

URBAN ABORIGINAL KNOWLEDGE NETWORK (UAKN) RESEARCH PROPOSAL

“Isolated Events?”: Connecting Patterns of Struggle and Vulnerability in Young Urban Aboriginal Women’s Narratives in Kijipuktuk (Halifax)

Research Team:

Primary researcher/Co-applicant: Dr. Trudy Sable

Academic co-applicant: Dr. Darryl Leroux

Urban Aboriginal community member/Community-based researcher: Chenise Haché

Ojibway Elder: Debbie Eisan

Government department representative: Dorothy Haché (AANDC)

Nova Scotia Native Women’s Association: Cheryl Maloney (President)

Research Question and Rationale:

This project aims to draw focus to the structural and historical forces that serve to systemically disadvantage and threaten the wellbeing of urban Aboriginal women in a post-colonial society (Smith 2005; Anderson et al. 2008; Jacobs and Williams 2008). Too often, when a case of a missing or murdered Aboriginal woman comes to light, her story is passed off as an isolated event that has nothing to do with her Aboriginal identity. Still, the shockingly disproportionate number of missing and murdered Aboriginal women in Canada (Pearce 2013; AIC 2009; NWAC 2007) suggests that these tragic events are connected through these women’s shared experiences of colonialism. While each of their lives and deaths are unique, research demonstrates that they all experience the social forces at play that disenfranchise, displace, and disadvantage Aboriginal women and girls in Canadian society. These troublesome patterns of violence cause indescribable pain to the families and communities that share their histories with missing and/or murdered Aboriginal women.

Our research will connect with the human development and social cohesion themes and priorities as outlined by the Urban Aboriginal Knowledge Network guidelines. We intend to shed light on the culture of disconnection and denial that exists (Jiwani and Young 2006) in regard to cases of missing and/or murdered Aboriginal women by highlighting the conditions and circumstances that serve to marginalize and suppress urban Aboriginal girls and women. These situations include women who are often young and/or single mothers, are or have been in abusive relationships, or are pursuing educational or professional opportunities. Using a phenomenologically-based, narrative approach, we will question the effects that the phenomenon of missing and murdered Aboriginal women has on the self perception and sense of personal safety of Aboriginal women currently residing in Halifax, Nova Scotia. Research questions will include:

- Is there an inherent fearfulness urban Aboriginal women in Halifax experience because they identify with murdered and/or missing women, both culturally and through shared life experiences and conditions?
- If so, within this culture of fearfulness, are there avenues of educational, professional, or cultural support and development for these women to experience a more fulfilling and secure life?

Identifying a Gap:

This project identifies a gap in the current research. It aims to connect the stories of missing and murdered Aboriginal women to one another, which research shows are not just isolated events. In doing so, we hope to document their stories, and create a comprehensive understanding of the

systemic challenges they face. We will also look at stories of women who have persevered in the face of these struggles and explore the points of resilience and strength that gave them a sense of safety and fulfillment in their lives.

Second, much of the research on missing and/or murdered indigenous women in Canada centres around cases in northern British Columbia (Highway of Tears 2006; HRW 2013), in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside (Culhane 2003), or in the Prairie provinces (Razack 2000). While this research has been essential in putting the issue on the table, Pearce's (2013) recent research suggests that rates of violence regarding indigenous women in the Atlantic provinces are in keeping with those elsewhere in Canada.

Thus, our research aims to add an essential empirical focus on the Atlantic urban context, through a dedicated focus on the urban indigenous population in K'jipuktuk (Halifax, Nova Scotia), the largest city east of Québec City. The "Urban Aboriginal People's Study: Halifax Report" (Sable et al. 2011) provides much of the significant demographic information.

Methods:

Per the guidelines of the Atlantic Policy Congress of First Nations Chiefs, we will follow community-based participatory research methods as well as a phenomenologically-based narrative inquiry to understand the "lived experience" of these women. This approach will include a community consultation to introduce the project (most likely at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre), creating spaces of comfort and empowerment, along with signed consent forms of all participants with a promise of anonymity if requested. We hope to do either audio or video recording, depending on the comfort level and consent of the participant(s), but will rely on note-taking in the event that recordings cause discomfort.

A focal point of this research is to explore the ways in which young urban Aboriginal women and girls are affected by the large number of Aboriginal women who are missing and/or murdered in Halifax, Nova Scotia and in Canada. We will conduct personal and group interviews where consent is given, facilitated by trusted community Elders or counsellors. In addition, we will facilitate group sessions to discuss common experiences among Aboriginal women and girls, from which we hope to derive patterns. We will conduct between 12-20 individual interviews and 3-4 group sessions from 21 August 2014 to 1 March 2015, depending on the comfort level and consent of participants. We will also conduct a background literature search, which will include media coverage in the Atlantic, to establish common themes. These findings will then be compared with the patterns that emerge from our group interviews and discussions.

We envision dissemination to include a community gathering at the Mi'kmaw Native Friendship Centre and partner institutions such as the Nova Scotia Native Women's Association and Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women. We also will incorporate web-based and social media dissemination through a twitter profile, Facebook account, and website that highlights our findings and other relevant materials. Our primary audiences include the urban Aboriginal community, academic and community-based researchers, and online communities involved in parallel research and/or advocacy.

Relevant Literature:

Amnesty International Canada (AIC). 2009. "No More Stolen Sisters." Available at: <http://www.amnesty.ca/amnestynews/upload/AMR200122009.pdf>

Anderson, A. Brenda., Wendee Kubik, and Mary R. Hampton, eds. 2010. *Torn from our midst:*

Voices of grief, healing and action from the Missing Aboriginal Women Conference, 2008. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press.

Culhane, Dara. 2003. Their spirits live within us: Aboriginal women in Downtown Eastside Vancouver emerging into visibility. *The American Indian Quarterly* 27(2): 593–606.

Highway of Tears Symposium. 2006. “A Collective Voice for the Victims Who Have Been Silenced: Highway of Tears Symposium Recommendation Report.” Prince George, BC. Available at: http://www.ubcic.bc.ca/files/PDF/highwayof_tearsfinal.pdf

Human Rights Watch (HRW). 2013. “Those Who Take Us Away: Abusive Policing and Failures in Protection of Indigenous Women and Girls in Northern British Columbia, Canada.” Available at: http://www.hrw.org/sites/default/files/reports/canada0213webwcover_0.pdf

Jacobs, Bev, and Andrea. J. Williams. 2008. Legacy of residential schools: Missing and murdered Aboriginal women. In *From truth to reconciliation: Transforming the legacy of residential schools*, 121–40. Winnipeg: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Jiwani, Yasmin, and Mary Lynn Young. 2006. “Missing and murdered women: Reproducing marginality in news discourse.” *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31(4): 895–917.

Native Women's Association of Canada. 2007. “Violence Against Aboriginal Women and Girls.” Available at: <http://www.laa.gov.nl.ca/laa/news/pdf/nwac-vaaw.pdf>

Pearce, Maryanne. 2013. “An awkward silence: Missing and murdered vulnerable women and the Canadian justice system.” PhD Dissertation. University of Ottawa.

Razack, Sherene H. 2000. “Gendered racial violence and spatialized justice: The murder of Pamela George.” *Canadian Journal of Law & Society*. 15(2): 91–130.

Sable, Trudy et al. 2011. “Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study: Halifax Report.” Available at: <http://www.uaps.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/UAPS-Halifax-report.pdf>

Smith, Andrea. 2005. *Conquest: sexual violence and American Indian genocide*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press.

Budget:

1. Revenue

Cash

a- Indigenous Blacks and Mi’kmaq Initiative (Dalhousie University Law School) – \$2,000 (confirmed)

b- Nova Scotia Native Women’s Association – \$3,000 (Summer research position – not confirmed)

c- SMUWorks Bursary Program (Additional student research position – not confirmed) – \$5,274.75

Total Cash – \$10,274.75

In Kind

- a- Loisel Technical Consulting – \$7,500 (Radio studio rental and services)
- b- Saint Mary’s University – \$2,000 (Office space for student assistant)
- c- Gorsebrook Research Institute – \$1,000 (Research support)
- d- Indigenous Blacks and Mi’kmaq Initiative – \$500 (Payroll support)
- e- Public Service Alliance of Canada/Atlantic – \$5,000 (web development/maintenance)

Total In Kind – \$11,000

TOTAL REVENUE – \$21,274.75

2. Expenses

- a- Community-based researcher (52 weeks, 25 hrs/week, \$17.50/hr) – \$22,750
- b- Honoraria (Elder and research participants) – \$2,500
- c- Hospitality (Food and beverages at meetings) – \$1,000
- c- Equipment (recording device) – \$500
- d- Travel – \$200
- e- UAKN Conference Travel (community-based researcher and co-applicants) – \$2,000

TOTAL EXPENSES – \$28,950

CASH – EXPENSES = \$18,675.25

OUR REQUEST – \$15,000

Team Biographies/Partner Overview:

Dr. Trudy Sable is the Director of Aboriginal and Northern Research at the Gorsebrook Research Institute at Saint Mary’s University. She has over twenty-five years of working in collaboration with Indigenous communities locally and internationally.

Dr. Darryl Leroux is an Assistant Professor of Sociology at Saint Mary’s University.

Chenise Haché is the Project Coordinator for the Initiative for Advocacy and Research into Violence Against Indigenous Women, which is developing a research institute to mark the legacy of her former classmate Loretta Saunders. She works extensively with young Aboriginal women to promote leadership and to encourage cultural capacity.

Dorothy Haché is an Intergovernmental Affairs Advisor with Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). With many networks that span several sectors from Aboriginal education to economic development, Dorothy is an instrumental liaison for those seeking a better understanding of the Atlantic Aboriginal context, more especially with regards to cross-cutting Aboriginal-Crown relations. Her expertise with government provides the research team with significant opportunities for public dissemination of its results.

Cheryl Maloney is the President of the Nova Scotia Native Women’s Association. In her position, she has brought attention to the issue of violence against Aboriginal women nationally and internationally. She is a leading advocate for political solutions to solve many of the struggles indigenous women currently face.