

The Link Between Literature and Empathy: Exploring the Capacity for  
Indigenous-authored Literature to Foster Change

Thesis

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### **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family. To Don, my husband and partner, my rock from the rock. To my children, Keili, Allie, Eve, and Will who share my life and shape it with love and laughter. They are my teachers.

I also dedicate this work to my parents, Ethel and Allan Blatch, who so perfectly set the stage for everything that has transpired in my life.

Thank you all for seeing me through this endeavour.

### Abstract

The objective of this study was to explore and describe the experience of non-Indigenous readers as they engaged individually and collectively with an Indigenous-authored fiction novel. The aim was to investigate an area of reader response theory that has not been excavated in light of the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada with respect to the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples. The central focus of this qualitative phenomenological inquiry was on the meanings participants ascribed to the experience. The findings identified salient categories of meaning while rendering the complexity of the experience. Participant reading journals, a transcript of the observed book club discussion, and transcripts of individual interviews provided the text for analysis.

According to the research process applied, I conclude the Indigenous-authored novel *Indian Horse* transported non-Indigenous readers into a narrative experience marked by empathy, reflection, new perspectives, and prosocial behaviour. Engagement in the novel triggered autobiographical memories, and the binding of lived experience to abstractions in the fiction narrative transported readers into the story, creating an experience that was a hybrid of both. Participants then infused the book club discussion with their reading experience and personal life experience. New awareness garnered from the book combined with reflection on personal experience to culminate in moments of reflexivity in the book club discussion. Participants experienced an affective response to the novel characterized by empathic distress, expressed as shame, horror, and sorrow. For some, the book both signalled and mediated change, and the social forum of the book club became the epicenter for cultural work enacted as prosocial behaviour in their daily lives.

### **Acknowledgement**

I would like to acknowledge DeNel Rehberg Sedo, my thesis supervisor and constant guide through this process. She challenged me by asking the questions that needed answers, by nurturing my confidence, and by holding an unwavering belief that I could do this.

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## Introduction

Since the 1980s, a growing body of literature by Indigenous authors has woven subtle threads of Indigenous narrative, culture, and life experience into the Canadian consciousness. In recent years, work by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to redress the relationship between the nation and Indigenous peoples has laid bare the historical trauma perpetrated within the residential school system. In December 2015, Prime Minister Trudeau, on behalf of all Canadians, committed to renew the relationship with Indigenous peoples by fully implementing the 94 Calls to Action tabled in the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The essence of this commitment is to think and act in new ways to establish and maintain mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Reconciliation, 2015).

The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is multifaceted and complex. Diana Brydon (2003) asserts Canada “has been a convenient structure for enabling a certain way of life for many people, but along with its rhetoric of peace, order, and good government, Canada carries an unsavoury colonial history of theft and oppression, a history whose consequences remain to be addressed and redressed today” (p. 49-50). The legacy of colonization is reflected in many aspects of contemporary Canadian politics, culture, and society, and is discussed and debated under the labels of colonialism, anti-colonialism, decolonization, indigenization, and postcolonialism. Laura Moss (2012) holds to the definition of postcolonialism as an ongoing process set in motion at the moment of first contact between colonists and Indigenous peoples. According to Moss, this process is characterized by both resistance and reconstruction, and “emphasizes the role of the writer/artist and de-emphasizes the role of the theorist in instituting change” (p. 61).



Change serves to challenge hegemonic social dominance, ideological heritage, and normative values. Brydon contends, “[t]he ‘post’ [in postcolonialism] does not refer to the end of colonialism, but rather to what was formed under colonialism and remains after official colonialism is abandoned and colonialism begins to be recognized as a major component of modernity” (p. 56). She proposes “healing will be accomplished through exchange and negotiation, both processes that require respect, equality, open-mindedness and compromise” (p. 53). Events such as the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2006, the United Nations adoption of the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in 2007 (endorsed by Canada in 2016), work by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and the recent establishment of the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation mark important milestones to address and redress the consequences of colonialism.

However, reconciliation is an action that must also unfold on an individual level in a process that is ongoing, emergent, and evolving. Data collected in a national Environics Institute survey in early 2016 indicate increasing public recognition of the role individuals play in reconciliation (Environics Institute, 2016). Laurie McNeill (2015) labels this politically, culturally, and socially constructed moment a *kairos*, an opportunity to witness and respond to the testimony of Indigenous peoples. The current societal momentum in Canada to know and understand Indigenous cultures and life experience dovetails with reader response theory and research that posits reading literature fosters empathy and new perspectives (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Dewan, 2013; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Episkenew, 2009; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Johnson, 2012, 2013; Konchar Farr, 2008; Koopman, 2015; Long, 1986, 1993; MacAdam, 1995; Ross, 1999; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006). A review of the literature on reading reveals a gap in the research with

respect to the experience of non-Indigenous readers of literary works penned by Indigenous authors. Exploring the experience of non-Indigenous readers as they engage with a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author represents a timely and pragmatic area for further investigation given the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada. Participant perspective is central to this phenomenological qualitative inquiry as it seeks to explore and describe the experience of reading Indigenous-authored literature. Michael Patton (2002) describes phenomenology as an exploration of how people make sense of their world and transform experience into consciousness, both individually and collectively (p. 104). Qualitative research methodologies offer a means to capture and describe the essence of participants' lived experience, specifically "how they perceive it, describe it, feel about it, judge it, remember it, make sense of it, and talk about it with others" (Patton, 2002, 104).

In addition, studies of shared-reading groups characterize these as sites of significant cultural work (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Konchar Farr, 2008; Long, 1986, 1993; Ross, 1999; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006). For example, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo (2014) posit that shared-reading events serve as sites to:

explore ideas and experiences that unsettle normative social relations, official histories, and institutional structures. In such circumstances, the book itself is a social artifact, and the shared reading of it becomes a form of cultural mediation that is not only ideologically dynamic and disruptive but also potentially creative and even politically empowering in terms of permitting citizens agency. (p. 17-18)

The following research explores and describes the experience of individual, non-Indigenous readers as they engage with a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author, and then mediate meaning within the context of their shared-reading group. By exploring in-depth the

specific experience of one group of non-Indigenous readers, our understanding of the broader social and cultural impact of literature written by Indigenous authors is enriched.

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions are:

RQ1: How do individual readers describe their experience of reading a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author?

RQ2: How do these same readers, as members of an established shared-reading group, experience engaging with the same text and mediating meaning within the context of the group?

### **Definition of Terms**

This thesis utilizes terminology from the University of British Columbia web site to refer to the first inhabitants of Canada. Therefore, for the purpose of this report, the terms *Aboriginal* and *Indigenous* refer to First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples within the borders of Canada. The United Nations uses the term *Indigenous* in a global context “to refer broadly to peoples of long settlement and connection to specific lands” (Indigenous Foundations section, n.d., para. 13). The term *Aboriginal* is synonymous to *Indigenous* in a Canadian context. When either term is used within this research thesis it will be capitalized to denote respect for Canada’s original peoples. The plural form of *people* will also be used to convey acknowledgement the Aboriginal population of Canada is comprised of more than one distinct group (Indigenous Foundations section, n.d., para. 17).

The National Endowment for the Arts (NEA), an independent U.S. federal agency, conducts a Survey of Public Participation in the Arts at regular intervals to explore the state of literary reading in the American population. The NEA defines *literary reading* as the reading of

novels, short stories, plays, or poetry during leisure time outside of school or work (NEA, “Reading at Risk”, 2004, n.p.). For the purposes of this thesis, the terms *reading for pleasure*, *pleasure reading*, and *leisure reading* are regarded as synonymous with literary reading, denoting reading engaged in for purposes outside of education or work.

For the purposes of this research thesis, the terms *shared-reading group*, *book group*, and *book club* are synonymous and denote a social group in which members meet on a regular basis to repeat and reconceive their individual reading experience by listening to and engaging with the emotional and cognitive reading experience of others (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014).

### **Literature Review**

The following review of the literature on reading frames the phenomenon in terms of our neurological capacity to read, the experience of reading for pleasure, contemporary Indigenous literature, and reading as a social activity. The literature establishes reading as a dynamic practice that shapes readers while it is being shaped by cultural and societal changes. The transformative, and transforming, act of reading is tied directly to neurological structure of the human brain.

#### **The Capacity to Read**

Cognitive neuroscientist Stanislas Dehaene (2009) describes the complex set of mechanisms “admirably attuned to reading” (p. 1). The author proposes a neuronal recycling hypothesis to account for a reading paradox – the fact that our neural circuitry did not evolve to enable us to read yet we can and do. He argues, “our brain was not designed for reading, but recycles some of its circuits for this novel cultural activity” (p. 8). According to Dehaene, “human brain architecture obeys strong genetic constraints, but some circuits have

evolved to tolerate a fringe variability” (p. 7). In essence, writing systems evolved to align with the brain’s neuronal limitations, “demonstrating how culture and brain organization are inextricably linked” (p. 9). Dehaene suggests two factors combine to make our species unique: “the ability to imagine the mind of others,” and the capacity for “an infinite variety of ideas [to] be recombined” (p. 9-10). These factors can be applied directly to pleasure reading as we immerse ourselves in a narrative by another about others, and as we are suspended within the infinite possibilities posed by our imaginations.

Naomi Baron (2015), a linguist who explores the convergence of language and technology, picks up on the research of Dehaene to suggest, “[s]ince the neural tools for reading are cobbled together from structures designed for other purposes, it is not surprising that reading activates areas related to what the text is about” (p. 160). In other words, when we read about scents the olfactory area of the cerebral cortex is activated, and descriptions of textures light up the sensory areas, according to Baron. Additional research finds reading fiction activates the same neural structures engaged for parallel actions and perceptions in the real world (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Baron, 2015; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Essentially, reading triggers neural webs that actively process text as a simulation and integrate it into the reader's own experiences (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013, p. 2). This provides scientific support for reading literature authored by Indigenous peoples as a means to bridge cultural, social, and historical divides. Baron states, “[f]iction invites us to slip inside other people’s skin and model the world through their eyes” (p. 129), an assertion echoed by P. Matthijs Bal and Martijn Veltkamp (2013), Megan Boler (1997), Maja Djikic, Keith Oatley, and Mihnea C. Moldoveanu (2013), Eva Maria Koopman (2015), and Raymond Mar and Keith Oatley (2008).

Paul Armstrong (2013), a literary critic and theorist, further grounds the experience of reading in the physiology of the brain by charting new links between neuroscience and phenomenology. According to the author, extensive phenomenological study of reading and literary interpretation provides detailed descriptions of lived experience to layer on neurological research findings. Armstrong explains four key cognitive functions involved in reading. First, hermeneutics, the theory of interpretation, states understanding is inherently circular and describes reading “as a process of gap filling and consistency building” (p. x). Second, the ability for different readers to render different meaning from the same text is accounted for by “the neurobiology of ambiguity” (p. xi). Third, the emotional responses experienced while reading are grounded in the brain’s neural capacity to couple and decouple cell assemblies as it assimilates the experience of each moment (p. xi). Finally, the “as-if body loop” (p. xi), accounts for vicarious bodily experiences created in, and instigated by, the brain. According to Armstrong, the as-if body loop is the neural structure that enables pleasure readers to have a concurrent sense of living *and* observing the experiences of literary characters.

David Beglar, Alan Hunt, and Yuriko Kite (2012) study pleasure reading as a vehicle to improve reading proficiency in second language learners. The authors hypothesize that when word recognition, considered a lower level skill, becomes automated it frees up cognitive resources for higher order skills such as comprehending relationships within text, synthesizing concepts, making inferences, summarizing key ideas, and resolving ambiguities. Learning to read involves prolonged effort “before the clockwork-like brain machinery that supports reading runs so smoothly that we forget it exists” (Dehaene, 2009, p. 2). Psychologist Victor Nell (1988) alludes to this when he describes the effortless concentration of a pleasure reader absorbed in a

book. The ability to read without thought to the process of reading appears to be the ticket to transport a reader to another realm of engagement with the text (Nell, 1988; Ross, 1999).

Exploring the act of reading literature as a complex cognitive and psychological process deepens our understanding of the subjective intellectual and emotional experience of reading. It effectively layers research based on relatively new neurological imaging technology with well-documented experiential and observational evidence to paint a dynamic picture of the practice of reading.

### **The Experience of Reading for Pleasure**

Janice Radway (1997), a literary and cultural studies scholar, contends books facilitate reflection, mediation, contemplation, and a sense of pleasure for readers. Academic librarian Pauline Dewan (2013) expands on this assertion by stating, “reading also promotes articulate expression, higher order reasoning, and critical thinking” (p. 313). Dewan highlights the connection between reading fiction and theory of mind, a cluster of cognitive adaptations that help to construct social relationships. Reading fiction is thus linked to improved social skills, empathy towards others, and deepened insights into the motivations of other people. Dewan concludes that as reading for pleasure facilitates our intellectual development, it also:

transmits the collective wisdom of our ancestors, improves social skills, increases self-knowledge, fosters empathy, advances human rights, provides a dress rehearsal for life, develops creativity, articulates emotions that help us cope with them, organizes experience, provides a prototype of meaning for our lives, and assists in identity formation. (p. 313)

The author maintains reading for pleasure has long been viewed in our culture as “self-indulgent and escapist” (p. 313). Dewan credits reader response theory for the positive shift in “attention away from the quality of the book to the quality of the reading experience” (p. 311).

Catherine Ross (1999) anchors her ethnographic research of avid pleasure readers on reader response theory, which frames the act of reading as a transaction between text and reader in which the reader constructs meaning through the use of literary codes and conventions in combination with personal experience. Mar and Oatley extend this concept and assert “stories are abstractions and thus rely on the participation of the reader in order to be completely comprehensible” (p. 178). Research by the authors, and others (see also Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013), suggests narrative fiction sparks vivid imagery and prompts autobiographical memories in the reader more than other text forms (p. 178). The reader’s memories, in turn, support imagery suggested by the text and facilitate narrative engagement (p. 180). Ross finds ardent readers report intrinsic motivation to read, and reports readers engage in a reciprocal transaction with text in which they use personal experience to construct meaning from text and use text to make sense of their lives. Kate Hodgson and Richard Thomson’s (2000) study of medical student reading habits notes a similar use of text. Students report pleasure reading expands understanding beyond personal experience and describe of the power of books to foster new perspectives.

Similar findings by Dan R. Johnson (2013) point to the function of fiction narratives to expose readers to characters, cultures, and circumstances beyond their own personal experience, and, at times, beyond what is possible for the reader to experience. He describes literature as a rich context in which to explore relationships, emotions, and motivations (see also Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler, 1997; Dewan, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999). Barbara MacAdam (1995), an academic librarian, agrees and posits, “[l]anguage incorporated into a narrative structure, particularly as literature, appears to have a peculiar power to extend our own experience by providing us with the opportunity” (p. 244) to experience life as lived by



others. MacAdam describes “the nature of writing to move human thought beyond the concrete work of particulars to the abstract realm of general ideas” (p. 244), and points to “the sheer power of narrative to inspire true critical thinking and inquiry” (p. 244). “Stories encourage application of information which invests it with real meaning, and storytelling is another way of putting information in context” (MacAdam, 1995, p. 245).

Louise M. Rosenblatt (1978) explicates “the experience shaped by the reader under the guidance of the text” (p. 12), and states, “[u]nder the magnetism of the ordered symbols of the text, [the reader] marshals his resources and crystallizes out from the stuff of memory, thought, and feeling a new order, a new experience, to be reflected on from any angle important to him as a human being” (p. 12). The author delineates between efferent and aesthetic reading. Efferent reading is characterized as a cognitive process of information acquisition and logical assessment. Whereas, “[i]n *aesthetic reading*, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text [emphasis in original]” (p. 25).

Rosenblatt's description of reading mirrors cognitive and affective empathy. Empathy is an emotional response further delineated as cognitive empathy which is the ability to understand the perspective of another person, and affective empathy which is the experience of feeling what someone else is feeling (Johnson, 2012, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Koopman further identifies empathic distress as negative feelings including anxiety, discomfort, tension, and sadness arising from observing the pain of another individual, and confirms fictional characters, as well as real people, trigger empathic reactions. Bal and Velkamp find the effects of fiction reading on empathy manifest over time and posit this incubation period allows time and space to both consciously and unconsciously connect elements of a fiction narrative to aspects of daily life.

Another line of research into the link between fiction reading and empathy focuses specifically on the influence of transportation into the narrative (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Koopman explains the concept of narrative feelings which includes empathy and sympathy with characters, identification with characters, and vivid experience of the narrative world as a reader is absorbed, immersed, or transported into the story. Transportation is evidenced by a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery (Johnson, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Bal and Veltkamp define transportation as a process in which all mental faculties converge to focus on the events in a narrative (p. 3). They contend “[a] reader will be affected by a fictional narrative only when it creates a narrative world that is real within its context, and more importantly, when it is realistic for the reader” (p. 2). The result, according to the authors, is an opportunity to be transported into the story and subsequently changed through the narrative (p. 2). Studies by Bal and VeltKamp, and Johnson (2012, 2013) further demonstrate fiction influences reader empathy and that the degree of influence is dependent on the level of emotional transportation into the story.

The importance of empathy lies in the positive correlation between high levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour (Bal & VeltKamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013). Based on her experience of readers of narratives written by Holocaust survivors, Boler states, “[e]mpathy is produced within networks of power relations represented by reader and text, mediated by language, narratives, genres and metaphors” (p. 261). She suggests that although literature prompts identification and emotional engagement, and positions the reader to witness the experience of others, it does not necessarily motivate “reflection or action, either about the production of meaning, or about one’s complicit responsibility within historical and social conditions” (p. 261).

The risk, according to Boler, is that readers take up a consumptive rather than reflexive role. She advocates for testimonial reading which requires the active participation of a self-reflective reader aware of his or her “relative position of power by virtue of the safe distance of reading” (p. 263), and open to the potential challenge to examine personal assumptions and world views.

Fiction offers a representation of selves in the social world and flows from the narrative mode of thinking, according to Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu. The authors propose fiction engages readers on an emotional level and encourages identification with characters as they simulate the experience rendered in a story. Keith Oatley (1999) positions the experience of reading fiction as cognitive and emotional simulation. Mar and Oatley theorize fiction readers simulate and learn from fictionalized accounts of social experience. The authors define simulation as a reader feeling emotions and experiencing thoughts congruent with the characters in a fiction narrative. Through this form of indirect experience, readers infer, predict, and derive meaning. Mar and Oatley posit fiction functions “to abstract social information so that it can be better understood, generalized to other circumstances, and acted upon” (p. 173).

Evidence thus exists to support the power of literature to engage, illuminate, and expand understanding (Dewan, 2013; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; MacAdam, 1995; Ross, 1999), and to foster empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013; Koopman, 2015). Jo-Ann Episknew (2009), a Métis author, educator, and researcher, explores the power of Indigenous literature to apprehend the life experience of others, and to inspire new perspectives, and she points to the potential for Indigenous-authored narratives to foster empathy among non-Indigenous readers.

### **Contemporary Indigenous Literature**

Episkenew examines the impact of Canadian public policy as revealed through contemporary Indigenous literature, and investigates the power of Indigenous narratives to heal historical trauma. Episkenew contends contemporary Indigenous literature “provides settler readers with a window into the daily life of Indigenous people, including the challenges and disappointments along with hopes and dreams” (p. 190). In this way it serves as a means for non-Indigenous readers to relate on an emotional level to Indigenous peoples. Episkenew suggests the result is a sense of empathy, and “empathy, in turn, has the potential to create a groundswell of support for social-justice initiatives to improve the lot of Indigenous people” (p. 191).

Episkenew argues contemporary Indigenous literature “serves a socio-pedagogical function as well as an aesthetic one” (p. 193), as did traditional Indigenous oral narratives. She further assesses the progressive and systematic disempowerment of Indigenous peoples in the wake of colonization. For example, according to Episkenew, settlers believed fervently in their own mythology as conquerors and purveyors of progress, as well as in their racial and cultural superiority, and so developed policies that, in effect, invalidated and attempted to eradicate the life experience and accompanying narratives of Indigenous peoples.

With little to no trust in bureaucrats or the political system Indigenous peoples seek resources within their own communities to heal historical trauma. “Over the last three decades, Indigenous people have witnessed the healing power of stories as they have begun to reassert their individual and collective narratives” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 11). Furthermore, “[a]lthough English is not always [an Indigenous author’s] language of choice, today’s writers use it to create literary works that aspire to accomplish many of the same aims as the oral stories did: to explain the history of the people, to buttress cultural practices and norms, and to articulate their relationship with the world” (p. 11). Episkenew contends the communal nature of

Indigenous literature acts as a counterbalance to the divisiveness of colonization and serves to reconnect Indigenous peoples “to the larger whole” (p. 12).

Episkenew provides a uniquely Indigenous perspective on the power of literature to facilitate empathy, expand understanding of the life experience of others, and inspire new perspectives, and echoes similar research findings by non-Indigenous scholars such as Jane Barstow (2003), Temma Berg (2008), MacAdam (1995), Elizabeth Long (1986, 1993), Hodgson and Thomson (2000), and Ross, Lynne McKechnie, and Paulette Rothbauer (2006).

Episkenew also connects reading Indigenous-authored literature to civic engagement and prosocial behaviour through empathy fostered by Indigenous narratives. She argues that “based on the premise that an enlightened population will demand equitable and effective public policy, this socio-pedagogical function of Indigenous literature promotes social justice for Indigenous people, perhaps more effectively than political rhetoric” (p. 193). Episkenew calls the process communitism, a term created by combining the words community and activism.

Literature by Indigenous authors publicly acknowledges and honours the stories of Indigenous peoples, their culture, historical trauma, and life experience. In this way, according to Episkenew, Indigenous literature has the potential to heal through cultural affirmation. Episkenew observes “the applications of Indigenous literature as it moves outside the boundaries of the text to affect the material world” (p. 193), and finds herself “prescribing” (p. 194) the words of Indigenous writers. Episkenew further suggests:

Indigenous literature, as a healing implement, is holistic and relationship-oriented in that it ‘treats’ the minds, bodies, spirits, and hearts of individuals and repairs the rifts in communities. Indigenous literature is inclusive as well; it does not limit its healing properties to Indigenous people. Indigenous literature reaches out to settler communities to

advance social justice, to heal the wounds of oppression, and to reconcile our communities.  
(p. 194)

By focusing on literature penned by Indigenous authors, Episkenew makes a significant contribution to the discourse on pleasure reading and its value as a means to heal the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples. Episkenew is, in effect, offering a means to bridge social, cultural, and historical divides in Canada by way of literature authored by Indigenous peoples. This hinges, in large part, on the social nature of reading.

### **Reading as a Social Activity**

The social nature of reading is a focus of study for many scholars (Baron, 2015; Collins, 2010; Collinson, 2009; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993; Ross, 1999; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006). Long (1993) explores the hegemonic image of the solitary reader, and collective reading from a historical perspective to create context for her ethnographic research of reading groups in Houston, Texas in the early 1980s. She describes the social infrastructure that supports learning to read and then frames the reading experience. Her research establishes “the ways group participation constitutes social identity and solidarity” (p. 197), and demonstrates “cases of personal insight and collective cultural or critical reflection” (p. 197). Long’s work points to the potential for contemporary collective reading as a vehicle for social and cultural change.

Ross, McKechnie, and Rothbauer also examine reading as a social activity, beginning with a review of the history of reading groups from the nineteenth century on to support the notion that book clubs are not a new entity. The authors describe the social infrastructure of reading, echoing Long (1993) when they assert reading “is taught within a web of social relations and the practice of reading is sustained by conversations about books” (p. 224). Ross, McKechnie,

and Rothbauer infer all aspects of reading are socially mediated and serve as a means by which to connect to others and engage with the world. Jim Collins (2010) traces the evolution of American literary culture in the context of converging literary, visual, and material cultures in the aughts, and further highlights the increasingly social nature of reading. He points to unprecedented change in the infrastructure of literary culture including technology-based and supersized bricks-and-mortar delivery systems that supply literature along with actual and virtual sites to experience it within a reading community.

Professor and researcher Ian Collinson (2009) investigates contemporary reading practice embedded in the lived social and cultural experiences of everyday readers. Results of his study demonstrate the formation of informal socio-cultural networks through the shared consumption of books as another aspect of reading culture that goes beyond the text. Collinson finds a reader's engagement with a book continues and expands beyond the text as they discuss it with others, and that "book exchanges become a way of embedding social relationships through the shared consumption of cultural commodities" (p. 88). Collinson's ethnographic research provides a valuable contextual account of pleasure reading. Rather than privileging the text as the arbiter of meaning, it situates the reader as active meaning-maker and both illustrates and illuminates the social nature of contemporary book reading as it is lived by everyday readers. Collinson's rich ethnographic data sketches the potential trajectory for the "groundswell of support" (p. 191) Episkenew envisions.

Long (1986) explores shared reading by middle-class women in the late twentieth century to uncover how they respond "to the economic power of the modern book industry and to the cultural authority of the critical establishment" (p. 591). Long (1986) identifies reader response theory as the theoretical underpinning "for investigations of the cultural work accomplished by

readers in interaction with text” (p. 593). She stakes out the importance of such groups “to women’s cultural lives and the development of American literary and civic culture” (p. 592), and contends, “books both provide a signal that people must come to terms with change, and mediate between people directly involved in activism or analysis and those who feel the impact of social change more subtly or more indirectly in the routines of daily life” (p. 600). This assertion by Long (1986) provides the impetus to investigate the effect of reading literature written by Indigenous authors. Viewing another culture through a lens of its own making creates new insight and perspective on how people perceive the world and their place in it.

Many researchers find reading groups privilege books that provoke personal, affective responses (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Long, 1986; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006). Based on analysis by Radway, the stage was set nearly a century ago for the affective interpretation and identification with characters prevalent in contemporary reading communities as described by the authors mentioned above. Radway closely examines the Book-of-the-Month Club, a subscription-based book club offering new books to members in the United States monthly since 1926. She focuses specifically on the judges who reviewed and endorsed the book selections during the club’s early years, and who lent status to the books as literature rather than commercial commodities. Radway describes the judges as possessing “an unusual capacity for feeling and empathy” (p. 280), demonstrated by their selection of books intended to elicit an intense affective experience rather than contemplation. The judges privileged books with “rich and elaborate realism of character” (p. 282), convinced characters were the gateway to readers feeling the human experience. According to Radway, the judges positioned reading as “an event for identification, connection, and response” (p. 283-284).



Research by Roger Chartier (1994) further elucidates the relationship between text, book, and reader through his excavation of print culture during France's early modern era. Chartier emphasizes "reading is not uniquely an abstract operation of the intellect: it brings the body into play, it is inscribed in a space and a relationship with oneself or with others" (p. 8), echoing contemporary ethnographic research by Collinson and Ross. According to Chartier, to explore the history of reading practice requires that various communities of readers are distinguished by their level of skill and ability, by "the norms and conventions of reading that define, for each community of readers, legitimate uses of the book, ways to read, and the instruments and methods of interpretations" (p. 4), and by "the expectations and interests that various groups of readers invest in the practice of reading" (p. 4). Here, Chartier precisely captures the essence of research conducted by Ann Addington (2000), Berg and Barstow to examine academic and non-academic reading communities and how readers use, value, and interpret text.

Addington, Berg, and Barstow investigate reading practices in academic versus book club settings. Addington credits the book club setting with "creating a forum for egalitarian, exploratory talk that allow[s] students to make connections among texts, among people, and between texts and human experience" (p. 242). She finds the academic class setting provides more knowing with regard to the author, characters, structure of the narrative, and genre, whereas the book club discussion creates stronger personal connection to the text and demonstrates "the power of collaborative sharing about literature and life" (p. 242).

Berg explores the subtle, complex differences between reading in and out of school. Her observations suggest book club members "seek intellectual stimulation but not at the expense of enjoyment" (p. 146). She contends book clubs provide opportunities for "personal insight, and

collective support in dealing with the stresses of everyday life” (p. 146), corroborating research by Long (1986, 1993) and Barstow. Berg concludes, “book clubs, spaces where authority can be neutralized, offer us unexpected and indispensable laboratories for observing collective reading,” and notes they are “places where lives are intentionally plotted, and literature is richly lived” (p. 151).

Where Berg observes literature richly lived, however, Barstow sees unrealized literary potential in book clubs. Barstow suggests reading by book groups offers a narrow slice of life, and tends to support rather than challenge the preconceived notions of group members. She notes “the power of more radical texts to exercise our decoding skills and enable a fuller understanding of language and culture” (p. 16). The author recommends book groups maximize their potential by choosing less conventional texts, dig deeper to mediate meaning, and recruit more diverse members. Barstow, Berg, and Addington all approach their research topic from an academic perspective and demonstrate the theoretical divide between a focus on the reader and a focus on the text.

Cecilia Konchar Farr (2008), an English professor, explores the divide between elite and popular literature, and between cultural and economic capital to map a clear path through the complicated cultural and economic terrain of contemporary literature. She observes the popular books she teaches “mix some literary sophistication with an invitation to connect” (p. 45), and her students want to be “challenged intellectually and philosophically... but also personally, emphatically, and emotionally” (p. 46), with “rich, multilevel readings” (p. 46). Konchar Farr contends, “today’s world demands a different approach to books and to reading” (p. 47). She describes traditional reading as “building a solid foundation for the preservation of culture and unexamined common values” (p. 48), in contrast to the contemporary reader for whom it is

“about challenging and reconstructing (sometimes deconstructing) culture and values in the midst of momentous change” (p. 48). Social research by Don Tapscott (2009) echoes this shift from a culture of control to one of enablement and individual agency, and both authors structure support for reading literature by Indigenous authors.

A broad convergence of political, cultural, and social forces are currently bringing literature penned by Indigenous authors to the fore. In the past, these same forces have silenced the oral narratives of Indigenous peoples in this nation. The publication industry, distribution channels, and marketplace practices determine what is available to read (Chartier, 1994; Long, 1986; Radway, 1997), and “collective and institutional processes shape reading practices by authoritatively defining what is worth reading and how to read it” (Long, 1993, p. 192). Anouk Lang (2012) suggests online retail sites “interpellate [readers] not as consumers but rather as literary critics and discerning members of an imagined community of other readers” (p. 10), and that “the reviews, lists, and prior purchasing history of these unseen other readers signal that they, too, appreciate the books that the potential customer is considering purchasing, and offer affirmation that this book purchase is a socially validated action” (p. 10). These concepts of online book-buying behaviour can be extrapolated to the current phenomenon of reading literary works by Indigenous writers. In this instance, the hash tag #IndigenousReads, CBC Radio’s list of Indigenous-authored books, and the federal government’s declaration of June 2016 as Indigenous Book Club Month, combine to create real and imaged communities of readers, affirmed in their selection of genre and book, and imbued with social and cultural capital. Readers in this milieu are accomplishing identity work within the context of a very visible, current, and critically important topic in Canadian society.

Contemporary readers now assume more individual agency (Collins, 2010; Tapscott, 2009) when it comes to how and what they read, as well as the social networks in which they render meaning and share textual interpretations. All of these elements converge at a moment in Canadian history when the life experience and historical trauma of Indigenous peoples within this nation is receiving prominent media (print, broadcast, and social) and political attention.

Episkenew in her examination of Indigenous literature, and Megan Sweeney (2010) in her historical account of reading in the United States penal system, demonstrate the power relationships that exist in reading cultures, and portray the uses, values, and impact of reading in marginalized groups. The work of both authors alludes to the value of reading literature penned by marginalized people; a concept that is supported by scholars who have examined the lived experience of solitary readers (Collinson, 2009; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Radway, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1978; Ross, 1999) as well as readers who share interpretation of text in a social context (Addington, 2001; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Konchar Farr, 2008; Long, 1986, 1993; MacAdam, 1995). Other scholars investigate reading on psychological (Nell, 1988), physiological and cognitive (Armstrong, 2013; Baron, 2015; Beglar, Hunt, & Kite, 2012; Dehaene, 2009) levels as well as the specific influence of fiction reading on empathy (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler, 1997; Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999). Collectively they paint a detailed portrait of the ability of the human brain to transform symbols on a page into an intellectual, emotional, visceral, and vicarious experience – essentially the ability “to slip inside other people’s skin and model the world through their eyes” (Baron, 2015, p. 129).

Literature by Indigenous authors is, in effect, offering Canadians an opportunity to “advance

social justice, to heal the wounds of oppression, and to reconcile our communities” (Episkenew, 2009, p. 194).

## **Methodology and Methods**

### **Qualitative Phenomenological Research Design**

The intent of the current research is to explore and describe the experience of individual, non-Indigenous readers as they engage with a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author, and then mediate meaning within the context of their shared-reading group. I employ qualitative phenomenological research design to achieve this objective. John Creswell (2014) positions qualitative inquiry as a research approach for exploring, describing, and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to their world. He suggests, “Those who engage in this form of inquiry support a way of looking at research that honors an inductive style, a focus on individual meaning, and the importance of rendering the complexity of a situation” (p. 4). Creswell defines qualitative research by eight core characteristics including: a natural setting, the researcher as key instrument, data from multiple sources, inductive and deductive data analysis, a central focus on participants’ meanings, emergent design, researcher reflexivity, and a holistic account of the findings (p. 185-186).

Sharlene Nagy Hesse-Biber (2017) identifies the interpretive strand of qualitative research that focuses on subjective experience and small-scale interactions as a means to interpret and understand social meaning, and contends researchers in this tradition “value experience and perspective as important sources of knowledge” (p. 23). Phenomenology falls under the umbrella of the interpretive strand of qualitative inquiry and can be traced to the 18<sup>th</sup> century when criticism mounted regarding the assumption of an objective reality independent of individual consciousness (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 25). As a research methodology, phenomenology supposes

there is no one reality of how events are experienced and meaning is constructed and perceived. This strand of research includes methods such as analysis of written accounts of experiences in documents such as journals, observation, and in-depth interviews (p. 25-26). Hesse-Biber describes phenomenology as “a qualitative approach aimed at generating knowledge about how people perceive experience” (p. 26).

Catherine Marshall and Gretchen Rossman (2011) classify narrative and discourse analysis as methods of phenomenological qualitative study and suggest qualitative researchers “are intrigued by the complexity of social interactions expressed in daily life and by the meanings that the participants themselves attribute to these interactions” (p. 2). The authors further posit that investigations take researchers into natural settings and foster pragmatism in the use of multiple methods to collect data. To explore through qualitative research is to probe a phenomenon, to identify salient categories of meaning, and to prompt further research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). To describe the phenomenon of interest is to document in rich detail the “actions, events, beliefs, attitudes, and social structures and processes occurring” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 69).

The purpose of the current phenomenological qualitative study is to explore and describe the lived experience of non-Indigenous readers as they engage individually, and in an interactive group setting, with a fiction novel penned by an Indigenous author. The participants in the study are educated women in mid to late adulthood who are avid readers and have a long-term commitment to their book club. Their experience is explored and described at three distinct junctures in their interaction with the chosen text. First, they were asked to journal as they take up the book as an individual, solitary reader. Participants were given latitude to choose the form of journaling that best facilitated capturing their initial response to the text and all chose to write.

Qualitative data in the form of narrative texts take us inside the experience of reading a fiction novel by an Indigenous author through the subjective perception of individual, non-Indigenous readers. This phase of the research focuses on the words participants use to describe their lived experience as they engage with the selected text as a solitary reader and is “based on the notion that humans make sense of their lives through story” (Hatch, 2002, p. 28). Patrice Keats (2009) suggests, “Studying narrative texts aids the researcher in understanding how participants experience, live, and tell about their world” (p. 181). Participants were instructed to journal as frequently and as extensively as they chose, but at least once for each chapter of the novel.

Second, participant discourse was recorded during the book club meeting in which members discussed the chosen Indigenous-authored novel. Research participants are members of the same active, established shared-reading group. Familiarity among group members as well as with the meeting location and the discussion format is intended to maintain the focus on the text and the participants’ interaction. I attended the meeting as an unobtrusive, non-participating observer and audio recorded the event. I transcribed the audio verbatim and the transcript became the text data for analysis.

Third, participants were interviewed individually to capture their lived experience of reading an Indigenous-authored novel. Hesse-Biber cites the value of in-depth interviews for capturing exploratory and descriptive qualitative data that represents unique and important knowledge ascertainable through a participant’s telling of his or her lived experience (p. 106). “The process is a meaning-making endeavor [sic] embarked on as a partnership between the interviewer and their participant” (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 106). The data derived from this phase of the research expands on the data from the first two phases and helps to chart the evolution in readers’ emotional and intellectual interaction with the text as they mediate meaning.

Marshall and Rossman characterize qualitative research as pragmatic, interpretive, and “grounded in the lived experiences of people” (p. 2). They identify five hallmarks of qualitative inquiry – that it takes place in natural settings, draws on multiple methods, focuses on context, is emergent and evolving, and is fundamentally interpretive. Each of these signposts of qualitative research is evident in the methodology undertaken for this study. Participants experienced reading and group discussion within their natural milieu. The research project provided an opportunity for participants to share their individual and group experience at three distinct junctures and by multiple means. Analysis of the data derived was conducted within the current political, social, and cultural context with regard to the relationship between Canadians and Indigenous peoples. Narrative, observational, and interview data sources explore and describe participants’ individual experiences with the chosen text, their experience as they mediate meaning within a group setting, and finally, as they reflect on the entire experience. Lastly, data from the proposed research was analyzed and interpreted to describe the essence of the participants’ lived experience.

Particularity rather than generalizability is key to this qualitative study. Examining a specific, small group of non-Indigenous readers enables an in-depth exploration of their lived experience in order to illuminate the subtle nuances and inherent complexity of mediating meaning from a text that is written by an Indigenous author and read in the context of the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada with respect to the relationship with Indigenous peoples. Peter Knight (2002) argues the value of small-scale inquiry and cites it as the predominant mode of research. He contends it is of value to both the researchers and the participants, and contributes significantly to the broad arena of practice, policy, and theory (p. xii). I believe exploring the lived experience of one specific group of non-Indigenous readers



helps to illuminate the broader social and cultural impact of literature penned by Indigenous writers.

### **Role of Researcher**

Researcher reflexivity is a core characteristic of qualitative inquiry, and “creates an open and honest narrative that will resonate well with readers” (Creswell, 2014, p. 202). The qualitative researcher serves as the primary data collection instrument necessitating reflection on their personal background, culture, and experiences (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). I ascribe to a constructivist worldview and subsequently employ broad, general, open-ended questions in order to interpret and construct the meaning participants have about their lived experience. “These meanings are varied and multiple,” according to Creswell, and require that I recognize “the complexity of views rather than [narrow] meanings into a few categories or ideas” (p. 8).

Marshall and Rossman call on qualitative researchers to systematically reflect on who they are in the inquiry and to be sensitive to their personal biography and how it shapes the study. As the primary researcher for the proposed study, my overall aim is to contribute to the national commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples on a level that is both personal and pragmatic. On a personal level, it is due to my proclivity for pleasure reading, and lived experience as an avid reader and member of several book clubs over the past 15 years that makes me uniquely suited to unobtrusively observe a book group session and comfortably interview participants from a point of commonality. As an avid reader I am engaged in the topic and firmly believe in the power of narratives to create, expand, and challenge personal perspectives. Literature provides an alternative lens to view the world, structure new frames of reference, and foster change.

Reading fiction novels is a familiar and pragmatic means to stretch our understanding and provide time in a private sphere to contemplate new knowledge that extends beyond our own life experience. Book clubs provide a venue to voice the meanings we mediate from the text, to listen openly to the meanings mediated by others from the same words, and to place new meaning within the context of our everyday lives.

I also have an emerging and evolving awareness, as a non-Indigenous person, of the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous peoples and its consequential influence on their contemporary life experience as a result of the work undertaken by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. The profile of Indigenous issues in broadcast and social media is contributing to a political, cultural, and social moment of reception (McNeill, 2015). At the same time the work of Indigenous authors is gaining prominence through venues such as the hash tag #Indigenousreads, the virtual book club on the CBC Radio program *Unreserved*, and the federal government's declaration of June 2016 as Indigenous Book Club Month.

### **Participants**

The participants in the current study are non-Indigenous individuals who are current, active members of the same established shared-reading group. This represents a purposeful sample designed to obtain the participation of practicing readers who regularly take part in a scheduled and structured event in which they mediate meaning of a selected text first as individual readers and then within an interactive group setting. Familiarity among group members, as well as with the meeting location and discussion format, is intended to maintain the focus on the text and the participants' response to it. The small sample provides an opportunity to explore in-depth, and to facilitate rich, thick description (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 103). For convenience, the participants are members of a local book club within the Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM).

The reading group was identified initially when one member of the book club responded to a social media post announcing the study, and then brought the opportunity to participate to the other members of her group. I attended a regularly scheduled book club meeting on April 28, 2017, to describe the study in detail and to distribute hard copies of the consent form, demographic and background questionnaire, and journaling instructions. Nine of the 13 book club members were in attendance and all those present agreed to participate. Seven participants signed and returned the consent form during the meeting. The remaining consent forms were returned to me at the book club discussion on June 16, 2017.

I followed-up the meeting by emailing the four book club members who were not present to extend an invitation to participate, and to send electronic copies of the consent, questionnaire, and journal instructions. Two other book club members agreed to participate in the study bringing the total number of participants to 11. I also forwarded electronic copies of the questionnaire and journal instructions to the nine who attended the meeting in April. In addition, I scanned and emailed each signed consent form to the corresponding participant.

Participants self-reported demographic information including age, gender, education, occupation, as well as background information on reading practice, book club activity, and previous reading experience related to Indigenous-authored fiction in a three-page questionnaire (see Appendix A). The completed questionnaires were returned by email or in hard copy between April 28 and June 16. The book club is comprised of 13 active and two inactive members, and has been established for 30 years. The average number of years members report being part of the group is 14.5 years. The length of membership in the book club ranges from two to 30 years for one participant who reports being a founding member. Five participants have been members of the book club for more than 20 years. The group meets once a month for 10

months each year and each member takes a turn choosing a book for everyone to read and discuss the following month. All participants report positive value in being a member of a book club citing friendship, a sense of community, discovering books beyond their usual repertoire, and exposure to new perspectives as key aspects of book club membership.

The reading experience of each book club member is established by the number of books read in a typical six-month period. Members report reading an average of 16 books. The average was calculated using the median number of books when a participant reported the number as a range. For example, nine is used to calculate the overall average in the case of a participant who reports reading eight to 10 books over a period of six months. The number of books read during a six-month period ranges from six to between 40 and 60. Six of the 11 participants report typically reading more than 10 books in six months.

The age, gender, education, and employment demographics of the study participants reflect those of the average Canadian reader as reported by BookNet, a national book retail industry association that conducts reader surveys regularly (BookNet, 2015). Based on the data derived from the demographic and background questionnaire, the participants are well-educated, avid female readers in mid to late adulthood. The median age range is 55 to 64 years with two participants 45 to 54 years old, and three who report their age to be between 65 and 74 years. All study participants have post-secondary education. Two have college diplomas and the remaining nine have university degrees at either an undergraduate, graduate, or PhD level. Four participants in the study group are employed full time, and one part time. Two study participants report working part time in retirement, and the remaining four participants are retired. Being non-Indigenous is a requirement to participate in the study as stipulated on the consent form. Therefore, by signing the consent all participants indicate, in effect, that they do not identify as

Indigenous peoples. All participants ascribe a high, positive value to reading books citing entertainment, intellectual stimulation, vicarious experience, and new perspectives as key outcomes.

Participants completed the questionnaire in hardcopy or on their computer and returned it by email or in person at the book club meeting on June 16. Each participant read the selected novel on their own between April 28 and June 16. Responses to some questions indicate some participants completed the questionnaire after reading the novel. One participant completed the questionnaire and participated in the book club discussion before withdrawing from the study. She confirmed permission for the data already collected to be included in the study. Another participant completed the questionnaire, but did not take part in any other phase of the research.

**Research site.** Phenomenological qualitative inquiry is characterized by research conducted in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 1995, 2011). Participants initially engaged with the selected text as individual readers in their own personal space. The book group meeting took place at the home of one of the study participants. The choice of location, and the location itself, are both part of the book club members' regular proceedings and therefore a familiar and natural setting for the participants. The site was purposefully selected as a familiar location for this group of readers to meet to discuss a novel and therefore supports the natural flow of activity for book club members. The interviews were either conducted at a location chosen by the interviewee, or by telephone. All locations allowed for private, uninterrupted conversation.

**Text material.** This research explores and describes the actual experience of fiction reading by individuals who are non-Indigenous and who belong to the same book club. At the April 28 book club meeting, the study participants selected the novel *Indian Horse* by Richard

Wagamese (see Appendix B) as the book to read and discuss for the purposes of the current study. Participants chose the book from a CBC Radio list of top 15 Indigenous-authored books recommended for Indigenous Book Club Month in June 2016 that I provided. One group member had read the book previously and recommended it based on her positive reading experience. The group members also expressed interest in it because of the tributes and accolades paid to the author and his literary works following his recent passing on March 10, 2017.

*Indian Horse* is a 232-page (print edition) fiction novel by award-winning author Richard Wagamese. The book was published in 2012 by Douglas & McIntyre, a Vancouver-based, independent publishing company founded in 1971. Study participants read the book in a variety of formats including hardcover, paperback, and e-reader. Participants either bought a copy of the book, borrowed it from the Halifax Public Library, or from another member of the book club.

I made a deliberate decision not to read the selected novel during the research process. I did not want my experience with the novel to influence how I perceived, analyzed, and interpreted the experience of the participants. I am comfortable with this decision due to the fact that the research focus is on exploring and describing the experience of the participants and not a literary analysis of the chosen text.

### **Ethical Considerations**

This study adheres to the core ethical principles of respect for persons, concern for welfare, and justice as detailed in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2). Participant risk was assessed as minimal based on the TCPS2 definition of minimal risk as “research in which the probability and magnitude of possible harms implied by participation in the research is no greater than those encountered by participants in

those aspects of their everyday life that relate to the research” (p. 22). The Mount Saint Vincent University Research Ethics Board awarded clearance for the study and consent procedure. All participants provided written informed consent to be included in the study. A digital copy of each consent form (see Appendix C) was created and is securely stored under password protection on the MSVU OneDrive server. Print copies of the signed consent forms were shredded. Participant names and other identifying information has been removed from the collected data to minimize the possibility of individual participants being identified. The data corresponding to each participant was assigned an identifying code from P1 to P11. Real names and other identifying information will not be used in the dissemination of results including in this final study report, presentations, or print communication of the research findings.

## **Methods**

To fully explore and describe the experience of non-Indigenous readers as they read a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author and then mediate meaning within the context of their shared-reading group, I used multiple data collection methods to capture the experience and perspectives of participants. These include participant-generated texts in the form of reading journals, audio recording and verbatim transcription of the book club discussion, and audio recording and verbatim transcription of the individual in-depth interviews.

**Reading journals.** Each participant was instructed to capture their initial experience of the chosen novel as they engaged with it as an individual reader. This was a self-directed exercise and participants chose the mode of self-expression they were most comfortable with (see Appendix D). Participants were instructed to journal as much and as often as they wanted, but at least once for each chapter. Of the nine participants who completed this component of the research study, all participants chose to write a reading journal. Two of the original 11

participants withdrew from the study before undertaking the journaling activity. The result was journals ranging from 238 to 3,220 words with the average length being 1,358 words.

Participant-generated texts, in some cases handwritten, were entered as digital files and stored under password protection on the MSVU OneDrive server. They were also uploaded to the MAXQDA 12 software program on my personal laptop, secured by password, and used only in my private home office. The MAXQDA 12 working files were securely stored on the MSVU OneDrive server each day.

Participant response to the journaling activity is recorded in the journals, the book club discussion, and in the individual interviews. Several participants report finding the journaling intrusive as it interrupted their engagement with the narrative. The response is understandable given the 232-page novel is divided into 56 chapters leaving little more than four pages per chapter. The parameters for the journaling activity were set as part of the overall research plan prior to the participants choosing which novel to read. Some participants, however, report finding it helped them to recall the book more accurately during the book club discussion. The journal data provides significant information on the readers' narrative experience and their empathic response to the book. As a data collection method, journaling is worthwhile to pursue in future research, perhaps with more flexibility with regard to the number of entries required. A more organic approach may also reveal richer data.

**Book club discussion.** The book club discussion took place on June 16 at the home of one of the participants located in a rural, coastal area of HRM. Ten members of the reading group gathered in the living room with just enough space to accommodate a comfortable seat for everyone. The chairs circled a small round coffee table and square ottoman, both covered with decorative throws and laden with food. The space was grounded with light wood floors and full



of natural light from large picture windows. Artwork hung in every conceivable space on the white walls. Eclectic collections of natural elements were displayed around the room including a fragrant bouquet of flowers on the dining table. I used an observation form to describe the event and record portions of the dialogue of each participant to serve as a point of reference to transcribe the audio recording.

I observed and audio recorded the book group session and captured participants speaking and acting authentically in an existing shared-reading group, in a familiar setting and routine meeting structure. The recorded discussion lasted for two hours, 10 minutes. It was a fast and free-flowing conversation, with ideas ricocheting from person to person. Participants were attentive to whoever was speaking, open to each other's perspectives, and built on one another's comments. They used verbal and non-verbal indicators of agreement such as smiling and nodding to encourage the conversation to continue. One member took the lead in keeping the conversation focused on the book, even reprimanding another person once for having a side conversation. Participants were vocal in their empathic response to the novel, specifically in terms of their empathic distress. All participants shared memories triggered by the novel. Discussion of the book ended as the participants shifted the conversation to group membership, communication between members, and choosing books and meeting dates to begin another year in September.

I maintained a stance of neutrality at the meeting to collect data and describe the event. I was cognizant of the potential impact of my presence and attempted to minimize any disruption to the flow of activities. Beyond initial introductions, I operated as a complete observer. I provided full and complete disclosure to participants that they were being observed and all interaction was being audio recorded. Based on the scope of the research project, my goal was to

be minimally intrusive and present for only one book club meeting. I was a brief presence in the life of the book club and the individual participants.

**Individual in-depth interviews.** Phenomenological interviewing “rests on the assumption that there is a structure and essence to shared experiences that can be narrated” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). It creates a situation in which the interviewee lays out what they know and feel relevant to their lived experience. For the current study, the individual interviews required participants to articulate their full experience, from individual reading to group discussion to personal reflection. “The purpose of this type of interview is to describe the meaning of a concept or phenomenon that several individuals share” (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 148). Hesse-Biber suggests that by reducing any hierarchy between researcher and researched in the cooperative pursuit of knowledge, that “the relationship between interviewers and interviewees can be characterized as *reciprocal* [emphasis in original]” (p. 117). In effect, “interviewees are given authority over their own stories, meaning that they are seen as experts on the topic” (p. 117). Rapport can be constructed by helping the interview participant to feel safe, comfortable, and valued by taking genuine interest and listening actively. Hesse-Biber advises interviewers to pose a question and revert to an active listener.

In preparation for the interviews I reviewed the literature and all data collected to that point to formulate the questions. I conducted nine interviews between June 19 and June 28, compiling two hours and 30 minutes of recorded audio. The interviews ranged from just over six minutes to 29 minutes in length, with an average running time of 17 minutes. I conducted four of the interviews with participants face-to-face, at two participants’ homes, one at a work office, and another at a coffee shop. The locations for the in-person interviews allowed for private, uninterrupted conversation. The remaining interviews were done by telephone. Hesse-Biber

contends the quality of the interview is significantly elevated if it is conducted face-to-face due to the opportunity to build rapport through gestures and eye contact as well as verbally. I did find the telephone interviews tended to be more direct and to the point, however all resulted in valuable data on participants' perceptions of the experience in their own words. Two telephone interviews were brief, both lasting just over six minutes. However, the remaining seven interviews average 20 minutes in length whether in person or by telephone. Providing an option to do the interview by telephone appeared to make committing to a date and time easier for most participants. I conducted the telephone interviews from my home office, and was able to maintain privacy while I used the speakerphone function to record the conversation. I started each interview by stating the conversation was being recorded. Audio recording the interviews is part of the consent each participant signed. The format of the interviews was semi-structured to enable a degree of comparison between participant interviews while allowing latitude for the words and salient perceptions of each individual to be the focus (see Appendix E). This approach ensured an emic perspective rather than an etic perspective.

**Transcription.** I used an Olympus WS-853 voice recorder to audio record the book club discussion and individual interviews. The device did not have a feature to adjust the playback speed of the recording, and the rewind feature was not very accurate on digital files of this size making the process of replaying difficult-to-hear sections very time consuming. Identifying markers such as names, place names, and personal information was not included in the transcript. I transcribed sections then replayed them to confirm the dialogue. The transcripts therefore reflect the words spoken by individual participants with a reliable degree of accuracy. I was unable to distinguish dialogue and recognize participant voices when more than one person

spoke at the same time. This occurred often in the book club discussion and I subsequently labeled these as “inaudible, multiple voices.”

I began the book club discussion recording by requesting that each participant say their name. I then took detailed notes so that I could later match what was spoken to individual participants. As a result, I labeled passages with the participant code when I was completely certain who was speaking. When I had a degree of certainty I used the participant code followed by a question mark. At times I could not identify the owner of the voice at all and simply labeled it with a question mark to indicate I did not know who was speaking. I time stamped the transcript frequently to make it convenient to access specific segments of the audio.

I transcribed all four hours and 40 minutes of audio data verbatim and in APA format as described in “Guide to Transcribing” by Áine Humble, Department of Family Studies and Gerontology, Mount Saint Vincent University. The transcripts of the individual interviews are an accurate record of the words spoken. The transcript of the book club discussion provides a record of the words spoken and, in most instances, by whom. The transcripts do not capture the nuances of the natural flow of conversation such as the tone of voice, speed, or volume of speech. It does not capture the communication imbedded in pauses, or the emotion that hangs in the voice of the speaker. All of these nuances add layers of perception unique to each listener and are not captured in the transcripts. The transcripts are best viewed as a black and white, still photograph compared to the full-colour, high definition, flowing image that is the audio recording. It is important to note an audio recording of the spoken word is void of the punctuation and visual clues that often shape the meaning of the words when transcribed. I recognize this in respect for the participants’ voiced experience and acknowledge it as I document, interpret, and report the findings.

The process of transcribing, although extremely time consuming, provided an opportunity to engage actively with the data by listening intently to capture the voiced experience of participants, and offered an immediate route to become immersed in the data.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

The demographic and background questionnaire data was analyzed numerically where possible. I compiled information such as age, gender, education, and employment from the questionnaire in a table to describe the study participants and quantitative data regarding the number of books read in a typical six-month period and the number of years of membership in the book club (see Appendix F). All text data was recorded and the findings, including salient text segments, are presented in the next chapter.

Qualitative data analysis is an explorative and descriptive process on the path to understanding the essence of an experience. Marshall and Rossman (2011) contend, “The process of bringing order, structure and interpretation to a mass of collected data is messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating” (p. 207). In other words, it does not proceed in a neat, linear fashion. The term analysis, according to the authors, represents the convergence of description, analysis, and interpretation (p. 207). With that in mind, data analysis and data collection are recommended as simultaneous activities (Creswell, 2014; Marshall & Rossman, 2011). My initial coding of the reading journals therefore prefigured codes for analysis of the book club discussion transcript, and the individual interview transcripts. All of the data collected prior to the interviews was used to finalize the questions for this phase of the study. Hesse-Biber (2017) states, “There is an iterative qualitative inductive methods practice between data collection, data analysis, and theory generation in a process known as analytical induction” (p. 44). The process is a dynamic, continuous loop of activity as data are collected, interpreted,

and ideas generated and tested through the collection of additional data. The author suggests scanning for patterns that emerge from the thick descriptions of social life recounted by participants, and asserts that they speak about both experience and perceptions providing the researcher access to thoughts and perceptions in the participant's own words (p. 110).

I did a first read-through of the reading journal data to highlight and memo important segments of text and telling quotes as a first pass at analysis and interpretation. I did not code all the text, but rather focused on what was specifically relevant to the study. Hesse-Biber explains the analytical process in terms of decontextualization and recontextualization. She states:

Decontextualization means that segments of your data are first looked at in isolation from their particular contexts. These segments are linked to other like segments into groupings or categories, a process known as recontextualizing your data, provides a mechanism for discovering larger themes or patterns in your data that reveal a new level of understanding your data as a whole. (p. 335)

I followed the same procedure to code the book club discussion transcript. The individual interviews all closely followed the interview guide. This facilitated compiling the data by question to analyze each individual response to a specific question as a data group. I searched the data from each source for "segments of text to generate and illustrate categories of meaning" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 208), as well as outliers that indicate the breadth of experience. The overall analytical strategy was one of reading through each data source for general understanding, and re-reading to identify repetition of expressed ideas, thoughts, and emotions to uncover and discover sets of experiences. The sets, or categories, were further examined to highlight the properties that characterize them. The described categories were then compared and contrasted to establish the existence of any linkages.

The literature review demonstrates transportation into a narrative as a predictor of empathy as an outcome of reading, and further characterizes empathy as either a passive social emotion, or active witnessing of another's experience. It also highlights Indigenous narratives as disruptive and destabilizing. These findings from established research framed the very initial phases of data analysis. Although the literature review acted to sensitize me to potential themes, I remained open to revising existing themes and to new emergent themes. The analysis phase facilitated the emergence of a coherent interpretation with related concepts and themes. Marshall and Rossman assert the phenomenological focus on individual lived experience flows from an "assumption that there is an *essence* [emphasis in original] to an experience that is shared with others who have also had that experience" (p. 20). As such, individual experiences "are analyzed as unique expressions then compared to identify the essence" (p. 20).

My analysis of the collected data followed detailed analytical procedures set out by Marshall and Rossman, and Creswell. Generally, all three authors include measures to organizing the data, become immersed in the data, generate codes and themes, code the data, offer interpretations through analytic memos, search for alternative understandings, and write the final report to present the study. Each phase of the data analysis entails a reduction of the data as it is organized into text segments, and interpretation as the "researcher brings meaning and insight to the words and acts of the participants in the study" (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 210). Creswell stresses a process of winnowing the data to focus on what is relevant to the study (p. 195).

I disassociated participant names from the data prior coding, interpretation, and reporting. I used MAXQDA 12 software as an efficient means to store, sort, code, and retrieve data, and to facilitate testing and questioning themes and ideas. The function in the software to retrieve text

segments was invaluable as a means of extracting text from the volumes of data, and for identifying the location of specific text segments so that I could review the context as necessary. I duplicated and saved a new MAXQDA 12 file each day to the MSVU OneDrive server as a backup and to track the evolving analytical process.

**Memo writing.** The MAXQDA 12 software enables memo writing. I wrote descriptive memos for codes to capture reflections on data, structure categories and connections, and facilitate the emergence of salient topics (Hesse-Biber, 2017, p. 313). I date stamped each memo to track the coding process. In addition, I kept detailed notes as I worked through the data analysis each day. Writing method notes helped to integrate the many processes that happen at once and helped me to keep an eye on the big picture. It is important to be able to track and see the progress in a process that requires you to continuously reread, review, and reevaluate. By writing notes I could see that, even though I was continuously looping back through the data, I was still moving forward in the research. The daily notes also served as a placeholder to review so that I could pick up quickly where I left off the day before.

**Coding.** I find the coding process transports you deeper into the text as it pushes perspectives, and pulls understanding to another level. The process is one of dissecting, or decontextualizing, the text using codes to label small fragments of meaning and then reintegrating, or recontextualizing, the segments of text to reveal themes that give order to the text and point to an overarching statement of experience. The coding process for each data source was the same and began with reading the entire data set prior to coding. After the first pass through the data I then reread the text segments within the codes. This facilitated renaming, combining similar codes, deleting duplications, and reassigning text segments to more relevant



codes where necessary. The result is 610 segments of text data derived from all data sources and located in 57 codes.

I reread the coded data next to search for categories of meaning to recontextualize the data and organize it into broader themes that represent the experiences captured in the text. Through this process I identified five organizing themes to describe the experience of participants: 1) Narrative Experience; 2) Indicators of Transportation; 3) New Perspectives; 4) Empathic Response, and 5) Prosocial Behaviour (see Appendix G). Further exploration and analysis of the organizing themes culminated in the following statement to describe the experience of participants: The Indigenous-authored novel *Indian Horse* transported non-Indigenous readers into a narrative experience marked by empathy, reflection, new perspectives, and prosocial behaviour.

**Strategies to validate findings.** Multiple approaches to validate the findings were incorporated throughout the research beginning with triangulating different data sources including the reading journals, the book club discussion, and the individual in-depth interviews. According to Creswell, “If themes are established based on converging several sources of data or perspectives from participants, then this process can be claimed as adding to the validity of the study” (p. 201). I also attempt to include sufficient detail to make the report a rich reflection of the experience of participants. This includes reporting data that runs contrary to emerging themes. In this study reliability is assisted by the fact that one researcher is analyzing the data assuring consistency in coding. Regular debriefing of the data with my thesis supervisor served to add another layer of validity to the research process.

Next, I present the findings of the current phenomenological qualitative study in descriptive narrative form to elucidate in rich detail the experience of reading Indigenous-

authored literature as a non-Indigenous individual and as a member of a shared-reading group interacting to mediate meaning from the text. Creswell (2014) suggests, “The basic procedures in reporting results of a qualitative study are to develop descriptions and themes from the data, to present these descriptions and themes that convey multiple perspectives from participants” (p. 204).

The writing strategies I use to convey the data analysis and interpretation include quotes from the participants, dialogue representing thoughts, attitudes, and emotions regarding the meaning and impact of the text. When participant comments are very similar I use salient quotes to describe the findings. The words of the participants are interwoven with my interpretations as researcher. The overall narrative relies heavily on description of the participants, their experience as individuals and as members of a culture-sharing group.

### **Findings and Discussion**

In this section I detail the experience of the study participants as they individually read and then collectively discuss the fiction novel *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese. As outlined previously, I use the words of the participants to describe the essence of the experience. Next I present the detailed findings derived from the four data sources: 1) the demographic and background questionnaire; 2) the participant-generated reading journals; 3) the book club discussion transcript, and 4) the individual, in-depth interviews transcripts. I also interpret the findings based on the themes that emerge from the data, and in the context of existing literature on reading and shared-reading groups.

#### **Demographic and Background Questionnaire Findings**

All 11 study participants completed the questionnaire. The demographic description of the participants is presented in detail in Chapter 2. To summarize, the participants are non-

Indigenous, educated women in mid to late adulthood who are avid readers with an enduring commitment to their shared-reading group. In addition to the demographic questions, the questionnaire poses six open-ended questions requiring a written response. The intent of the open-ended questions is to paint a picture of the participants' individual and shared reading experience in broad strokes, and to highlight specific experience reading Indigenous-authored fiction.

All participants ascribe a high, positive value to reading books citing entertainment, vicarious experience, and new perspectives as key outcomes. P5, for example, finds, "Reading rates among my highest valued ways to spend time, to become informed, to expand my range of vicarious experiences, [and] to engage with another person's creativity." P1, writes, "Love [books]: they have educated me, entertained me, made me think, brought me closer to God." P6 reports, "It's relaxing and mentally stimulating at the same time. I love the experience of being immersed in a different time and place and situation. It's an escape but simultaneously a learning experience. I have learned many things about behaviour, nature, history, [and] politics from reading fiction." P7 values "reading for its ability to transport one into others' lives. It opens the door to looking at the world from another perspective and also to confirm the commonality of many of our experiences." P9 maintains, "Reading not only lets you enter other worlds but can teach you – you can vicariously experience other cultures, [and] situations different to your own ..."

Of the 11 participants, nine report finding enjoyment in specific genres including mystery and detective. Five respondents identify a preference for fiction, specifically Canadian, and female-authored fiction as a means to access perspectives of other women. Two participants highlight content as a more important element than genre. To this point, P6 writes, "The quality

of the writing ... the use of language, and the character development are more important to me than genre,” and P8 confirms her preference for “character-rich novels.”

All participants value being a member of a book club. P1, for example, writes, “I have read books I would never have read on my own. See[ing] and hear[ing] how others perceive the book increases what I learn from the book. [It] makes me think.” P9 finds enjoyment in the intellectual stimulation and writes, “... when you know that discussion will follow your reading of a book, you read it more deeply, with more thought.” P2 reports, “It is important to connect with friends who are open to new ideas, who want to discover, and to share.” P4 states, “I value the perspectives of my peers. I value being pushed out of my comfort zone by reading books that I typically would not gravitate to.” P5 comments, “... I make attending [book club] gatherings a top priority whenever possible.” P9 adds, “... I learn so much from other [book club] members and like hearing their thoughts. Often my ideas change regarding a book – whether I like it or not. Also [book club] members bring up ideas that are different than mine, or see things (connections etc.) in a book that I haven't.” P10 writes, “Being in this book club, with the nature of the conversation in a group of women, I find thrilling – even if I did not care for the book.”

Ten of the 11 participants report having read at least one Indigenous-authored novel prior to reading *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese. All ten confirm having read *The Reason You Walk*, by Wab Kinew, as a book club selection in April 2017. Of these ten participants, seven report having read multiple books by Indigenous authors. The number ranges from two to nine books, and averages 5 books per reader. Eight of the 11 participants report not actively seeking Indigenous-authored books to read. Of these, three cite the content of the book as the primary consideration when choosing what to read. P4, for example, writes, “No[,] I don't seek out any

particular type of author. I am interested in the content of the book foremost.” P11 specifically notes, “I look for good plot[-] driven fiction ...”

In all, three participants note an emergent interest in novels written by Indigenous authors, including Richard Wagamese, the author of *Indian Horse*. P7 writes, “Recently I have started building a short list of [I]ndigenous authors that I would like to read. I am hearing more about [I]ndigenous authors these days through print media and radio.” P6 reports, “Not purposely, but reading *Indian Horse* has encouraged me to do so. After finishing *Indian Horse*, I immediately read *The [B]reak* [by Kathereena Vermette].” P9 writes, “No, but after reading *Indian Horse* I will be. I certainly want to read more of Wagamese.” The responses of P6 and P9 indicate they completed the questionnaire after reading the novel.

**Discussion of demographic and background questionnaire findings.** The participant demographics in the current study mirror that of the average book reader in Canada as described by BookNet Canada, a retail industry organization that annually surveys Canadians on their book buying habits and leisure-time activities (BookNet, 2015). Based on data derived from the demographic and background questionnaire, the study participants are well-educated, female readers in mid to late adulthood. All participants indicated they do not identify as Indigenous peoples by signing the consent form that stipulates being non-Indigenous is a requirement to take part in the study.

The demographic and background questionnaire data describe the participants as avid readers with six of 11 reporting they typically read more than 10 books during a six-month period. All participants ascribe a high, positive value to reading books citing entertainment, intellectual stimulation, vicarious experience, and new perspectives as key outcomes. The findings of the current study echo evidence of the power of literature to engage, extend personal

experience, and expand understanding documented in research on reading (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler, 1997; Chartier, 1994; Dewan, 2013; Episkenew, 2009; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Johnson, 2013; MacAdam, 1995; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999; Ross, 1999).

The average length of membership in the book club is 14.5 years demonstrating an enduring dedication to this shared-reading group. All participants report positive value in being a member of a book club citing friendship, a sense of community, discovering books beyond their usual repertoire, and exposure to new perspectives as key aspects of book club membership. The value participants in the current study ascribe to membership in their book club is echoed throughout the literature on shared reading (Addington, 2000; Barstow, 2003; Berg, 2008; Collinson, 2009; Collins, 2010; Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Long, 1986, 1993; Ross, McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006).

### **Reading Journal Findings**

Of the nine participants who completed this component of the research study, all chose writing as the mode of expression to capture their response to the text as an individual reader. As a result, journals ranging from 238 to 3,220 words with the average length being 1,358 words, were submitted. Two of the original 11 study participants withdrew from the study before undertaking the journaling activity.

I create 26 codes as I read, re-read, analyzed, and interpreted the participant reading journals (see Appendix H). I code a total of 182 text segments representing themes that recur in the journal data as well as those I determine to be significant in order to describe the full breadth of the experience among participants. I also highlight text segments relevant to the current literature on reading, shared reading, and the link between reading fiction and empathy. The following is a synopsis of each of the nine journals submitted.

**P1 journal.** The reading journal by P1 is 503 words in length with 25 entries in non-sequential order. The journal entries include 10 questions. This questioning stance suggests a number of thought processes and may indicate a high level of engagement, a search for clarity and understanding, or a challenge to the author. For example, the entry for chapter 3 is a quote from page 84: “You have the spirit in you...” P1 follows this with a question: “Don’t we all?” From the same chapter she quotes a passage on page 88: “Like they expect me to be something that I don’t know how to be.” P1 seems to challenge this sentiment by writing, “How hard is this[?] [W]e all experience a bit of this, but never to this extent – to have your essence (your spirit?) stripped from you.” This statement challenges the passage by identifying it as a universal human experience, yet acknowledges the extremity of the Indigenous experience portrayed in the novel.

P1 notes her response to the description of the mining town’s “white population” and questions whether it is a “sweeping generalization.” She writes, “Just when is it okay to paint an entire group with single brush[?] Surely there is more than that one – one dimensional [sic] description of white people they [pronoun undefined] have.” I capture this and other journal entries significant to the study using the codes *novel triggered reflection*, *description of residential school life*, *description of landscape*, and *description of settlers*. In her entry for chapter 38, P1 identifies a repeating theme that runs through the novel as the main character views the landscape through a window as he travels by car, van, bus, and airplane.

**P2 journal.** The reading journal written by P2 is 1,745 words in length and includes an entry for each of the 56 chapters. P2 chronicles the narrative in brief notes and by quoting short passages. The quotes serve to mimic underlining or highlighting text in a physical book. This style of journaling captures passages of the book the reader finds significant but does not provide

her emotional or intellectual response to the text as data for analysis. It may be argued the act of quoting directly from the novel indicates it is meaningful to the participant, however, I do not want to assume how, or why it is significant, nor the extent of its significance. As a result, I did not code any text from the reading journal written by P2.

**P3 journal.** The reading journal written by P3 is 238 words in length and includes brief statements describing characters and events in the narrative. P3 also poses four questions. I interpret this to be an indication of engagement with the narrative and an attempt to understand it. She questions why the parents of the main character abandon him, the existence of “kind priests or nuns,” and whether they were all evil. She also asks, “Did Saul [main character] have to go down that darkness to come out the other side?” This appears to be an effort to make sense of the suffering of the main character.

I use the codes *description of main character being alone*, *description of residential school life*, *empathic response to role of priest*, and *empathic distress* to capture relevant text segments. I create the code *description of racism* to capture how P3 responds to accounts of racism in the novel. She writes, for example, “I am astonished at the racism of the white fans and the other teams that the Moose play.”

**P4 journal.** P4 writes 664 words in 58 separate entries. The entries are not labeled by chapter or page number so I cannot assume each entry relates to a specific chapter. The first entry reads, “Powerful use of metaphors and analogies. I feel such great loss for Saul [main character] and I am not convinced that he will be successful in his quest for sobriety nor the truth.” This statement is a comment on the overall writing style of the book and indicates her level of engagement with the narrative as she imagines a future beyond the scope of the novel.



P4 captures the essence of each chapter and her response to it in single words and brief notes that comprise no more than one line of text for each entry. For example, one entry reads, “Very difficult to read. Sterile. Demeaning.” In another she states, “Disposable.” She then asks the question, “How can these children[’s] lives mean nothing?” I capture relevant text segments using the codes *empathic distress*, *description of landscape*, *description of Indigenous life experience*, *description of main character being alone*, *description of hockey*, *description of residential school life*, and *empathic response to role of priest*.

**P6 journal.** P6 produces the longest journal in the study at 3,220 words. The journal entries take the form of chapter synopses rather than personal responses to the text. She also quotes directly from the book to illustrate her words. P6 questions the abandonment of the main character by his parents as do other study participants. She notes an event in the novel that triggers memories of Northern Ontario and experiencing the cold of early spring. She describes her emotional response to parts of the novel as “heartbreaking” and “devastating.”

Of residential school life, P6 writes, “Saul/Wagamese describes the violent erasure of the children’s identity: they are forbidden to use their language (and many did not speak any English), they are given new names and a new ‘Father,’ they lose their hair, and the nuns try to scrub their skin off with stiff-bristled brushes. Any traces of their old identity and way of life are violently cut away, amputated.”

P6 notes that she read chapters 45 through 56 “in one sitting” and made a single journal entry to reflect that. I capture the positive emotions P6 expresses in response to the narrative with the code *happy* and review the other participant journals for text segments that might fit in this new code. I also create a code labeled *comments on mode of reading* to highlight how P6 describes reading the novel as an e-book. I accomplish the rest of the coding for the journal by

P6 using the codes *novel triggered reflection, empathic distress, description of main character being alone, description of residential school life, description of racism, description of hockey, writing style, description of life experience portrayed, empathic response to role of priest, developed awareness, and extent of concern/compassion.*

**P7 journal.** The reading journal by P7 contains 1,241 words presented in point-form without reference to chapters or page numbers. Much of the journal is a synopsis of the novel, however, it also provides some indication of her personal response to the text. For example, at the end of the journal P7 writes, “Wagamese makes it so clear why ‘anger and rage and violence’ are often the visible signs of broken souls.” She also writes about her anger at the harm perpetrated at residential schools stating it was “either ignored or condoned as being the better alternative to children living the ‘Indian’ way.” P7 records feelings of sorrow, horror, and heartbreak at different points in the novel. She notes she is “ashamed for the generation I grew up in” in response to the description of the main character’s experience playing hockey in Toronto.

P7 equates residential schools to cultural genocide and writes, “We are only at the beginning of the path to reconciliation.” She calls for non-Indigenous people to “listen, respect and follow [Indigenous peoples’] lead to healing and reparations,” and commits to “recommend Richard Wagamese’s book to anyone who wants to understand.”

**P8 journal.** The reading journal written by P8 is comprised of 664 words capturing her reaction to the narrative in brief sentences, notes in point form, and often single words. P8 comments on her struggle with the journaling activity and writes at chapter 15, “Having trouble journaling every chapter. They are short and the imagery pulls me in. Don’t want to break to journal.” She addresses the journaling again in her single entry for chapters 35 and 36 when she

notes, “Hate journaling. Breaks up my thought. Takes me away from the story. I want to stay in the book.”

On writing style, P8 comments, “Wagamese’s prose is so clean yet so emotive. He takes me there.” She labels the imagery in the novel “brilliant,” “wonderful,” and “amazing.” She expresses empathic distress in her journal entries using words such as “horrid,” “shameful,” and “unbelievable sadness.” P8 also expresses a sense of concern and compassion for the characters. The journal entries record the point at which she realizes the priest sexually abused the main character. She writes, “. . . of course Father LeBoutilier. Why didn’t I see it?” The journal writing also demonstrates insight into the behaviour of the main character when she writes, “Blackness, anger, rage, self pity and alcohol – of course. Self medication.” P8 describes the racism in chapter 31 as “Hate, humiliation and power.”

**P9 journal.** P9 writes a 961-word reading journal. She describes the writing style of the novel as “poetic,” “visceral,” and “powerful,” and states that it “packed a punch.” She points to the loss of a way of life and the tension between generations brought on by residential schools and the conversion to Christianity. She notes the “[c]onflict between the generations and the teachings and belief systems. Described very well here. I never really thought about it before.” She draws a comparison between Indigenous experience and the Holocaust. P9 writes, “Though I thought I knew about the residential schools and the abuse, and the results of that abuse, this book made it visceral in it’s [sic] description of the path of Saul Indian Horse. The tragedy and seriousness of what we did and how we destroyed a vital and natural way of life was really brought home.”

The journal entries by P9 indicate concern and compassion for the main character as well as shock at the abuse perpetrated by the priest. She writes, “OMG. Guess I should have known.

Father B was a monster like the others.” This statement follows an earlier comment about the positive influence of the love, attention, and acceptance the priest showed the main character. P9 also articulates a sense of empathic distress when she writes, “This section was so painful to read – I can’t imagine what it must have been like to live it.” She then notes, “Palpable: The cruelty makes me shake my head with incomprehension. Anger too.”

**P10 journal.** P10 writes extensively, compiling 2,985 words in her reading journal. She describes the writing in the novel as “succinct,” “engaging narrative,” “insightful,” and “beautiful poetic imagery.” However, the balance of the journal is a collection of direct quotes from the book. I do not assume the meaning P10 derives from the author’s words, or her personal response to it, and do not code the passages she quotes.

**Discussion of reading journal findings.** I frame the narrative experience of the participants with 86 of the 182 text segments (47%) highlighted in the reading journal data and organized into 11 codes. The intent of the journaling activity is to capture participants’ intellectual and emotional response to the text as a solitary reader, therefore, the fact this much of the journaling focuses on the writing style and content of the novel is to be expected. In all, 17 of these text segments record comments on the writing style and their assessment of the novel as a creative work that is engaging in its “clean,” “emotive,” and “poetic” prose, descriptive imagery, and animal metaphors. P9 writes, for example, “*Indian Horse*, though simply written, packed a powerful punch.”

The remaining 69 text segments document the readers’ narrative experience regarding aspects of the text such as descriptions of racism, residential school life, and the life experience of the main character. The basic theme *description of racism* highlights journal entries describing acts of racism the main character encounters. For example, P6 points to the irony in a non-

Indigenous hockey team named the Chiefs. P8 writes, “Hate, humiliation and power,” and asks, “What did they want from him?” The basic theme *description of residential school life* captures journal entries about events at the residential school. P4 writes, “Disposable. How can these children[’s] lives mean nothing?” P7 notes the, “slow destruction of a child's sense of self worth.” P9 states, “Palpable: The cruelty makes me shake my head with incomprehension. Anger too. The list of children they broke and how they did it is tragic.” P6 writes, “The successful life that he [the main character] could have led, the hockey career, the friendships and the family, everything was taken away from him by the scars and damage inflicted by his relationship with Father Leboutilier and by the destruction of his family by the residential school system.”

The basic theme *description of life experience portrayed* captures journal entries on the impact of being separated from one’s family, community, and culture as understood through the experience of the main character in the narrative. P4, for example, writes a series of entries on this element of the novel: “Disregarded, uprooted and untethered;” “Felt the real divide between the traditional way and the new teachings that were forced upon the new generation at school. Tension;” “More loss. More pain,” and “Being denied of their very essence.” P7 questions, “[T]here are survivors[,] but can anyone ever feel ‘free’ once you've experienced such sorrow[?]”

The journals also contain 37 text segments that illuminate the spectrum of participants’ empathic response to the novel. Although several text segments also express happiness and gratitude for positive events the main character experiences, the balance is coded as *empathic distress*, with specific focus on the readers’ empathic response to the role of the priest in the narrative. Koopman (2015) characterizes empathic distress as negative feelings including anxiety, discomfort, tension, and sadness arising from observing the pain of another individual

(p. 66). Koopman confirms fictional characters, as well as real people, trigger empathic reactions. Participants express empathic distress in terms of anger, disgrace, shame, horror, and sorrow. For example, P4 writes, “Horrific. Brutal. Inhumane. Unimaginable,” and “Very difficult to read.” Other participants use words such as “heartbreaking” and “sorrow,” and describe feeling anger, “unbelievable sadness,” and shame as they read the novel. P8 asks, “How do humans ever become so inhuman?” P9 writes, “This section [of the novel] was so painful to read – I can't imagine what it must have been like to live it.”

The basic theme *empathic response to role of priest* captures the affective response of participants to the character of the residential school priest. It includes text segments that express anxiety about the close relationship between the priest and the main character, degrees of surprise at the revelation of abuse at the end of the novel, and the shift from admiring the priest to feeling a sense of betrayal of the trust and affection the main character held for him. P4 describes the revelation of abuse as “Very powerful, visceral pain.”

Studies by Bal and Veltkamp (2013) and Johnson (2012, 2013) demonstrate fiction influences reader empathy, and that the degree of influence is dependent on the level of emotional transportation into the story. Bal and Veltkamp position transportation as a process in which all mental faculties converge to focus on the events in a narrative (p. 3). Transportation, being immersed or absorbed in a story, is evidenced by a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery (Johnson, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Mar & Oatley, 2008). A total of 34 text segments from the journal data indicate transportation into the narrative, most significantly in terms of readers expressing concern and compassion for the fictional characters and the novel triggering reflection.

The basic theme *novel triggered reflection* captures memories evoked by the setting and events depicted in the novel as well as connections readers draw between the narrative and reading, relationships, and events in their current lives. Memories of skating, playing hockey, and traveling in Northern Ontario are recurrent themes in the journal data and account for half of the text segments indicating transportation into the narrative. This finding echoes ethnographic research by Ross (1999) that depicts reading as a reciprocal transaction in which readers use personal experience to construct meaning from the text and use the text to make sense of their lives. Mar and Oatley (2008) further posit “stories are abstractions and thus rely on the participation of the reader in order to be completely comprehensible” (p. 178). Research by the authors and others (see also Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu, 2013) suggests narrative fiction sparks vivid imagery and prompts autobiographical memories in the reader (p. 178). The reader’s memories, in turn, support imagery suggested by the text and facilitate narrative engagement (p. 180).

Another 18 text segments from the journal data suggest the evolution of new perspectives as participants document acknowledgement of Indigenous life experience as portrayed in the novel, new awareness, and insight into the behaviour of the main character. The basic theme *acknowledgement* captures text segments that indicate participant recognition of issues and challenges facing Indigenous peoples. Ten of the 11 text segments coded as *acknowledgement* are written by two participants, P7 and P9. P7 writes, “[W]e must recognize that it [the residential school system] was cultural genocide.” She notes, “[S]o many knew of the damage being inflicted at the residential schools but it was either ignored or condoned as being the better alternative to children living the ‘Indian’ way.” P7 states, “We are only at the beginning of the path to reconciliation ... we have to listen, respect and follow their [Indigenous peoples’] lead to

healing and reparations.” P9 observes, “The division of families occurred not only through the residential schools but also through conversion to Christianity.” She states, “Though I thought I knew about the residential schools and the abuse, and the results of that abuse, this book made it visceral in it’s [sic] description of the path of Saul Indian Horse. The tragedy and seriousness of what we did and how we destroyed a vital and natural way of life was really brought home.”

Overall, the journal data paints a picture of readers who attend closely to the writing style and narrative elements of the novel, are transported into the story, respond to it with empathic distress, and generate new perspectives. Interestingly, the journal data represent the majority of text segments coded across all data streams in four basic themes: *description of life experience portrayed* (14 of 16); *description of racism* (13 of 19); *description of residential school life* (12 of 16); and, *empathic response to role of priest* (10 of 10). I interpret this trend to be a reflection of the journaling process as study participants attend closely to the narrative events and document those that evoke cognitive and affective responses.

### **Book Club Discussion Findings**

I code 178 text segments from the book club discussion transcript in 30 basic themes (see Appendix I). Overall, 72 (40%) of the text segments are located in two basic themes, *novel triggered reflection* and *developed awareness*. *Novel triggered reflection* is a significant basic theme to emerge in the book club discussion data and accounts for 43 of 69 text segments from all data sources in the study. The book club discussion appears to provide a venue for members to share personal memories evoked by the novel. Participants connect their own lived experience to places, events, and characters in the novel. They share memories from their personal and work lives that relate to some aspect of the narrative. The setting of the novel triggers memories of traveling, working, and living in Northern Ontario for some participants. They share these



memories with the group and the connection they feel to the physical locale of the novel.

Participants also reflect on time spent in Northern Ontario and the people they were with. Other participants reflect on conversations with friends, colleagues, and acquaintances impacted by the residential school system. Some share their knowledge of public figures who have experienced racism, or sexual abuse. The discourse has the effect of paralleling lived experience with the fictional account of the experience of the characters in the novel.

Participants also share early memories as children in school learning, or not learning, about Indigenous peoples and cultures. The following dialogue captures one such moment:

P6: “Well I can remember when I was in elementary school where we, I'm pretty sure, we never learned about residential schools but I do remember we learned about Pacific West Coast, you know, Native culture.”

P7: “We sure didn't.”

P9: “Well you did, you were in BC. We didn't learn anything.”

P6: “But what we learned was we talked about potlatches and why the potlatches were wrong and why they were outlawed and they [the government] had to stop those things because they [Indigenous peoples] were just giving away all their possessions so they didn't have enough to eat and it was a terrible thing and the government had to intercede because they were just going to, they didn't know what they were doing.”

P8: “Yeah.”

P6: “They needed to have somebody help them so they weren't going to hurt themselves basically. And that was kind of the, and I still remember that class and the teacher, and we had to write it all down and there were ...”

P[?]: “And when you're young you believe what you're told.”

The text segments describing new perspectives, specifically in terms of developing awareness, also represent a significant emergent theme from the book club discussion data. Dialogue on participants' level of awareness of residential schools before reading the novel feature prominently and result in 29 coded text segments for the basic theme *developed awareness*. This accounts for 60% of the text segments regarding awareness from all data streams. Participant awareness ranges from none, to some, to new and developing awareness of residential schools, and Indigenous life experience and cultures. P6 states, "I feel that I got a lot of history to make up because I, you know, it's nothing I ever learned about and it's like this big hole in my understanding ..." P10 agrees and adds, "I don't think any of us ever learned." P10 speaks further about being unaware that many Indigenous children died at residential school. She has the following exchange with P9:

P10: "And that's what this book brought home to me that I had not ..."

P9: "Yeah, about all the ones that died there too I really had no idea."

P10: "Yes, died from abuse and they died from suicide."

P9: "Yeah. And from starvation and who knows what."

P10: "And all those kids, the other kids were witnesses and ..."

P9: "And TB. They died of TB. I had no idea."

A new level of awareness is also evident in this dialogue between P9 and P10. P9 comments, "And, you know, you think you know about that whole experience [of residential schools] because you hear it over and over again, but that [book] made it, you know, so visceral, so palpable. It just made it, uh, you know, I'm reading it thinking, '*fuck*'." P10 adds, "So I kind of knew about it [the residential school system] but, I'm like you [P9 name], it wasn't until I read this book, despite all of the truth and reconciliation and all that we've heard. I had no idea of the

extent and the enormity [of it] and this [book] was believable to me.” P10 describes the narrative as believable and touches on a sentiment that runs through the book club discussion, articulated within minutes of the start of the meeting when P1 says, “This hit us because it was a visceral recounting of what it was really like and it rang true.” It appears the line between truth and fiction is faint for the participants as the discussion flows between the experiences of the characters in the novel and the experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada, as it is understood by this non-Indigenous group of readers.

**Discussion of book club discussion findings.** The experience of the participants, as documented in the book club discussion data, supports theory that frames the act of reading as a transaction between text and reader in which the reader constructs meaning through the use of literary codes and conventions in combination with personal experience (Ross, 1999). Readers engage in a reciprocal transaction with text in which they draw on lived experience to construct meaning from the text and use the text to make sense of their lives. The book club meeting provides a venue for this reciprocal transaction to be expanded and shared among a group of people who share the experience of having individually read the same novel. Mar and Oatley position this as reader participation, a necessary part of the reading process facilitating concrete comprehension of the narrative which is, in effect, an abstraction. I propose the level of participation is amplified when meaning is mediated within a group. Mar and Oatley, and others such as Djikic, Oatley, & Moldoveanu (2013), suggest fiction prompts autobiographic memories which support narrative engagement and transportation into the story. Participants note memories triggered by the novel throughout this study, however, it is during the book club discussion in particular that reflection on past experience appears to lead to moments of reflexivity. For example, participants recall their school experience in an attempt to clarify and understand their

knowledge base and how it was constructed. This is really an exploration of the question “How do I know what I know?” For P8, the reflection, new awareness, and reflexivity evoked by the novel prompt her to ask, “So if this book was so powerful, now what? Like, where does this take us as a book club?” This launches the participants into a discussion of other Indigenous-authored books to read as a group.

To fully describe the breadth of experience among study participants it is important to note that while all participants express concern and compassion for the main character in the novel as well as empathic distress in response to the experiences portrayed, P1 also expresses a feeling of resentment about how non-Indigenous people are characterized in the book. She states, “For me there is a little good in the worst of us and a little bad in the best of us.” She argues there must be some redeeming quality in the clergy who ran the residential school. She also articulates her belief in the power of choice regardless of the circumstances. She says, “Horrible things have happened but we still have a choice ...” as the group discusses the behaviour of the main character. This represents a challenge to the dominant thread of the discussion and it is significant that P1 contributes her opinion openly. Barstow (2003) points to the homogeneity of most book clubs as a barrier to challenging preconceived notions of the group. However, the long history of this book club and subsequent familiarity among group members may be a factor that facilitates the sharing of different, even opposing, views.

The book club discussion findings support research by Addington (2000) who credits the book club setting with “creating a forum for egalitarian, exploratory talk” that prompts “connections among texts, among people, and between texts and human experience” (p. 242). Reading researchers characterize shared-reading groups as sites of significant cultural work (Fuller & Rehberg Sedo, 2014; Konchar Farr, 2008; Long, 1986, 1993; Ross, 1999; Ross,

McKechnie, & Rothbauer, 2006). Long (1986) finds “books both provide a signal that people must come to terms with change, and mediate between people directly involved in activism or analysis and those who feel the impact of social change more subtly or more indirectly in the routines of daily life” (p. 600). I believe, for some participants, an underlying sense of complacency exists. Although complacency is not explicitly articulated in the reading journals, the book club discussion, or the individual interviews, I believe it is evident in the need expressed by some participants to do more because they now know more. For these participants the book both signalled *and* mediated change.

### **Individual Interview Findings**

The following is a synopsis of participant responses to the individual interview questions. The intent is for each participant to describe, in their own words, the experience of reading the novel and then discussing it in their book club. I ask specifically about aspects of their experience that indicate transportation into the narrative such as the level of engagement, visualization, emotions evoked by the novel, and the extent of concern and compassion for the main character. I get at the impact of reading and discussing the novel by enquiring about changes in perceptions, sensitivity to other media, and whether the novel serves as a catalyst for conversations.

Participant responses are split when I ask if *Indian Horse* is a book they would have chosen to read on their own with five responding “yes,” and four responding “no.” Those responding “yes” did so in degrees of affirmation ranging from “definitely” to “probably” to “might have.” Two participants cite book recommendations as a factor when choosing what to read. Two interviewees say they would not have chosen the book simply because they did not

know about it. Three recognize the author by name, and one participant cites not knowing the author as the reason she would not have chosen to read *Indian Horse* on her own.

Eight interviewees report they will now seek out other Indigenous-authored novels with seven stating they “definitely” or “absolutely” will. P6, for example, states, “Yes. Absolutely. In fact I've already got a couple of his [Richard Wagamese’s] titles on hold at the library and the very first book I read after finishing *Indian Horse* was by an Indigenous author. So, definitely.” Another participant confirms she has already purchased another book by the same author. P7 comments on the media coverage on Indigenous authors and predicts the book club will likely read novels by other Indigenous writers. The remaining interviewee responds that she might seek out other novels by Indigenous authors but prefers to read less serious books for the entertainment value.

All nine participants report feeling engaged in the book with eight describing their level of engagement in terms of being very, totally, or completely engaged. P3 comments, “Oh, I was totally engaged in the book and in the story.” P4 responds, “Oh, a hundred percent. I found it very engaging right from the start.” One participant talks specifically about her high level of engagement and how it was disrupted by the journaling activity. She says, “... I just did not want to break off to write down thoughts ... if I'd had the time, I would have just sat down and read it from start to finish.” One interview respondent struggles to articulate her engagement with the novel and states, “I guess I was engaged in the book and the reading of it. But, I didn't necessarily love everything about the book.”

Three participants comment on the writing style as a factor in their level of engagement with one describing it as an easy read and two citing the author's simple yet beautiful use of language. The content of the narrative is also credited as a trigger for engagement. For one reader

who had been to Northern Ontario, the descriptions of the landscape create a connection to the story. Others relate to the scenes of skating, practicing and playing hockey and reflect on their own experience with the sport.

The participants speak about the emotions the book evokes in terms of anger, disbelief, sadness, sorrow, horror, shame, disgrace, regret, and resentment. I code these responses as *empathic distress*. Four other themes emerge from the responses to this question including *developed awareness*, *identification*, *admiration for Indigenous peoples/cultures*, and *inspired to read/learn more*. The majority (22 of 27) text segments fall into two codes *developed awareness*, and *empathic distress*. P1, for example, describes the depiction of residential schools as “heart wrenching.” P8 talks about residential schools as “just so horrifying and shaming even though I have not personally been involved in anything like that I feel on behalf of ... my own ethnic background and the fact that I come from colonists.” P7 characterizes the emotional impact of the description of residential school life as a quiet sorrow and states, “It’s just little smaller moments [in the novel] that just kind of take your breath away, you know, just really understanding what they [residential school children] were experiencing.” P9 is appalled by the residential school experience portrayed in the novel and expresses both sadness and anger “that so many lives were wasted and destroyed because of the residential schools.”

More than half of the participants discuss the extent of their awareness of the residential school system and the impact on Indigenous peoples and cultures. P1 recounts a recent conversation with a family member in which they talk about the fact they had no awareness of the residential school located in their community as they grew up. P6 describes how reading the novel made her realize how little she knows about the history of residential schools. She says, “... it was something never mentioned in school. I never studied it, never learned about it. It was

just this thing that, you know, I had no idea about.” P9 also speaks of her awareness of the residential school system prior to reading *Indian Horse*. She says, “... we read about it [residential schools], we all think we know, but this book, his [Richard Wagamese’s] writing, he made it so much more real for me.” P2 states, “I knew about abuse at the schools so I wasn’t surprised [by the events depicted in the novel], but you do feel kind of disgraced and ashamed. It’s impossible not to feel badly when you’re reading about things like that.”

P10 researched the Indian Act as an undergraduate student five decades ago and “was horrified at that point at the paternalistic, dehumanizing manner that Canada was dealing with its Native peoples.” She comments, “I was very aware ... that the aim of residential schools was to assimilate the Aboriginal peoples, the First Nations, the Inuit, the Métis into mainstream Canadian culture. That was the purpose from the days of Confederation. That’s what they [political leaders and clergy] thought needed to happen and [I recognized] the cultural genocide that that implied.” P10 admits “[I] had no idea about the murders, and I consider any suicides in residential schools to be murders, any physical abuse and emotional abuse to be basically torture.” She expands, “not only was the government complicit up to a certain point but the churches were complicit. In fact, they really carried out this mandate in a murderous way. So that, that was really shocking to me to have that awareness.” She continues, “Any Indigenous person who went through residential schools and survived and then went on to have children, I mean, that was a generation that went through a holocaust. And so they were just not in a position, or capable of being the people they would have been had they not had that experience.” P10 concludes, “So, this book was a real eye-opener.”

P8 and P9 both talk about how they identify with the main character in the novel. P8 comments, “I find nature to be such a powerful force in my own life, calming [and] revalidating,



and so when he talked about his connection with nature and how going back to it always strengthened him I could identify with that and the way he just described the imagery of his connection with the land was so poetic and really drew me in.” P9 describes her identification with the main character in broader, yet significant terms. She states, “... he’s another human being so in a way I can identify with him and then see what happens to him and how he’s changed. It makes it [the experience of reading the novel] very powerful. It’s very ... potent.”

P1 specifically articulates a feeling of resentment as part of her experience reading the novel and notes she struggles with this response. She explains, “... in some way the non-Indigenous person in me, resented the fact that there was not one non-Indigenous person that was decent... I just believe that, you know, in any group of people there’s evil and there’s good and not everyone is evil in one group of people and not everyone is evil in another group.” P1 goes on to convey her understanding that, given the experiences of residential school children, “there must be a feeling that everyone is evil...” I code the text segments as *resentment* to capture it as an outlier. Given the size of the research group, the social risk inherent in group dynamics, and the sensitivity around discussing Indigenous issues, I believe this experience is important to note even though it is expressed by a single participant.

Participants were asked to what extent they were able to visualize the narrative as they read the text. The experience of visualizing the story indicates transportation into the narrative world which predicts empathy development in the reader (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013). I code emergent themes to capture the extent of visualization, and to further note visualization based on the descriptions of the landscape, hockey, and residential school life, as well as the author’s writing style. Five of the nine interviewees make seven specific references to the author’s description of the landscape and cite it as a key factor in their ability to visualize the

story. For some, it resonates with their own personal connection to the land and nature, and for others it evokes memories of being in Northern Ontario. P1 finds the author “painted a really strong picture in my mind.” Two participants cite Wagamese’s writing style as the leverage for visualizing the story. P10 specifically comments on his use of metaphors in creating “a very visual book.”

The descriptions of hockey are another aspect of the novel that seem to facilitate readers’ visualization of the story as cited by four participants. Others highlight the descriptions of life at the residential school. P2 is moved by the author’s depiction of what it was like for the children. She states, “Well, I think the school was very adequately portrayed. You know, the drudgery of the children[’s] day-to-day existence, the horror of being taken from your family, you know, the terrible nights where you’re lying there wishing you were somewhere else. And, then the sexual abuse – just the horror of it. It’s profound. And, the day-to-day activities of the school, you know, mostly focused around chores.” P7 finds the descriptions of residential school life difficult to connect with, saying, “... it’s almost beyond my comprehension... [Wagamese] described the hollowness in children’s eyes and just that, that sorrow and that sort of overwhelming sadness...”

When asked about the extent to which the main character in the novel inspires a sense of concern and/or compassion, all participants express great compassion for the protagonist describing it as total, complete, and absolute. Emotional engagement is another indicator of transportation into the narrative, a predictor for empathy development (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson 2012, 2013). P6 states, “I found that I kept wanting to protect him and I was very concerned about him all the way through,” especially with regard to his close relationship to the priest. P9 comments, “You know, I wished he’d had someone to speak to, somebody who could

help him.” A sense that the main character was on his own, isolated, segregated, alienated, and abandoned was a recurring theme and I code these text segments as *description of main character being alone*. P1, P2, and P3 focus on this aspect of the protagonist’s experience. P1 states, “I can’t imagine what it would be like to be alone in the world ... but, just not alone in the world, alone in a world that was intent on stripping you of ... your identity...”

Another theme to emerge from the responses to this question was the idea the negative and self-destructive behaviour of the main character made perfect sense when the context for his choices was known and understood. P7 states, “I think the way Richard Wagamese wrote the book is that ... you can walk in his [the main character’s] shoes ... what I found is that I understood his rage and it made perfect sense to me and the alcoholism made perfect sense to me.” P6 notes the same when she comments, “because of the back story it became much more understandable why he behaved the way he did.” P3 explains, “I was very concerned about, you know, his choices he was making in his life. But then ... I didn’t realize ... I was one of the ones that was quite astounded that the priest, which I thought was so nice, wasn’t nice at all.” P10 observes, “it seemed to me like he was hanging on pretty tight and then of course the explanation [the sexual abuse perpetrated by the priest] came at the end [of the novel].”

P8 describes an insight she has after reading and discussing the novel at the book club meeting. Initially, she is angered by the main character’s “apparent coldness” toward the priest “who did so much for him.” She admits the “feeling of compassion for Saul disappeared when I felt that he was misbehaving or not meeting expectations for compassion for this man... And I thought about that later that we often do that. We blame others for their misbehaviour in so many ways when we really don’t have any idea what the context is.” This is a significant insight attained from reading a fiction novel. By describing it as something that came to her over time,

the experience fits with the assertion by Bal & Veltkamp that the empathy, evident following reading, continues to manifest over time as readers consciously and unconsciously connect elements of a fiction narrative to aspects of daily life.

I also code a segment of text that captures a noteworthy aspect of the experience of P7 and speaks to the power of fiction to create a visceral experience in a reader. She states, “None of it [the book] feels like fiction,” and explains, “I think we’re hearing more and more of the story [of residential schools in Canada] so all of it, all of it’s very real ... the description of some of the incidents at the school I just felt like he’s telling a story that has actually happened... It felt very real...” Bal & Veltkamp contend the impact of fiction balances on the creation of a realistic narrative world. The result, according to the authors, is an opportunity to be transported into the story and subsequently changed by the narrative experience.

I attempt to gauge if the participants have been changed by their experience reading and discussing *Indian Horse* by asking if they perceive a change in their perceptions of Indigenous peoples since their encounter with the text. Both P3 and P6 report no change in their perceptions of Indigenous peoples after reading and discussing the novel, and P1 is unsure if her perceptions changed. The remaining six participants all report a shift in perceptions regarding Indigenous peoples and characterize it as the beginning of a process, as enlightenment, as building on their level of awareness, and as a deepening appreciation for the experience of Indigenous peoples. P9 states, “I think it [reading and discussing the novel] made me more understanding, more compassionate.” P10 comments, “So how this changed my views is to have a much deeper appreciation ... of what these people have gone through.” P8 says, “I would say it just started a process of creating a view other than the one that is created by media and discussion and *our*

[with emphasis] understanding of history.” P4 finds the book enlightened her and offers “a whole different level of understanding,” and has recommended the book to family and friends.

In responding to this question several participants also express their acknowledgement of Indigenous life experience in Canada. P10 states, “... this gave me so much more awareness of what they [Indigenous peoples] are up against, what the colossal struggle is.” P7 says, “You know, they lost their way of life. It was a very natural, magical way of life that they were for thousands of years connected to the land and the earth...” P1 recognizes the loss of important family and cultural ties for many Indigenous peoples and the subsequent impact spanning generations. P2 speaks about understanding the “daily experiences... feeling [like] lesser members of society, feeling less privileged, and trapped in your social situation... When they have this amazing history in this country and been reduced to these little outcast communities where they are obliged to suffer degradations...” I believe it is important for non-Indigenous Canadians to be confronted with the experience of Indigenous peoples and to recognize the historical trauma and the racism that exists and persists. However, it is far too easy to assume all members of a group of people share the same experience and have the same views. It is important to be cognizant that a group of people connected by history and race is made up of individuals with a spectrum of experiences. It also does not do anyone justice to romanticize the past as “magical.”

Three participants speak at length about their personal experience with Indigenous peoples, two having grown up in Western Canadian cities with large urban populations of Indigenous peoples. For these participants, the novel triggers reflection on past experiences, their thoughts at the time, and the understanding they gleaned from reading *Indian Horse*. P7 speaks about having no awareness of residential schools in the late 1960s and 1970s when she would “see a lot of

Indigenous peoples passed out on the street and, you know, stumbling around, and back then who knew ... we had no idea.” P6 shares a similar experience of observing Indigenous peoples in an inner city, saying, “It was just so depressing and so sad.” She recalls her understanding and awareness changing as she worked with Indigenous students and learned about their traditions and cultures for the first time. P8 shares a more recent experience working with people from a local Indigenous community. She says, “And so again you realize that other, in quotation marks, is not other, it’s the same as us in so many ways. Same challenges. Same needs. Same desires, and hopes, and heartache.”

Several interviewees also express admiration for Indigenous peoples and cultures. P10 expresses her respect for Indigenous peoples and states, “I’ve long had a great admiration for Indigenous peoples and for their ability to maintain a culture which is so different from Western culture.” Other participants remark, with admiration and respect, on the long history of Indigenous peoples, their traditional way of life and connection to the land.

All nine interviewees agree reading *Indian Horse* was a meaningful way to gain an understanding of the life experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada. P9 states, “A book can paint a picture. An article, or a news report, it doesn’t do that.” P8 finds the novel to be “a meaningful start, but I think it’s always dangerous to create an image from one source. So I’m sure Indigenous people are as varied and layered and complex as anyone else is...” P7 finds the novel impactful and P10 “would recommend it to every Canadian.”

The participants also agree reading the novel may serve as a catalyst for conversations regarding Indigenous peoples and reconciliation beyond the book club. P1 states the novel “has created a lot of thought in me and it has created discussions and I’m sure it will ripple on through my life.” P2 tells about discussing the book with friends in Montreal, Winnipeg, Vancouver, and

elsewhere who plan to read the novel in their book clubs based on her recommendation. P6 speaks about a convergence of experiences, ideas, and events from reading the novel to attending a conference and exploring ways to fulfill the Truth and Reconciliation Commission recommendations regarding post-secondary education. P7 sees the potential of using the novel as a reference point in future conversations and feels it has created a level of awareness that will make her “more likely to be able to have that conversation with people.” P9 talks of posting her views on the novel to Facebook, as well as her recommendation to read it, and her conflicted feelings around the Canada 150 celebrations. It appears that for all of the study participants, the novel provides a touch point to talk to people about Indigenous issues in Canada. It is the catalyst for conversations that may not have taken place otherwise.

When asked if reading *Indian Horse* has made them more, or less sensitive to media stories on issues specific to reconciliation and Indigenous peoples, six of the nine participants report being more sensitive after reading and discussing the novel. P7 states, once you have “a sense of what the dimensions are of an issue then I think you do start noticing articles, and being more attuned to the articles, and to the language that’s used in the articles.” P8 explains, “It’s given me a story to hang things on... Around what I hear from the media, I will buffer it with the experience of this book.” P9 talks about the book club members’ continuing conversation on Facebook, sharing media stories and discussions that continue the dialogue triggered by the book. P6 credits the book with stimulating an interest in reading and learning more about Indigenous peoples. P1 is unsure if she experienced a change in her perception of Indigenous peoples, or if it changed, how it changed. She states, “I like to think I view them as people and I did before [reading the novel].” Two other participants report no change in their perception of Indigenous peoples based on their experience reading and discussing *Indian Horse*.

When talking about the experience discussing the novel at the book club meeting, P2 states, “Well, I found it was a more focused experience than we’ve ever had. Basically, I think, because you were recording it and people were very, not careful about what they said, but they were really thoughtful about what they chose to say. And, the discussion was a lot deeper sometimes than we normally get into a book.” P1 speculates people were concerned about appearing racist and suggests the topic of the novel plus the presence of a researcher observing and recording the event may have had an influence. She says, “... we seemed less honest than usual... It didn’t seem like an ordinary book club to me... Like, we’ve never had a book where we seem to think now we should somehow become agents of change in some way... I found it, that aspect, awkward. And I felt we sounded like, a bit of, I don’t know, pompous white women.” She concludes by saying, “So. Anyways... it was a good read. It certainly got us talking and like I say it’ll, it’ll rest with me for some time, as will Richard Wagamese.”

P3 articulates another response that is divergent from the group when she comments, “I can’t say that I feel guilt about what was done to the Native people because I wasn’t part of that. So I know some people feel like guilty, but I don’t feel guilty.” For P7, the book generates “straightforward and honest” discussion but with fewer divergent opinions than usually encountered in this group. “There’s [sic] usually strong feelings on, on a number of different fronts but it, it wasn’t the case with Indian Horse. And whether that was because we were being recorded, or we were being extra thoughtful about what we were saying, I’m not sure.” P10 observes most book club members had a similar response to the book, “So much so that [P8 name] at the end said, ‘How is this going to effect us as a book club?’ That’s never, that question has never come up. Has never come up.” She continues, “I think most people had a similar response to the book. And it had to do really with the, our lack of understanding of just how



dreadful the residential school system was to everybody who was ripped away from their families.”

P8 characterizes the discussion as “probably the most homogenous discussion of a book that I’ve experienced with this book club... I’ve been thinking about that and I really don’t know [why]. Maybe because it was such an eye opener for all of us... We are such a non-diverse group... I think we were all coming from a position of naiveté.” P2 finds “people’s sense of outrage, feeling disgrace, feeling humiliated that our culture has been so thoughtless of the Indigenous peoples” resounded in the discussion. P4 says, “... our experiences were all pretty much the same. We felt very strongly that we learned a lot from the book and that we all felt, you know, sad and angry that this happened and is happening and I think we all want to know what we can do to educate ourselves further and what we can do to help invoke some change.” P9 comments, “Well, I think we all agreed it was an important book... so true to life.”

P6 captures her overall experience of *Indian Horse*, saying, “... reading a book like this is a, just an incredibly powerful way to kind of empathize or understand a period of history that, or a person in a social situation that is, you know, something that I’ve really never thought of, it is so far removed from my experience... I do find that this is sort of my way of getting that kind of emotional understanding and it does for me open doors to, you know, I think now, you know, I would be much more prepared to read a nonfiction account, or, you know, a historical account.” P10 took the step to research the author and share parallels she uncovers between the author’s life and the characters he creates in *Indian Horse*. She explains in the interview, “... my sense was his was a true voice... Very fictionalized, but very true.”

**Discussion of individual interview findings.** Each of the nine individual interviews I conduct closely follow the interview guide with seven questions and 10 possible probes used to

delve into the essence of the experience of each participant and describe it using their own words. Two participants, P5 and P11 withdrew from the study before the interview phase.

Overall, the individual interview data point to a high level of transportation into the narrative as participants read the novel. Six basic themes capturing 42 text segments frame the experience of being immersed in the story in terms of the participants' concern and compassion for the main character, their level of engagement, memories triggered by the novel, the ability to visualize the story, and identification with elements of the narrative (see Appendix J). Research by Mar and Oatley (2008), and Djikic, Oatley, and Moldoveanu (2013), suggests narrative fiction sparks vivid imagery and prompts autobiographical memories in the reader that, in turn, support imagery suggested by the text to facilitate narrative engagement. This binding of lived experience to abstractions in the fiction novel transported readers into the narrative and created an experience that was a hybrid of both and unique to each reader. Ross demonstrates avid readers engage in a reciprocal transaction with text in which they use personal experience to construct meaning from text and use text to make sense of their lives. Literature provides a rich context in which to explore relationships, emotions, and motivations (see Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Boler 1997; Dewan, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999), and has the capacity to extend our own experiences and perspectives by presenting life as lived by others (Dewan, 2013; Hodgson & Thomson, 2000; Johnson, 2013; MacAdam, 1995). Storytelling, according to MacAdam, gives information context and inspires critical thinking and inquiry (p. 244). Transportation is evidenced by a high level of cognitive engagement, emotional involvement, and vivid imagery (Johnson, 2013; Mar & Oatley, 2008). Researchers describe transportation as a process in which all mental faculties converge to focus on the events in a narrative (Bal &

Veltkamp, 2013; Koopman, 2015; Nell, 1988). The result, according to Bal and Veltkamp, is an opportunity to be transported into the story and subsequently changed through the narrative.

Research further demonstrates fiction influences reader empathy and that the degree of influence is dependent on the level of emotional transportation into the story (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013). All nine participants express empathic responses to the novel. The individual interview data indicates the overall affective response was one of empathic distress as participants report feelings of horror, sorrow, sadness, regret, disgrace, shame, and anger. The current literature on reading and empathy suggests the importance of empathy lies in the positive correlation between high levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour (Bal & Veltkamp, 2013; Johnson, 2012, 2013).

Study participants describe behaviours arising from the experience of reading and discussing *Indian Horse*. I capture these in the individual interview data in 35 text segments recorded in six basic themes including *catalyst for change*, *catalyst for conversations*, *inspired to read/learn more*, *recommend book to others*, *sensitized to media*, and *shift in perceptions of Indigenous peoples*. Episkenew (2009) argues Indigenous literature offers more than aesthetic value and, in fact, serves a socio-pedagogical function. The findings of this study support her position. Participants voice a need for change and express a desire to play a role. Since reading and discussing *Indian Horse* they report starting conversations with people outside of their book club, seeking more reading experiences with Indigenous-authored works, they recommend *Indian Horse* to others in their social circles, some feel more sensitized to media stories on Indigenous issues, and many report their perceptions of Indigenous peoples have changed. I deem these behaviours to be prosocial and believe participants in this study demonstrate engagement with the narrative that goes beyond an empathic response and, in effect, represents

active reflectivity and reflexivity. Boler (1997) characterizes this as testimonial reading as readers reflect, challenge assumptions and perspectives, and become active in the production of meaning.

### **Discussion of Overall Findings**

A thorough analysis of data collected from the reading journals, book discussion transcript, and individual in-depth interview transcripts resulted in 57 codes to capture more than 600 text segments in an effort to explore and describe the experience of the study participants. The data, when examined in its entirety, can be categorized into five organizing themes based on the codes and underlying text segments. The five organizing themes are: 1) Narrative Experience; 2) Indicators of Transportation; 3) New Perspectives; 4) Empathic Response, and 5) Prosocial Behaviour (see Appendix G).

The theme Narrative Experience organizes 14 codes with a total of 176 text segments. It represents participant experience with the novel and records comments on the author's writing style as well as their assessment of the novel as a creative work. The theme also captures readers' experience with aspects of the content of the novel including the setting, events, and characters. The majority of coded text segments derive from the reading journal data as participants documented their response to the novel as they engaged with it individually. Codes in this organizing theme capture repeating data regarding, for example, descriptions of racism and residential school life.

Due to the importance of transportation as a predictor of empathy development, I coded text segments (129) from all data sources that indicate transportation into the narrative. The codes in the organizing theme Indicators of Transportation capture recurring themes including: *novel triggered reflection (69)*; *extent of concern/compassion (26)*; *level of engagement (15)*;

*visualization* (11); *identification* (6), and *book becomes part of you* (2). The most significant element to surface in the data was reflection on personal memories triggered by the novel and was largely represented in data derived from the book club discussion transcript. Participants connect their lived experience to places, events, and characters in the novel, sharing episodes in their personal and work lives that speak to some aspect of the book.

I captured the theme of New Perspectives in terms of new awareness, acknowledgement of Indigenous life experience, insight into the behaviour of the main character, and reflexivity. I organized 93 text segments from all data sources in this category, the majority originating in the book club discussion of the novel and as responses to interview questions.

The theme Empathic Response organizes six codes capturing 69 text segments to document participants' affective response to the book. Empathic distress is by far the most frequently noted response to the narrative with 44 text segments representing the experience of participants. Readers' affective response is also described in terms of their empathic response to the role of the priest in the narrative, and admiration for Indigenous peoples and cultures. This organizing theme also demonstrates the breadth of experience of the participants with text segments that represent one participant's resentment of the way non-Indigenous people are portrayed in the novel, and the sense of being guilt-free expressed by another.

Participants express the impact of the book in terms of being inspired to read more Indigenous-centered literature and to learn more about Indigenous peoples and cultures. Many also indicate a shift in perceptions of Indigenous peoples and increased sensitivity to media regarding Indigenous issues. All participants see the book as a catalyst for conversations, and for some it serves as a catalyst for invoking change. Most participants have and will recommend the book to other people they know. I categorize these experiences as examples of prosocial

behaviour prompted by the book. Change begins with the awareness that it is necessary, and reading the novel led to new perspectives in the form of developed awareness. I believe it is an act of prosocial behaviour when a participant continues to seek new knowledge and shares what she knows with others. Text segments underlying the theme Prosocial Behaviour were derived largely from responses to questions in the individual interviews, but were also noted in all other data sources.

These five organizing themes construct an overall statement regarding the experience of participants in this study. The Indigenous-authored novel *Indian Horse* transported non-Indigenous readers into a narrative experience marked by empathy, reflection, new perspectives, and prosocial behaviour. I will expand on this statement next and place it in the context of reconciliation in Canada.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The objective of the current study was to examine the lived experience of non-Indigenous readers as the engaged individually and collectively with an Indigenous-authored fiction novel. The qualitative phenomenological inquiry approach supported the inclusion of participant voices, called for flexible exploratory methods, and allowed for multiple answers to be revealed in rich detail. The aim was to explore an area of reader response theory that has not been fully excavated in light of the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada with respect to the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. The study findings add to the breadth and depth of knowledge regarding reading and the experience of it as both a solitary act and collective event. It may also contribute to the national commitment to reconciliation, the essence of which is to think and act in new ways to establish and maintain respectful relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation

Commission of Canada: Reconciliation, 2015). The study findings demonstrate the potential for Indigenous-authored literature to evoke empathy, trigger connections between people, challenge perspectives, and prompt prosocial behaviour.

The central focus of the current study was on the meanings participants ascribe to their experience. I posed two research questions. First, how do individual, non-Indigenous readers describe their experience of reading a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author? Second, how do these same readers, as members of an established shared-reading group, experience engaging with the same text and mediating meaning within the context of the group? My intent, through the use qualitative phenomenological methodology, was to identify salient categories of meaning while rendering the complexity of the experience. I collected data from multiple sources and through an iterative process of inductive and deductive analysis presented a holistic account of the findings. The reading journals provided written accounts of experience for narrative analysis, the transcript of the observed book club discussion provided text for discourse analysis, and the individual interviews provided participant reflection on the meaning they attributed to the experience. This phenomenological research hinged on experience and perspectives as important sources of knowledge and generated understanding of how this group of non-Indigenous readers lived, perceived, and storied the experience of reading and discussing the fiction novel *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese.

According to the research process applied to the subjective experience of the participants in this small-scale study, I conclude the Indigenous-authored novel *Indian Horse* transported non-Indigenous readers into a narrative experience marked by empathy, reflection, new perspectives, and prosocial behaviour. The findings demonstrate readers, in the solitary act of reading, engaged deeply with the narrative in a reciprocal transaction with the text as the novel evoked

autobiographical memories. The binding of lived experience to abstractions in the fiction narrative transported readers into the story and created an experience that was a hybrid of both. Participants then infused the book club discussion with their reading experience *and* personal life experience. The resulting discourse had the effect of paralleling lived experience with the fictional experience of characters in the novel. The line between truth and fiction also blurred at times as the discussion flowed between the experience of the characters in the novel and the experience of Indigenous peoples in Canada, as understood by this non-Indigenous group of readers.

Awareness of Indigenous life experience, as portrayed in the novel, is another key outcome of reading and discussing *Indian Horse*. The findings demonstrate the words of author Richard Wagamese facilitated new perspectives in the form of awareness and acknowledgement of Indigenous life experience with regard to racism, residential schools, and Indigenous culture. New perspectives, combined with reflection on personal experience, culminated in moments of reflexivity in the book club discussion. I propose the level of engagement with the text was amplified when meaning was mediated within the shared-reading group. Long (1986) finds books signal the need for change and play a part in mediating that change. Some participants expressed a need to act on their new perspectives and share, recommend, and discuss the book with others beyond the book club. For these participants, the book both signalled and mediated change, and the social forum of the book club became the epicentre for cultural work enacted as prosocial behaviour in their daily lives.

As one participant stated, the novel “has created a lot of thought in me and it has created discussions and I’m sure it will ripple on through my life.” *Indian Horse* wove a narrative into the lives of the participants evoking an empathic response largely characterized by empathic



distress expressed as shame, horror, and sorrow. This affective response, combined with personal memories and new awareness, culminated in prosocial behaviour. The book challenged the readers emotionally and cognitively. The book club discussion rode that momentum and moved participants to moments of reflexivity and prosocial behaviour.

Louise DeSalvo (1999) finds, “[w]orks of art make the act of listening possible” (p. 205). I believe listening is the keystone to building and maintaining the mutually respectful relationships called for by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In *Indian Horse*, Wagamese gave words to life and life to words, and his work of art made the act of listening possible. As a nation we are committed to reconciliation, but true reconciliation requires a personal commitment at the individual level. Fiction novels written by Indigenous authors provide an access point for individuals to gain an understanding what it was and is to be Indigenous in Canada. Long asserts books “provide a signal that people must come to terms with change” (1986, p. 600). Fuller and Rehburg Sedo (2014) identify shared reading as “a form of cultural mediation that is not only ideologically dynamic and disruptive but also potentially creative and even politically empowering in terms of permitting citizens agency” (2014, p. 17-18). This convergence of fiction, force, and forum creates a catalyst for change, and the “groundswell of support” Episkenew (2009) envisions.

### **Study Parameters**

Although the demographics of the research participants mirrors the description of the average Canadian reader (BookNet 2015), the intent is not to generalize the findings to a broader population. Nor is the intent to establish a normative framework for the experience of reading Indigenous-authored novels in general, or *Indian Horse* in particular. This study describes the specific experience of 11 readers who are active members of an established shared-reading group

to capture the essence of the experience in order to add to our knowledge of readers, the act of reading, and the interaction of shared reading. By examining the phenomenon of reading an Indigenous-authored fiction novel and mediating meaning in a shared reading group within the current societal, cultural, and political context of reconciliation in Canada, my intention is to provoke discussion regarding reconciliation, and to investigate ways individuals can take up a role in reconciliation.

The homogeneity of the study participants in terms of age, gender, education, reading experience may extrapolate to economic status, values, perspectives, and worldviews. The homogenous nature of the group may also contrive a group milieu that subdues challenges to individual responses to the novel and reinforces a narrow spectrum of experience. I believe it is worthy endeavour to replicate this study to generate data based on the experience of diverse groups of participants in terms of gender, age, reading experience, and geographical location. Although Bal and Velkamp (2013) note no gender differences in transportation, it would be worthwhile to have a representation of genders in future study groups.

The members of the book club read *The Reason You Walk: A Memoir* by Wab Kinew in April 2017 as a book club selection. The experience described in this study may be the result of accumulated experience with Indigenous-authored novels. It may also hinge on the narrative and/or the writing style of this particular novel, *Indian Horse* by Richard Wagamese, and may not be replicated in experiences with other Indigenous-authored novels, or with other non-Indigenous readers.

Finally, although the overall research design is intended to replicate a typical book club experience, the presence of a researcher observing and audio recording the book club meeting may have influenced the topic and tone of the discussion. The questionnaire, journaling activity,

and individual interviews were all outside the normal experience for the book club members and highlighted the fact they were being observed and their experience was being documented. This may have created pressure on some participants to respond and interact within socially and culturally constructed boundaries.

Reasonable explanations for the findings of the current study may also include a tendency for highly empathic people to be avid readers, that avid readers may tend to be transported to a greater degree into the story, and that there may be an accumulative effect of reading on the formation of new perspectives and prosocial behaviours. The current study is exploratory and descriptive in nature and therefore a causal interpretation of the data derived is not intended. It is also not possible to generalize the results to a larger population of readers. The results of the current study provide a detailed account of the experience of one specific group of non-Indigenous readers as they engaged individually and collectively with a fiction narrative written by an Indigenous author.

### **Implications for Future Research**

To explore through qualitative research is to probe a phenomenon, to identify salient categories of meaning, and to prompt further research (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 69). The current study reveals a number of implications for future research on the experience of non-Indigenous readers reading Indigenous-authored fiction novels. To replicate this study with an established book club of non-Indigenous readers committed to reading Indigenous-authored fiction novels for an entire year would expand our understanding of accumulative narrative experience over time. A mixed-methods research design incorporating empirical data through the use of measurement scales for empathic concern, emotional transportation, narrative understanding, and attentional focus, layered with qualitative data derived from journaling and

transcribed audio from book club discussions and individual interviews would extend our understanding of the experience while illuminating its complexity. This extended study would investigate the accumulative effect of reading Indigenous-authored novels on both empathy and prosocial behaviour. It would test the sleeper effect observed in fiction research and hypothesized to be the basis of increased empathy experienced over time rather than directly following a narrative experience. Bal and Veltkamp (2013) posit, “[t]he effects of fictional narrative experience may flourish under conditions of an incubation period, in which the changes in empathy become internalized and part of the self-concept” (p. 10). A future study of this nature could also explore differences in the narrative-kindled empathy Boler (2006) describes as passive empathy triggered by the consumption of text and a form of socially responsible active empathy sparked by testimonial reading.

The 94 Calls to Action tabled by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in its final report encourage all of us to think and act in new ways. “We are all Treaty people who share responsibility for taking action on reconciliation” (Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015, p. 12). I believe empathy, awareness, and new perspectives will underpin the mutual respect necessary for reconciliation. This research is my attempt to articulate a role in reconciliation within this political, societal, and cultural moment.

Mar and Oatley (2008) contend that in order to comprehend narrative fiction requires readers to acknowledge the “common humanity present between ourselves and ... others” (p. 181). This research reveals the capacity for Indigenous literature to mediate within the current political, cultural, and social environment in Canada. Indigenous authors are establishing a uniquely Indigenous voice through the written word, giving non-Indigenous people the

opportunity to hear and respond to that voice. *Indian Horse* author Richard Wagamese captures the very essence of the experience described in this thesis in his most recent book, *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, and so his will be the final voice. “We're all storytellers, really. That's what we do. That is our power as human beings. Not to tell people how to think and feel and therefore know – but through our stories allow them to discover questions within themselves” (p. 172).

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**Appendix A****Demographic and Background Questionnaire**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Age:**

- 18 – 24
- 25 – 34
- 35 – 44
- 45 – 54
- 55 – 64
- 65 – 74
- 75 +

**Gender:**

- female
- male
- other \_\_\_\_\_
- would rather not say

**Education:** *(Please indicate the highest level of education achieved)*

- some high school
- high school diploma
- professional certification
- some post-secondary
- college diploma
- university degree
- graduate degree
- PhD
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**Occupation:**

- employed full-time
- employed part-time
- self-employed
- not employed
- retired
- student
- homemaker
- other \_\_\_\_\_

**Book reading:**

*On average, how many books do you typically read during a six-month period?*

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*Do you have a favourite genre? If so, what is your favourite genre and why?*

---

---

---

*What value do you ascribe to reading books? Please explain.*

---

---

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**Past experience reading Indigenous-authored books:**

*Have you read books by Indigenous authors? If so, please list them.*

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*Do you seek out Indigenous-authored books to read? Please tell me why, or why not.*

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**Book club participation:**

*How long have you been an active member (i.e., attend all or most meetings) of this book club?*

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*Do you, or have you, belong[ed] to other book clubs? If so, please indicate how many book clubs, length of membership, etc.*

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*What value do you ascribe to being a member of a book club? Please explain.*

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Thank you for your time and effort completing this questionnaire. If you have any questions or comments, please contact me by email at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca), or by phone 902-XXX-XXXX.

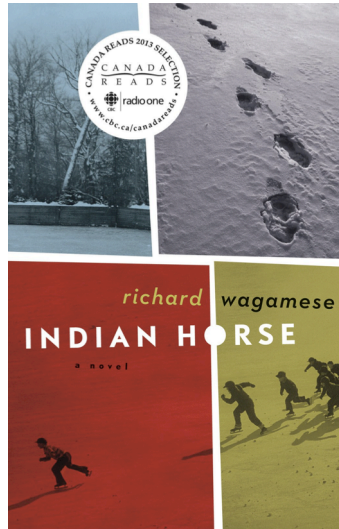
You may submit your completed questionnaire to me by email, at the next book club meeting, or I can pick it up from you at a time that is convenient.

Thanks again!

## Appendix B

### Novel Synopsis and Author Biography

Text retrieved from: <http://www.douglas-mcintyre.com/book/indian-horse>



Saul Indian Horse has hit bottom. His last binge almost killed him, and now he's a reluctant resident in a treatment centre for alcoholics, surrounded by people he's sure will never understand him. But Saul wants peace, and he grudgingly comes to see that he'll find it only through telling his story. With him, readers embark on a journey back through the life he's led as a northern Ojibway, with all its joys and sorrows.

With compassion and insight, author Richard Wagamese traces through his fictional characters the decline of a culture and a cultural way. For Saul, taken forcibly from the land and his family when he's sent to residential school, salvation comes for a while through his incredible gifts as a hockey player. But in the harsh realities of 1960s Canada, he battles obdurate racism and the spirit-destroying effects of cultural alienation and displacement.

*Indian Horse* unfolds against the bleak loveliness of northern Ontario, all rock, marsh, bog and cedar. Wagamese writes with a spare beauty, penetrating the heart of a remarkable Ojibway man.

**Richard Wagamese** (1955–2017), an Ojibway from the Wabaseemoong First Nation in northwestern Ontario, was recognized as one of Canada's foremost First Nations authors and storytellers. His debut novel, *Keeper 'n Me*, came out in 1994 and won the Alberta Writers Guild's Best Novel Award. In 1991, he became the first Indigenous writer to win a National Newspaper Award for column writing. He twice won the Native American Press Association Award for his journalism and received the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness in Literature for his 2011 memoir *One Story, One Song*. In 2012, he was honoured with the Aboriginal Achievement Award for Media and Communications, and in 2013 he received the Canada Council for the Arts Molson Prize. In 2015, he won the Matt Cohen Award, a recognition given out by the Writers' Trust of Canada that honours writers who have dedicated their entire professional lives to the pursuit of writing. In total, he authored fifteen books including *Indian Horse* (2012), the 2013 People's Choice winner in CBC's Canada Reads competition, and his final book, a collection of Ojibway meditations, *Embers* (2016), received the Bill Duthie Booksellers' Choice Award.

## Appendix C



*Participant: (Please print your full name)*

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*Title of Research Study:*

The Link Between Literature and Empathy: Exploring the Capacity for Indigenous-Authoring Literature to Foster Change

*Student Researcher:*

Allana Bartlett, student, MA (Communication), Communication Studies, MSVU  
[allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca)  
902-XXX-XXXX

*Thesis Supervisor:*

Dr. DeNel Rehberg Sedo, Professor, Communication Studies, MSVU  
[denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca](mailto:denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca)  
902-457-6478

### **Purpose of Research Study**

You are invited to join a research study to explore and describe the experience of non-Indigenous readers as they engage individually and collectively with a fiction novel written by an Indigenous author. Established reading theory suggests that reading literature fosters empathy, understanding, and new perspectives, and studies of book clubs characterize these groups as sites of significant cultural work. I believe exploring the experience of readers as they engage with a novel written by an Indigenous author is a timely and pragmatic endeavour given the current political, cultural, and social climate in Canada.

### **Participant Recruitment**

You must be a non-Indigenous person and a current, active member of an existing book club with a minimum of eight members in order to participate.

### **Requirements of Participants**

Study participants will be asked to complete a questionnaire to collect demographic and background information such as age, gender, education, occupation, reading practice, book group activity, and prior experience reading Indigenous-authored literature. The written questionnaire will take approximately 20 minutes to complete.



Your experience of reading and discussing an Indigenous-authored novel will be explored in three distinct phases:

- 1) You will be asked to journal as you take up the novel as an individual reader. You may do this via written text (print or digital), photographs, videos, voice recordings, and/or some form of art. You will be asked to journal at least once for each chapter of the book. The time required for this activity will depend on the form of journaling you choose and the extent to which you engage with the book.
- 2) You will be asked to attend the book club meeting when the novel is to be discussed. I will attend this event to make an audio recording of the discussion and to take notes to describe the setting and observable behaviour like gestures, facial expressions, and body language.
- 3) You will be asked to meet with me one-on-one to talk about your experience. You will choose the date, time, and location to meet for approximately one hour.

### **Potential Risks & Benefits**

As a practicing reader and an active member of a book club you are aware of the risks and benefits of reading fiction novels. The Indigenous-authored novel to be read and discussed in this research study will contain a fictionalized account of Indigenous life experience and may include scenes of emotional, physical, and/or sexual violence and abuse. This may trigger an intellectual and emotional response. The book may challenge what you know, what you think you know, and how you know it.

It is reasonable to expect that you will benefit from this study as you do generally from reading fiction novels. Specifically, you may gain new understanding and perspectives from a fictionalized account of experience that is beyond your own lived experience. It is my hope that by exploring in-depth the specific experience of one group of readers, the broader social and cultural impact of literature written by Indigenous authors may be illuminated.

### **Data Storage, Security, and Use**

Research data will be collected via:

- 1) a written demographic/background questionnaire
- 2) a journal in the form of written text (print or digital), photographs, videos, voice recordings, and/or some form of art
- 3) a digital audio recording of the book club meeting
- 4) written notes of the researcher's observations at the book club meeting
- 5) a digital audio recording of the one-on-one interview, and
- 6) written notes of the researcher's observations at the one-on-one interview

Data collected in hardcopy will be stored in a locked file as well as transcribed to a computer file. Digital audio recordings will be stored on a memory card in the same locked file as well as transcribed verbatim to a computer file. Hardcopies of these transcripts will also be stored in the locked file. I will be the only person with access to the locked file. All computer files will be secured by password protection, backed-up, and stored on the MSVU OneDrive server located on campus.

Study data will be electronically archived indefinitely for its potential to inform future research. All computer files will be archived on the MSVU OneDrive server. Data in hardcopy form will be destroyed upon completion of the research study.

### **Confidentiality**

Your participation in this study will be confidential. I will not use your name or any information that would allow you to be identified in the data and subsequent analysis and final report. All identifiable information will be securely stored separate from the data collected in the study. To protect your confidentiality, information about you will only be accessible to me and to the members of my thesis committee (Dr. DeNel Rehberg Sedo, Dr. Marnina Gonick, and Catherine Martin).

All participants will be asked to keep what each other says during the book club discussion confidential.

### **Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you do not want to answer some of the questions on the demographic/background questionnaire, or in the one-on-one interview, you do not have to and you can still remain in the study. You have the right not to participate and to end your participation at any time, for any reason, with no consequences to you. The right to withdraw from the study extends for the duration of your participation. In the event you withdraw from the study, all associated data will not be used in the analysis, interpretation, or final report unless you indicate otherwise.

### **Dissemination of Results**

The final study results will be disseminated according to MSVU policy for electronic, hardcopy and/or bound copies to the library, archives, and thesis committee members.

I intend to seek opportunities to publish and present the results of my thesis research once complete. Your confidentiality will be maintained in any and all published articles or presentations that may result from this study. You will not be identified as a participant, nor will comments be attributed to you in the final study report, potential articles or presentations.

I will inform you by email when the study report is finalized and you will have an opportunity to read the final report.

### **University Research Ethics Board Clearance**

The ethical components of this research study have been reviewed by the University Research Ethics Board and found to be in compliance with Mount Saint Vincent University's Research Ethics Policy.

### **Contact Information**

If you have questions about the study and wish to speak to someone directly involved in the research, you may contact me, Allana Bartlett, as the lead researcher at 902-XXX-XXXX or via email at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca). You may also contact Dr. Rehberg Sedo, my research thesis supervisor, via email at [denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca](mailto:denel.rehbergsedo@msvu.ca).

If you have questions about how this study is being conducted and wish to speak with someone not directly involved in the study, you may contact the Chair of the University Research Ethics Board (UREB) c/o MSVU Research Office, at 902-457-6350 or via email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

### Signatures

I, \_\_\_\_\_ (Please print your full name), consent to participate in the study entitled *The Link between Literature and Empathy: Exploring the Capacity for Indigenous-authored Literature to Foster Change* conducted by Allana Bartlett. I understand the nature and requirements of this study and wish to participate. My signature below indicates my consent.

Participant:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher:

\_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

*You will receive a copy of this form for your records.*

## Appendix D

### Participant Instructions for Journaling

The intent of the journaling activity is to capture your personal response to the novel. Please choose whatever means of self-expression feels most comfortable to you. Some ideas include writing in print or digital format, taking photographs, recording video and/or voice, or some form of artwork (e.g., painting, drawing).

You may journal as much and as often as you like, but at least once for each chapter in the book.

If your journal is in digital format, you may email the complete journal to me at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca)

If your journal is in hardcopy, please bring it to the book club session when the novel will be discussed, or contact me and I will pick it up at a time that is convenient for you.

If you have any questions or comments about this phase of the study, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached by telephone at 902-XXX-XXXX, or by email at [allana.bartlett@msvu.ca](mailto:allana.bartlett@msvu.ca)

Thank you in advance for your time, thought, and effort on this phase of the research project.

## Appendix E

### Individual Interview Guide

Q1. Is *Indian Horse* a book you would have chosen to read on your own?

Probe a) Do you think you will seek out other novels written by Indigenous authors?

Q2. Can you tell me about your experience reading the novel.

Probe a) For example, to what extent did you feel engaged in the book?

Probe b) What thoughts and emotions did reading the book evoke?

Probe c) To what extent were you able to visualize the story as you read the book?

Probe d) Did you relate to the storyline in the novel?

Probe e) Did you relate to, or identify in any way with the characters in the novel? For example, to what extent did you feel concern and/or compassion for Saul? What other emotions did you feel toward the main characters, or other characters in the story?

Q3. In what ways, if any, did reading this novel effect your perceptions of Indigenous peoples?

Q4. Did you find that reading *Indian Horse* was a meaningful way to gain an understanding of the life experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada?

Probe a) Do you think that reading this novel may serve as a catalyst for conversations regarding Indigenous peoples and reconciliation beyond your book club?

Probe b) Have you found that reading *Indian Horse* has made you more or less sensitive to media stories on issues specific to reconciliation and Indigenous peoples?

Q5. Tell me about your experience discussing this novel in your book club?

Probe a) How did you find your experience of the book compared to that of other members of the group?

Probe b) Did you find that the experience of other book club members effected your own perception of the book?

Q6. Is there any thing you wish I had asked that I didn't ask?

Q7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

## Appendix F

Table of Demographic Data

	Age	Gender	Education	Employment	Books read (per 6 mo.)	Book club member (years)
<i>P1</i>	55-64	female	college diploma	retired/PT	8-10	25
<i>P2</i>	65-74	female	university degree	retired	30-40	30
<i>P3</i>	55-64	female	university degree	retired	>10	25
<i>P4</i>	45-54	female	college diploma	PT	6-7	4
<i>P5</i>	45-54	female	university degree	FT	12-15	3.5
<i>P6</i>	55-64	female	PhD	FT	18-24	9
<i>P7</i>	55-64	female	university degree	FT	6	24
<i>P8</i>	55-64	female	graduate degree	FT	6-8	5-6
<i>P9</i>	65-74	female	university degree	retired	8-10	4-5
<i>P10</i>	65-74	female	graduate degree	retired/PT	40-60	2
<i>P11</i>	55-64	female	PhD	retired	10-12	27

## Appendix G

### Codes Organized by Theme

The following is a list of the codes used in analysis of all data sources. The number of text segments is indicated. The codes are organized in thematic categories.

1. Narrative experience (176)
  - 1.1. writing style (30)
  - 1.2. description of hockey (21)
  - 1.3. description of racism (19)
  - 1.4. description of residential school life (16)
  - 1.5. description of landscape (15)
  - 1.6. description of life experience portrayed (15)
  - 1.7. description of role of priest (15)
  - 1.8. similar experience (14)
  - 1.9. response to book (11)
  - 1.10. description of main character being alone (10)
  - 1.11. novel feels like true story (4)
  - 1.12. romanticized image of Indigenous life (4)
  - 1.13. description of settlers (1)
  - 1.14. compared to *The Reason You Walk* (1)
2. Indicators of transportation (129)
  - 2.1. novel triggered reflection (69)
  - 2.2. extent of concern/compassion (26)
  - 2.3. level of engagement (15)
  - 2.4. visualization (11)
  - 2.5. identification (6)
  - 2.6. book becomes part of you (2)
3. New perspectives (93)
  - 3.1. developed awareness (48)
  - 3.2. acknowledgement (22)
  - 3.3. insight into character's behaviour (16)
  - 3.4. novel triggered reflexivity (7)
4. Empathic response (69)
  - 4.1. empathic distress (44)
  - 4.2. empathic response to role of priest (10)
  - 4.3. admiration for Indigenous peoples/culture (7)
  - 4.4. happy (5)
  - 4.5. resentment (2)
  - 4.6. no guilt (1)



5. Prosocial behaviour (49)
  - 5.1. inspired to read/learn more (13)
  - 5.2. shift in perceptions of Indigenous peoples (9)
  - 5.3. catalyst for conversations (9)
  - 5.4. sensitized to media (8)
  - 5.5. recommend book to others (6)
  - 5.6. catalyst for change (4)
- Response to interview Qs (48)
  - Q1 yes (5)
  - Q1 no (4)
  - Probe Q1 yes (10)
  - Probe Q1 yes/title recognition (3)
  - discussion had no effect on reading experience (7)
  - discussion politically correct/less honest (7)
  - discussion validated reading experience (3)
  - novel got people talking (3)
  - discussion more focused (1)
  - no change in perceptions of Indigenous peoples (2)
  - not sure if perceptions of Indigenous peoples changed (1)
  - no change in sensitivity to media (1)
  - unsure if more sensitized to media (1)
- Research study experience (27)
  - book club experience (14)
  - journaling experience (9)
  - influence of audio recording (4)
- Reading theory (19)
  - author recognition (6)
  - learned about author (6)
  - comments on mode of reading (3)
  - book recommendations a factor in choice (2)
  - book club demographics (2)

## Appendix H

### Codes for Reading Journal Data

The following is a list of the codes used in analysis of the reading journal data. The number of text segments from the reading journals and the total number of text segments located in the code from all data sources is indicated.

1. narrative experience/writing style (17/30)
2. narrative experience/description of racism (13/19)
3. narrative experience/description of life experience portrayed (13/16)
4. narrative experience/description of residential school life (12/16)
5. narrative experience/role of priest (9/15)
6. narrative experience/description of hockey (8/21)
7. narrative experience/description of main character being alone (6/10)
8. narrative experience/description of landscape (5/15)
9. narrative experience/novel feels like true story (1/4)
10. narrative experience/romanticized image of Indigenous life (1/4)
11. narrative experience/description of settlers (1/1)
12. indicators of transportation/novel triggered reflection/connection (17/69)
13. indicators of transportation/extent of concern/compassion (11/26)
14. indicators of transportation/identification (4/6)
15. indicators of transportation/level of engagement (1/15)
16. indicators of transportation/visualization (1/11)
17. new perspectives/acknowledgement (11/22)
18. new perspectives/developed awareness (5/48)
19. new perspectives/insight into character's behaviour (2/16)
20. empathic response/empathic distress (22/44)
21. empathic response/empathic response to role of priest (10/10)
22. empathic response/happy (5/5)
23. prosocial behaviour/recommend book to others (1/6)
24. research study experience/journaling experience (2/9)
25. reading theory/author recognition (2/6)
26. reading theory/comments on mode of reading (2/3)

## Appendix I

### Codes for Book Club Discussion Transcript Data

The following is a list of the codes used in analysis of the book club discussion transcript data. The number of text segments from the book club discussion and the total number of text segments located in the code from all data sources is indicated.

1. narrative experience/response to book (7/11)
2. narrative experience/description of hockey (6/21)
3. narrative experience/description of racism (6/19)
4. narrative experience/writing style (5/30)
5. narrative experience/role of priest (4/15)
6. narrative experience/description of life experience portrayed (2/15)
7. narrative experience/description of residential school life (1/16)
8. narrative experience/description of landscape (1/15)
9. narrative experience/description of main character being alone (1/10)
10. narrative experience/novel feels like true story (1/4)
11. narrative experience/romanticized image of Indigenous life (1/4)
12. indicators of transportation/novel triggered reflection (43/69)
13. indicators of transportation/extent of concern/compassion (5/26)
14. indicators of transportation/level of engagement (4/15)
15. indicators of transportation/visualization (1/11)
16. new perspectives/developed awareness (29/48)
17. new perspectives/insight into character's behaviour (8/16)
18. new perspectives/acknowledgement (5/22)
19. new perspectives/novel triggered reflexivity (5/7)
20. empathic response/empathic distress (7/44)
21. empathic response/admiration for Indigenous peoples/culture (1/7)
22. empathic response/resentment (1/2)
23. prosocial behaviour/inspired to read/learn more (6/13)
24. prosocial behaviour/recommend book to others (2/6)
25. prosocial behaviour/catalyst for change (2/4)
26. prosocial behaviour/catalyst for conversations (1/9)
27. research study experience/book club experience (14/14)
28. research study experience/journaling experience (3/9)
29. reading theory/learned about author (5/6)
30. reading theory/comments on mode of reading (1/3)

## Appendix J

### Codes for Individual Interview Data

The following is a list of the codes used in analysis of the individual interview data. The number of text segments from the individual interviews and the total number of text segments located in the code from all data sources is indicated.

1. narrative experience/similar experience (14/14)
2. narrative experience/description of landscape (9/15)
3. narrative experience/writing style (8/30)
4. narrative experience/description of hockey (7/21)
5. narrative experience/response to book (4/11)
6. narrative experience/description of residential school life (3/16)
7. narrative experience/description of main character being alone (3/10)
8. narrative experience/role of priest (2/15)
9. narrative experience/novel feels like true story (2/4)
10. narrative experience/romanticized image of Indigenous life (2/4)
11. narrative experience/compared to *The Reason You Walk* (1/1)
12. indicators of transportation/extent of concern/compassion (10/26)
13. indicators of transportation/level of engagement (10/15)
14. indicators of transportation/novel triggered reflection (9/69)
15. indicators of transportation/visualization (9/11)
16. indicators of transportation/identification (2/6)
17. indicators of transportation/book becomes part of you (2/2)
18. new perspectives/developed awareness (14/48)
19. new perspectives/acknowledgement (6/22)
20. new perspectives/insight into character's behaviour (6/16)
21. new perspectives/novel triggered reflexivity (2/7)
22. empathic response/empathic distress (15/44)
23. empathic response/admiration for Indigenous peoples/culture (6/7)
24. empathic response/resentment (1/2)
25. empathic response/no guilt (1/1)
26. prosocial behaviour/shift in perceptions of Indigenous peoples (9/9)
27. prosocial behaviour/catalyst for conversations (8/9)
28. prosocial behaviour/sensitized to media (8/8)
29. prosocial behaviour/inspired to read/learn more (7/13)
30. prosocial behaviour/recommend book to others (3/6)
31. prosocial behaviour/catalyst for change (2/4)
32. research study experience/journaling experience (4/9)
33. research study experience/influence of audio recording (4/4)
34. reading theory/author recognition (4/6)
35. reading theory/learned about author (1/6)
36. reading theory/book recommendations a factor in choice (2/2)
37. reading theory/book club demographics (2/2)
38. response to interview Qs/Q1 yes (5/5)

39. response to interview Qs/Q1 no (4/4)
40. response to interview Qs/probe Q1 yes (10/10)
41. response to interview Qs/probe Q1 yes/title recognition (3/3)
42. response to interview Qs/no change in perceptions of Indigenous peoples (2/2)
43. response to interview Qs/not sure if perceptions of Indigenous peoples changed (1/1)
44. response to interview Qs/no change in sensitivity to media (1/1)
45. response to interview Qs/unsure if more sensitized to media (1/1)
46. response to interview Qs/discussion had no effect on reading experience (7/7)
47. response to interview Qs/discussion less honest/politically correct (7/7)
48. response to interview Qs /novel got people talking (3/3)
49. response to interview Qs /discussion validated reading experience (3/3)
50. response to interview Qs /discussion more focused (1/1)