

Weekly Journals

Student ID #:t00755761

Class Name and Title: Jenna-Marie Cowan (Bilow)

PART 1: WEEKS 1-4

WEEK 1:

My name is Jenna-Marie Cowan (married name is Bilow). I am the only child of three who wasn't named after a relative. It is a tradition in my family to name children after relatives as a way of keeping them alive in our hearts. However, my parents named me after a T.V. character from the show Dallas. As a daughter of parents who were in the military, I've lived in many places. We finally settled in a Mennonite community in northern Alberta when I was 16. Originally, I am from Goose-Bay Labrador. In the recent years, I have become proud to call Labrador my home as I am starting to understand what it means to be an Inuit woman from the land.

Growing up, my mother would often tell others she was Inuit but other than that, we were not really raised with the knowledge of Inuit culture and traditions. Because of this, I feel a disconnect whenever I say I am Inuit, as if I am an imposter. I struggle with my identity. I never understood what it meant to be Indigenous, and I never understood the implications colonialism had on our people back home until I started my Social Work education. I am taking this class not only because it is mandatory, but also because I want to further understand how Canada's systems and policies have and continue to marginalize and oppress the Indigenous people.

If I am being honest about worries or anxieties towards this course, it would have to be presenting to the class. I'm anxious about not getting my thoughts out the way I would like. Also, I am anxious about writing papers again as it has been many years since I've been in school.

Regarding hopes and aspirations, I am hoping that I can connect more with my home roots through the readings and discussions in class. I want to be able to take what I learn and reflect on the history of the Inuit back in Labrador.

Púsmeᓂ (heart) Emotional Goals: Emotionally and with my heart, I want to sit with the uncomfortable, be that with readings or through class discussions. I want to let myself cry.

Sképqiᓂ (head) Mental Goals: A mental goal that I have is to be open minded with class discussions. To receive what others, have to say.

Tmícw (land) Physical Goals: I want to feel more connected to the land. To get out more and appreciate nature. I also want to continue working through my chronic pain by practicing yoga and completing daily exercises to help minimize the pain I feel every day.

Súmeᓕ (soul) Spiritual Goals: A spiritual goal for me is to work towards building my identity as an Inuit woman.

Week 2:

This week's reading, The Story of Tessie as told by Ida William, was interesting and I learned something new about Indigenous bands from back in the day through the telling of the story. It shows the importance of storytelling to keep the history alive through the generations. There is a statement in the paper that really spoke to me, "Secwépemc elders thus viewed the oral history stories of warfare, as well as the places and people commemorated in them, as evidence of their own ancestors' defence of the Secwépemc homeland and of the Secwépemc people's continuing rights to that land, which they had defended with their own blood" (Ignace & Ignace, pg.315). It made me think of the ongoing battle for Indigenous groups to regain rights to their lands. Lands that were lost to Colonialists. Reading through the paper brought up feelings

of sadness because storytelling wasn't a big part of my growing up. We very rarely heard stories about our territorial lands or of our family history.

Much can be gained from utilizing oral history. It keeps memories of people alive, it passes on cultural norms, it provides caution and it can be used as evidence. I feel the reasons offered in the article are compelling and I believe the point the author was trying to get across. The article taught me something new about oral history and it has changed my perspective on storytelling. It gave me an appreciation for the elders who take their time to sit with us and share stories from their life and the lives of those who lived before. Looking back, if I could ask one question to the author, it would be how does anthropological research aid in oral history in terms of land claim agreements?



I've included a piece of artwork from a cousin, Jason Sikoak (previously Jason Shiwak) of traditional Inuit art. It reminds me of the story of Sedna and the creation of the sea creatures that are prominent in Inuit culture. A link to an article he has written about his own journey with reclaiming his name and identity is below. There are more pieces of art as well.

References:

Marianne Ignace & Ronald E. Ignace. "Secwepemc People, Land, and Laws". McGill-Queen's University Press. 2017.

Sikoak, Jason. "Shiwak to Sikoak: Taking Back My True Surname Atiq (Naming Your Soul)". Inuit Art Quarterly. Retrieved September 19, 2024. [https:// www.
Inuitartfoundation.org/iaq-online/shiwak-to-sikoak-taking-back-my-true-surname.](https://www.inuitartfoundation.org/iaq-online/shiwak-to-sikoak-taking-back-my-true-surname)

Week 3:

This week I have chosen to summarize and evaluate "Whose Land is it Anyway". In this article, it is broken down into three sections: Machinery of Colonialism, the Resurgence and a Path to Reconciliation. In the second section of the article there is a subsection titled "Decolonizing the Violence Against Indigenous Women". I was drawn to this subsection the most because I know what it's like to grow up in a home where there is violence. Indigenous women before colonization had a role to play in the community. They were "honoured because of their decision-making instincts and their responsibilities in carrying and bringing life into the physical world" (McFarlane & Schabus 2017, pp.48). The shift into a patriarchal society due to colonialism meant women were no longer held to the esteem they once were. Women became vulnerable to violence instead of being protected by the men.

It is stated in the third section of the article that, politically, there is a want for the Indigenous people to “just get over it” (McFarlane & Schabus 2017, pp. 74). This really struck a nerve as I have heard this saying before, sadly. It was my first year of my undergrad in Social Work and in studying with another student about colonization and ongoing social issues, she asked me “why don’t they just get over it?”. It has been the aim of the government as well as other Canadians for Indigenous people to move on from the past. But how can they move on when today the effects of colonization are still strong in our communities? The authors talk about how political figures claim they are all for decolonization, through the changing of names on buildings and park benches to commemorate an Indigenous person (McFarlane & Schabus 2017). But this is just superficial I find and there is not nearly enough being done that could be.

What I got from the reading was that the author is trying to make a point of knowledge is power. Reading about the impacts of colonialism, such as the high rates of suicide and the violence toward women, was very formative and I feel that there is still so much more to say. What aided in the delivery was having different authors inform the readers about the past, the pain and the suffering and what reconciliation means to many Indigenous people. Some of the more personal stories enhanced my learning as it was made more relatable and opened my eyes to a different perspective.

What I would like to relate this reading to is the Red Dress movement that was started in 2010. The meaning of this movement would change for me in 2014 when a cousin went missing and was found murdered. This really affected my family. The Red Dress movement now is something that I recognize every year not only for my family, but for the many Indigenous women who have been reported missing or murdered. I’ve come to understand more how meaningful and powerful a movement can be, especially if it is recognized throughout Canada.

References:

McFarlane, Peter & Schabus, Nicole. "Whose Land is it Anyway: A manual for

Decolonization". Federation of Post-Secondary Educators of B.C. 2017

Week 4:

Reading and watching the material for the week drew a very emotional response. I cried with every piece. Even as I write this, I'm full of sadness. The videos of "Stolen Children: Residential School survivors speak out" and the "Kamloops residential school survivors recall students going missing, digging of graves in orchard" shed light on the realities of residential schools as told by survivors. It was the aim of the government to "destroy the Indian" (1879) (CBC News: The National, 2015) and they succeeded with so many children. Those interviewed spoke of what it was like to be a child taken away from their home and how they were told that this was "good for you" (CBC News: The National, 2015). They were torn away from their family and culture by the colonialist and came home as strangers to family members. The children were taught to be ashamed of themselves (Finland, G, 2022) and this shame has followed many generations.

It is noted in the video "Stolen Children: Residential School survivors speak out", that the children from the first generation of residential school survivors often faced abuse at home (CBC News: The National), that the parents didn't know how to love their children because of what they faced themselves as children (Finland, G. 2022). The feeling of immense sadness came over me while sitting and watching this part of the video, it felt like part of what I was hearing was my childhood as well. My mother, from time to time, would tell us about the abuse she faced from her parents growing up. That it was hard to be in their home. Before watching the video's, I

couldn't understand why my own mother displayed violence in the home and why she struggles with addiction. These video's shed light to my situation and I have a deeper understanding for my mother. I've since sought help to work through my childhood but like my brothers, so many have not. The result is the continuation of intergenerational trauma. This trauma will continue to affect families of survivors until the cycle is broken.

The way the videos were created really brought to life the events that occurred. It was a very powerful message sitting and listening to each story, feeling the pain that still affects them. Based on the videos, I feel as though their point was to give a voice to those who survived residential schools as well the children that never made it out alive. And it did. I also find this method is necessary to educate those who still don't know about residential schools and how the children were treated.

I've included a link to a news article that is about the residential school in Northwest River, Labrador. This school is a twenty-minute drive from Goose-Bay, where my grandparent's settled. This summer, I went to see the residential school for the first time as my mom or grandpa would never take us to visit that part of our history. Growing up, I knew my grandpa went to the residential school but never understood what it meant. My journey through my undergrad in Social Work brought to life the monstrosities that occurred, and I began to understand why it's hard for my grandpa to talk about it. Today, you can't enter the building as it is all boarded up. But just standing outside of it you can feel the years of pain and suffering which continues to affect the families to this day. I've also attached a YouTube video on the residential school apology to the Innu and Inuit from Justin Trudeau. It made me question whether an apology from the government can help heal the pain and trauma. Are they just words? Is there any value to the

words spoken? Or is it just a replacing a band-aid that previous politicians have placed on the Indigenous people in Canada?

<https://newsinteractives.cbc.ca/longform/orange-shirt-day-nl-residential-schools-legacy/>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=23OHx_0qwG0

References:

“Stolen Children: Residential School survivors speak out”. CBC News: The National,”

June 2, 2015. 18:35, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vdR9HcmiXLA>.

Finland, Gillian., “Kamloops residential school survivors recall students going missing,

digging of graves in orchard”. January 13, 2022, 43:40,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m8wXExEHIS8>

Journal response to video:

To Rita Watcheston,

Thank you for sharing your story. It was heartbreaking to hear how you were removed from your home at the age of six. You were too young to be taken away from your father. On top of being taken to that cold and dark place, it must have been scary to witness your brother being taken away to the male side of the school and not being able to interact with him. At the same time having your sisters close but in different areas of the residential school. I’m sorry for all the anger that the residential school had created in you. I’m sorry that your father couldn’t be there to protect you. Like so many other survivors, turning to alcohol must have been a coping mechanism for you. It was great to hear that you are thirty years sober now. About the abuse

toward your children, it is more common than you think. I hope as they got older, they were able to move past that part of their lives and take part in healing alongside of you. Finally, I just want to let you know that I can never understand your pain and trauma, but I feel your pain as you talk about your experience. I am forever grateful for the chance to hear your story.