, I use my collaborators' statements as evidence to suggest that they are strategically appropriating social media space in order to articulate the individual and collective Indigenous identities that they envision for themselves and their communities. In order to do so, I demonstrate that my collaborators have positioned themselves as influential emerging leaders within Yukon's Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. I argue that my collaborators have extended their leadership from their offline experiences into the online realm by building empowered communities of Indigenous people on social media, which intensifies their influence as leaders in turn. Finally, I suggest that my collaborators' representational praxes of Indigenous identity influence their audiences in both online and offline communities. Such positive leadership helps to create and transmit an affect within certain Indigenous social media spaces that is decolonizing, empowering, and sometimes even mobilizing, for Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike.

Over the past decade, increasing access to the Internet and social media sites has created an unprecedented degree of connectivity in Yukon, and has provided Yukoners with new channels for broadcasting their voices within their communities and to the rest of Canada. Yukoners today enjoy better communications connectivity than ever before, but the latest report by the Canadian Internet Registration Authority (CIRA) found that Internet download and upload speeds in Yukon are still the by far the slowest in the country ("Manitoba internet speeds 2nd slowest in Canada," 29 April 2016). Although methods used in the CIRA report may have resulted in inaccurate reporting for Nunavut (CIRA, April 2016), similar studies reported that Internet connectivity for residents of all three northern territories is much slower and costlier than for their southern counterparts (Nordicity 2014). Meanwhile, recent economic initiatives have positioned the northern territories in the lead in Canada in terms of GDP growth. Developments in the North generate economic benefits for Canada, but do not proportionately benefit northerners due to inadequate communications

infrastructure. If made sufficiently available, modern communications technologies have the power to afford northern residents increased access to education, business, and economic opportunities, as well as reduced health-care costs and improvements to public safety (Ibid.). More attention must be paid to developing an understanding of how communication technologies affect not only economic, but also social and political conditions for residents of Canada's North, including in Yukon. Such an understanding may provide the catalyst for governments to invest in much need upgrades to communication infrastructure, finally allowing access to the "reliable and affordable communication services [that] are seen as a foundation for Northerners to meet many of the socio-economic challenges they face" (Ibid.).

In the meantime, social media is allowing Yukoners like me, who are temporarily outside, to keep tabs on what is happening in our home communities, while also inviting interested outsiders to discover what social and political life is like for residents of Canada's least-known northern territory (Alia 1999). While the fiscal and socio-economic implications of the relative increase in communications connectivity in Yukon has been examined through governmental studies,[2] and has even enjoyed some discussion in the national news media,[3] comprehensive studies of how this shift is impacting the cultural identities and social lives of people in Yukon, and most drastically, its first peoples, are noticeably absent. Not since Valerie Alia's 1999 book, *Un/Covering the North: News, Media, and Aboriginal People*,

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[2] In the past five years, the federal and territorial governments have commissioned several reports to evaluate the current and future communications needs in Yukon. Generally, these identify where information and communications technology (ICT) infrastructure in Yukon needs to be implemented or upgraded so that residents can enjoy equal opportunities for broadband connectivity and comparable costs to their Southern counterparts. These reports provide economic and socio-economic rationales for upgrading ICT in Yukon, and emphasize results like increased national and territorial GDP and jobs, and additional income from and taxes, as benefits of increased service to underserved Yukon communities. See CRTC, "Northwestel Inc. – Regulatory Framework, Modernization Plan and related matters,"18 December 2013; and Nordicity, "Northern Connectivity: Ensuring Quality Communications," January 2014.

[3] Contemporary national news media coverage on the state of communications infrastructure in Yukon generally report the results of governmental studies, and emphasize the importance of ICT infrastructure as necessary to drive economic growth in the North. Examples include: Jamie Sturgeon, "BCE's NorthwesTel proposes $233M plan to boost Northern telco services, roll out 3G," 17 January 2013; Vela Thandiwe, "NorthwesTel Rivals Pitch Telecom Projects at CRTC Hearings," 19 June 2013; and QMI Agency, "CRTC cracks down on Internet rates in the North," 4 March 2015.

which includes a survey of the communications context in early 1990s Yukon, has a scholarly work focused on how media and communications technologies affect social realities for Yukoners. My thesis works toward closing that scholarly gap by providing a critical analysis of how the relatively recent proliferation of one type of communications platform – social media sites – is affecting the social and political lives of one important group of Yukoners – young Indigenous women who are emerging as leaders. I focus on Indigenous women because their dually marginalized race and gender identities exclude them from economic opportunities and social services, and expose them to higher rates of systemic and material violence, positioning them as one of the most subjugated groups in Canadian society (Coulthard 2014). In addition, Indigenous peoples typically have limited access to mainstream media production, which is necessary for challenging racist perceptions of Indigenous identities and improving realities for Indigenous peoples (Soriano 2012). When (on rare occasions) Indigenous identities and issues are given space in the mainstream media, representations tend to be based on negative settler-colonial stereotypes. By carving out new communicative spaces on social media, Indigenous women leaders represent Indigenous identity, including gender identity, in ways that demand attention from both within and outside of their communities. Within scholarship, it is imperative that we understand such developments if we are to gain a better understanding of the importance of social media for social change in Indigenous communities.

Though developments in communications in Yukon since the turn of the century have evaded much academic interest, scholars including historian Ken Coates and anthropologist Paul Nadasdy have shed light on another aspect of social and political life that is unique within the Yukon context – Indigenous-state and Indigenous-settler relations. Indigenous-settler relations are a point of pride for many Yukon residents, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, and have been one area of Yukon socio-political life that has garnered a

degree of sustained interest from outside politics, media, and society (Coates 2015). Although less than in the other northern territories, the proportion of Indigenous peoples in Yukon is high compared to southern regions of Canada: over 23 percent of Yukoners self-identify as Aboriginal[4] while Aboriginal peoples comprise less than eight percent of the population in all southern provinces, except Manitoba and Saskatchewan (Statistics Canada, 2011). Moreover, 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations have signed the *Yukon First Nation Final and Self-Government Agreements* (Final and Self-Government Agreements),[5] which are "modern, comprehensive" treaties between each First Nation and the territorial and federal governments ("A History of Yukon Land Claims," 3 August 2015). The settlement of the Final and Self-Government agreements means that most Indigenous individuals and communities in Yukon have rights that are distinct from those of their counterparts in both northern and southern regions of Canada, most of whom are governed according to the *Indian Act*.[6]

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[4] Many Indigenous peoples today, including most of my collaborators, prefer to identify themselves according to their family and community location, clan membership, or traditional names. Although my collaborators may hold that preference, they all also identify more generally as "Indigenous." Indigenous is considered by many Indigenous peoples and scholars to be "the most inclusive term of all, since it identifies peoples in similar circumstances without respect to national boundaries or local conventions" (Kesler 2009). For the sake of brevity and clarity, I refer to my collaborators as Indigenous throughout this thesis. Despite my best efforts at consistency, I occasionally quote my collaborators or other writers who use somewhat analogous terms to refer to the Indigenous inhabitants of Canada, such as "Native," "Indian," "First Nations," or "Aboriginal," and do not modify those quotes.

[5] In Yukon, treaties are called First Nation Final Agreements and have been negotiated so that First Nations have constitutional power (under section 35 of the Canadian Constitution) to own and manage their land. Each of the eleven Yukon First Nation Final Agreements is accompanied by a Self-Government Agreement. The Self-Government Agreements recognize self-governing Yukon First Nations as governments, rather than Indian Act bands, and provide the framework for their governance structures and for some intergovernmental relationships. The Yukon First Nation Final and Self-Government Agreements are based on a foundational document called the *Umbrella Final Agreement*, which was negotiated between the Council of Yukon Indians (now Council of Yukon First Nations), the Government of Canada, and the Government of Yukon, and was signed in 1993 ("Agreements," Government of Yukon, 23 February 2016).

[6] In Canada, treaties ratified since 1973 are called "Comprehensive Land Claim Settlements," and include areas of Canada where Indigenous peoples have not signed historic treaties. Of the 24 Comprehensive Land Claim Settlements, 18 have self-government provisions, including the 11 that have been ratified by Yukon First Nations. The number of self-governing First Nations is high in Yukon relative to other regions of Canada, including the two other northern territories. Nunavut has a unique form of self-government, which represents all the resident of the territory under the *Nunavut Land Claims Agreement*. In the Northwest Territories, only one Comprehensive Land Claim and Self-Government Agreement has been completed (*Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada*, accessed 9 August 2016).

A born and raised Yukoner, Coates has dedicated much of his academic career to examining the modern treaty negotiation and settlement process that has been taking place in Yukon since the 1970s. Coates' work suggests that the ostensibly successful settlement of the Final and Self-Government Agreements has positioned Yukon in a unique and oft-admired position when it comes to how Indigenous and non-Indigenous governments and citizens live, work, and relate to one another. Despite this widely proclaimed socio-political achievement, Coates admits that realities for Indigenous peoples in Yukon remain fraught (2015). He attests that conditions for Indigenous Yukoners are noticeably "good" not when considered relative to white citizens, but rather in comparison to the deplorable situation for most Indigenous peoples and communities in Canada. Systemic social, cultural, economic, and political barriers, as well as more latent struggles, continue to plague Indigenous individuals and communities in Yukon as they too confront the pervasive effects of settler-colonialism.[7]

Nadasdy provides a more nuanced explanation of how the Final and Self-Government Agreements fall short, using research gathered through ethnographic fieldwork in the mainly Indigenous village of Burwash Landing, Yukon, as a point of departure (2003; 2012). He examines some of the sacrifices that Indigenous peoples and societies had to make to their traditional approaches to both negotiation and governance in exchange for the (limited) power to manage their lands, citizens, and resources under the Final and Self-Government Agreements. Nadasdy argues that implementation of this largely Euro-Canadian form of political power in Yukon has resulted in unforeseen and problematic alterations to social and political life and relations both within and among Indigenous communities (2012). For example, much of the traditional territory of the White River First Nation and the Kluane

[7] A.J. Barker explains settler-colonialism as the hegemonic political and cultural order in Canada that confronts Indigenous peoples with "constant threats to their existence, as both formal powers invested in the state and informal sociocultural discourses of the Canadian nation seek to erase Indigenous peoples' claims to the land in order to transfer legitimate possession to colonial authorities" (2015, 44). Although the settler-colonial project has been ongoing for centuries, in various forms and through different strategies, most scholars consider it failure in the face of "powerful, multifaceted, and enduring Indigenous resistances" (Ibid.).

First Nation overlaps. Although these two groups traditionally shared resources in the territory, tension has arisen as the two communities feel pressure from the state to draw boundaries in order to expedite the settlement of their Final and Self-Government Agreements (Ibid.).

From my own understanding of the conflicts that permeate both internal and intergovernmental political relations among Indigenous communities in Yukon today, an understanding which I mainly garnered when I worked in Aboriginal Relations, I can personally attest to the validity of Nadasdy's claims. Yet, what interests me as much as parsing the failures of institutionalized political power in overcoming settler-colonialism is how Indigenous peoples in Yukon acknowledge such shortcomings and tensions, and are moving forward in spite of them. Certainly, Indigenous politics in Yukon are contentious and Indigenous communities remain imperfect (as is true in non-Indigenous politics and communities), but from such contested terrains emerges an optimism, pride, and openness among Indigenous peoples as they work toward self-actualization and self-determination. What captures my attention are the people who are ushering in a new period in Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) social and political life in Yukon. Many of those, mostly men, who negotiated the Final and Self-Government Agreements are now making room for the next generation of leaders, including many young women. And this next generation is more connected to Indigenous Yukoners, as well as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples outside of Yukon, than ever before. Increasing access and their ability to strategically use social media has Indigenous women leaders gaining influence in Yukon Indigenous communities. Moreover, social media allows Indigenous leaders to take space for sharing information about themselves, their communities, and their cultures to large audiences beyond their home communities, audiences whose membership comprises Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, northerners and southerners alike.

**Research Premise**

My preceding consideration of scholarship focused on Yukon demonstrates that in-depth studies of the territory's communication and cultural contexts are few and far between. While this is certainly disappointing, a desire to add to the available literature on life in my home territory is not what inspired this project. Rather, I was initially interested in a gap that I noticed in the mainstream media. Frequently, I read news coverage of the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women, about how Indigenous communities across the country are coping with disproportionate rates of suicide, or less frequent but highly sensational stories about celebrities appropriating Indigenous cultural artefacts as fashion accessories. While these issues certainly warrant the media attention that they garner, as I scan the headlines of major news sources like the *Globe and Mail*, the *National Post*, or even the Aboriginal section of the *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation* (CBC) website, I am struck by the amount of space that is taken up by a few recurrent narratives about Indigenous peoples. What strikes me as missing is representation of the *variety* of Indigenous peoples, communities, cultures, and concerns that I see first-hand in my home community.

**Project Collaborators**

This thesis develops from conversations that I had with nine young Indigenous women who are emerging as leaders in Yukon about their use of social media for building community and constructing Indigenous identity. Although many of the examples that my collaborators gave were localized or subjective, they often explicated links between their experiences and broader systemic issues, between their understanding of an issue and the ontological beliefs that inform that understanding, and between their personal approaches and more established Indigenous epistemologies. Social media provided the critical backdrop for these conversations – a familiar territory with codes of conduct understood by both my

collaborators and me. Grounding their experiences in social media allowed my collaborators and I to find a common foundation from where we could speak through some of our cultural differences. I am deeply indebted to my collaborators for their abilities to build bridges where there were gaps between my understandings and theirs. Even though I am not a member of an Indigenous community, this project is rooted in a broad, emancipatory socio-political agenda that all of my collaborators and I subscribe to, and which guides each of our work. For all of us, this project represents one small act in confronting the oppressive settler-colonial and patriarchal logics that structure contemporary Canadian society. Beyond demonstrating how my collaborators' self-actualized praxes on social media counter the hegemonic discursive regime, we go one step further to collaboratively imagine what decolonized and liberated expressions of Indigenous identity might look like at the individual and community level, and within social media space.

The nine young Indigenous women who collaborated with me on this project were my friends and acquaintances before they became my collaborators. I selected potential collaborators based on my observations of their activity on social media (I was connected to most through Facebook or Twitter before the project was even conceptualized), and more importantly, on their being recommended to me by one another. However, prior to recruiting collaborators, I developed some loose criteria in order to narrow the scope of my research. First, I chose to collaborate with young Indigenous women because I have observed first-hand that they are emerging as among the most influential and outspoken leaders in Yukon, and I am personally excited about the vision that many Indigenous women have for the place that we call home. I limited the age range for potential collaborators to between 25 and 35 because people in this range fall into the category of "adult" but are still at the youngest end of the spectrum (*Statistics Canada*, 15 May 2015), and because people in that range are close in age to me. I believe an age proximity lessens the risk of unbalanced power dynamics

between us as researcher and collaborators. I chose to work solely with emerging leaders who identify as women because I was interested in how gender expectations from both their Indigenous communities and the dominant, patriarchal Canadian culture influence their approaches to leadership, as well as their experiences on social media. Finally, in our preliminary discussions, potential collaborators had to self-identify or be identified by other collaborators as avid Twitter and/or Facebook users, and active participants in at least one community on social media.

Once I had established a set of criteria for collaborators, recruitment was simple. Although I was familiar with the who's who of emerging Indigenous leaders in Yukon by virtue of their visibility (in the local newspapers, as well as at political, social, and cultural events) in our close-knit Yukon community, I am not Indigenous, and am not a part of the Yukon Indigenous community. As such, I left it up to my initial collaborators to tell me which Indigenous women in the territory they view as emerging leaders and avid social media users, and I contacted those women accordingly. When I first began conceptualizing the project with my close friend and collaborator, Kluane Adamek, we came up with a list of names of female Indigenous friends and acquaintances who we believe are influential in various offline and online communities. Some of the women I knew quite well and reached out to via social media. Kluane helped me contact the others whom I had not met before by connecting us through social media, or by allowing me to reference her collaboration on the project as a point of connection. The method I used closely resembles snowball sampling, a well-established sociological research method that relies on recruiting participants based on recommendations and help from an initial collaborator (Morgan 2008).

In order to participate in the project, each collaborator was required to allow me to friend her on Facebook and/or follow her on Twitter, and to conduct a formal, recorded interview with me. Although I offered each collaborator the option to anonymize her name in

the thesis, all consented to being referred to by her full name. Each collaborator formally agreed to these provisions by signing a consent form, which I emailed to her and discussed in greater detail either face-to-face or on the telephone before our interview took place. I also emailed my interview guide and questions to each collaborator a week before her scheduled interview. My line of questioning differed from interview to interview so as to not disrupt the natural flow of our conversation (some of the most interesting findings came in the form of anecdotes and asides), but most were thematically structured like this thesis. To begin, we talked about the collaborator's home community and her personal approach to leadership and community building, first offline and then online. Next, we talked about mainstream media representations of Indigenous communities and peoples. Finally, we talked about how she uses social media to represent herself, her Indigenous identity, and her community, and what she thinks the influence of such interventions may be on both her Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences.

I travelled to Whitehorse twice to conduct interviews, for three weeks in October 2015 and two weeks in December 2015. During the trips, I sat down for informal conversations with Kluane, Erin Pauls, Angela Code, and Claire Anderson, and completed face-to-face interviews with those four women as well as Erin Linklater and Melaina Sheldon. My interview with Jeneen Frei Njootli took place during a layover in Vancouver, and interviews with Samantha Dawson and Chantal Rondeau were conducted over the telephone. I was nervous about compromising the conversational tone that naturally occurred in the face-to-face interviews, but Samantha and Chantal proved to be exceptionally forthcoming and easy to talk to on the telephone. In fact, my conversations with Samantha and Chantal were among the longest in duration, each just under one hour and 45 minutes long. I found that interviews lasted longer with the collaborators who I did not have an informal face-to-face conversation with prior to the recorded interview (i.e., those who I had

only communicated with via Facebook messenger or email exchanges prior to the interview), including Samantha and Chantal, plus Erin L. and Jeneen. My interview with Claire, which lasted just over two hours was the exception to this rule. At the shortest end of the spectrum was my interview with Erin P., which finished after about 45 minutes because Erin P. had family obligations to attend to.

Despite their busy schedules and the sometimes physical distance between us, all of this project's collaborators were eager to be involved from the start. The following are the nine women who I focus on in this thesis:

> **Kluane Adamek**, 29, is from the killer whale clan and is a member of the Kluane First Nation. Her Tlingit name, Aagé, means daughter of the lake and was also her great-great grandmother's name. Kluane is of German, Irish, Tlingit, and Southern Tutchone descent, and is a fluent French-speaker. She identifies as a Yukoner and currently lives in Whitehorse. Kluane has held roles in organizations including the Yukon Aboriginal Sports Circle, the Assembly of First Nations National Youth Council, the Aboriginal Women's Council, the Council of Yukon First Nations, and was an advisor to National Grand Chief Sean Atleo. For her 2013-2015 Jane Glassco Northern Fellowship project, Kluane created Yukon's first and only territory-wide Indigenous youth organization, Our Voices. Today, Kluane co-chairs the Our Voices organizing committee, and leads planning for the group's annual gathering for youth from across Yukon and northern British Columbia. She uses social media to stay connected to the Our Voices organizing committee and gathering participants year-round.
>
> **Angela Code**, 27, is a Sayisi Dene First Nation woman originally from Tadoule Lake, Manitoba. Angela's family moved to Whitehorse when she was ten. After graduating from the University of British Columbia's First Nation Studies program, Angela

moved back to Whitehorse and now works as an Outreach Coordinator with a youth organization called Bringing Youth Toward Equality (BYTE). Angela has been doing community building work for as long as she can remember, and said that she has always had a strong drive "to help out my people and Indigenous peoples across the country." Experiences working with youth while she was in university developed Angela's interest in engaging with young Indigenous people, whom she views as critical agents toward decolonization and creating a resurgent Indigenous identity. Angela is an organizing committee member with Our Voices, and a member of the ReMatriate collective. ReMatriate is campaign in opposition to the cultural appropriation of Indigenous women's identities that mostly takes place on social media. Angela regularly posts about her involvement in cultural and political events on Facebook, which she says is "a way of letting my people know that I am still fighting for us."

**Samantha Dawson**, 27, currently lives in Vancouver, but grew up in central Yukon and in Whitehorse. She is a Tlingit/Northern Tutchone woman, and a member of the Selkirk First Nation. She is a grateful guest on Coast Salish Territory, attending law school at the University of British Columbia. Samantha says it was her desire to challenge dominant representations of and systemic racism toward Indigenous people, and specifically women, that lead her to first pursue journalism, and now law. She was the Yukon female youth representative with the Assembly of First Nations, and has worked as a newspaper reporter in Toronto and Iqaluit, and in Indigenous governance in Yukon. While at law school, Samantha is continuing her work in the North as a 2015-2017 Jane Glassco Fellow, conducting research on how Yukon First Nation governments can move toward implementing justice systems based on provisions of the Yukon First Nation Final and Self-Government Agreements. She is

also involved in Our Voices as an organizing committee member. Samantha continues to write about Indigenous issues as a freelance journalist and as an avid Twitter user.

**Claire Elizabeth Anderson**, 31, is Taku River Tlingit, from Atlin, British Columbia, which is the one of the northernmost communities in the province and is only accessible via road through Yukon. Claire now lives in Whitehorse, where she practices corporate-commercial law, real estate law, wills and estates, and Aboriginal law. Claire says that applying the skills that she has developed as a lawyer is a very "rewarding form of engagement," especially when working with and for First Nations and First Nation corporations. In addition to sitting on the Board of Directors for seven Aboriginal corporate entities, Claire also is a founding member of the ReMatriate Collective. Within that group, Claire believes that she is most effective and engaged in capacities that allow her to draw on her legal expertise to do more "behind the scenes" work like establishing the group as a not-for-profit organization. Although Claire feels more comfortable out of the spotlight, she is outspoken on social media about the issues she cares about, including the rights of Indigenous peoples and women.

**Chantal Rondeau**, 32, who is also named T'sa Kwan Jinga (which translates to "Fire, Sparkle, and Shine") in Northern Tutchone, is from the Little Salmon Carmacks First Nation and grew up in Whitehorse. Chantal currently lives in New York City, where she is a communications consultant, but she has lived in cities across Canada, including intermittent stints back in Yukon. She maintains strong ties to Indigenous communities in Yukon, and travels home multiple times per year to work on events with Indigenous organizations like the Adäka Cultural Festival and Our Voices. For over ten years, Chantal has been a prominent blogger and social media personality,

creating content about Indigenous news and issues on her Tumblr blog, Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram accounts.

**Erin Linklater**, 25, grew up in Whitehorse, Yukon and currently lives in Victoria, British Columbia. Her Gwitchin name is Gwaandak, meaning "Storyteller" or "She is Telling a Story," and was given to her by her grandfather. Erin L. is a member of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, and although she did not grow up in the Gwitchin community of Old Crow, Yukon, she now considers it one of her homes. A current law student at the University of Victoria, Erin L. sits on the Indigenous Law Students Association and is on the executive for the Environmental Law Centre Society. Erin L. has worked with a variety of organizations that support the rights of women and Indigenous peoples, including the Victoria Faulkner Women's Centre, the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Native Women's Association of Canada, and the Vuntut Gwitchin government. Erin L. is an outspoken advocate for Indigenous rights; she recently joined the ReMatriate Collective, and uses her voice on Facebook to educate her followers about Indigenous issues from an Indigenous perspective.

**Erin Pauls**, 32, is from the Wolf Clan, identifies as Tahltan and Tlingit, and is a member of the Champagne and Aishihik First Nations. Erin P. has a bachelor's degree in education, and has been teaching dance since she was a teenager and member of the Dakwäkäda Dancers in Haines Junction, Yukon. Now, she is Director of the Dusk'a Head-Start enriched preschool program for Indigenous children with the Kwanlin Dün First Nation in Whitehorse. Erin P. dances as a member of the Dakhka Khwaan Dance group, and continues to teach dance to youth in the Dakhka Khwaan Juniors group and the Elijah Smith Elementary School dance group, the Flying Eagles. She counts her daughter, Trina, among her dance students, and says that being a mother is her most important role. She uses Facebook to organize practices and performances for

her dance groups, to post photos of herself and her family taking part in cultural activities and events, to share information about her Indigenous culture, and to keep updated on and contribute to Indigenous rights movements like Idle No More.

**Jeneen Frei Njootli**, 27, is a Vuntut Gwitchin artist, a member of the ReMatriate Collective, and sits on the Board of Directors of Grunt Gallery in Vancouver. She has worked as a performance artist, fashion designer, workshop facilitator, youth coordinator, and has both lived and exhibited across Canada. Jeneen's practice concerns itself with Indigeneity-in-politics, community engagement, and productive disruptions. At the time of writing, she is a grateful, uninvited guest on unceded Tsleil-Waututh, Musqueam, Skwxwú7mesh territories, pursuing a Master of Fine Arts Degree at the University of British Columbia. As a core member of the ReMatriate Collective, Jeneen takes on many administrative duties related to managing the ReMatriate Facebook page and Twitter account, and has been instrumental in the success of their social media campaigns.

**Melaina Sheldon**, 34, is a Dèshitàn woman who lives in her home community of Teslin, Yukon, where she works for the Teslin Tlingit Council Heritage Department as the Community Arts and Events Coordinator. Melaina is Inland Tlingit/Southern Tutchone from her mother's side and Polish/Ukrainian from her father's side. Since completing her Bachelor of Arts in 2008, she has worked and volunteered for various Indigenous organizations in Yukon, including the Council of Yukon First Nations, the Self-Government Secretariat, the Yukon College First Nation Initiatives Department, and the Skookum Jim Friendship Centre. She has been a long-time board member with Gwaandak Theatre, Yukon's only Indigenous theatre company, and is a member of the Our Voices organizing committee. Melaina is also a 2015-2017 Jane Glassco Northern Fellow, and she hopes to incorporate her theatre experience with her

fellowship research to devise policy improvements for northern judicial systems, specifically pertaining to Indigenous people. Melaina is enthusiastic about learning from and sharing knowledge with other young leaders from across the North, and uses social media to connect and build northern Indigenous networks.

Throughout this thesis, I refer to each of my collaborators by name as much as possible, in order to avoid homogenizing their identities and opinions. However, when there were significant overlaps between the statements that each woman provided on a given topic, or when their experiences converge, I may refer to them collectively as "my collaborators." This label speaks to our and their relationship within the context of this project, and says very little about who these women are independently. My hope is that through their individual statements, readers will come to recognize the diverse and complex identities of these nine women. My collaborators come from different Indigenous (as well as non-Indigenous) communities, each with its own culture, traditions, governance models, languages, and more. From their diverse origins, as well as their vast and varied life experiences outside of their home communities, each of my collaborators has developed her own approach to navigating the social and political worlds in which she lives. Some of my collaborators are artists or performers; some are teachers and others are students; some are radical activists and others are more comfortable calling themselves advocates. Despite these differences, I suggest that it is, in many ways, from their common position as young Indigenous women from Yukon that my collaborators' overlapping approaches to leading, building, and representing resurgent Indigenous communities grow.

**Chapter Breakdown**

In order to substantiate the above claim, in chapter two, I weave together various conceptual threads from key works in the fields of Indigenous studies, cultural studies, and

communications studies, to build a backdrop against which my collaborators' community building and representational interventions on social media can be understood. In the first section of the chapter, I lay the theoretical foundation for the entire thesis by exploring a new paradigm in Indigenous-led efforts to decolonize their communities and reconstruct their identities: *Indigenous resurgence*. In the second section, I establish my collaborators as influential leaders within the paradigm of Indigenous resurgence by exploring the communities – mostly Indigenous – that have fostered my collaborators' approaches to leadership both online and offline. I employ the concept of intersectionality to explain how settler-colonial ideas about both race and gender influence Indigenous women's approaches to leadership, and suggest that Indigenous feminism and resurgence offer Indigenous women alternative ways to think about and practice leadership both offline and in social media communities. I conclude the chapter by examining two Facebook communities that most of my collaborators have created or helped build: ReMatriate and Our Voices. I propose that social media provides a connective space where my collaborators extend and strengthen their Indigenous communities, and build entirely new ones, based on feminist and resurgent Indigenous values.

In chapter three, I establish that reductive and racist understandings of Indigeneity evidenced in settler-colonial discourses, and principally as articulated in mainstream media, necessitate Indigenous resurgence. Then, I illustrate how my collaborators are bringing their leadership experience and community building agendas online. I argue that by building safe and supportive communities for Indigenous peoples to speak out on social media, my collaborators are creating social spaces where Indigenous peoples can come together to articulate a resurgent vision of Indigenous identity. Having positioned my collaborators as leaders in chapter two, I lay the foundation for my central claim in chapter three: my collaborators are influential leaders within social media communities because they build and

participate in affectively charged discursive spaces where they can appeal to their audiences' emotions. I hone in on my collaborators as individual social media users and everyday activists before elucidating the affective value that their personalized expressions of *Indigenous identity* have for decolonization at the level of the self.

In chapter four, I tie my collaborators' *individual* and personalized expressions of identity to the construction of a resurgent *collective* Indigenous identity, determined by and for Indigenous people. I analyze how my collaborators take advantage of the connective, communicative, and emotive affordances of social media in order to construct the Indigenous identity that they imagine. By creating linkages between the words of my collaborators regarding their practices on social media to scholarship that illustrates how social media is affecting contemporary social realities, I consider the broader discursive impact that my collaborators' use of social media has for disseminating knowledge about Indigenous identity, community, and culture that challenges settler-colonial constructs. I argue that by representing their vision of Indigenous identity with the aim of affecting feelings of pride and empowerment among their Indigenous audiences, my collaborators embody the principles of Indigenous resurgence. I conclude by suggesting that my collaborators' everyday representations of Indigenous identity and culture have the cumulative power to deconstruct settler-colonial stereotypes and provide for more nuanced notions of Indigenous identity and community.

**Notes on Methodology**

Prior to our interviews, I undertook a preliminary intertextual analysis to develop an understanding of how my collaborators represent and mobilize Indigenous identity on their social media profiles and within groups. Formative discourse analyst Norman Fairclough explains that intertextual analysis draws attention to the ways in which texts (i.e., spoken or

written statements) depend on socially and historically produced discourses, but also demonstrates that texts can transform discourses in turn (1992). By applying an informal intertextual analysis to the Twitter and Facebook profiles of my collaborators, I observed how they subvert historical and social constructs of Indigeneity through their affectively charged discursive practices. For example, Chantal balances her Twitter feed by complementing her humorous tweets about celebrity gossip, pop culture, and everyday life with tweets about Indigenous news and issues, and in support of fellow Indigenous peoples' accomplishments. Kluane often posts articles about inspiring Indigenous leaders or initiatives on the Our Voices Facebook page, and then shares the posts with additional commentary on her personal profile. Erin P. is fond of posting smiling selfies of herself and her daughter dressed in their regalia before dance performances, but also posts more serious status updates about the importance of revitalizing cultural traditions for future generations. Samantha adds trending hashtags to her tweets so that her opinion is heard in current conversations surrounding major political issues like the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The issues that they choose to talk about and the parts of their lives that they show on social media are sometimes as differing as my collaborators' individual personalities – but what they share is a focus on representing the empowering and positive aspects of their Indigenous identities and communities. Observing my collaborators' interventions on social media caused me to wonder about how their similar approaches and practices emerged, and in what ways the affordances of social media might help to explain such overlaps. While many of my collaborators' personal practices on social media, as well as their methods of community leadership and building, reflect typical codes of conduct within these spaces, I noticed that they also seemed to bring their individual experiences and identities as Indigenous women to bear.

In order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the connection between their experiences, identities, and practices on social media, I conducted in-depth interviews with each of my collaborators as my primary research method for this project. For all of my collaborators, "social networking sites," which are a type of social media site dedicated to promoting interpersonal connections between individuals and groups (van Dijck 2013), are the type of social media sites that they spend by far the most time on and participate in most. For that reason, our discussions were limited to each of my collaborators' participation on either or both of the two social networking sites that they collectively use most – Facebook and Twitter. Facebook and Twitter are similarly structured sites in that both allow for many community structures to exist: members may have strong ties or weak ones, communications between members may be minimal, one-way only, or mutual, and members may either build upon their offline connections or form entirely new ones (Gorton and Garde-Hanson 2013). On Twitter, conversations and communities most often form around hashtags related to certain trending topics (e.g., #idlenomore). On Facebook, discussions also take place through hashtags, in groups, or on pages, which may have hundreds of thousands or millions of participants, members, or "likers," respectively. Despite the ostensibly basic forms and functionalities of Facebook and Twitter, the possible uses of and behaviors on these sites are seemingly endless. As such, each of my collaborators has a unique approach to and presence on Twitter and/or Facebook, and each takes part in various communities within these sites.

Based on my reading of work by Margaret Kovach on conducting ethical research with Indigenous peoples (2009), I determined that interviews with my collaborators would allow me to engage with my topic through a critical analysis of how my collaborators' statements compare with both hegemonic mainstream media and radical scholarly discourses about Indigeneity. At the same time, quoting directly from our interviews allows me to represent my collaborators in their own voices as much as possible. I have been mindful of

my privileged and powerful position as a researcher, particularly as someone who has been educated within the dominant Western system, which has "a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualization of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialized forms of language, and structures of power" (Tuhiwai Smith 1999, 42). As a white woman who aims to approach my research through an anti-colonial lens, and in positioning this project in solidarity with Indigenous-led decolonization efforts, I believe it is crucial that my analysis flows as much as possible from the understandings and interpretations that my collaborators conveyed to me during our interviews. Therefore, my approach to integrating my collaborators' words into my thesis are based on the methodological approach advocated by critical Indigenous studies scholar Andrea Smith. My analysis depends not on scrutinizing the content of my collaborators' statements, but rather on locating them within a broader "intellectual inquiry around [the] intersecting logics of white supremacy, colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy…[that] structure all of society" (Smith 2005, 242).

The interview data that I collected with my collaborators was triangulated across different sources from cultural and communications studies, particularly literature on media representation, social media communities, social media activism, and online identities, and was primarily analyzed within the framework of Indigenous resurgence. This approach allows me to demonstrate where my collaborators' experiences and approaches align not only with one another, but also with other online communities, as well as where they differ. My research design and interview data provide evidence for the inference of affective and discursive impacts of my collaborators' interventions on social media for themselves, their Indigenous communities, and even some astute non-Indigenous observers. Yet, the qualitative nature of my research did not allow for before-and-after analyses to empirically assess the material effects of my collaborators' interventions. Despite this limitation, the

research was successful in describing how effective Indigenous community building is taking place on social media, and for providing an understanding of the praxes that Indigenous people are employing and embodying in order to construct a resurgent Indigenous identity. The research suggests that the Indigenous resurgence framework used in this thesis can be a useful theoretical model for the purpose of analyzing Indigenous community building and identity representation and formation on social media.

According to Kovach: "Giving back does not only mean a dissemination of findings, it means creating a relationship throughout the entirety of research" (2009, 149). Since I collaborated with individuals from different communities, I did not have specific protocols developed by an Indigenous community to guide my work on this project. Instead, I put maintaining trusting relationships with my collaborators at the centre of my research and writing process. My collaborators had opportunities to review the transcripts of our interviews and draft chapters of this thesis. I have appreciated their sustained interest, suggestions, and support throughout. I trust the feedback that they have given me, and I am confident that they trust me as an ethical researcher. I believe that this project demonstrates how critical ethnographic research can be an act of solidarity with Indigenous peoples as they decolonize their identities and build resurgent communities. Given the colonial history of Canada and the current settler-colonial structuring of Canadian society and politics, the critical ethnographic methodology of this thesis supports the need for Indigenous people to determine for themselves what their identities are and how their communities should develop.

From start to finish, this project has been a collaborative undertaking between my collaborators and me; however, I do not wish to falsely imply that its authority is equal. I directly quote my collaborators as much as possible, but recognize that I had an unequal amount of power in deciding what interview content was ultimately included. Pages of our transcribed interviews have been excluded. Nonetheless, I have made it my personal goal in

writing to amplify the voices and representations of my collaborators as they would like to be heard and understood, and I consider this project as being of shared authority between my collaborators and me. My collaborators are already outspoken community leaders and/or activists with wide spheres of influence in many Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; so, my intention in writing this thesis is to carry their voices and messages even further, to previously unreached audiences. While my collaborators hold social and political influence in Yukon and beyond, their current contributions to conversations about Indigenous identity or leadership within the academy are limited. My goal is to demystify some of my collaborators' praxes of Indigenous resurgence on social media by aligning them with established scholarly theories and studies. In doing so, I hope that I am helping to alleviate the burden on my collaborators of needing to build yet another bridge – this time between academia and resurgent Indigenous peoples and communities.

# Chapter 2: Conceptualizing and Building Contemporary Indigenous Communities

## Indigenous Politics in Canada

Indigenous peoples' resistance to cultural assimilation and racist settler-colonial discourses has a history as long as colonialism in Canada, and as a consequence, has received considerable scholarly attention. In recent years, preeminent Indigenous scholars in particular have foregrounded resurgent praxes of Indigenous peoples and communities to combat the negative effects of historical oppression and resist the more allusive impacts of contemporary settler-colonialism. Resurgent praxes are the practically applied theories of Indigenous *resistance* and *revitalization*. The Idle No More movement provides perhaps the most recognizable example of Indigenous resurgent praxes at both individual and collective levels. Social media also played a critical role in the development of Idle No More, functioning as a space where strategies were developed and discursive action took place (Barker 2015), which makes the movement still more useful for comparison in this thesis. In his seminal conceptualization of a paradigm of Indigenous resurgence, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*, theorist Glen Sean Coulthard examines the Idle No More movement in order to develop a vision of resurgent decolonial politics in practice (2014). Coulthard proposes that individual acts of resurgence demonstrated during the movement included individuals creating works based on Indigenous artistic traditions, writing social media posts in Indigenous languages, publishing blogs or Facebook posts about Indigenous ontologies – really, any public display that attempted to *revitalize* traditional Indigenous cultures or beliefs. At a collective level, Coulthard cites everything from round dances in shopping malls to teach-ins on Indigenous histories and rights to the use of road blockades as examples of Indigenous peoples' *resistance* to settler-colonial assaults on their land, rights, cultures, and identities. In the case of Idle No More then, *resurgence* was

demonstrated in Indigenous peoples' individual and collective practices of revitalizing their histories, languages, cultures, and identities – practices that resist dominate settler-colonial dominance by foregrounding Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and relating.

Using examples from my collaborators about how they are working to revitalize their Indigenous communities and resist the settler-colonial imaginary of Indigenous identity, through everyday interventions in both offline situations and on social media, I argue that my collaborators provide grounded examples of praxes of Indigenous resurgence. I demonstrate that my collaborators' daily leadership and community building efforts, although not yielding nearly the degree of widespread influence as Idle No More, exemplify praxes of Indigenous resurgence at individual, intra-community, and inter-community levels. In doing so, I acknowledge that the diversity of my collaborators, who have varying life experiences, cultural backgrounds, and politics, leads to discrepancies in the particular strategies that each takes to leading and building her communities. Despite their differing methods, I argue that my collaborators are all nevertheless working toward common end goals: to empower and revitalize themselves and their communities, and to construct a resurgent Indigenous identity. I evince this argument by couching my collaborators' statements about their own leadership, community building, and cultural representation praxes, whether offline or online, within a paradigm of Indigenous resurgence.

In this thesis, I argue that my collaborators' interventions into their online and offline Indigenous communities are informed by a nuanced understanding of not only what is actually feasible, but also what is proven to be beneficial *by and for Indigenous communities*. In contrast, most previous scholarship on the socio-political relationship between the colonizer (i.e., settler Canadians of European descent and the Canadian state) and the colonized (i.e., Indigenous peoples and communities) has been celebrated for its dual focus on the theoretical and practical requirements of a relationship that benefits *both the Canadian*

*state and Indigenous nations*.[8] Coulthard provides a highly critical examination of the "recognition approach" that has prevailed over both political theorizing on and actual relations between Canada and Indigenous peoples for the past half century (2014). He explains that the predominant paradigm of recognition is characterized by a liberal discourse of a renewed and reciprocal relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples. Rather than creating a mutually beneficial and judicious relationship between Canada and Indigenous peoples though, Coulthard contends that the structuring of recognition politics in practice has tacitly upheld settler-colonial hegemony. He states that recognition-based theory in its contemporary liberal form serves essentially to rearticulate "the very configurations of colonialist, racist, patriarchal state power that Indigenous peoples demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (2014, 3).

***Emerging Indigenous Leaders as Practitioners of Indigenous Resurgence***

Looking forward, Coulthard turns to Indigenous scholar-activists at the fore of contemporary decolonial Indigenous theory and praxis, specifically Taiaiake Alfred (2005, 2009) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2011), to provide much of the ontological and epistemological scaffolding for his own theorizing of Indigenous resurgence as an alternative to recognition. Following Alfred, Coulthard acknowledges that Indigenous peoples as a

[8] Throughout this thesis, I will refrain from using the word "nations" to describe Indigenous communities in Canada for three reasons. First, not all of my collaborators are citizens of self-governing First Nations, so it would be inaccurate to write inclusively of my collaborators' Indigenous communities as nations. Second, when I refer to my collaborators' "Indigenous communities," I am not necessarily referring to the nation or band in which they are a legal citizen. Rather, I am referring to any community comprising mainly Indigenous peoples in which my collaborators said they feel as though they belong. These communities include social media groups like ReMatriate and Our Voices, which have official memberships and organizational structures, to more fluid communities like networks of activists or journalists on Twitter, or Idle No More groups on Facebook with thousands of members. Finally, I do not wish to discredit the official nationhood status that 11 of 14 Yukon First Nations have sought and achieved through the Yukon First Nation Final and Self-Government Agreements, but recognize that some Indigenous peoples in Canada and Yukon reject these documents because they conform to a Western rather than Indigenous understanding of nationhood. In his study of ethno-territorial nationalism among Yukon First Nations, Paul Nadasdy explains that "most … critics, despite their radically different perspectives, object to indigenous adoption of terms like 'nation,' 'state,' and 'sovereignty' on the grounds that such terms have origins in a particular, European cultural and historical context and are therefore inapplicable to indigenous contexts" (2012, 501).

rendered minority in Canada must continue to participate in dominant legal and political systems, but calls on emerging Indigenous leaders to maintain integrity in their relations with the state and non-Indigenous society by grounding their politics and practices in Indigenous resurgence. Coulthard contends that to practice a politics of Indigenous resurgence, new Indigenous leaders must renounce "the instrumental rationality central to the liberal politics of recognition and instead … *enact* or *practice* our political commitments to Indigenous national and women's liberation in the cultural form and content of our struggle itself" (emphasis in original, 2014, 159). He cautions, however, that Indigenous resurgence may not fit with neat models of leadership or social movements, since it does not necessarily work toward a specific end or goal. Instead, he states: "Indigenous resurgence is at its core a *prefigurative* politics—the methods of decolonization prefigure its aims" (Ibid.). In the following chapters, I suggest that the everyday leadership and cultural practices that my collaborators embody and employ within their Indigenous communities reify some of the theories of Indigenous resurgence put forth by Coulthard, Alfred, Simpson, and a few others.

To come to this conclusion, I must first establish my collaborators as community leaders and proponents of Indigenous resurgence. For the remainder of this chapter, I focus on examining the Indigenous communities that have shaped my collaborators, and which they are now shaping as emerging leaders. Throughout, I draw on collaborator statements that illuminate their resurgent approaches to leadership and focus on building the strength of Indigenous communities from the inside out. The first section of this chapter provides an in-depth examination of the complexities of contemporary Indigenous community membership and leadership, based on the understandings and experiences of my collaborators. In the second section, I highlight how these nine young women extend their resurgent leadership into the realm of social media by examining two Facebook communities as case studies, ReMatriate and Our Voices. My collaborators acknowledge the tensions that arise when the

complicated dynamics that already exist within Indigenous communities are also realized, and even inflated, online. However, I suggest that their experiences and reflections also exemplify how social media is providing the next generation of Indigenous leaders a powerful tool for building the strength of their existing communities, and for creating space for new Indigenous communities to grow.

**Women's Leadership in Contemporary Indigenous Communities**

Prior to exploring the practices that my collaborators employ in order to effect the changes that they envision for their communities, it is necessary to first contextualize what community membership and leadership means in the particular experiences of these nine young women. Although their understandings were subjective, certain commonalities emerged. Most of my collaborators suggested that the primary obstacle to their leadership, just as it is their primary source of inspiration, was and is at the level of the self. For example, Claire said that for a long time she struggled to find roles that made her feel confident in both herself and in the value of her contributions for her community:

> I previously to now have taken a very social/cultural approach to the way that I want to be involved with my community. So that would be things like joining the dance group or helping with community events like getting people together, but then once we were together I felt like I wasn't contributing the skills that I had learned in law school ... Doing corporate work for my First Nation feels much more productive, and I think that it is important to practice cultural practices, but for the time being … I really like that fast-pace and I really like utilizing my skills in a very specific way … I feel like this was the right choice.

Considering the positions that she now works and volunteers in with her home Indigenous community, Claire went on to strengthen her claim that she felt more valuable to and valued

by her community once she gained confidence in the education and lifestyle choices that she has made for herself (even when those choices were made despite what other community members or outsiders thought was best for her), and then segued the skills born of those choices into meaningful contributions to her community. Claire reflected that her sense of belonging in her community emerged from her personal ability to shift her attention from where she felt she was falling short of expectations to "focusing on my strengths and going back to my community and offering them my corporate knowledge."

Most of my collaborators recounted similar tales to Claire's when asked how they feel about their position and roles within their home communities; they focused on their internal struggles to feel as though they belong and are worthy of leading rather than any lack of support they may feel from fellow community members. The general sentiment expressed among my collaborators was that, despite some interpersonal disagreements over certain decisions or approaches to specific issues, their communities are overwhelmingly supportive of them as individuals. After hearing such similar anecdotes time and again in discussion with each of my collaborators, I began asking them to further reflect on where their feeling of imposter syndrome and hesitancy to acknowledge their own leadership might then emerge, as it seemed to be a potentially gendered phenomenon.

In what came as a somewhat of a surprise to me at the time, some of my collaborators were unwilling to chalk their reluctance to recognize their own leadership up to gender expectations or cultural values, and viewed it more as a personal choice. Samantha, Jeneen, and Claire, agreed that the imposition of dominant Western gender stereotypes and ensuing expectations, which celebrate men who publicly demonstrate leadership but create prejudice toward leading women who demonstrate the same behaviors (Eagly and Karau 2002), likely have encouraged hesitancy among Indigenous women to label themselves leaders. Yet, Claire, as well as Angela, Kluane, and Melaina, additionally testified that certain cultural

codes of conduct within Indigenous communities may also be factors that contribute to their modest approaches to leadership. Kluane explained her thinking on the topic:

> For women, if we had to stand in a room and talk about our accomplishments, I bet more than half of us would hum and haw because speaking about ourselves, our achievements, what we do, is something that not many of us are comfortable with. If you ask a couple of men to talk about all their accomplishments, it will be far easier for them. That's the gender stuff that has been perpetuated for years and years … I have the confidence to say that I am a leader, but sometimes I am uncertain of how that will be received, and I want to ensure that being humble is at the heart of my leadership. I think I would be more comfortable with saying that I am a community elevator … I should probably be able to say I am a community leader, but I don't know if it's not being humble. That is something that is a huge value for a lot of Indigenous people, but for me that is a value I was raised with from my Mom's non-Indigenous side. It's better to have people tell your great story than to tell everyone about your great story. I know that I work, and have worked hard, and continue to work hard to build community, whether that is with emerging leaders and youth or with the territory or nationally. I know that is what I will be doing always.

Kluane's humble approach to leadership is influenced by gendered expectations from both her Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, but also reflects her personal and familial value systems. Although she is accepting of her modest approach to leadership, it is still troubling that Kluane and a few others recognized that they often adjust their behavior in public spaces as a result of the prejudices that they continuously come up against as women who take on assumed male behaviors and roles. Shari Huhndorf and Cheryl Suzack observe that contemporary Indigenous women leaders and activists are often criticized for undermining traditional values, fracturing communities, or diverting attention from struggles for

Indigenous sovereignty to issues of gender (2010). Facing such scrutiny is undoubtedly a tacit reason for many Indigenous women's humbler approach to both leading and speaking about their leadership.

In works ranging from the theoretically radical to more grounded explorations of Indigenous leadership in current practice, scholars agree that Indigenous women are on the forefront of change in Indigenous communities. Even with the increased presence of Indigenous women, including all of my collaborators, in "official" leadership positions in politics, academics, and business, Indigenous women are still subject to greater scrutiny and held to higher standards than men in comparable roles (Tsosie 2010; Voyageur 2014). Rebecca Tsosie explains that because of the traditional maternal responsibility for teaching cultural values and beliefs, there is a gendered expectation that female leaders will be more easily able to reflect and adhere to the values of their Indigenous society (2010). However, Carolyn Kenny maintains that Indigenous men and women leaders alike struggle "to walk between Indian country and the mainstream societies in which we find ourselves today" (2012, 4). Kluane's statement above echoes claims that Indigenous women leaders are expected to silently yet skillfully navigate between their personal ambitions and their community's expectations, between their own social and political goals and those of others in their communities, *and* against the influence of the dominant Euro-centric Canadian culture. Claire, Angela, Jeneen, and Samantha expressed similar frustrations. Scholars of Indigenous leadership agree that there must be a greater appreciation in Indigenous communities of the demands placed on all leaders as they grapple with the latent assimilationist agenda of Canadian politics and equivocal allure of dominant Canadian culture (Simpson 2012; Coulthard 2014).

In addition to being subjected to greater expectations due to their gender when in official leadership roles, Indigenous feminists have observed yet another issue with dominant

approaches to leadership in many Indigenous communities: that much of Indigenous women's "unofficial" leadership still goes unrecognized (Huhndorf and Suzack 2010; Simpson 2012). Simpson states that Indigenous women's "labour, inspiration and unending contribution forms the backbone of our families and communities, and family and community are the backbone of our political systems" (2012, n.p.), but that such efforts often go unrecognized because they are not mandated by settler-colonial legislation or an official Indigenous organization. Beyond simply recognizing the contributions of Indigenous women leaders in both official and unofficial capacities, Simpson argues that Indigenous communities need an entirely different conceptualization of leadership. She states that a resurgent notion of Indigenous leadership requires leaders to "continue to vision and build strong Indigenous nations based on a celebration of diversity, a fluidity around gender, individual self-determination and the Indigenous philosophies that allowed our Ancestors to do just that" (Ibid.). Challenging heteropatriarchal norms, whether derived from settler-colonial influence or traditional Indigenous culture, that have come to dominate Indigenous social movements, governance structures, political economy, and daily life is a critical aspect of Indigenous resurgence both in theory and practice (Alfred 2005; Simpson 2012; Coulthard 2014).

Successful Indigenous leadership strategies in the contemporary moment are perhaps best not backwardly focused on reviving traditional governance models, but rather, on reconnecting Indigenous peoples with their land, culture, and community (Alfred 2005; 2009). Indeed, Alfred suggests that reconnecting with "the very best practices of our traditional cultures, knowledge systems and lifeways in the dynamic, fluid, compassionate, respectful context in which they were originally generated" is imperative for decolonizing the minds of Indigenous leaders so that they may imagine alternative approaches, free from settler-colonial influences, to leading and building their communities (2009, 5). Although

most of my collaborators were raised with a connection to their cultures fostered through family, others recounted stories of being distanced from their Indigenous culture at various points in their lives, and recalled the eventual empowerment that they gained by connecting with their community and traditional lifeways. Kluane and Chantal in particular recounted to me their very personal and emotive stories of coming to their culture, which allowed me to understand just how critical yet precarious this process is for many Indigenous peoples as they work to decolonize first themselves, and then, their communities. Chantal recounted a story that reveals the roots of her relationship to cultural leadership:

> I was raised in Whitehorse, I was raised away from my community, and I was also raised in French immersion. I wasn't exposed to a lot of Native culture...I was raised with fellow students calling Native people 'chugs' and being called racist names. My mom went to residential school and through that process she has become assimilated. I do talk a lot about the story of my mom. She is very religious; she was raised in that way where our spirituality was not seen as a good thing. So for a long time I was not proud to be Native … But that changed when I went to a pow-wow in Calgary. I just got invited and I went. And a drum started. And it connected me in a way that I can't explain. The power of our drum is like a heartbeat, and it connected me to the Earth, it connected me to my people, and that is where my life changed. I realized that I wanted to make sure that I was proud to be Native and I also wanted to make sure that the next generation behind me never has to go through what I did. That they would immediately be proud of who they are.

As was also the case for Kluane and a few others, namely Jeneen, Angela, Erin P., and Erin L., Chantal went on to attest that she continuously overcomes the strain of balancing traditional and modern lifeways by grounding herself in her culture. The pride that she feels as an Indigenous woman is strengthened by her participation in traditional cultural practices

and community, which in turn strengthens her resolve to revitalize and celebrate her culture with others in her Indigenous communities.

Besides connecting with culture, many of my collaborators spoke of practicing another of Alfred's calls to action for resurgent Indigenous leaders: reconnecting themselves and others in their communities to the land (2005; 2009). When speaking of their own relationship to the land, all of my collaborators emphasized that being on the undeveloped lands of their traditional territory is critical to their sense of well-being and belonging. Beyond the importance of a personal connection to land, Angela also spoke directly of her desire to help other Indigenous people, and especially young women and girls, to connect with the land. While talking about the empowering affect that connecting with the land through hunting provides Indigenous peoples, Angela explained that reconnecting herself and other women to the land and hunting has anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal implications as well:

> I would really like to encourage other women and girls to also hunt and to also do things that are maybe viewed as more of a male role … I find the gender roles really interesting because nowadays you have some Native communities that say it is not the woman's role to be a hunter or that she shouldn't even hold a gun. It's very strict. And I wonder how much of that is really Indigenous, and how much of it is influenced by Christian missionaries and through assimilation and through a new worldview that was introduced by settlers? And so it's a funny grey area. But for me personally, I see the value in it for women to get involved. One thing that I would love to do at some point would be to get a group of girls, like an all-girls hunting group, together and take them out in the bush to do a hunting trip. And then have the group of girls tan their own hides and make something out of it, like a pair of slippers or mitts. I think

> that would be the ultimate form of decolonization and revitalizing Indigenous ways of being and knowing.

Angela's suggestion of her own land-based practices as decolonizing, her desire to share such practices with other women, and her actual work in developing land-based and other programming for Indigenous youth (which she described throughout our interview) confirms her leadership abilities and demonstrates how her leadership practices take up the call of Indigenous resurgence. Moreover, her recognition of the additional challenges that Indigenous women leaders confront in their own communities, due to the imposition of settler-colonial gender expectations, illustrates the murkiness of the community politics that Angela and other emerging female leaders must navigate in order to push their community building agendas forward.

The feminist concept of intersectionality calls upon researchers to explore "the distinct and frequently conflicting dynamics that [shape] the lived experience of subjects" who face multiple forms oppression due their subjectivity at the intersections of various marginalized identities (McCall 2005, 1780). As Indigenous women, my collaborators are multiply marginalized within hegemonic non-Indigenous society, facing discrimination based on their gender as well as their race, plus potential other factors like class, sexual orientation, religion, etc. Since Indigenous women share a marginalized racial identity with Indigenous men in mainstream Canadian society, Indigenous feminists argue that within Indigenous societies, heteropatriarchy is the dominate force of oppression (Huhndorf and Suzack 2010; Simpson 2012). A key question then, for Angela and most leaders with an Indigenous community-first focus, reflects a crucial inquiry for Indigenous feminists: recognizing that women in Indigenous communities face discrimination stemming from the influence of settler-colonial misogyny, they now ask how responsible Indigenous communities themselves are for perpetuating internal gender-based oppression? While recognizing the roots of settler-

colonial heteropatriarchy in Indigenous intra- and inter-community relations, [9] resurgent Indigenous feminists focus on a vision of community building that celebrates difference and diversity (Smith 2005; Simpson 2012). Such an undertaking requires resurgent Indigenous leaders to have a big-picture vision of how they want their communities to develop, and of the decolonizing and empowering practices required to make that vision a tenable reality for all members of the community. Importantly, it also demands a caring and respectful approach to those within their communities who may be more bound to settler-colonial influences.

Despite their often divergent approaches to leadership, my collaborators were careful not to be reproachful of the decisions made by those who came before them, choosing to instead acknowledge the foundation that had to be laid by previous leaders. Kluane's statement below is exemplary of how many of my collaborators delicately approached the topic of their own goals for their communities while expressing appreciation for the work of other community members:

> I am really proud that we have so many nations [in Yukon] that have finalized their Self-Government Agreements, but I have to say that in terms of building our communities, we still have a lot of work to do. Health, wellness, education, supporting youth, mentorship, all of those areas they missed when they were so busy negotiating agreements and drafting legislation. That is such important work, but if the people aren't able to be part of that in the way we need them to be then how effective is it? Normally I am pretty optimistic and I don't want to be cynical. We

[9] Indigenous feminist and scholar Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states the issues of violence against women and gender discrimination in the *Indian Act* dominate the discussion around how to end gender-based oppression in Indigenous communities. For Simpson and other proponents of resurgence (e.g., Alfred 2009; Coulthard 2014), however, all of the mechanisms of heteropatriarchy must be dismantled as a part of the decolonization project. Simpson writes: "I see the expression of heteropatriarchy in our communities all the time – with the perpetuation of rigid (colonial) gender roles, pressuring women to wear certain articles of clothing to ceremonies, the exclusion of LGBQ2 individuals from communities and ceremonies, the dominance of male-centred narratives regarding Indigenous experience, the lack of recognition for women and LGBQ2's voices, experiences, contributions and leadership, and narrow interpretations of tradition used to control the contributions of women in ceremony, politics and leadership, to name just a few. This simply cannot be a part of our nation-building work. This is not resurgence." (2012, n.p.).

> know the solutions that are needed in our communities, and young people have incredible ideas and ways to build our communities and nations! It's about creating opportunity and about getting back to identity, clan, and the land.

Kluane was hesitant to be overly critical of the dominant recognition approach that has been widely adopted by past and current Indigenous leaders in Yukon and beyond. Similarly, Melaina was adamant that in her own self-governing community she is not a radical dissenter, and that she does feel like her opinions and ideas are fairly considered and often acted upon. Nevertheless, she acknowledged that there are certain issues where she must continuously speak up on behalf of herself and more marginalized community members:

> Recently we had a meeting where we were discussing [our] electoral system, and traditionally in Tlingit country, in Teslin Tlingit country there has never been a female chief. The Carcross-Tagish First Nation has had a female chief and the Taku River Tlingit First Nation currently has a female chief. In my community, they're not so keen on it, but I make a point to stand up and say that I don't think we should discredit our female leaders or female warriors. I always speak to the need to have a female voice in leadership. If we have a male leader, then who is his female counterpart? And a long time ago it used to be the wife of the chief who would be that feminine voice but we're living in a time when our leader may not have a Tlingit wife, and we're living in a time when that male leader might not even want to take a wife, he might be taking a husband ...We talked about Ha Kus Teyea,[10] which is the Tlingit way, and there are elements of it that have been adapted or have been left to the wayside, and I think as a nation we need to discuss how we're picking and choosing which values we keep and which we leave behind.

[10] In an informal discussion between Melaina and I prior to our recorded interview, she explained the Tlingit concept of Ha Kus Teyea as literally meaning and translating to "the Tlingit way" in the Tlingit language. It is an expression used by Tlingit people to broadly describe their culture.

In contrast to my collaborators' gentle critiques, Coulthard lambasts Indigenous leaders as complicit in allowing the recognition approach to dominate the politics of Indigenous internal and intergovernmental relations. He calls on Indigenous leaders to recognize the hypocrisy that an "approach that is explicitly oriented around dialogue and listening [is not] more sensitive to claims and challenges emanating from … dissenting Indigenous voices" (2007, 447). Although Coulthard is certainly more scathing in his critique of the hegemonic approach of Indigenous political leaders than Melaina is, it is useful to compare their words in order to highlight how the lived experiences of the emergent generation of Indigenous leaders informs their political thought and practices from the level of community governance all the way to their relations with the Canadian state. Melaina's statement is especially insightful because it also illustrates the divides that exist within Indigenous communities over what a union of traditional and contemporary political and social epistemologies means, let alone how it might then be practiced. Most important of all, however, is that Melaina is working to bridge those gaps so that the road forward may be easier to navigate for both herself and for other marginalized peoples, particularly women, in her community. Melaina's statement reveals that she understands that as a community member with strong ties to her culture and traditional values, and as an educated woman with a critical understanding of Western hegemony, she is powerfully positioned to use her dissenting voice and have it be heard.

There was a widespread recognition among my collaborators that their personal politics and leadership practices are sometimes misaligned with more conventional approaches undertaken by the previous generation of (mostly male) Indigenous leaders in their communities. Another space where this generational gap is particularly noticeable is within the realm of communication. Unlike many of the community leaders who came before them, and even many leaders in the contemporary moment, my collaborators take advantage

of nontraditional communications methods, like using social media as a tool to engage and connect with their communities, to widen their sphere of influence and promote their socio-political agendas. While all of my collaborators take a very hands-on approach to leadership and involvement in their Indigenous communities – by sitting on boards and committees, attending community meetings, working for the government, and/or organizing events – they recognize that such established community building strategies still do not allow them to reach all community members. To engage members who are not physically present in the community, and even more so to connect with youth, my collaborators turn to social media.

**Our Voices and ReMatriate as Community Case Studies**

In order to elucidate how my collaborators are using social media to revitalize and build the resurgent Indigenous communities that they hope to lead, it is useful to focus on two specific social media communities: Our Voices and ReMatriate. These groups both comprise a large number of my collaborators, and were established by Yukon Indigenous women, including some of my collaborators. By focusing on these two social media communities, I demonstrate how the resurgent leadership praxes that my collaborators employ in order to build their offline communities map to their social media communities as well, thus blurring the lines between the online and offline lives of my collaborators. In doing so, I also reveal the some of the adept strategies these young women are using as they take advantage of social media as a tool for connecting, growing, and building support for their Indigenous communities.

***Our Voices***

The Our Voices group comprises Indigenous youth who want to engage in leadership and cultural initiatives. The group primarily connects offline during its annual weekend

gathering, which is planned by the Our Voices organizing committee for Indigenous youth from across Yukon and the North (*Our Voices* n.p., n.d.). Despite its focus on organizing an annual gathering of dozens of youth from across the North for a weekend of cultural and leadership-building activities, Our Voices maintains communications among its organizing committee members, and with gathering participants, throughout the year on Facebook. Among the women who collaborated on this project, Kluane, Chantal, Samantha, Angela, and Melaina are all current members of the Our Voices organizing committee.

Samantha indicated that the ongoing success of Our Voices in building and growing a community of Indigenous youth from communities across Yukon and the North is largely due to the ease and speed with which organizing committee members can communicate through Facebook group messaging. Facebook provides a smooth and straightforward path where the foundational first steps – sharing ideas, soliciting support, and delegating tasks – are made by the organizing committee before the Our Voices gatherings take place. Moreover, Chantal explained that Facebook not only provides her with a tool for communicating with Our Voices organizing committee members, but also that she considers it a space where she can work year-round to sustain the larger community of youth gathering participants. Chantal was able to travel home to Yukon twice in 2015 to attend the Our Voices organizing committee general meeting and the summer gathering. Still, she more regularly contributes to the organizing committee, and the entire Our Voices community, by leading the group's communications efforts – a job that she does from her home in New York City. Chantal relies on social media to keep her informed not only about what the organizing committee is planning for the next gathering or related Our Voices events, but also more broadly about what events are happening for Yukon youth. She often then relays that information on the Our Voices Facebook page to keep youth participants connected and engaged in the

community throughout the year. Without social media, Chantal confirmed that it would be next to impossible for her to do such work while she is so physically far away from Yukon.

Kluane also spoke about the critical role that Facebook plays in keeping youth Our Voices participants engaged beyond the annual summer gathering, and for including even more youth in the community:

> [Facebook is] the most I think, effective way of reaching out to each other, especially because people are in rural communities. We have hundreds of followers on our Facebook page and it's growing every day … This summer … we posted photos every day, we posted on Instagram, and we had responses like, 'I wish I was there' or 'That's so amazing,' 'Looked like such a great time!' Even though young people maybe couldn't have been at the gathering, they see their friends or cousins or people they know. Someone young is having fun at this event and it makes them feel like a part of it and it makes them want to be a part of it. You know, we have to use social media to engage people.

In addition to attracting and engaging youth participants to the gathering, Kluane also revealed that Facebook is often the only avenue that she has for communicating with youth when she is home in Whitehorse and they are in rural Yukon communities. During the gathering, Kluane steps into a leadership role that does not end when the weekend is over – it simply moves online. Kluane said that throughout the year she often receives Facebook messages from young Our Voices participants, mostly girls, in search of advice and support. Because many of the girls do not have personal phones, Kluane surmised that she would likely not be having such critical conversations with them if not for the communicative possibilities afforded by Facebook.

Increasingly, new media and communication technology researchers are embracing the "mutual-shaping approach," in which social action and technology are understood as

mutually constitutive and determining. Of particular interest to advocates of the mutual-shaping approach is the concept of *affordances*, which Leah A. Lievrouw succinctly defines as "opportunities for or invitations to action that [technologies] present to actors" (2014, 48). In the case of Our Voices, the relational and communicative affordances of Facebook make the site an ideal platform for the group's geographically dispersed but emotionally dependent membership. Although each of the organizing committee members I spoke with undertakes different practices on Facebook according to her Our Voices responsibilities, all recognized the importance of Facebook to them as leaders of the group. Facebook affords Our Voices organizing committee members a powerful communicative tool that allows them to maintain connections, provide support, and influence one another and youth gathering participants across time and distance. The communicative possibilities afforded by Facebook are also a major reason that core members of ReMatriate cited for the collective's use of the platform. Perhaps even more important, however, for the ReMatriate leaders are the "gaps, spaces for alternative action, [and] opportunities for pushback" that Facebook additionally affords (Ibid.).

### *ReMatriate*

ReMatriate began as a Facebook campaign by and for "Indigenous women opposed to appropriation of [their] cultural identities" (*ReMatriate* n.p., n.d.), and has quickly grown into a flourishing collective of Indigenous women from across the country. The ReMatriate campaign was conceived in a Facebook group message and the over 200 memes created by the collective have been most widely circulated on Facebook, [11] though the social media

[11] Typically, memes created by the ReMatriate collective for their Facebook campaign consist of images submitted by Indigenous women that "showcase an accomplishment, a strength, a goal, a healthy lifestyle/daily practice, or a way that you contribute to community" overlaid with text slogans that correspond to the pictured woman's story or achievements (e.g., "ReMatriate: we are lawyers," "ReMatriate: we allow ourselves to be Rebirthed," "ReMatriate: We are mamas with Masters degrees," etc.).

campaign has received some attention in the national news media as well. At the time of research for this project, the Our Voices organizing committee was communicating through an online project management application, TeamworkPM, in addition to Facebook messaging. In just over a year since its inception, the vast majority of the ReMatriate collective's administration and campaigning activities still take place in group messages and on their Facebook page, respectively, but there are major plans in the works to move the campaign offline as well. Of my collaborators for this project, Jeneen, Claire, and Angela are among the founding members who conceptualized ReMatriate, and Erin L. is now also a core member.

A visit to the ReMatriate Facebook page easily evidences it as a safe, positive, and empowering space where Indigenous individuals and non-Indigenous supporters come together to celebrate Indigenous women. The Indigenous women whose portraits get turned into memes for the campaign, and whose stories are shared in the captions, are as diverse as the audience members who "like" the page. What is common is that their stories and images resonate pride, illustrate the complexities of their experiences and identities as Indigenous women, and garner dozens if not hundreds of likes and positive comments from members of the ReMatriate community. A recently initiated core member of ReMatriate, Erin L. spoke about how overwhelmingly active, incredibly engaged, and thoughtful the women involved in ReMatriate are, and of how that overarching approach and ethos has made being a part of the collective a rewarding experience for her:

> That's been really interesting, just in terms of the different women who are working on the project and how passionate they are. We actually all communicate over Facebook and Skype, so seriously every day in my Facebook inbox there are like 40 messages! It's because there are really interesting debates going on within that campaign, about how to manage it properly … there are some really interesting

> questions that come up, and just to hear everybody's opinions on [issues]; I am learning a lot from them.

Jeneen echoed Erin L.'s observation about the inclusiveness fostered in the ReMatriate online community. Clearly proud and excited about how the collective approaches leadership and membership, Jeneen described to me how the group functions:

> We have an ongoing open call for submissions and people can also become as engaged in ReMatriate as they want. So it's an open leadership; it's like a fluxive style of leadership! We've had good feedback on that too, in that it is not exclusive that way. Hopefully it feels as open and non-alienating as possible to people, so they feel their voice, so people can feel like it's a place where their voice can be heard.

Jeneen also revealed that in addition to sending Facebook messages to inspiring Indigenous women to either submit photos and/or to join the Facebook community, she and other core members were also working on a call for submissions that includes two-spirited and LGBTQ+ Indigenous peoples, and possibly men. For Jeneen and many of the other core members, what began as a grassroots resistance to negative and disempowering representations of Indigenous identity and culture in popular culture and the mainstream media has grown into something generative and meaningful. Today, ReMatriate is a positive online community where Indigenous people from a variety of subjectivities and situations, but who have all been disempowered and marginalized according to the stereotypes cast upon them by settler-colonial society, can assert individual agency over their identities in a safe and supportive space.

### *Building Resurgent Indigenous Communities on Social Media*

ReMatriate and Our Voices are Indigenous communities that were created by and for certain demographics of Indigenous peoples (women and Yukon youth, respectively). Due to

the fact that both Our Voices and ReMatriate rely on social media in order to grow and build the membership of these communities, however, they are visible not only to those Indigenous individuals whom the groups invite into their community's respective memberships, but also to those outside of their intended audiences. Although photos and stories submitted to the ReMatriate campaign are screened by core members according to a list of criteria that are posted publicly on their Facebook page, and core membership is restricted to Indigenous women, any Facebook user can participate in the community by commenting on or sharing the memes. Similarly, anyone can like and post on the Our Voices Facebook page, even though attendance at the annual gathering is restricted to Indigenous youth (age 14-30), their chaperones (for participants under 18), and some invited guests. While the openness and visibility of both communities certainly exposes them to risks, more often than not, my collaborators attested that outsider reception on social media has been positive and supportive.

Social media has enabled Indigenous members of these online communities to promote their decolonizing and resurgent, and in the case of ReMatriate, explicitly anti-colonial and anti-patriarchal, socio-political agendas. By way of circulating discursive materials aimed at empowering Indigenous audiences within open and accessible social spaces on social media, they are also reaching receptive non-Indigenous audiences. Among leading scholarly conceptualizations of Indigenous resurgence, recognition of Indigenous culture and community by mainstream society is not a primary goal. Still, even the most radical theorists and practitioners of Indigenous resurgence acquiesce to the reality that Indigenous peoples must co-exist with settlers, and as such, devote some attention to finding ways to teach and transform settler society based on Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies (Alfred 2005, 2009; Coulthard 2007, 2014). Likewise, my collaborators stipulated that their community building and leadership work is aimed first and foremost at

people in their own and other Indigenous communities, but acknowledged and were appreciative of the support that their efforts have attracted from those outside of their communities as well. While they were enthusiastic and willing to share their experiences and insights with me, as a feminist researcher and under the auspices that I will uphold and extend the anti-colonial discourses that they articulated to me, they are still happy to share their knowledge simply with the hope of building support for the positive and oft-ignored aspects of their cultures and communities. Even if only in terms of a like, share, or encouraging comment, garnering outsider support and solidarity for their leadership efforts and community-building initiatives is an unintended albeit welcomed effect of the visibility of my collaborators and their communities on social media. Indeed, the sad reality that was pointed out by more than one of my collaborators is that to be Indigenous in contemporary Canada still means having to constantly defend your community against both tacit and explicit racism. While being provided the tools and spaces to educate curious, and even ignorant, potential non-Indigenous supporters on a large scale still places unfair demands on already marginalized people, it still requires less time and energy than, as Kluane stated, "...on a daily basis … [having] to inform somebody about culture or tradition [or] the Indigenous people that live here."

In the next chapter, I explain how the mainstream media produces and perpetuates the settler-colonial assumptions about Indigenous culture, communities, and peoples that my collaborators are working to deconstruct. I argue that social media provides an important social space that Indigenous people are appropriating in order to challenge racist settler-colonial media constructs through everyday emotive and self-representational practices. Building on Zizi Papacharissi's statement that, "mediated technologies effectively construct electronic elsewheres—social spaces sustained through digitally enabled affective structures that support meaning-making and construction of marginalized viewpoints" (2015, 24), I

suggest that the intensity with which my collaborators self-represent Indigenous identity gives their representations affective value in certain social media spaces. I rely on my collaborators' statements about how they use social media to celebrate the complexities of their individual Indigenous identities to argue one of the key premises of this thesis – that praxes of Indigenous identity on social media allow for complexities that counteract essentializing and prejudicial settler-colonial constructs. Following Sonja Vivienne's work on everyday activism and digital media (2016), I argue that my collaborators' self-representations and daily discursive interventions on social media are significant because they affect a cascading feeling of empowerment in Indigenous peoples, starting with my collaborators themselves. Creating affectively charged discursive spaces where Indigenous identity is nuanced and celebrated is a fundamental requirement for a gradual change in how both insiders and outsiders understand Indigenous individuals, communities, and cultures.

# Chapter 3: Challenging Settler-Colonial Constructs and Representing Individual Identity in Social Media Space

## Identity Formation and Media Representation

Seminal cultural studies scholar Stuart Hall explains that meaning, which "gives us a sense of our own identity, of who we are and with whom we 'belong,'" is produced through various practices and processes at various sites of social interaction (1997a, 3). Although Hall maintains that our personal and social interactions are the primary place where individual identity is constructed, he contends that in the contemporary moment, identities are also produced, exchanged, and represented within and between different cultures by the mainstream media. Since "identity is deeply implicated with representation," how a given identity is represented in the media profoundly affects how that identity is both constituted and positioned within supposed multicultural states and societies like Canada (1996, 620). Consequently, for Indigenous peoples in Canada, a sense of Indigenous identity is constructed primarily through social interactions with other members of their Indigenous communities, but also by the settler-colonial dominated mass media. For many non-Indigenous members of Canadian society, who may not have social interactions with Indigenous peoples, how Indigenous peoples and communities are represented in the mainstream media may be their only way of identifying what it means to be Indigenous.

Hall's work elucidates that even under the contemporary liberal discursive order, hegemonic media tacitly upholds racism by relying on stereotypes. According to Hall, stereotypes are a set of essentialized and often binary characteristics (e.g., good/bad, civilized/primitive, pure/promiscuous) that are ascribed as "natural" to people with a racialized identity, in order to represent racial and ethnic "others" to hegemonic white society (1997b). Due to mainstream media's status as an apparatus through which hegemonic power

perpetuates, the stereotypical representations of marginalized identities that media rely on and reproduce profoundly influence how we construct and communicate difference and otherness on a societal level. Through stereotyping, settler-colonial identifications, social values, and practices are upheld as the "natural and inevitable" norm against which all other peoples and societies are measured (Hall 1997b, 259). As such, it is left to othered peoples, whose marginalized identities force a confrontation with "the very difficult problem of strategy and tactics…to intervene in the media construction of race, so as to undermine, deconstruct and question the unquestioned racist assumptions on which so much media practice is grounded" (Hall 1981, 8). In their strategic use of social media space for representing Indigenous communities, culture, and identity, I argue that my collaborators are visibly and vocally undermining racist assumptions reproduced through the Canadian mass media. By instead presenting a powerful and proud image of Indigenous individuals, most notably of themselves but also others in their communities, my collaborators are gradually deconstructing racial stereotypes. In addition, they are slowly replacing stereotypes with more positive yet complex constructions of Indigenous identity that empower their Indigenous audiences to undertake similar acts of self-decolonization and everyday activism (Vivienne 2016). I will evince these claims at length in this chapter and the next, but first it is necessary to examine the media context in Canada that has compelled my collaborators to emphatically undertake strategic practices to deconstruct and reconstruct dominate representations of Indigenous peoples and, particularly, Indigenous women.

### *Mainstream Media Misrepresentations of Indigenous Peoples*

It is obvious to any critical consumer of mainstream Canadian media that Indigenous peoples are overwhelmingly represented by negative stereotypes. Writing on how Indigenous peoples are constructed across hegemonic mainstream media, including news, film, and

television programming, Augie Fleras suggests that Indigenous peoples today receive one of two dichotomous images: "first, a depiction of Aboriginal peoples are positive ('good Indians'), who work within the system, yet are vulnerable to forces beyond their control or susceptible to victimization; second, Aboriginal peoples as problem people ('bad Indians') in need of containment – by force if necessary" (2011, 219). For Indigenous women in particular, Randolph Lewis states that media representations overwhelmingly fall into "a twofold simplification: dichotomization or dismissal" (2006, 73). The dichotomy Lewis refers to is now largely a historical phenomenon in mainstream media that cast Indigenous women as either passive and romantic characters who willingly give up their own cultures to help with settler-colonial expansion, the maidens, or wanton women who are silenced in their own communities and inevitably subsumed as sex objects for white men, the squaws. More at issue in the contemporary moment is the tendency toward dismissal. Indeed, even within the scholarly realm, surprisingly few studies dedicated to critiquing hegemonic media representations of Indigenous women and girls exist. Those that do, such as analyses of settler-colonial representations of Indigenous women in academic studies by Laura Klein and Lillian Ackerman (1995), popular literature by Laura Beard (2000), and newspapers by Yasmin Jiwani and Mary Lynn Young (2006), concur with Lewis' conclusion that "[m]ost of the time … even the worst stereotypes have been absent: when it comes to Native women, the Western gaze has been dismissive, uninterested, or pointed in the wrong direction altogether" (Lewis 2006, 74).

Among my collaborators, the dismissal and misrepresentation of Indigenous women by the mainstream media was a calamity decried by all. While they recognized the ultimate good in issues that disproportionately affect Indigenous women finally being addressed in the mainstream media, such as the National Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls, many collaborators claimed that the framing of these national issues still

subtly blames Indigenous communities rather than the root colonial cause. The predominant narrative of the missing or murdered Indigenous woman is as she is *remembered* by surviving family members and through the police report of her disappearance or death. Besides occasional news coverage of outstanding achievements or controversial comments made by "good" exceptions to the rule, stories of complex Indigenous women who are vocal activists, artists, or leaders are few and far between (Fleras 2011). Such a lack of coverage is not because stories of Indigenous women's activism and accomplishment do not exist or are not newsworthy. Rather, it is because such stories do not fit with what Christopher Gittings calls a "discourse of the vanishing indigene," an imaginary of Indigenous peoples as disappeared – silent, passive casualties of colonial history (2008, 198).

Regrettably, Erin P. noted that the media's portrayal of Indigenous women as voiceless victims is sometimes momentarily inverted only to be replaced by representations of Indigenous women in other negative terms. She recalled an example of a racist and sexist meme that she saw floating around Facebook captioned, "Reasons why Native women shouldn't date white men. Because they'll call the cops the first time that you try to stab them," as demonstrative of how pervasive mainstream media stereotyping can grow beyond hegemonic discourse via user-generated media. Such misrepresentations by mainstream as well as user-generated social media is a major motivation that Erin P. cited for her decision to represent herself on social media. In contrast to reductive and racist stereotypes, Erin P. defines her online presence not as victimized or violent, but rather as a proud and culturally-engaged Indigenous woman, mother, and emerging community leader. Sonja Vivienne argues that people who are marginalized based on their identities, like my collaborators, tend to the take up the call of "everyday activism" rather taking formal political avenues or participating in strategic or organized activism in order to catalyze social change (2016). By disrupting stereotypes through her individual acts of self-representation and the sharing of personal

stories in public spaces, Erin P. takes on yet another role: everyday activist. Over time, Vivienne claims that the practices of such everyday activists have the power to "inscribe culture with new patterns for being, and potentially, new patterns for communication" (2016, 205).

### *Indigenous Peoples and (Social) Media Activism*

The use of social media by Indigenous activists and leaders builds on a long tradition of Indigenous individuals and groups appropriating space in the mediascape to advance their social and political agendas. In her work on community radio service on Kahnawake Mohawk Territory during the 1990 Oka Crisis, Lorna Roth demonstrates that Indigenous people have long recognized the potential of alternative media for "[controlling] the kind and content of discourses that represent them in the mediated public sphere" (1993, n.p.). Roth's article finds commonality with this thesis over Indigenous peoples' appropriation of media space to influence dominant settler-colonial understandings of Indigenous resistance and resurgence efforts, which will be explored at length in the final section of the next chapter. A number of additional works on alternative Indigenous media production also improve the understanding of how Indigenous peoples use non-mainstream media for less militant, more everyday purposes than in Roth's example. Other scholarly works that focus on the role of alternative media use and production that counter racist mainstream media representations of Indigeneity include analyses of Indigenous-run newspapers by Shannon Avison and Michael Meadows (2000), television networks and programs by Kerstin Knopf (2010), and online networks by Fenwick McKelvey and Susan O'Donnell (2009). In *The New Media Nation: Indigenous Peoples and Global Communication*, Valerie Alia includes a chapter of examples of how Indigenous peoples in Canada, and particularly the North, have appropriated various media forms in order to insert their voices into the national mediascape from the 1980s to

2000s (2009). These works lend credence to my claim that my collaborators' practices of decolonization and resurgence on social media build upon Indigenous peoples' prior appropriations of media space.

Despite the pervasiveness of racist settler-colonial media discourses, Indigenous peoples in Canada continue to refuse settler-colonial definitions of their cultures and identities, carrying on a centuries-old tradition of everyday activism. Unfortunately, such ongoing efforts generally go unnoticed or are outright dismissed by non-Indigenous Canadian society "until certain flash-point events, culminations or times of crisis occur" (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014, 21). The most recent flash point occurred in the winter of 2012-2013 during the height of the Idle No More movement. The winter of 2012-2013 has been recognized by Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars alike as a zenith of Indigenous activism that built upon previous instances, including "… the Red Power Movement of the 1960s and the 1969-1970 mobilization against the White Paper, and resistance movements at Oka, Gustefson's Lake, Ipperwash, Burnt Church, Goose Bay, Kanostaton, and so on" (Ibid.). Despite this recognition, many observers still proclaim Idle No More as unique and more successful than previous culminations of Indigenous resistance. Scholarly cross-disciplinary works on Idle No More agree that the movement's successful delineation is in part due to the role that social media played in mobilizing nationwide support for the movement at an incredible speed (Coulthard 2014; Tupper 2014; Barker 2015). Jennifer Tupper, for example, credits Twitter and Facebook for affording individual Indigenous activists space to connect over their collective concerns. As she writes: "The Idle No More movement exemplifies how isolated forms of initial dissent and civic engagement can grow exponentially through the use of social media" (2014, 90). During Idle No More, many Indigenous people, including a few of my collaborators, understood social media as a space where their everyday actions can be imbued with political potential. Papacharissi states: "Impact is derived from context, so a

statement that is perceived as ordinary in one context may appear provocative in a different one" (2015, 112). It is likely that many Indigenous people had encountered resurgent rhetoric prior to the Idle No More movement. The presence of the movement on social media, however, may have infused previously received messages of resurgence with greater meaning for some Indigenous social media users. By perceiving their mentors and peers easily and effectively take up the call of resurgence during Idle No More and on social media, many Indigenous people were motivated to undertake such everyday activist practices for themselves, and perhaps, for the first time.

Tupper and Papacharissi's statements point to the connective affordances of social media, which allow for isolated individuals to join in collective movements without feeling like they are "trading off personal beliefs for more restrictive group identifications" (Bennett and Segerberg 2013, 1). Celebrated studies by W. Lance Bennett and Alexandra Segerberg demonstrate that social media has enabled an unprecedented degree of political engagement, organization, and action by ordinary citizens (2012; 2013). Such regular community members turned everyday digital activists connect, organize, and often mobilize online over their shared concern about important issues. The online citizen's brigade is drawn to social media as the primary location for their political engagement, rather than to more conventional social organizations or protest movements, due to the inclusive "personalized action frames" afforded to individual participants who share collective concerns (2013, 2). Bennett and Segerberg explain:

> Personalized action frames allow people to specify their own connection to an issue rather than adopt more demanding models regarding how to think and act. People can share their engagement and contributions in forms easily adopted by others as personal action frames that do not narrowly specify group identity and thus travel more easily beyond identity boundaries (e.g., group, ideology, geography, culture)

> across social networks. Technological networking mechanisms, and in particular digital and social media, enable sharing with distant others and may also offer multiple levels of entry into an action space. Connective action networks in this sense build on and scale up via personalization (197).

Bennett and Segerberg's conceptualization of the personalized action frames that draws people into social media-centric "connective action networks" maps well to scholarly discussions of Idle No More. Most analyses conclude that the movement would not have enjoyed its massive amount of engagement from Indigenous peoples and their allies without their ability to personally connect to the open and inclusive discursive framing of the movement, which was articulated by Idle No More's supporters and through social media (Tupper 2014; Barker 2015; Coates 2015). My previous analysis of the Our Voices and ReMatriate communities that my collaborators have been instrumental in building on social media came to a similar conclusion – the inviting and empowering ethos that my collaborators have affected in those community spaces is what draws new members in, and is what has attracted the communities' attention from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences alike.

Adam Barker presents another compelling angle in his analysis of the significance of social media to the Idle No More movement. He explains that because of the historic and ongoing processes of settler-colonialism, which "seek to erase Indigenous peoples' claims to the land in order to transfer legitimate possession to colonial authorities" (2015, 44), Indigenous activists throughout the twentieth century have often responded "by (re-)claiming a particular place or site" (Ibid., 45). Barker uses the well-established importance of site-based efforts to Indigenous resistance to claim that Idle No More continued such a tradition by "bringing indigeneity into electronic forums, as well as physically into shopping malls and urban intersections, [therefore disrupting] the settler colonial relationships by which those

spaces are integrated into settler colonial geographic imaginaries" (52). Barker's claim places the contestation of space, whether physical or virtual, as the main tension surrounding Idle No More. By asserting the importance of social media as a site for Indigenous resistance, Barker's work supports my argument that social media is a critical *social space* for Indigenous leaders to claim in their project to deconstruct settler-colonial imaginaries of Indigenous identity and community, and decolonize their people.

**Social Media as Social Space**

Unlike the mainstream mediascape, which is dominated by settler-colonial hegemony, social media sites are contested, constantly changing spaces. The ability of users to generate their own content and engage in two-way communication with their audiences allows social media to hold its grip on users and has led to its triumph over conventional mass media in terms of popularity (van Dijck 2013). Although some early studies of web 2.0 questioned the extent to which user interventions on sites like Facebook and Twitter actually engenders offline or "real life" social change (Lovink 2011), in recent years, esteemed Internet studies scholars including danah boyd (2010), Sherry Turkle (2011), José van Dijck (2013), and Bennett and Segerberg (2013) have forcefully and effectively refuted the notion that online interactions do not affect human sociality. Bennett and Segerberg describe a "general shift in power in the so-called networked society away from hierarchical organizations and political institutions toward loosely tied, flexible citizen networks" that allows power to operate differently within the different spaces, networks, and communities that exist on a given social media site (2013, 149). Social media sites afford the possibility for entirely new spaces and communities, which do not reflect existing offline political or social formations, to emerge (boyd 2010). Within such spaces and communities, social relations can be shaped anew by individual users with the agency to decide how they want to participate.

Many users have appropriated social media as a space where they "connect the private to the public and the personal to the civic" (Papacharissi 2015, 112). As such, the potential that social media affords for making the personal political has been particularly important with regards to identity politics. Papacharissi argues that for people with marginalized identities, it is a political act to self-represent one's identity in direct refusal of dominant, essentialized constructs. Furthermore, she suggests that such individual public refusals may have the collective force to eventually transform how societies understand the identities that they wish to recognize in members of "othered" groups (2015). Vivienne develops the idea further, contending that even when individuals have a relatively limited following or reach on social media, the political force of their self-representations are still powerful. She states: "… a [social media] storyteller retains agency in the creation of congruent self-representation. Similarly, ownership of this self-representation is manifest in the choice to share with select publics – networks of friends and family as well as imagined unknown allies and antagonists" (2016, 172). While it is important that social media affords marginalized individuals opportunities for cultural participation and increased control over how their identities are understood by dominant society, for Vivienne, what may be even more significant is that individuals feel empowered by social media to choose the audiences and communities that they want to speak and self-represent to.

***Representing Self and Reshaping Social Realities***

Among my collaborators, a spectrum emerges for how significant a role social media plays in the social, political, and even economic aspects of their daily lives. At one end of the spectrum are users like Chantal, for whom social media is both her job and a part of her personal identity. She runs a Facebook page with over 5,900 followers that is linked to her

blog of the same name and subject matter, *Indigenous Today*, which she said gets between 10,000 and 20,000 views per month. Chantal told me:

> Everything that I do is public on social media. I am very aware of what I am posting at every single second … On my Twitter account, I try to be funny and goofy and a little bit weird because that is who I am and I don't want people to think that I am robotic … especially when I am working with Indigenous communities. Because they need to know that I am not just somebody who is intelligent, and that I am actually a real human being and I have real feelings about what is happening to me and what is happening in our communities.

For Chantal, posting news and information on social media about what is happening in her own life as well as in the Indigenous communities to which she belongs or cares about, is not just her job, but extends almost all aspects of her offline life into the virtual realm. Furthermore, her activity on social media has broken down the divide between her social and political activities and her employment. Due to the attention that her blog, Twitter account, and Facebook page have garnered, Chantal has largely stepped away from her previous career as a journalist for various mainstream media outlets, and now earns her income as a self-employed communications and social media consultant.

At the other end of the spectrum, Kluane, Erin L., and Claire were warier of the potential impact that they feel their social media presence could have on their offline realities, and attested that they self-regulate their behavior and interactions on social media perhaps even more cautiously than they monitor their offline social relations. For example, Claire recounted that her social media presence and activities have shifted as she has moved through different phases in her career. She said that she was more politically active on social media during her time at law school, but a fear of having her views wrongly interpreted by potential employers led her to quiet her social media voice for a time. Today, Claire said she believes

she has found a balance on social media that allows her online voice to echo her offline opinions, and the experiences that inform those opinions, while also allowing her personal Facebook profile to be a space where she can reflect the less serious aspects of herself and her life. In her words:

> …[For] a while it was all very serious posts about like international Indigenous legal issues, and really big issues. Then, as the years progressed and I became more comfortable being a lawyer, and being more comfortable with this new role that I have taken on, I have relaxed quite a bit … I just kind of had this epiphany, like, I can be an advocate for Indigenous issues, but that doesn't have to encompass my entire identity. I can still have a life and act a little bit silly or whatnot. Not take myself so seriously. So I guess that is where I am at now: 40 percent not serious and 60 percent serious.

Although Claire testified to the importance of balancing her social and political interventions with jokes and fun on social media, mirroring how she approaches social spaces and interactions in her offline life, she went on to reveal that some of her former co-workers still expressed surprise at just how politically outspoken she is on social media. She recalled:

> ...I articled for the Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs in Toronto, and I remember having to bite my tongue at a lot of issues that would come up. When I added some of [my co-workers] on Facebook, I remember some of them saying to me that they were under the impression that I wasn't very politically engaged, and I think some of them were a little surprised that I felt really strongly about Indigenous issues.

Claire's story is suggestive of the importance of social media as a space where many Indigenous people feel that they can represent the complexities of their individual identities, and voice their honest opinions about the issues affecting them and their communities. Facebook affords Claire a space where she can address the structural constraints that affect

Indigenous peoples' everyday lives, and feel as though her cumulative discursive interventions may have eventual political impact. The simultaneously public and private nature of Facebook allows Claire to educate a wide audience about Indigenous issues without worry that she will be penalized for voicing her political opinions in an "inappropriate" context. Like Claire, many users appropriate space on Facebook and Twitter as a venue for personal expression, thus making articulations of the personal and political a common, accepted, and effective practice within social media space. In making such a celebration of social media's affordances, however, it is important to note that not all, if not most, social media users with marginalized identities use the platforms for self-representation, personalized action, or other forms of everyday activism. Though digital self-representation is preferred practice for activists like Claire and the rest of my collaborators, Vivienne notes that the technical aptitude and emotional investment required to publicly present one's identity on social media is still deemed too difficult or risky an endeavor by many marginalized individuals (2016).

Many of my collaborators, however, expressed a similar sentiment to Claire when speaking about the importance of social media as a discursive space for Indigenous peoples, both individually and collectively, to express their politics. Samantha – who falls somewhere in the middle of the spectrum in terms of how much of her social, political, and vocational life takes place on social media or is impacted by her social media participation – gave a particularly salient statement about how empowering Twitter is for her:

> So for me [social media] has been really important in two ways. The first way is that it has been important for me personally is in expressing anger, expressing different emotions to those mainstream representations … or to different issues that come up, and being able to have a space to say, 'You know what? This isn't okay and these are the reasons why.' The second reason why Twitter specifically has been important to

> me is that it allows me to communicate my views, which are sometimes opposing views, to a wider audience. That can be upsetting for some people, but it can also be reaffirming for others who may not be hearing those views elsewhere. I think it is pretty important when that really isn't happening in the mainstream media. I know it's not that helpful to frame it in a like mainstream media versus Twitter presence dichotomy, but for me, it really is about having the space to say how I feel, and to be able to counter some of the things that are being said that aren't okay … It's important to be able to have somewhere to sort of air those grievances, but also to be able to mobilize people, and to get inspired and to inspire each other.

It is clear from this testimony that Twitter provides Samantha a space where she feels her voice is heard with regards to the social and political issues that she cares about and that affect her and her communities. Moreover, social media is a space that she can access to release some of the feelings of anger and hurt that are often her emotional responses to her embodied experiences as an Indigenous woman in the offline world. In communicating her feelings of frustration and indignation to her social media audience, she feels she can use social media as a discursive space to challenge some of the racist discourses about Indigenous peoples, cultures, and communities that deepen cultural wounds and prevent decolonization. Samantha recognized that before other Indigenous people can be mobilized to challenge and change settler-colonial discourses through their own social media interventions, they must have access to spaces where they can feel the "affect that provides the intensity with which we experience … the urgency to act upon those feelings" (Papacharissi 2015, 22).

### *Affect, Empowerment, and Social Media Space*

Although the conceptual definition of affect is contested among theorists, in exploring how affect is transmitted through the Internet and on social media, Joanne Garde-Hansen and

Kristyn Gorton find affect theorist Sara Ahmed's definition particularly useful. Ahmed describes affect as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (qtd. in Garde-Hansen and Gorton 2013, 33). Using Ahmed's definition as a point of departure, Garde-Hansen and Gorton argue that media produced and circulated online produce affect due to their ability to transmit ideas and values that produce lasting emotional responses in individuals and collective audiences. Ahmed further clarifies: "Affect does not reside in an object or sign, but is an effect of the circulation between objects and signs (= the accumulation of affective value.) Signs increase in affective value as an effect of the movement between the signs: the more signs circulate the more affective they become" (2004, 45).

Emotional responses are often ephemeral and do not always result in immediate action, making the value of the representations that help to produce affect difficult to gauge (Papacharissi 2015). Garde-Hansen and Gorton find a solution to the problem of measuring affect by suggesting that studies of affect in social media spaces are best oriented instead toward studying social media's "ability to guide and direct its users to particular feelings, and actions to take on behalf of those feelings" (2013, 112). Most of my collaborators were hesitant to overtly proclaim the lasting importance of their individual social media interventions, particularly when compared to the "real work" that they believed they could and should be doing (and are, as was demonstrated in chapter two) to decolonize and build their Indigenous communities offline. Nonetheless, many indicated a belief in the ability of their aggregate representational practices within social media spaces and communities to eventually affect feelings of empowerment in their Indigenous audiences. Inspiring their audiences to feel pride and empowerment in their own Indigenous identities is the step my collaborators realize they must take before any collective resurgent actions can be made. And

social media provides the space where my collaborators – usually – feel empowered to take that first step.

### *Weighing the Benefits and Risks of Representation*

For my collaborators, social media sites can simultaneously be: a safe space where they seek support and community connection, a dangerous space where threats of racism and sexism are always lurking, and an empowering space where they go to broadcast their emotions and opinions and feel as though they are being heard. The ambivalence that some of my collaborators, most notably Angela, Jeneen, Claire, and Erin L., expressed over whether or not they believed their social media practices are more personally valuable than they are detrimental reveals the complex relationship that they have with social media as a contested social space. Some of the negative or detrimental outcomes that these women pointed to as potential results of their social media interventions included: racist or sexist responses to personal posts or pictures, alienating employers and others for expressing "radical" political opinions, or being perceived as or feeling narcissistic due to their self-representations. The appalling phenomenon of online hatred toward women is well-documented by contemporary feminist Internet studies scholars, who demonstrate that women and people of colour online are often subject to the same oppressive social, political, and economic structures that exist in the offline world (Beyer 2012; Gajjala and Oh 2012). More subtly, Lisa Nakamura reminds us that just as it is offline, in the white- and male-dominated world of the web, subversive interventions by women, and particularly racialized women, are at the very least met with intense social scrutiny and often stigmatization (2015).

Nonetheless, similar studies to this one conclude that women who participate in online social justice communities usually felt it to be worthwhile for the strong sense of community and camaraderie that it provides (Nakamura 2015). Certainly, my collaborators

all spoke of the connections they have forged through social media, about the personal empowerment, pride, and feeling of belonging they gain from participating in social media communities like ReMatriate and Our Voices, and of instances where they felt they were able to use the platforms to effectively educate others regarding an issue that they care about. Samantha explained that even though participating in online activist spaces and communities exposes her to hatred, it more importantly allows her to access networks of support, and provides her with a feeling of empowerment:

> I might be experiencing something at law school or I might have had a discussion at law school where I walk away and I still feel unsettled, or I still feel that there is something that needs to be addressed. So I am able to tweet about that and have those thoughts be out there in the world and that can be a very empowering experience … In terms of connecting, I think that there are a few different communities that I like to connect with on Twitter and the one that is important to me is the sort of Indigenous community that has developed on Twitter and also the network of journalists that I work with … Even though we are in different geographical locations it is a way to stay connected and to know what people are doing.

For Samantha and most others, belonging to social media communities, whether the community membership comprises fiery activists or formidable advocates, provides a place to turn for solace or empowerment when experiences in their offline communities are cause for frustration. While Angela, Claire, Jeneen, and Erin L. revealed that the potentially negative effects of their interventions into social media sometimes cause them hesitation, they all still continue to post their opinions about Indigenous issues and exert their Indigenous identity despite the risks. The empowering feeling that voicing their thoughts and opinions provides is stronger than their fear.

The variation across my nine collaborators in terms of the affective value, for both themselves personally as well as for their Indigenous online audiences, that they give their social media interventions points to their varied feelings toward social media as a simultaneously personal and public space. Samantha, Erin P., and Chantal spoke assuredly of the catharsis and personal sense of empowerment that sharing their opinions on social media provides. Yet, like Angela, Erin L., and Jeneen, they remained somewhat less certain of how strongly the empowerment that they personally feel on social media resonates publicly to affect their audiences. Internet studies scholars have only recently begun to analyze whether personalized, everyday activism on social media is achieving the social change that regular citizens turned digital activists hope for. In her study of how digital media can afford empowerment for marginalized people and groups, Vivienne offers support for the idea that "the cumulative influence of diverse voices dispersed among networked publics can provoke subtle and profound shifts in values, thereby constituting new cultural norms" (2016, 3). Although the affective value of my collaborators' representations for their Indigenous audiences is impossible to quantify, following Vivienne's notion, I claim that by self-representing their Indigenous identity, my collaborators are reclaiming agency and ownership over their identities from hegemonic settler society. For people whose identities as Indigenous people and women are cause for them to be marginalized in mainstream society, such personalized yet public reclamations of their identities can be considered everyday activism. Therefore, I argue that my collaborators cumulative representations of Indigenous identity within the public space of social media have the cascading power to inspire others to likewise assert their own destabilizing understandings, and to challenge dominant notions of what it means to be Indigenous.

**Narcissism or Pride? Representing Individual Identity**

According to Simpson, hundreds of years of colonial abuse has produced a collective, embodied shame in many Indigenous peoples and communities (2011). This "insidious and infectious" sense of shame Simpson places as the dominant affect of what she calls the "cognitive imperialism" that colonial powers use to convince Indigenous peoples that they were and remain "a weak and defeated people, and that there was no point in resisting or resurging" (2011, 14). For Simpson, realizing that cognitive imperialism lay at the root of the sense of shame and latent desire to disconnect from Anishinaabe culture and community that was affecting her, and seemingly many others in her community, led her on a quest to discover and tell stories of Indigenous resistance. Through the act of storytelling, Simpson aims to foster pride and empower her people so that they can begin to imagine "new social spaces based on justice and peace … and at least see the potential for radically different ways of existence" (Ibid., 148). Based on their statements, I suggest that my collaborators have similar understandings of the disempowering and shaming affect that settler-colonialism has had on them personally, and on their entire Indigenous communities. I also argue that they share Simpson's belief in individual agency to resist racist discourses, and to construct an Indigenous-defined identity and socio-political order. I contend that it is my collaborators' shared belief in the affective value of *pride* to overcome the shame of cognitive imperialism, and to produce real change in how Indigenous peoples see themselves and their communities, that is at the heart of my collaborators' representational praxes on social media.

The importance of pride, both in oneself and one's culture and community, was a recurring topic in my discussions with my collaborators. Most of my collaborators linked the concept of pride closely with empowerment, and suggested pride contributes to the affect of empowerment that Indigenous people feel when they enter certain Indigenous spaces in both the online and offline world. Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel assert that an empowered

and resurgent Indigenous identity must begin at the level of the self, where it builds the strength necessary to resonate outwardly to affect all of the spaces and relationships that constitute Indigenous ontology (2005). Reflecting on what drives her own community building work, Angela recognized that her self-esteem is essential to her ability to help others find theirs in turn:

> The work that I do with youth and the revitalization efforts that I do with my language and my culture, I do it because I want to do it for myself … I think *decolonization begins with the self*. You have to work on things on your own and know what is valuable to you … I just like doing what I want to do, which includes helping other people find their sense of identity and finding pride in who they are (emphasis added).

Angela recognized that before one can ask others in her community to respect her as a leader, she must first learn to respect and value herself. Similarly, before Indigenous leaders can demand decolonization in others and at the community level, first they must embody a decolonized individual Indigenous identity and pride in their Indigenous culture (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Simpson 2011). All of my collaborators alluded to the fact that they use social media to share their reverence for aspects of their Indigenous cultures. While the word pride may not have been one that they all used to describe how they represent their individual identity, with regards to the aspects of their lives as Indigenous peoples that they represent online, I contend that pride is the predominate affect resonating from each of my collaborators' personal social media profiles. Following Ahmed's notion that the cumulative circulation of signs (i.e., representations) gives them meaning, I suggest that my collaborators' proud representations of themselves participating in and celebrating Indigenous culture generates an empowering affect among their Indigenous communities and audience members with every successive post or tweet.

Although their experiences as Indigenous people are not the only formative aspects of the individual identities that they represent on social media, Chantal, Erin P., Melaina, and Jeneen spoke of their belief in the potential of their personalized portrayals of Indigeneity to affect how other Indigenous people understand and embody it in turn. Melaina spoke illustratively about how her sense of self and her collective Tlingit identity intersect to constitute her individual identity:

> My identity is strongly based in being a Tlingit woman, having my cultural knowledge, my spiritual knowledge, and a very strong sense of self that was reinforced by my mother and my community and my elders. I am very proud, so it's a proud identity… I am also a very positive person – very optimistic, very happy, very positive in my outlook – and that forms a part of my identity.

Melaina's pride in herself and her culture certainly come across in her posts on social media, where she said she feels that she has the power to represent her particular understanding of what it means to be a proud and independent Indigenous woman.

Melaina admitted that she would like to focus more on harnessing the influence that she feels she has on social media to shape broader discourses surrounding what it means to be a contemporary Indigenous woman. By actively choosing to represent herself publicly on social media as an empowered and proud Indigenous woman, however, I argue that she is already taking the first steps in both resisting cognitive imperialism and practicing Indigenous resurgence. According to media scholar Bart Cammaerts, social media is a space wherein individual identities are both socially and personally constructed, and as such, is one where individuals may adhere to the socially inscribed identities cast upon them, but also have the agency to resist those constructs (2015). Vivienne builds the argument by suggesting that individual "agency over storytelling and ownership of self-representation are fundamental tools in negotiating an empowered congruent identity" (2016, 210). Through her proud

representations of self on social media, Melaina embodies a resistance to reductive settler-colonial constructs of Indigenous womanhood, which empowers her as an Indigenous woman. By taking ownership over her Indigenous identity, Melaina is decolonizing first and foremost at the level of the self. Moreover, as Vivienne argues, the agency and empowerment that Melaina expresses through her marginalized identity likely have a ripple effect, inspiring others within her network to reclaim and celebrate their own Indigenous identities in turn.

Although my collaborators generally agreed that they feel a sense of personal empowerment or pride from self-representing their identities on social media, the wider affective value that they placed on such personalized social media interventions varied. Like Melaina, Samantha, Jeneen, Erin P., and Chantal said that their empowered social media presence produces a positive, empowering emotional response in them personally. They also expressed hope that this has affective resonance with their online Indigenous communities and audiences as well. Claire, Kluane, and Angela, were more skeptical though, and expressed doubt about how far such personal affects extend. Angela was perhaps the most uncertain about the affective value of her social media practices for producing real change in how Indigenous people represent themselves and their communities in social spaces, particularly in the offline world. Although she stated that she regularly posts updates and photos of herself "trying to do work that is positive" as "a way of letting my people know that I am still fighting for us," she was ambivalent about the overall impact her efforts at self- and cultural-promotion actually has:

> Now, it seems like some people's Facebook or social media profiles are very narcissistic … You never use it as a tool to unleash how you're really feeling or what's really going on. I think social media can be a really useful tool in terms of connecting with people, but in terms of representation I think that it is not always the most accurate. As [is the case] with any form of media … The real connections that

> you make are through the everyday work that you do and through the interactions that you have in a real basis. I am hoping that through the work of ReMatriate and through social media we will spark the real work, as opposed to just what [is] put out on social media.

Angela was more uncertain than most of my collaborators about how much of an impact she considers her interventions on social media to have on how members of her audience feel about their own Indigenous identity. Nevertheless, she confirmed a belief that social media does in fact provide for affectively charged discursive spaces where self-actualized identities may be represented, if not realized.

In chapter two, I demonstrated that my collaborators use social media as a communicative space for strengthening and building the resurgent Indigenous communities that they want to lead. In this chapter, I suggested that the communities and spaces that my collaborators are building on social media are affectively charged in part by my collaborators' influential self-representations of individual Indigenous identity. In the next chapter, I propose that my collaborators' proud representations of both *individual* and *collective* Indigenous identity on social media resonate outwardly from their personal profiles, the communities that they lead, and the discursive spaces that they occupy, generating a feeling of empowerment among their Indigenous audiences. Beyond everyday activism, in the first section, I argue that their self-representations of *individual*, and personalized representations of *collective*, Indigenous identity on social media fall under the rubric of cultural practices that are required for Indigenous resurgence. From there, I suggest that my collaborators representational practices may also be showing some resonance, and possibly inspiring acts of solidarity, among astute members of settler society, and even mainstream media. I conclude chapter four by positing that this shift may be happening because influential Indigenous social media users, including my collaborators, tend to

observe cross-culturally legible, normative discursive and representational practices on social media. Throughout, I couch my collaborators' representational practices within scholarly debate over the potential of social media interventions to shift broader discourses surrounding collective identities, and conclude that expressions of self-actualized and self-determined identities by marginalized peoples can have discursive effects beyond the confines of social media space.

# Chapter 4: Representing and Constructing Resurgent Indigenous Identity on Social Media

## (Re)Constructing Indigenous Identity as Resurgent Praxis

Rejecting rigid, settler-colonial state definitions and discourses of Indigeneity, such as Indian status and Aboriginalism,[12] Alfred and Corntassel broadly theorize a collective *Indigenous identity* as a "dynamic and interconnected concept...constituted in a shared history, ceremony, language, land," and kinship networks or community (2005, 609). They argue that Indigenous as an identity is first and foremost a construct of settler-colonialism designed to confine and compartmentalize traditional values so that Indigenous communities are forced to "mimic the practices of dominant non-Indigenous legal-political institutions and adhere to state-sanctioned definitions of Indigenous identity" (Ibid., 600). Echoing Alfred's eminent work in *Wasáse: Indigenous Pathways of Action and Freedom* (2005), Alfred and Corntassel call on Indigenous peoples to cast off settler-colonial categorization and reconstruct a new concept of Indigenous identity by and for themselves. In seeking to lay the ontological and epistemological foundations for Indigenous peoples to construct a self-determined Indigenous identity, Alfred and Corntassel resist the temptation to establish "universal definitions of Indigenous peoples" (2005, 606). Rather, their question focuses scholars and Indigenous peoples on the embodied individual and collective praxes that Indigenous peoples employ as they decolonize from the level of the self to the level of community to wider society and politics. Indeed, Alfred and Corntassel themselves refrain

[12] According to Alfred and Corntassel, the Canadian government's labelling of Indigenous people as "Aboriginal" is a "legal, political and cultural discourse designed to serve an agenda of silent surrender to an inherently unjust relation at the root of the colonial state itself." They contend that many Indigenous peoples in Canada have accepted this governmental assault on their Indigenous identities, including the connection to culture, community and land that informs those identities, because "in a politico-economic context of historic and ongoing dispossession and of contemporary deprivation and poverty… Indigenous peoples are forced by the compelling needs of physical survival to cooperate individually and collectively with the state authorities" (2005, 598-599).

from presenting a didactic theory of Indigenous identity, and consider any decolonizing and resurgent strategies that Indigenous peoples or communities practice as reconstructing the notion of what it means to be Indigenous. As they state: "There is no concise neat model of resurgence in this way of approaching decolonization and the regeneration of our people … But there are identifiable directions of movement, patterns of thought and action that reflect a shift to an Indigenous reality from the colonized places we inhabit today in our minds and in our souls" (Ibid., 612).

Accordingly, anti-colonial scholarly projects must not seek to provide a definitive understanding of Indigeneity. Rather than setting out to expose some "truth" about what contemporary collective Indigenous identity is or should be, my goal for this project is to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the shared experiences, and common social and political goals, that influence the praxes of resurgent Indigenous women leaders. The concept of intersectionality makes space for describing similarities and differences between members of a perceived group and provides a site from which we can "[subvert] race/gender binaries in the service of theorizing identity in a more complex fashion" (Nash 2008, 2). Taking an intersectional approach, I argue that by embodying and representing their individual experiences and understandings of Indigeneity, my collaborators are slowly eroding settler-colonial constructs and contributing to the construction of a resurgent collective Indigenous identity. The concept of Indigenous identity that I employ is not meant to invoke an idea of a fixed, permanent, or essentialized subject position within any given social context. Instead, it attempts to elucidate how Indigenous leaders strategically embody and represent Indigenous identity in order to achieve the *social* transformation required, alongside a new approach to political relations, for an achievable and liberatory paradigm of Indigenous resurgence.

When I asked my collaborators to discuss what identity means to them, most spoke of the push and pull that they experience as Indigenous women who seek to transcend certain categorical identities while building others up. On the one hand, my collaborators want Indigenous individuals, including themselves, to surpass the reductive and racist Indigenous identity inscribed upon them through settler-colonial discourse. On the other hand, they recognize the value for Indigenous peoples in reconstructing a collective Indigenous identity that will allow Indigenous peoples from different social and political locations to find a common position. From that locus, Indigenous peoples can support one another as they take the first steps away from settler-colonialism and toward a new reality. A few of my collaborators spoke of the need for Indigenous peoples to be aware of their common experiences of settler-colonial oppression, but also of the shared cultural values and approaches that can provide the foundation for a stronger, collective resistance to settler-colonialism. For example, Jeneen spoke of ReMatriate as a space where Indigenous peoples are coming together to transcend their personal and cultural differences in order to collectively decolonize:

> [ReMatriate] has definitely been a rad initiative just to talk about how to combat this like static, singular, colonial concept of what Indigenous women are or what an Indigenous woman is, or looks like, or does. It's showing the complex diversity of what Indigenous identity is and looks like, and also how smart and talented and brilliant and supportive our people can be of each other. And wanting to showcase that in a positive light. It's also generative – we're not pinpointing instances in the past that are hurtful or maybe a site of trauma, but instead are trying to present, using positive imagery as a way to generate … as a locus of community.

Indigenous peoples are constructing not only new Indigenous communities, but also a new collective Indigenous identity based on what they identify as their common ways of being

and doing. Though my collaborators individually differ in many ways, they share in feeling strongly grounded in their Indigenous lands, traditions, languages, cultures, and communities. That common grounding develops each of their strategies for decolonizing and building up their peoples and communities.

***Representing Indigenous Identity as Everyday Activism***

I have demonstrated that my collaborators' everyday practices of community building and Indigenous empowerment, both online and offline, critically contribute to the emergence of the new paradigm of resurgence affecting Indigenous peoples and communities. This paradigmatic shift toward resurgence is supported by the decolonizing practices of individual community members (e.g., my collaborators) as well as the coalitions of Indigenous peoples and groups that are acting together to achieve common goals for their communities (e.g., Our Voices and ReMatriate). The specific set of theories, as well as methods for implementing those theories, that constitute a paradigm of Indigenous resurgence, make the Indigenous resurgence movement more well-defined, institutionalized, and perhaps more likely to succeed than most previous moments of Indigenous activism.[13] Complementing the framework of Indigenous resurgence, it is useful for the purposes of this section to draw on studies of online identity activism and social movements mobilized around a sense of collective identity. Indeed, many scholars and practitioners of Indigenous resurgence take heed from both theories and practices of historic social movements, and subsequently call on Indigenous peoples to mobilize around collective identity as a practice of resurgence (Alfred and Corntassel 2005; Coulthard 2014; Barker 2015).

[13] According to scholars including Barker (2015) and Coulthard (2014), the Idle No More movement should be considered part of the Indigenous resurgence paradigm.

Candis Callison and Alfred Hermida cite Idle No More as an example of how Indigenous people appropriate social media as both a communicative tool and discursive space through which they can construct a self-determined collective identity (2015). Previous studies of Indigenous activism have demonstrated that collective representations of Indigenous issues, and certainly identity, are contested within social media space (Morris 2014; Barker 2015). Ultimately, however, these tend to agree with Callison and Hermida's conclusion that social media provides a space where Indigenous peoples from communities across the country come together to reconstruct Indigenous identity by and for themselves. Among my collaborators, there was likewise a general agreement that social media affords Indigenous peoples the space to construct and assert a self-determined collective Indigenous identity in unprecedented ways.

Speaking about new Indigenous communities and coalitions formed on social media, such as ReMatriate and Idle No More, Samantha, Claire, Jeneen, and Erin L. recognized the empowerment that is felt among Indigenous peoples as they form such communities at a grassroots level. Moreover, they recognized that is critical for Indigenous people to have spaces where they can debate and define for themselves what it means to identify collectively as Indigenous. Claire spoke specifically about how the ReMatriate community provides a space where Indigenous people come together to reclaim agency over their collective identity:

> [Indigenous people] are being constantly deprived of the ability to portray our identities as unique, diverse cultures and we just get conglomerated into these stereotypes … It's being controlled by non-Indigenous people, and frankly, white people. And so, [ReMatriate] has been re-empowering. Even just the process of reclaiming our images has been empowering, which I think is really neat. It's a really great group to be a part of for that.

Importantly, Claire went on to acknowledge that ReMatriate is still somewhat remarkable in that it is an Indigenous community wherein members are empowered and celebrated for expressing their individual interpretation of Indigenous cultures and identities. She recognized that tensions still arise as Indigenous women from various communities and cultures collaborate to construct a new identity, but said that the open and accepting ethos of the ReMatriate community makes those challenges easier to overcome.

Bennett and Segerberg suggest that individuals who join online communities and movements tend to have shared experiences or goals with other community members, but identification with the group's collective identity is not often cited as a primary motivating factor for individuals to get involved (2013). Instead, they suggest that most people who take part in online communities and movements are like Claire: they are drawn in because the group's "broadly inclusive, easily personalized action frames" appeal to individuals who do not necessarily want to trade off their personal beliefs for restrictive political or social identities (2). The appeal of joining open and inclusive online communities, which generally "allow people to specify their own connection to an issue… [and] do not narrowly specify identity" (197), is certainly understandable. For my collaborators and other Indigenous people, who are in many ways still subject to having their identities constructed for them through apparatuses of settler-colonialism, the appeal is perhaps even stronger. By building safe and inclusive communities on social media, my collaborators find and create the empowering spaces they require to debate and determine with other Indigenous peoples, rather than settler-colonial hegemony, what it means to be Indigenous.

While Claire celebrated the inclusiveness and potential for self-determination that online Indigenous communities afford, she was critical of the reality that in many Indigenous communities offline, collective identity is still often rigidly defined and enforced by "official" leaders. However, she interpreted that such divisive internal struggles over

collective identity are often due to the legacy of colonialism as well as the ongoing settler-colonial project:

> There's this idea ... this notion of the Pan-Indigenous identity. That there is just this one sweeping collective identity and that is the identity that we are going to ascribe to Indigenous people. But the cultures are so varied, you know? ... So what does being Indigenous mean? … I think that there is a large issue that is laying at the back of a lot of people's heads about whether or not to sign treaty. Coming from a community that hasn't signed treaty, it's just something that I think a lot of people, a lot of Canadians, wouldn't think about. But I know when I go back home; people get in fights about it. People get in fights that last years. So I mean, what does it mean to be Indigenous? I think that in some ways, it is maybe an overly broad question because the cultures are so different, and then in other ways there is that collective memory of Residential School or there is the threat of colonialism, or that sad understanding of how the government or the courts interprets an X on a random piece of paper that is written in a language that an Indigenous person couldn't understand 150 years ago and all of a sudden, people's traditional territory that was the size of France is being ceded to a white, colonial government that says they will look after the Indigenous peoples' best interest but that they won't. I think that's something that I understand more by virtue of being in a position where we are being asked again to cede our land for a very limited amount of rights. I think there is just this profound injustice that I don't think a lot of people understand.

Claire's statement illustrates that she is aware of the fact that Indigenous identity has been and still is used by settler-colonial society and state to divide Indigenous communities. However, she also acknowledged that Indigenous communities have always found ways to turn such colonial tactics on their heads. By rallying around their common experiences and

memories – or as Erin L. noted, more positive cultural commonalities like the "Native sense of humor" – that create a sense of collective Indigenous identity, Indigenous peoples in Canada have achieved greater political power to be self-determining now than in any point since colonization began. Equally important is that many Indigenous people, including my collaborators, are claiming their collective experience of oppression as an impetus for generating pride in the resilience and resurgence of their peoples and communities. By conveying their sense of Indigenous pride from an individual feeling into a public expression on social media, while still allowing space for the expression of individual community identities and histories, my collaborators transcend decolonization and resurgence from the level of the self to the community level. Over time, such complex and proud expressions of their marginalized identities and communities slowly erode stereotypes, deconstruct social categories, and change social relations (Vivienne 2016).

***Contending with Fears over Representation on Social Media***

Despite their ultimate favour for sharing aspects of Indigenous culture and identity on social media, many of my collaborators still expressed a concern over the potential for their representations of their individual, communal, and inter-communal identities to be conflated by obtuse outside observers. During our interviews, my collaborators were specific about when they were speaking from their personal experience and understanding as an Indigenous person, and when they were talking more generally about experiences and understandings that they believe are shared by Indigenous peoples within their particular community or even across Canada. In contrast to our conversations, all said that they worry they are unable to distinguish their various Indigenous identities as clearly within the limiting discursive confines of social media. While all of my collaborators share photos of and updates about their participation in cultural activities on social media, they nevertheless expressed concern

that by doing so, they may be yet again presenting an essentialized representation of themselves and their fellow Indigenous peoples, albeit this time at least according to the terms that they prescribe.

With regards to their Indigenous communities in Yukon specifically, my collaborators said they are more cautious when they represent those perhaps more rigidly defined, traditional identities on social media. Kluane described how she strategically decides which aspects of her communal Indigenous identity and culture she represents and shares on social media. She said:

> I mentioned that I am from the Killer Whale clan. On a lot of my social media I will post Killer Whale things – photos of our territory, selfies of me in my Killer Whale regalia, photos of Killer Whale clan members doing cultural activities with captions describing what they're doing – because I connect. That clan, my great-grandfather's clan, acknowledged me and I have the rights to the crest and the songs and the protocols that go with being a Daklaweidi woman … At the same time though … people feel really strongly about regalia and when you show it and when you wear it. And I am learning … I don't think there is any right or wrong way. It's about how culture and your identity start to change and grow.

Kluane's statement illustrates the importance that sharing her cultural identity as a Killer Whale clan woman on social media has for her personal identity development. It is a practice that she feels she has the right to do as an autonomous community member, and is one that she finds so personally significant that she continues to do it in spite of potential contestation from other community members who are less open to sharing their culture in non-traditional spaces.

Although Kluane's statement indicates that she is willing to push the boundaries of what aspects of culture are acceptable to share from her own Indigenous community, it is

key, as she attested, that she would never be so bold as to represent aspects of Indigenous culture from communities with which she may be familiar but does not belong. Indeed, almost all of my collaborators explicitly stated that they only feel entitled to speak about and share aspects of Indigenous culture from their vantage point within their particular Indigenous community. As Angela pointedly said:

> I can only speak from my own perspective as a Sayisi Dene First Nations person. I am not from the Yukon, but I definitely want to work toward fostering young, Yukon First Nations people in embracing their own culture and their own language and their own community. I think that it is really important in that act as well to be inclusive of non-Indigenous peoples.

In emphasizing her identity and position as a Sayisi Dene citizen, Angela acknowledges that there are aspects of her cultural identity that she does not share with other Indigenous peoples in Yukon. As an Indigenous person who has begun the work of decolonization at the level of the self, and who is engaged in efforts to revive her own Indigenous culture and community, however, she recognizes that she is also well-positioned to act in solidarity with other Indigenous peoples and communities as they undertake similar journeys.

Angela's willingness to share her personal perspectives on decolonization and community building, which are formed in large part through her identification with the culture and values of her Sayisi Dene community, does not stop at other Indigenous communities and people. Additionally, Angela believes that a self-determined, decolonized Indigenous identity should be shared with non-Indigenous peoples, whom she believes can learn and benefit from Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies:

> We have this term called Dene K'éh and it means "the Dene way of being" and it is like a set of rules or expectations for how to carry yourself … It is a way of being. Those are the kinds of things that I think really need to be embraced and need to be

> revitalized … A lot of our culture has been tainted by colonization and through assimilative tactics, and I think there is a lot of work that we need to do to revitalize our languages and our culture and our values. I think it is not just for Indigenous peoples; I think all Canadians should be exposed to that knowledge and that skill development because it will be for the betterment of everyone, including the land, water and the animals. I don't think it should be us only because I see a lot of value in our ways of knowing and our ways of being.

Working toward decolonization by raising awareness of the positive and empowering aspects of Indigenous culture and identity, so that these may be sources of pride for Indigenous peoples, is a paramount personal and political objective for Angela and my other collaborators alike. A secondary, but still important, goal is making Indigenous cultural values and practices not just visible to non-Indigenous society, but also accessible and appreciated. Like Angela, each of my collaborators expressed an openness and willingness to share their understanding of their culture with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Providing a representation of any cultural practice, or of the identities of those who engage in such practices, within Twitter's 140-character limit is challenging. Still, studies of online activism and social movements clearly suggest that the communicative affordances of social media present it as a space where new and personalized notions of collective identities can be successfully constructed by individuals (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Ratto and Boler 2014; Cammaerts 2015). However, social media's adequacy for representing and communicating the complexities of pre-existing categorical identities, such as Indigenous identity, and particularly in ways that render those complexities legible to outsiders, is less established (Vivienne 2016). My collaborators' fears over misrepresenting or being perceived as having misrepresented collective Indigenous identity then may not be without reason.

**Rendering Indigenous Identity Cross-Culturally Legible**

According to Jeneen, knowing when and where to assert Indigenous identity is yet another balancing act contained in the experience of being an outspoken Indigenous community leader and activist. Jeneen recognized the strategic importance of making her self-actualized Indigenous identity legible to non-Indigenous people as a step toward deconstructing reductive, racist settler-colonial notions of Indigeneity. She remained wary of the re-essentializing effect that depending on identity politics can have, and said that misunderstandings by outside observers are unfortunate and inevitable, but concluded that she still finds it worthwhile to celebrate her Indigenous identity as much as possible. In her words:

> I think that there is a problem around the language of Indigenous identity in that it can sometimes be placed on things that aren't necessarily about that. I automatically think of artwork and how sometimes people are like, 'Oh, is this work about your identity?' and I am like, 'Well, it comes from me so it is completely tethered to my experiences as a human and in my subject position, but the work isn't necessarily about identity, or my writing isn't necessarily about identity.' But that can be like a blanket or lens that gets placed on things that are made or created by Indigenous people because it's something that is coming from 'the Other' so it's easier to just be like, 'Oh, that's from a common-sense that is not mine so therefore it is about their identity' as opposed to it just being like, 'They're just making work or they're just writing or they're just being,' and it's not necessarily about identity. But, I think that it is also really important to assert Indigenous identity, especially in places where those identities are legible. So through social media you also can carve out that space.

Jeneen's statement illustrates some of the challenges that arise for Indigenous leaders, who are visible and vocal proponents of decolonization and Indigenous resurgence, as they

confront racist or ignorant members of settler society. While Jeneen understands the risks that she takes in asserting her sense of Indigeneity for outsiders who may not understand the complexities of it – or even that it is not her sole source of meaning-making – she believes that social media presents a space where the complexities of both individual and collective Indigenous identities may be communicated in ways that are perhaps more easily understood by settler society as a whole.

For Jeneen and the rest of my collaborators, affecting a change in how non-Indigenous people understand Indigenous identity and culture is not a primary motivation for representing Indigenous identity on social media. Since the opportunity to do so has readily presented itself though, as leaders who consider themselves bridges between their Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, my collaborators are taking advantage of their position and ability to seize social media space in order to make social change. By presenting positive and proud images of Indigenous identity, my collaborators believe that they are resisting, and possibly even reconstructing the notion of Indigenous identity held by their non-Indigenous audience members. Although such beliefs are difficult to verify, recent research with LGBTQ+ digital activists by Vivienne evinces the notion that individuals with marginalized identities can effectively use social media to speak across difference (2016). Specifically, Vivienne finds that by strategically using emotive language and sharing personal narratives in digital spaces, marginalized individuals build "social connection among divergent publics, bridging difference and creating new space for other disenfranchised voices" (2016, 203).

In his seminal work on identity and representation, Hall states: "Representation is only possible because enunciation is always produced within codes which have a history, a position within the discursive formations of a particular space and time" (1989, 447). Social media has emerged over the past decade as a distinct social space wherein "affectively charged discourses … that command our attention" are articulated through the

representations and messages of "voices frequently marginalized by the societal mainstream" (Papacharissi 2015, 7). However, such marginalized voices are only heard and their complex identity representations are only visible when they adhere to the normative codes of expression and self-representation within social media space (Papacharissi 2015; Vivienne 2016). Because of their "digital fluency," my collaborators have positioned themselves as bridges between individual members of their home communities, *and* between their home communities and other Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Indeed, my collaborators' adherence to the norms of expression and representation on social media allows them to represent themselves and their identities in ways that are legible across cultures and to anyone who is digitally literate. By representing emotionally resonant notions of resurgent Indigenous identity on social media, my collaborators not only inspire Indigenous peoples to publicly share their own notion in turn, but also invite non-Indigenous audiences to a new understanding of what it means to be Indigenous.

As content contributors and producers on Facebook and Twitter, my collaborators regularly produce, circulate, and distribute the messages and images of contemporary Indigenous identity that they want to encode in the minds of their social media audience members. With each retweet or share that their proud posts or images earn from their followers, my collaborators' representational interpretations of Indigenous culture and identity transmit a decolonizing and empowering affect (Ahmed 2004). Besides slowly creating affect, my collaborators' cumulative representational and rhetorical practices may also have important discursive effects. Hall's theory of the communication process as a "structure of relations...produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments – production, circulation, distribution/consumption, reproduction" (1980, 91) – is useful here. When my collaborators post pictures of or share their commentary on aspects of Indigenous culture or identity, they are producing a message. Because they

produce the message according to the normative social codes established within the discursive space of social media sites, they are often successful in circulating and distributing the message to their audiences. When the message transmits an empowering affect that is felt among audiences, to the extent that individual followers feel compelled to share or rearticulate the message in their own words, my collaborators' original message is reproduced. When my collaborators' message of a proud and empowered Indigenous identity is articulated with other Indigenous peoples' similar messages, a new discourse of collective Indigenous identity emerges. Finally, because this new discourse of Indigenous identity circulates within the public space of social media, and according to the normative codes of conduct therein, it may resonate and be understood by individuals and groups outside the original or intended audience. Such a communicative process is slow, and difficult if not impossible to track, but has the power to effect lasting social change.

***Creating Coalitions and Rearticulating Discourses***

Considerable scholarly attention has been dedicated to addressing the potential for building or nuancing collective identities on social media and most conclude that social media is a space where hegemonic social and political discourses can be challenged and differently articulated from marginalized perspectives (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Meikle 2014; Cammaerts 2015; Papacharissi 2015; Vivienne 2016). In his account of how social media makes individuals and the issues that they care about visible to new audiences, thus creating opportunities for solidarity and collective action, Graham Meikle contends: "each link, like and share [is an] opening up of different kinds of association, different possibilities for meaning, different trajectories for further circulation" (2014, 377). Although Meikle acquiesces that such openings often result in new audiences simply gaining an understanding of previously unknown issues or identities more than they prompt observers to actually

engage in solidarity activism with marginalized groups, he remains optimistic about the capacity of social media to at least unite the masses required for eventual action.

More optimistic than Meikle, a few of my collaborators suggested that they believe their social media interventions prompt non-Indigenous people to not only educate themselves about Indigenous identity and culture, but also to express support for Indigenous peoples' self-determined notions of Indigenous identity. Claire, Angela, and Samantha each pointed to my work on this thesis as an obvious example of anti-colonial solidarity with Indigenous communities born of our social media connections. In addition, some of my collaborators said that they believe other non-Indigenous individuals have likely been compelled to support or act in solidarity with Indigenous communities as a result of their own online connections to my collaborators, or to the groups like Our Voices and ReMatriate that my collaborators administer. Even if outsider support is demonstrated only in the form of a like, a supportive comment, or a retweet, my collaborators welcome all forms of encouragement for their resurgent Indigenous communities and identities.

From the dominant Western scholarly perspective, many just critiques have been aimed at the use of categorical identity as a grounds for political organization. However, these tend to overlook the potential for groups of people who share certain common identities to use those as a basis on which to form coalitions with other marginalized groups (Caratathis 2013). Idle No More provides a striking example of the viability of groups of people that ascribe to different identities to work together to "overcome some of the pitfalls of political alliances organized on the premise of homogenous or essential identities" (Ibid., 942). As it grew into a movement, Idle No More saw Indigenous peoples from communities and situations across the country come together on social media and in offline spaces to construct a complex yet collective Indigenous identity on their own terms. Many of the scholarly accounts that have emerged since Idle No More suggest that the empowerment participants

felt during the movement was gained not from recognition received from settler-colonial state or society (Morris 2014; Barker 2015). Rather, individual participants felt proud of and found meaning in the movement because it saw Indigenous people creating space to assert their "multilayered identities," their "awareness of systemic inequities," and their "right to belong" all at once (Tupper 2014, 90). The personalized action frames of Idle No More's significant social media presence allowed for individual Indigenous peoples from across the country to come together to create a self-determined concept of collective Indigenous identity for the first time during the winter of 2012-2013 (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014; Barker 2015). Such a coming together built strength both within and across Indigenous communities, and provided many individuals the broad base of support that they required to assert their own personalized notion of Indigenous identity (Tupper 2014). Moreover, forming a coalition of Indigenous peoples and communities under the umbrella of Idle No More raised the sheer number of people in support of a resurgent Indigenous identity, thus making it more visible and more difficult for outside observers to ignore.

In his reflection on Idle No More as a profound moment in Indigenous resurgence, Barker suggests that the movement was not immediately legible to most mainstream Canadian media outlets (2014). News media were unsure of how to contend with the empowered, complex, and self-determined representations of Indigenous identity that emerged during Idle No More, and which stood in direct contrast to their long-held and essentialized constructs. Eventually, Barker writes, some educated or astute non-Indigenous Canadians were able to decode the anti-colonial and resurgent messages of Idle No More. He maintains, though, that the movement was generally illegible to Canadian politics and media, which remain tethered to the dominant recognition approach when it comes to Indigenous relations.

Contrary to Barker's conclusion, Callison and Hermida's quantitative analysis of tweets from the height of Idle No More found that top 25 most influential voices during the movement were made up of mostly mainstream news reporters and media celebrities. They also observe that the tweets that were most often *retweeted* during Idle No More came "on the one hand from INM activists and other well-known Aboriginal voices, and on the other hand, from and against those who openly challenged the movement" (2015, 697).

Based on our interviews, most of my collaborators would likely agree more with Barker's conviction that mainstream media most often misrepresents Indigenous peoples and issues. However, they were optimistic about the growing understanding and support that they say they feel and observe from non-Indigenous individuals and groups. For example, Samantha, who is a former journalist, stated:

> I think there are certain tropes that get ascribed to Indigenous people in the media … On the ground in newsrooms I don't know that people really give that sort of agency … to Indigenous communities. It's always sort of victimization, and that's what has really bothered me about it. Recently, … there has been a reclaiming of that agency. People are really turning that whole concept of, you know, Indigenous women as victimized and devalued; they're turning that completely on its head. We're seeing things like the ReMatriate campaign. Especially on Twitter, social media, people are really pushing back and challenging those ideas and stereotypes and representations, and just completely throwing them out the window … It's interesting because on Twitter there are some pretty strong Indigenous voices that are coming out more and more and people are really catching on to that and they're following these alternative voices and realizing that there is a lot of merit in what people are saying. They are realizing that there is more to Indigenous issues than what we are reading online or what you know CBC commenters are saying.

Although Samantha remains skeptical of the mainstream media's capacity to articulate the complexities at work in contemporary Indigenous identities and communities, she believes that many Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are discovering Indigenous-constructed counter narratives within the discursive space of social media. Almost all of my other collaborators, including Melaina, Jeneen, Angela, Claire, and Kluane, also expressed a similar optimism about how Indigenous peoples' social media interventions are changing how settlers understand Indigenous identity and experience.

Even prior to Idle No More, in his examination of how social media redefined how Indigenous peoples and communities connect and communicate in Canada and beyond, Fleras suggested that social media affords Indigenous people and communities the tool and space to assert their own identities. Fleras theorized that social media networks establish Indigenous coalitions or support networks for "enhancing the dynamics of intergroup cooperation, securing access to knowledge for dealing with the state administration, and fostering an international personae in new and imaginative ways" (2011, 212). In asserting their individual and collective identities, and supporting other Indigenous individuals as they do the same within social media space, Fleras contends that Indigenous peoples gain even greater empowerment by "challenging or changing their exclusion by mainstream media" (Ibid.).

Today, social media has become a main source that mainstream media turn to for information about Indigenous peoples and issues from the perspective of Indigenous peoples themselves (Barker 2015). As influential social media users and group administrators, many of my collaborators are not only shaping how Indigenous identity and community are understood by their online audiences; sometimes, their interventions and representations are deemed subversive or significant enough to garner mainstream media attention as well. Claire and Jeneen have been interviewed about the ReMatriate campaign by national media outlets

including *Vice* (Wohlberg, 4 May 2015) and *CBC* ("ReMatriate wants to take back 'visual identity' of First Nations," 12 April 2015). Our Voices has enjoyed extensive coverage in regional media, and Kluane was interviewed about the group for an article from the Banff Centre (Duncan 2016). I am certain that as these nine young women continue to emerge as outspoken and influential leaders, their community building interventions and empowering representational practices, in social media space and elsewhere, will only continue to attract the attention they are due. Fortunately, it is not recognition from dominant settler-colonial media or society that my collaborators seek, and while many outsiders continue to grapple with Indigenous resurgence, my collaborators will continue to practice it.

## Chapter 5: Conclusion

This thesis has explored how nine young Indigenous women from Yukon are positioning themselves as influential leaders and representatives of Indigenous identity within social media space. By focusing on the community building and representational practices of a small but influential group of emerging leaders, I questioned what the affective value of Indigenous leaders' interventions into social media space is for both empowering Indigenous individuals and building resurgent communities. Additionally, I asked if Indigenous peoples' cultural practices and representations of identity on social media can successfully challenge and change not just Indigenous notions, but also dominant discourses, surrounding what it means to be Indigenous. To answer these questions, I focused on elucidating how resurgent Indigenous leaders appropriate social media to build communities that function as empowering social spaces where Indigenous peoples can challenge settler-colonial constructs of Indigeneity while making the complex nature of their identities and communities legible. My hope is that this thesis is generative – prompting readers to question the constructs of Indigenous peoples and communities that they see in the media, and perhaps to problematize their own understanding of what it means to be Indigenous in contemporary Canada. To seek their own answers to such questions, I encourage readers to discover the open and inclusive social spaces and communities where Indigenous peoples articulate their identities by and for themselves. Such communities can be found on social media, and are also described in other research that employs the emergent theory of Indigenous resurgence. Indigenous resurgence is a developing theory and practice, and so too is the body of research that engages Indigenous resurgence as a theoretical model and a mode of inquiry. This thesis maps everyday practices of Indigenous resurgence, particularly the construction of resurgent Indigenous communities and identities, to social media activism, demonstrating that the two ostensibly separate areas of study in fact have many areas of overlap. In the following

conclusion, I identify key points in my analysis that contribute to the research literature, mainly at the intersections of Indigenous studies, cultural studies, and communication studies, as well as where issues were raised that warrant further investigation. Finally, I present a few suggestions for what the statements that my collaborators provided may indicate for the future of Indigenous resurgence.

**Reflections on Indigenous Resurgence in Theory and in Study**

Simpson declares that new leaders, who have a grounding in traditional Indigenous values and lifeways, are needed for Indigenous resurgence movements (2011). She finds hope in her observations of such leaders emerging within Indigenous communities, but laments that the nature of Indigenous approaches to leadership are still "rarely seen in print" (Ibid., 119). This thesis puts into print some of the everyday practices, taking place both offline and on social media, of Indigenous leaders who observe the principles of Indigenous resurgence. My focus is not on the traditional values that inform resurgent leadership practices. Since I am not a member of the Indigenous community, I am not in a position to critique whether or not my collaborators' praxes on social media reflect traditional Indigenous approaches or values. Instead, I aim to shed light on what everyday acts of Indigenous resurgence look like in the contemporary moment, as practiced by an emerging group of female Indigenous leaders and within the communities and social spaces that they occupy.

Alfred and Corntassel (2005), Coulthard (2014), and Simpson (2011) cite connection to traditional cultural, social, and political values as requirements of resurgent Indigenous leaders. None of my collaborators cited theoretical models of Indigenous resurgence as guiding their personal leadership practices; but all spoke of the relationships, lands, traditions, and ceremonies that have influenced their approaches to building their communities. Accordingly, throughout this thesis, I argued that their interventions on social

media evince my collaborators' embodiment of leadership praxes that support the ideology of Indigenous resurgence. My focus on my collaborators' discussions of the topics – leadership, community building, and Indigenous identity – that closely align with the principles of Indigenous resurgence was deliberate but still limiting. On the one hand, from my preliminary observations of their social media use, I suspected that my collaborators would confirm in our interviews that their personal values and leadership practices readily align with the principles of resurgence. On the other hand, my goal for this project was to demonstrate that everyday acts of Indigenous resurgence are taking place on social media, and therefore, should be considered within media and communications scholarship as well as Indigenous studies. For the latter reason, I knew it would be necessary to exclude interview data not obviously related to resurgent Indigenous leadership as it can be articulated on social media. For example, many of my collaborators spoke extensively about the importance of "getting out on the land" as a meaningful aspect of Indigenous experience and identity for themselves and other Indigenous peoples. Coulthard likewise stresses that "[a]ccess to land is essential" for Indigenous resurgence to be realized (2014, 176). In this thesis though, I only included a brief nod to the centrality of land-based practices for my collaborators as leaders. I did not ask my collaborators specific questions about how they represent a connection to the land as part of their Indigenous identity on social media, and therefore did not have the data required to make insightful claims about how that aspect of resurgent Indigenous leadership praxes translates to online spaces. I will now concentrate on where some of the other topics that I included in this thesis contribute to the research literature, as well as where limits were reached that present opportunities for future research.

**Implications of Research and Areas for Further Study**

The analytical work of this thesis began with an overview of the social and political structures of the contemporary Indigenous communities that my collaborators belong to across Canada, and specifically, in Yukon. Research literature on life in Yukon is scant. Providing this overview begins to locate the personal, cultural, and cross-cultural experiences and knowledges from where my collaborators' overlapping approaches to leadership and community building emerge. Moreover, it adds insight into contemporary social and political life for young Indigenous women in Yukon. My collaborators attested to the fact that, in many ways, community life for Indigenous women leaders in Yukon is much like it is for their counterparts in other regions of Canada. Indigenous women leaders in Yukon face discrimination from settler-colonial state and society based on their intersecting race and gender identities, but also encounter certain barriers to their leadership within their Indigenous communities. My collaborators, like resurgent Indigenous leaders from across Canada, find the strength to confront such barriers by connecting themselves and others with the positive and empowering parts of their Indigenous cultures and identities.

Of particular significance for scholarship on Yukon, was that my collaborators confirmed the important affordance of social media for allowing Indigenous Yukoners opportunities to connect with and represent their communities, cultures, and complex identities to outsiders. Alia has provided significant scholarly accounts of how Indigenous people in Yukon have carved out space for themselves in national mediascape, suggesting that even though Indigenous residents of Canada's smallest territory are geographically isolated, they have long been adept at inserting themselves in national conversations by creating their own media (2009). While Alia's claim still rings true today, the media that she focuses on, radio and television, are swiftly becoming outdated as the preferred modes of communication and media-making among Indigenous Yukoners. This thesis builds on Alia's

work by providing insight into how contemporary Indigenous women in Yukon continue the tradition of making a "disproportionately large contribution to Indigenous politics and media" by intervening in and through social media (Alia 2009, 4). By way of their participation in Twitter conversations surrounding Indigenous issues and movements, and their building of Indigenous communities on Facebook, like ReMatriate and Our Voices, my collaborators are inserting female Indigenous voices from Yukon into new discursive spaces in the national mediascape.

Indigenous women, and northern Indigenous women in particular, are one of the most misunderstood and underrepresented populations in Canada. The experiences and approaches of my collaborators as female Indigenous leaders adds to the scholarly understanding of what it means to be a contemporary Indigenous woman in one of Canada's most isolated, but increasingly connected, regions in Canada. Simultaneously, sharing my collaborators' words problematizes hegemonic media discourses about Indigenous communities, not just in Yukon or the North, but across Canada. Media portrayals of Indigenous communities tend to focus on the dysfunctional aspects, but my collaborators attested that contemporary Indigenous communities are complex and changing. Indigenous communities are often supportive and inclusive, and many Indigenous community leaders are taking innovative approaches to addressing the problems in their communities, including increasing communication among members and seeking support from the extended Indigenous community via social media.

My exploration of how my collaborators build Indigenous community with an inward focus, whether offline or online, exemplifies alternative leadership praxes to dominant recognition-based efforts. My collaborators' statements also make evident that emerging female leaders in contemporary Indigenous communities must contend with not only the influence of the patriarchal settler-colonial society outside of their communities, but also as it has shaped the social and political identifications of people within them. I pointed to some of

the cultural and cross-cultural gendered expectations that inform my collaborators' particular approaches to leading their Indigenous communities, but I would have liked to have been able to nuance this section further. Simpson (2012) and Coulthard (2014) both place gender equity as a foundational element of Indigenous resurgence, and call on Indigenous leaders to demand that misogyny comes to an end not only in settler society, but also in their own societies. A few of my collaborators, like Claire, Angela, and Melaina, made similar statements. A fascinating future study would dive deeper into how resurgent Indigenous feminists use social media to promote their cause and assert their demands. As a point of departure, Huhndorf, Suzack, Perreault, and Barman's collection on Indigenous women's activism and approaches to leadership offline, *Indigenous Women and Feminism: Politics, Activism, Culture* (2010), could be compared to how Indigenous women practice a politics of resurgent Indigenous feminism in online Indigenous communities.

Discussing the various communities that my collaborators are building on social media, I argued that they are creating space for resurgent Indigenous communities within the expanse of social media sites. I analyzed two Facebook communities administered by my collaborators, ReMatriate and Our Voices, as examples of social media communities that empower their individual members to support and promote an agenda of Indigenous resurgence, including the reconstruction of Indigenous identity. My analysis presents findings that contribute to the burgeoning body of literature on social media activism and affect, showing consistency with studies that highlight how individuals are drawn to politically charged communities and conversations on social media through personal and emotional connections. Such studies tend to concentrate on flashpoints of activism or large-scale protest movements like Kony 2012 (Garde-Hansen and Gorton 2013), Occupy Wall Street (Bennett and Segerberg 2013; Papacharissi 2015), the Arab Spring (Papacharissi 2015), or Idle No More (Tupper 2014; Coates 2015). This thesis demonstrates that everyday activism efforts, as

well as evolving social movements like Indigenous resurgence, also benefit from the affectively charged discursive spaces that are carved out by and for activist communities on social media. However, given that most of my collaborators said they rarely join in open communities or the broad conversations that take place via hashtags, for example, their resurgent ideologies may only reach those who seek and join the Indigenous-dominated social media communities that my collaborators administer or feel safe enough to participate in. Following Vivienne, I contended that by selecting the audiences and communities with whom they want to share their self-representations, my collaborators take ownership over their Indigenous identities, and practice resurgence at the level of the self and the level of community. More research with the most outspoken social media activists among my collaborators, including Chantal, Jeneen, and Samantha, as well as additional activists in the Indigenous community, would add an even richer contribution by exploring everyday activism and resurgence at societal and political levels.

Tying my discussion of community building to Indigenous identity, my principal concern was with the feelings of pride and empowerment that my collaborators said they aim to embody and transmit on social media. Employing Alfred and Corntassels' notion that the construction of resurgent Indigenous identities must begin at the level of the self (2005), I argued that my collaborators' proud self-representations of their individual identities on social media, including their Indigenous identity, are resurgent praxes. While the felt importance of such interventions for my collaborators themselves was demonstrated, the research model restricted me to speculation about broader affective and discursive impacts. Some of my collaborators enjoy large audiences on social media, and some have expressed their idea of Indigenous identity beyond their social media communities, including in the mainstream media. Most, however, could only state hope and belief that their individual representations of empowered Indigenous identity effect how collective Indigenous identity is

articulated in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous discourse. Alfred and Corntassel argue that an empowered sense of self resonates outwardly from Indigenous individuals, transmitting a decolonizing affect within their Indigenous communities. Likewise, I argue that my collaborators' personalized and proud representations of Indigenous identity transmits an empowering affect among Indigenous audiences within certain social media spaces and online Indigenous communities. A faction of communication studies explores how individual and collective identities are contingently articulated on social media; this thesis has shown that the Indigenous resurgence framework can also be a useful theoretical model for the purpose of analyzing Indigenous identity construction on social media.

While my sample of collaborators is small and not representative of their demographic as a whole, a few implications of our research are clear. For an emancipatory paradigm of Indigenous resurgence to be realized at a societal level, it is critical that Indigenous peoples reclaim the dominant definition of what it means to be Indigenous from settler-colonial discourse. Media is a critical apparatus for upholding settler-colonial hegemony and allowing settler-colonial misunderstandings and essentialist representations of Indigeneity to dominate. By taking advantage of the connective affordances of social media to realize their resurgent visions of Indigenous community and identity, my collaborators are more than countering settler-colonial media discourse; they are reconstructing Indigenous identity and community by practicing, embodying, and proudly representing these concepts for all to see. However, such resurgent articulations of Indigeneity by my collaborators, and indeed all Indigenous peoples, will only be legible to those who are open to such a new understanding. Neither the media nor academia is keeping pace with the rate of change happening in Indigenous communities. To better understand contemporary Indigenous peoples and communities, researchers and journalists can turn to social media. We must be aware that the representations of Indigenous identity and community that we see on social

media only tell part of the story, but at least it is the part that Indigenous peoples themselves want to have told.

**Imagining Futures**

As I write this conclusion, the third annual Our Voices gathering is scheduled to take place on Champagne and Aishihik Territory, just outside of Haines Junction, Yukon, next week. Administrators for the Our Voices Facebook page (i.e., Kluane and Chantal, and possibly a few others) are posting updates multiple times per day, hoping to attract youth participants to the event. Their efforts are clearly generating excitement among Our Voices community members, visible in the form of likes and enthusiastic comments on the posts. Meanwhile, the most recent ReMatriate meme has generated 117 likes, has been shared 24 times, and has received six positive comments (*ReMatriate*, 25 July 2016). When I login to Twitter, Samantha's handle appears at the top of my feed, Twitter's algorithms having calculated a high probability that I like her latest tweet supporting the trending hashtag, #NotYourNativeStereotype. The focus of Chantal's tweets and posts on her personal Facebook profile has shifted a bit recently. Since the birth of her daughter, many of Chantal's updates are now about balancing her previous roles with being a new mom, but her *Indigenous Today* Facebook page remains up-to-date with the latest Indigenous news. Several weeks ago, Chantal tweeted that her most recent post on the page had reportedly been viewed by over 1,000,000 Facebook users.[14]

These examples demonstrate that in the over half a year since I interviewed each of my collaborators, not much has changed regarding their ongoing praxes of leadership, community building, and identity representation on social media. In other areas of their lives,

[14] The post included a caption, written by Chantal, and 1978 photo of celebrities including: Muhammad Ali, Buffy Sainte-Marie, Floyd Red Crow Westerman, Harold Smith, Stevie Wonder, Marlon Brando, Max Gail, Dick Gregory, Richie Havens, and David Amram at a concert celebrating the Longest Walk, which was a 3,600-mile march for Indigenous rights.

my collaborators have accomplished goals, which they added photos of and posts about on social media to inspire their audiences: Jeneen completed an advanced degree and exhibited her art in gallery shows, Chantal became a mother, Erin P. was accepted to a Master's program, Erin L. and Samantha are entering their second year of law school, and Claire has taken on additional executive positions with her First Nations' corporate entities, to name just a few. Such accomplishments necessitate new roles, but the core values that have inspired my collaborators as leaders, and which are at the heart of Indigenous resurgence, continue to critically inform their lives, work, and identities. A cursory glance at any of my collaborators' social media profiles demonstrates their ongoing commitment to proudly representing Indigenous identity. The Facebook community pages that they manage still resonate an ethos of care and support, and welcome Indigenous and non-Indigenous supporters alike.

This thesis deliberately avoids specifying how Indigenous leaders, including my collaborators, should approach decolonization and resurgence. Instead, my approach was to listen so I could find connections between what my collaborators say about the work that they are already doing with their Indigenous communities, and what Indigenous resurgence demands of its leaders. In doing this work, I support Indigenous resurgence in theory and demonstrate it as a viable and worthy practice for both existing and emerging Indigenous communities and leaders. By quoting my collaborators directly, I honoured their opinions and understandings. By linking their ideas to established Indigenous theories, as well as to related concepts from fields across the humanities, I amplified their voices so that they can reach academic audiences. By aligning my collaborators' experiences on social media to those of other social media users summarized in related studies, I added their stories to the growing body of research that explores how marginalized individuals form communities and rearticulate identities on social media. While works like this grow the body of research literature related to the paradigm of Indigenous resurgence, emerging Indigenous leaders are

continuing to cultivate the theory in practice. For direction, such new leaders will look to the land, traditions, ceremonies, stories, and kin that have guided Indigenous leadership for centuries. As bridges between traditional and contemporary Indigenous cultures, however, they may also seek connections to new people and new communities to inspire their leadership practices. Many of those connections may be found, built, and celebrated for all to see on social media.

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## Appendix I: Interview Guide

### Project Background

This thesis explores how young (i.e., under 35 years old) Indigenous women in the Yukon are using social media for two distinct yet related purposes: first, for engaging as community leaders with both their Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities; and second, for reconstructing representations of Indigenous culture and identity, including gender identity. The goal of this research is to illuminate how young Indigenous women and community leaders are using social media as a communication tool and a space for challenging most common media representations of Indigenous women, identity, and culture.

By using interviews from young, female Indigenous community leaders from across the Yukon, this thesis will add a unique northern and Indigenous perspective to a growing body of academic literature that addresses the potential of social media for community building, and as a space for challenging misrepresentations of groups including youth, Indigenous people, and women. Beyond academia, I also intend to create a website where I can display this research and our joint contributions for a wider audience.

I appreciate the opportunity to collaborate with you on this project and your willingness to share your experiences and insights. The next steps for this project include a sit-down interview with me, focused on your community building and leadership work; how your sense of Indigenous culture and identity factors into this work; and how you use social media for community building and representational purposes. I expect the interview to be conversational and casual, and of course you are not required to answer all of the questions if you feel uncomfortable doing so. You are encouraged to raise any concerns that you may have with me before, during or after the interview is conducted. I have included a rough outline of the questions I hope to ask during our interview below, just for informational purposes as I will be taking notes during the interview and no written preparation is needed. Please note that the below questions only provide a guide – many overlap, and we can cut and add questions as we go – I am happy to hear about whatever experiences you feel are relevant to this topic!

**General Questions**

Please begin by introducing yourself – state your name, age, and where you are from and currently live. Feel free to include any additional identifying information that you want like your current occupation, First Nation citizenship or lineage, your educational background, whatever you feel is important!

Please give a description of the kind of work (paid and/or volunteer) that you have done with Indigenous people and communities in Yukon.

If you're involved with specific organizations, please name them and give a brief overview of what work they do, and what you do with them.

**Indigenous Identity**

What does being Indigenous mean to you?

What does identity mean to you?

How does gender factor into your understanding of Indigeneity? Put another way, what does it mean to you to be an Indigenous woman?

**Leadership**

What role(s) do you think you play in your community(s)?

What does being a community leader mean to you?

Do you consider yourself to be a community leader?

How does your culture or identity inform your community leadership and/or activism work?

What are the core issues that Indigenous communities and people in Yukon are currently addressing?

**Media Representation**

How do you think Indigenous people, culture and issues are represented in the mainstream media in Canada?

Do you think these representations are accurate? How would you like to see Indigenous people and culture represented?

**Social Media – Connection**

Please name all of the social media platforms that you use (e.g., Twitter, Tumblr, Facebook) and what you use them for – personal, professional or for other reasons.

Please name all of the social media groups that you administer or help manage.

Are your social media profiles and groups are open to the public or private?

Do you monitor your reach and/or engagement on social media? Do you do anything to boost your reach on social media (e.g., use hashtags or sponsor posts)?

How do you use social media to connect or maintain contact with communities and groups that you're a part of?

How do you think social media has affected the lives of Indigenous people in the Yukon, considering their relative geographical isolation from the rest of Canada?

**Social Media – Representation**

How do you represent yourself on social media? Would you say you have a specific identity or social media presence that is different from how you present yourself in real life?

How do you represent Indigenous culture and identity on social media?

Do you think social media is a positive and/or safe space for you to represent yourself and your culture and identity?

Have you encountered any negativity on social media, including overt racism, sexism, or both?