

Leaving Kuujjuarapik: An Ethnography of the Inuit Experience of Travelling Down South to  
Face Justice

By

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## Abstract

Aboriginal people continue to be disproportionately overrepresented in Canadian correctional populations. Most of the literature regarding “what works” for Aboriginal inmates, places great emphasis on traditional culture as a primary method of rehabilitation. However little is known of how Aboriginal peoples actually perceive mainstream Western programming or culturally sensitive programming. Through the narratives of Inuit participants, this research attempts to determine how Inuit peoples experience Western forms of justice and how they negotiate the use and forms of traditional culture to create common ground with Elders and resist further perceived attempts of assimilation by the state.

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## **Introduction**

The Canadian criminal justice system continues to fail Aboriginal people; a clear indication of this failure is the gradually increasing over-representation of Aboriginal offenders in Canadian penitentiaries and jails. On a national scale, Aboriginal offenders are more likely to be incarcerated than non-Aboriginal offenders. In addition, many incarcerated Aboriginal offenders have been convicted of a previous indictable offence and are more likely to commit a crime upon their release, making the rate of recidivism disproportionately high compared to non-Aboriginal populations. In sum, Aboriginal offenders serve a greater part of their sentence in institutions with a higher security classification and have higher rates of re-incarceration during periods of conditional release.

There is a general consensus among both scholars and Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) employees that in order to solve the issue of over-representation and high recidivism rates among Aboriginal offenders, they must be reconnected with their traditional culture. In this context, culture becomes a 'cure' for the socio-economic and emotional ailments that have plagued Aboriginal communities for so long. Since their inception, many government reports and academic assessments have been conducted on the effectiveness of culturally specific programming, most of which favor the incorporation and integration of Aboriginal traditions and methods in rehabilitative efforts. However, very little of this research focuses on the narratives of Aboriginal peoples specific experiences with Western-based institutions and contexts. It is crucial to understand how CSC perceives itself as working in the context of culturally specific programming, and how it actually functions as perceived by those who experience Western conceptions of traditional culture along in conjunction with mainstream programming. Thus, an

ethnographic approach will add individual experiences and valuable insights into the perceived successes and limitations of institutional and community based initiatives.

Since the implementation of culturally specific programming, over incarceration and recidivism rates have not decreased among Aboriginal inmates. This suggests that what they achieve on a personal level for the participant, and why people agree they should be implemented, are complicated questions and that ‘culture’ has a different meaning at different times. This research will focus specifically on the experiences of Inuit people who are required to leave their communities to travel “down south” in order to face justice. Their narratives paint a vivid picture of how Western institutions, such as prison, are conceived of as overt efforts to further colonize Inuit peoples. The Canadian government’s history of overt governance, control and efforts to assimilate Aboriginal people has had a lasting impact on the way in which Western institutions are experienced and conceptualized. Therefore, my research will involve a two-pronged approach, the first will examine Inuit experiences with Western imposed justice, and how these experiences elicit feelings of isolation that are unique to Inuit peoples. This will be prefaced by, and framed within Michel Foucault’s theory of governmentality, conceptions of power and the carceral. According to Foucault, the goal of prison, as conceived by the state, is to produce a specific kind of individual that becomes a productive, but docile member of society. The second approach will assess how this works in practice for Inuit people and how in an effort to resist perceived assimilationist efforts, common ground is created between Elders and Inuit inmates where meaningful connections are made based on shared lived experiences and culture.

#### Methodology:

Initially, participants were to be recruited with the help of a contact I made through a colleague. This contact was an Ottawa area parole officer, who works exclusively with

Aboriginal offenders post their release from provincial and federal prisons. I will herein refer to this contact as Jake, though this is not his real name. After consulting with Jake as to what Corrections Service Canada requires from researchers in order to conduct this research, he informed me that I would not be required to complete a CSC ethical clearance, as the clearance obtained by Carleton University's Ethics Board would be sufficient.

We came to an agreement that participants would be recruited through the following process: having reviewed my research proposal and ethical clearance, Jake would approach clients who have participated in culturally specific programming and determine whether they would be interested in participating. They would be provided with my Letter of Information, which Jake would review with them and should they show interest, they would then be provided with my Letter of Consent. Jake would review the Letter of Consent with the potential participant to ensure that they were fully informed. Once they decided to participate, Jake and I would choose a pseudonym in order to protect their identity and Jake would send me an email to set up a time to meet.

Interviews were to be conducted in Jake's office, in a private room where only the participant and I would be for the duration of the interview. Jake and I believed that this location would serve as a safe space for both the participant and myself, as it is one that both parties were familiar with and provided privacy for the interview itself. It wasn't long before I had two interviews booked, with the assurance that there were many more of Jake's clients interested in my project. It all came together very quickly and seamlessly, which was a great motivator. As Anthropology students, we learn how difficult it can be gaining access to participants with regards to overcoming barriers and gatekeepers. As it turns out, I was about to encounter my first gatekeeper.

On February 11<sup>th</sup>, 2014, I had my first interview scheduled for 10:00am. It got off to a great start; the participant seemed to be very interested in my research. It was a secure environment, where both clients and workers appeared to be comfortable. We were about ten to fifteen minutes into the interview, when a disgruntled man, who I would later learn, was the District Area Manager, stormed into the room, visibly upset and shaken, he informed me that this had not gone through the proper channels and that the interview had to be stopped immediately. The participant did not seem surprised and asked if it would make a difference if we conducted the interview elsewhere. However the Manager indicated that because all of the communication was conducted through Jake, this was not possible. At this point, he seemed very angry and indicated that the interview should not have even started. He sternly asked the participant and me how long the interview had gone on for. He then demanded that I erase any recordings and notes that I may have taken. I complied. Standing on the street, feeling cold and humiliated, it dawned on me; I had just encountered my first gatekeeper.

A few weeks later, Jake provided me with the proper channels to follow should I wish to keep him as a contact. I was determined to finish the interview I started with the first participant, so I prepared my application for CSC and sent it off. My application was rejected for the most part because my research interests were too broad. Another blow, but perhaps not a surprise. I took great solace in knowing that James Waldram, a fellow Anthropologist whose work centers on Aboriginal mental health in various contexts such as medical clinics, remote communities and prisons, encountered a similar issue. In Waldram's (2012) preface of his book "Hound Pound Narrative: Sexual Offender Habilitation and the Anthropology of Therapeutic Intervention" he discusses how his research "emerged fortuitously out of a failed attempt to obtain approval of the Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) to undertake a study of a healing program designed

specifically for Aboriginal sexual offenders” (ix). This research proposal was created and submitted by Waldram in conjunction with the Aboriginal Elder who ran said program; rather than focusing on the treatment of sexual offenders, Waldram intended to focus on Aboriginal approaches to healing (Waldram 2012). However, according to Waldram (2012) “A research official with CSC insisted that all our transcripts be provided in raw form as part of the project, ostensibly to allow for confirmation of our data” (ix). For obvious ethical reasons, Waldram rejected this and as a result was forced to end this avenue of research. It seems apparent to me that CSC would have been aware of the ethical implications an Anthropologist would face if asked to share his or her transcripts in raw form with government officials. However, a few years later, still determined, Waldram submitted a proposal to study a mainstream sexual offender treatment unit that accommodates both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders.

Determined, I managed to make another contact through the same channels that led me to Jake. However in this instance, my contact was an active community member in a rural Inuit community called Kuujjuarapik, I will refer to this contact as Jordan. With a recruitment process similar to that used with Jake, Jordan managed to find four interested participants. This was completed upon making routine visits into the community and speaking with people who he believed would be interested and subsequently providing them with my Letter of Information. When an individual agreed, they were then provided with my Consent Form, which they were free to review before the interview was set-up. Because of the distance, interviews were conducted over the phone from a secure location, provided by Jordan who would not be present when the interview was taking place. Consent was acquired verbally from participants before the formal interview began and they were reminded that the interview would be recorded. It is important to note that conducting the interviews over the phone created a different dynamic. One

that I believe created a more conducive environment for the participant to speak more freely and comfortably as there was no imposition of myself, my notebook or my recorder in their physical space.

I conducted one in-depth, unstructured interview with each of the participants via the telephone feature on Skype, with no video feed. These interviews were recorded, lasted approximately an hour (depending on the participant's interest), and involved a broad discussion of their connection to traditional Inuit culture, the importance of family and language, their personal experiences within the prison system, and their journey of healing. All four participants were Inuit, three men and one woman, all of whom had served multiple sentences in St. Jerome, a medium security detention Centre, located a great distance from their community. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and the research below is a result of the analysis of these transcripts, field notes and comparative literature.

### Terminology:

When referencing the supporting literature in this paper, I will use "Aboriginal", as an inclusive term to encompass First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples. As outlined in the Constitution Act of 1982, the term "Aboriginal" would be representative of a collective identity of all indigenous peoples of Canada (Boldt 1993). While this term is widely criticized because it is used to encompass a multiplicity of First Nation, Inuit and Métis peoples, all with their own unique beliefs, cultural practices, and languages, it can also be understood as a means to achieve a broad goal. Dickson-Gilmore and La Prairie (2005) state, "to create a common identity that can unite members of very different cultural groups and nations into a force to challenge shared social and political problems" (19). While cultural beliefs differ greatly, First Nation, Inuit and Métis people's share the lived experience of inter-generational trauma caused by the legacy and

persistence of colonialism and cultural alienation. As reflected in my research, participants acknowledged the differences between Inuit and of the Aboriginal culture's, but recognized and embraced the shared experiences outlined above. These shared experiences made them feel open to various Aboriginal healing practices and, within the context of prison, they often identified as being Aboriginal themselves; speaking to the desire and willingness to achieve common goals. However, when discussing my specific research findings, I will use the term Inuit as their experiences do differ, at the very least based on their geographical location. Furthermore, I will henceforth use the acronym CSC to refer to Corrections Services Canada.

## **Chapter One: The Legacy of Colonialism and a Brief History of Contact**

Current Aboriginal discourse centers on the historical and ongoing legacy of colonization. However, the Inuit lived experience of colonization differs slightly from that of Aboriginal and Metis peoples. First and foremost, the Inuit had never signed treaties with the Canadian government and remained isolated from contact with non-Inuit peoples for far longer, largely due to the harsh climate and inhospitable land. In addition, policies such as the Indian Act of 1876 did not initially affect Inuit people, as they were not considered to be “Indians”, and thus were not the legal responsibility of the Canadian government.

In 1924, a bill was passed to amend the Indian Act recognizing Inuit peoples in Canadian legislation for the first time, under the authority of Indian Affairs. This bill passed with the condition that Inuit people were still considered Canadian citizens and would not yet become wards of the state. In 1928 an order was issued to transfer authority from Indian Affairs to the North West Territories Council (Bonesteel, 2006). Up until 1935, financial responsibility for Inuit communities fell to the Quebec provincial government until they brought the question of responsibility to the Supreme Court (Bonesteel, 2006). In 1939, the Supreme Court sided with Quebec, a decision based on the historic description of “Esquimaux” as an Indian tribe in various documents (Bonesteel, 2006). This amendment was referred to as *Re Eskimo* and through this decision; the Canadian government became legally responsible for the health and welfare of Inuit peoples. However the Second World War disrupted this, and *Re Eskimo* did little to change the delivery of government services or programs for the Inuit (Bonesteel, 2006). Consequently, this meant that food and medical relief (to name a few of the required services) were not delivered to Inuit communities in time of need.

### Inuit Life Pre-Contact:

Prior to Euro-Canadian contact, the Inuit lived in bands consisting of about fifty people, each composed of two to five families (Vick-Westgate 2002). Their traditional way of life was heavily influenced by the extreme climate and stark landscape. Hunting and fishing were an integral part of Inuit life as their diet, clothing and tools depended upon the capture of whales, walruses, seals, or fish. Traditional diet consisted almost entirely of meat, traditional clothing was made from animal skins and fur, and sleds used for transportation were made of animal bones and skins. Family and community were and remain highly valued among the Inuit and traditions such as story telling; mythology, and dancing were and are an integral part of Inuit life and culture (Vick-Westgate 2002). Elders were the primary educators in Inuit societies and passed their knowledge through the traditional practice of oral storytelling.

Inuit people believed in animism, that all living and non-living things had a spirit and when that spirit died, it continued living on a different plain. As such, having respect for the land and the inanimate objects that inhabit it are of the utmost importance. Any display of disrespect, whether it be towards a person, animal or inanimate object would anger the spirits and likely bear consequences. The only people powerful enough to control or communicate with the spirits were Shamans, religious leaders. They used charms and dances as a way to communicate with the spirit world and in order to appease the spirits; Shamans would make recommendations and suggest offerings.

Occurrences such as bad weather, illness and uneventful hunting trips were believed to be caused by displeased spirits. There was a set of unwritten regulations that the Inuit adhered to in order to appease the spirits. These unwritten regulations also served as a guide to Inuit morality, as the transgression against these regulations not only incurred cosmological punishments, but

also a penalty imposed by a Shaman. Shamans were often the primary source of law, distributing fines to those who broke the rules and angered the spirits (Laugrand & Oosten 2010). Following a certain set of rituals in daily life, for example, when hunting and eating, was imperative in dealing with the spirits that lived in the animals that were hunted and consumed. Inuit perceive hunting as an integral part of their existence and is central to their identity (Laugrand & Oosten 2010). According to Laugrand & Oosten “Inuit and animals have always been connected in a cosmic cycle maintained by hunting and the rules that pertain to it” (2010, 104). Hunting remains an integral part of Inuit life today, which will be examined further in this manuscript.

#### Upon Contact: Whalers, Missionaries, The Hudson’s Bay Company and The Royal Canadian Mounted Police

Traditional Inuit lifestyle slowly started to change with the introduction of whaling in the 1700s, when European whalers traded their goods in exchange for their help with the procurement and butchering of the mammals. Although very little is recorded of this time, contact with whalers is believed to have changed Inuit technologies. For example, rather than using a harpoon to hunt whales, Inuit now used guns procured from Europeans while still using wooden canoes as their method of transportation. Inuit peoples were and still are open to new technology and forms of change that meet their needs and improve their way of life (Vick-Westgate 2002).

With the decline in whale population coupled with the harsh climate of the North, the contact between Inuit and Europeans lessened substantially. While the adoption of Christianity by the Inuit is not comprehensively understood, the arrival of missionaries was perhaps one of the biggest influences on Inuit traditional culture (Laugrand & Oosten 2010). As whaling began

to decline, missionaries entered Inuit territory. Once there, they would systematically convert many Inuit people to Christianity by imposing their own moral agenda. Their initial focus was on women and children, as men were often out on hunting trips; however, their efforts really gained traction when they were able to convert influential camp leaders (Laugrand & Oosten 2010).

Through Christian doctrine, missionaries presented a new worldview to the Inuit, one that often clashed with traditional beliefs and values. While the younger willingly accepted the new religion, Elders and Inuit community leaders resisted Christian teachings for much longer (Stuckenberger 2005). Missionaries rejected many aspects of Inuit culture, especially shamanism and any rituals associated with shamanistic practices (Laugrand & Oosten 2010). Many ceremonial practices were discouraged as they were considered pagan rituals and once the leaders had made the conversion to Christianity, shamans no longer practiced openly (Laugrand & Oosten 2010).

While the impact of the white man occurred later and more gradual in the North, with the establishment of The Hudson's Bay Company and the boom of the fur trade, contact became much more frequent. Many of the contemporary communities of Nunavik were a result of trading posts and missions that were created near camps that had been used by Inuit for thousands of years (Vick-Westgate 2002). With the establishment of trading posts, Hudson's Bay storefronts, and missionaries, Inuit peoples became more sedentary. The demands of the fur trade dramatically altered Inuit life as people adopted trapping into subsistence, hunting and fishing (Vick-Westgate 2002). Permanent trading posts created varying degrees of dependence. According to Brody (1975), traders systematically encouraged the Inuit to devote more time hunting the animals that they considered to be most valuable in the southern market, and to

spend less time hunting animals that were a source of food. This shift in hunting sometimes left the hunter and his family hungry, thereby causing further dependence on trading posts and southern goods (Brody 1975). Between the years 1925 and 1930, Inuit life, for the most part, shifted from a traditional subsistence economy to one based on trade. The fur trade enveloped every part of the Arctic, so much so that trapping still remains a common practice among Inuit peoples today.

By this time, Inuit peoples were living a vastly different lifestyle from the previous generation. According to Brody (1975), institutions such as churches, the Hudson's Bay Company, and the government of Canada were now determined to exercise control over the minds and lands of the Inuit peoples. The joint endeavor was the incorporation of Inuit peoples into mainstream Canadian life. The end of World War II saw the awakening of Canadian colonization efforts in the north; "where land and people were incorporated into a growing political entity without regard to the people's own wishes" (Brody 1975, 18). The presence of the Canadian government in the Arctic intensified as the country recognized the need to establish its sovereignty. Besides the influence of missionaries, one of the most profound changes to Inuit culture and way of life was the government initiative to move Inuit peoples from their traditional camps to larger permanent settlements between 1955 and 1965. This initiative stemmed from widespread humanitarian ideologies that demonstrated a growing concern to improve the conditions of a nation's less advantaged citizens. The provision of new services such as housing, schools, policing, and health care facilities coupled with increased contact with non-Inuit people's only encouraged Inuit people to adopt a more Westernized lifestyle (Brody 1975).

Within the first thirty years of settlement, Inuit became almost entirely dependent on government assistance. Children were taken away from their families and communities and sent

away to residential schools, a decision that was made by the government without the informed consent of Inuit parents. Inuit children became the target for the purpose of assimilation; removed from their families for most of the year and by extension their traditional culture, they were educated under the authority of various religious institutions (Waldram 1997). It was illegal for parents to keep their children out of residential schools, and most Inuit parents were “completely unaware that their children were at risk of physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, sexual, cultural and verbal abuse” (Jacobs and Williams 2008, 126). Parents were essentially helpless when it came to protecting their children from the harms of residential schools. The removal of children from their families drastically altered relationships, as the maintenance of family bonds were not part of the residential school experience (Jacobs and Williams 2008).

According to Frideres and Gadacz (2012) “much of the family violence, alcoholism, and suicidal behavior among First Nations citizens has originated either directly or indirectly from the abuse inflicted on students in the residential schools”. Research shows that several generations of Aboriginal citizens have been repeatedly exposed to the traumatic experiences of sexual abuse, child abuse, substance abuse, accidental death, and suicide. It is also important to note here that the effects of trauma can also be transferred to subsequent generations through culture. The way in which culture encourages or discourages people to deal with their negative emotions will, to some extent, determine the intergenerational effects of trauma (Raphael et.al 1998). In the case of Aboriginal peoples, silence is a mechanism to cope with the effects of intergenerational trauma. Through their actions, Aboriginal peoples display the effects of this trauma, many of which lead to their incarceration.

By 1903, the RCMP began to establish stations throughout the Eastern Arctic, and almost immediately began arresting and imprisoning Inuit peoples for reasons that were completely

obscure or unknown to them (Brody 1975). An early example of police intervention as told by Brody, occurred in Pond Inlet during 1923, when three Inuit men were tried for the murder of a free trader, Robert Janes. These men shot Janes because they believed him to be a dangerous man as he threatened to shoot their dogs. In order for the court proceedings to occur, lawyers and jury members had to be brought in from the south. In the end, one was found guilty of manslaughter, one was convicted of aiding and abetting, while the other was acquitted. The Inuit man convicted of manslaughter was forced to serve a 10-year sentence in a southern prison (Brody 1975). Traditional Inuit conceptions of Western written rules or laws are seen as ephemeral, greater weight is placed on possessing this knowledge in one's head and orally passing it on. Written law is assumed to exist only on paper and paper is seen as a material that is easily destroyed. However, possessing this knowledge in one's mind, suggests that it will not disappear or be destroyed because it becomes a part of that person (Oosten et.al, 1999).

Dependence, coerced religious conversion, residential schools, and forced sedentary lifestyle all contributed to the decline of traditional Inuit culture and the devastating effects of intergenerational trauma. This trauma remains in the collective memory of Inuit peoples and coupled with the current state of isolated communities, are believed to have negative effects on high Inuit unemployment and crime rates. High levels of unemployment among Inuit communities, coupled with the authority of a non-Inuit policing and justice system has greatly contributed to the current breakdown of traditional community leadership (Bonesteel, 2006). Since the 1970s, the crime rate in the North has been significantly higher than in most other regions of Canada and Inuit peoples are overrepresented in the prison system (Bonesteel, 2006).

## **Chapter Two: A Background to Culturally Specific Programming**

Aboriginal peoples continue to be disproportionately represented at all levels of the criminal justice system in Canada, including the Federal correctional system. In 2010/2011, Statistics Canada released a report indicating that of 27% of all adults in provincial and territorial custody, and 20% in Federal custody were Aboriginal peoples (Dauvergne 2012). This is about seven to eight times higher than the proportion of Aboriginal peoples in the general adult population (3%) (Dauvergne 2012). For Aboriginal women, these numbers are even more alarming, representing 41% of adult women in sentenced custody (Dauvergne 2012). The overrepresentation of Aboriginal peoples is consistent across Canada, and has been an ongoing issue.

In order to address these disparities, a number of initiatives and commissions have been undertaken over the years. Beginning in 1991, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) was established and subsequently concluded that the justice system was failing Aboriginal peoples. Following the recognition of RCAP, the Corrections and Conditional Release Act introduced in 1992 redefined the relationship between CSC and Aboriginal peoples (Mann 2012). It required that CSC provide programs designed to address the needs of Aboriginal offenders and gave CSC the authority to enter into agreements with Aboriginal communities for the provision of Correctional Services. At this time Aboriginal spirituality was tolerated in many instances, but not fully accepted; it was seen as subordinate to mainstream correctional programming (Waldrum 1997).

With what little change came from RCAP, in 1997 CSC adopted the National Strategy on Aboriginal Corrections, in recognition of the need for a comprehensive plan to address the overrepresentation and high recidivism rate among Aboriginal peoples in correctional facilities

(Zellerer 2003). Corrections staff were required to provide their recommendations on potential culturally competent treatment models, however most of them fell directly in line with CSC's mandate, involving mainstream programming that was not necessarily compatible with Aboriginal spirituality and traditional forms of healing.

Despite its efforts, the National Strategy on Aboriginal Corrections was unable to narrow the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal offenders, or to lower recidivism rates. In 2000, the Department of the Solicitor General in partnership with the National Parole Board developed a framework of Effective Corrections Initiative in an attempt to enhance the role of Aboriginal communities (Mann 2012). In the same year, the federal Treasury Board approved funding for this initiative, and CSC received 18.6 million dollars over a five-year span (Mann 2012). Most of the funding was intended to develop additional Healing Lodges in partnership with Aboriginal communities and CSC experienced several failed attempts to establish and sustain these healing lodges. One of the main reasons they did not succeed is that while Aboriginal communities were eager to accept them, they did not have the resources to implement and maintain the Healing Lodges.

At the end of the five-year initiative, CSC had developed a number of strategies within the Continuum of Care model with the guidance of community Elders and the participation of national Aboriginal organizations. This model includes the creation of seven national Aboriginal correctional programs that target their specific needs, along with key research studies that allegedly identified diverse profiles and needs of Aboriginal, Metis, and Inuit offenders (Mann 2012). These initiatives were encouraging to CSC at the time of their creation and implementation, however since then, the number of Aboriginal offenders in sentenced custody has increased.

In 2003, CSC, in conjunction with Aboriginal stakeholders, established the Aboriginal Corrections Continuum of Care Model in an attempt to develop new approaches to addressing Aboriginal offender needs (Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Corrections 2013). At the core of this model is the medicine wheel, which according to CSC “reflects research findings that culture, teachings and ceremonies (core aspects of Aboriginal identity) appear critical to the healing process” (Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Corrections 2013). Within the Continuum of Care model, the focus is twofold. First, Aboriginal offenders should be reconnected/connected to their culture, families and communities through the process of rehabilitation. Second, Aboriginal culture, spirituality and community support should be integrated within the overall operations of CSC, beginning at intake and continuing upon their release into the community.

Within CSC’s Continuum initiative, the problem of overrepresentation and high recidivism rates are identified and acknowledged, while reconnecting Aboriginal inmates to their cultural roots is provided as a solution. These solutions are carried out through the implementation of culturally specific programming, framed by principles that are allegedly guided by Aboriginal stakeholders and members of the community. However, based on published information available on CSC’s website, the implementation of these programs does not appear to be consistent throughout the nation and whether the participants themselves perceive them as effective is unclear. In addition, while CSC claims that the committee itself is non-political in nature, the way in which it is structured and deployed inevitably is.

The committee is assembled and facilitated by CSC, with initiatives delineated by CSC. In this context, CSC creates the illusion that Aboriginal stakeholders are included in decision-making processes with regards to culturally sensitive programming, by employing words like “stakeholders” and “non-political” throughout literature pertaining to the Aboriginal Continuum

of Care Model. This suggests that CSC is attempting to imply that Aboriginal community members are primarily influential in the outcome of decisions made regarding Aboriginal corrections, while simultaneously depriving the committee from having any real influence. There are no details as to how committee members are chosen, but these are the Aboriginal Stakeholders that are providing CSC with advice on how to implement and facilitate culturally sensitive programming.

This directive is saturated with delegated responsibilities, tasked to various bureaucratic positions whose responsibilities range from maintaining the regional Aboriginal Advisory Committee to consulting with Aboriginal communities and/or Elders, or ensuring Elders/Spiritual Advisors are afforded the same status as Chaplains within prisons. In some instances, Aboriginal communities are even afforded the opportunity to submit plans and ideas with regards to release and reintegration methods. Furthermore, the District Director's responsibility is to ensure that offenders have reasonable access to culturally appropriate resources in the community. It is evident that the framework of this directive is ambiguous; it would seem the Aboriginal community is offered participation, but nothing is clearly outlined, and there is no evidence of a concrete commitment.

Kiera Ladner, author of "Negotiated Inferiority: the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People's vision of a renewed relationship" believes that state initiatives like RCAP or the Continuum of Care Model does not create a relationship based on principles of mutual respect or responsibility. According to Ladner, it does the complete opposite by imposing "a vision of a renewed relationship between unequal partners", that is essentially based on a commitment to negotiate the inferiority of "Aboriginal nations, Aboriginal governments, and their inherent right to self-determination" (Ladner 2015, 13). Unfortunately, government initiatives that seek to

establish and rebuild relationships with Aboriginal Nations fail, as they are not based on mutual recognition; they principally reject the idea of coexisting, equal nations (Ladner, 2015).

Consider, for example, the Aboriginal Continuum of Care Model previously discussed. CSC states that Aboriginal stakeholders are consulted on correctional issues that pertain to their community members, while at the same time claiming that the Aboriginal Committee is non-political. Aside from being inherently political in the way that the committee is assembled, by stating that this group is non-political removes any autonomy they have over Aboriginal corrections. Furthermore, CSC is essentially claiming that the treatment of Aboriginal prisoners is not a political issue, however treating them differently comes back down to a political claim—one they should have involvement in.

Furthermore, these governmental policies, directives and committees serve under the guise of building and maintaining relationships with Aboriginal communities, when in reality they perpetuate unequal partnerships and assume that Aboriginal peoples are not in fact a true nation, but a group of people that can employ the delegated powers and responsibilities that were assigned to them by a superior government body (Ladner 2015). What transpires with regards to Aboriginal autonomy over correctional issues, is a fundamental rejection of collaborative jurisdiction by the Canadian government, which in turn compels Aboriginal “stakeholders” to negotiate their inferiority by accepting responsibility for powers that the federal and provincial government maintain control over (Ladner, 2015). This is demonstrated in the implementation of culturally specific programming, as Aboriginal stakeholders are limited in their capacity to directly affect the outcome of these programs, due in large part to CSC controlling their involvement. Control is exercised by operating under the guise of granting a certain amount of

autonomy to Aboriginal communities, while not providing them with the political power to make changes that they believe to be necessary.

In addressing statistical disparities in sentencing, incarceration, and recidivism, CSC conceptualizes its efforts towards culturally appropriate initiatives directed at Aboriginal offenders as an ongoing priority. A great importance is placed on working in conjunction with Aboriginal stakeholders and communities, to ensure that Aboriginal offender's interests are being met throughout the judicial process. Theoretically, initiatives like the Continuum of Care model are intended to provide Aboriginal communities with a certain amount of autonomy over how their people are treated and cared for both in and outside of prison. However, the way in which CSC overtly conceptualizes their efforts is in direct conflict with how these initiatives have historically and currently been politically employed. Ladner (2015) asserts that these initiatives serve as a platform for government bodies to negotiate Aboriginal people's inferiority and perpetuate unequal partnerships. Nevertheless, it was through this unequal partnership that the existing model for Aboriginal rehabilitation was created and implemented.

### Existing Traditional Methods

Sweat Lodges are a form of cultural healing most commonly offered in punitive institutions out West. The physical layout of the sweat lodge is crucial to its function as a spiritual space. In many traditions, the entrance to the sweat lodge faces to the East and a sacred fire pit burns at the front of the entrance, both of very significant spiritual value. Each new day begins in the East with the rising of the sun, while the fire signifies the undying light of the world. Through prayer, the sweat lodge allows participants to purify the mind, body and soul, in the belief that this will repair the damage that has been done to an individual's spirit (Nabigon, 2006).

The sweat lodge is a place of spiritual refuge and mental and physical healing. A place where answers and guidance are given to those who seek them, so that they may develop and focus on becoming balanced (Nabigon, 2006). According to Hyatt (2013), many inmates who use sweat lodges believe that the ceremony allows them to heal both physically and mentally. Some report that through their participation in sweat lodges, a cleansing occurs where a negative spirit is removed from their body (Waldram, 1997). This spiritual environment also allows for the release of negativity and the negative effects of prison and allows the person to be “metaphorically reborn into a person who projects positivity” (Hyatt 2013, 46).

Sweat lodges also work well in conjunction with mainstream programming in that in most programming, offenders are taught to make amends with themselves through prayer, especially for those who have hurt others as a result of their behavior. Thus, in contexts such as these, healing Aboriginal inmates involves two separate approaches. First, spiritual healing occurs in a culturally sensitive environment where ones well-being can be restored through recognizing that an imbalance exists. Once these imbalances are understood, the inmates then can understand how these imbalances impact their lives and by extension their families and communities (Hyatt 2013). Spiritual healing allows inmates to reconnect with these traditional cultural ceremonies, while learning the core values of traditional spirituality.

Healing lodges are another form of cultural rehabilitation that offers a unique alternative to traditional prisons. Healing is achieved in these settings by allowing inmates to connect with nature, participate in traditional ceremonies, and connect with Elders (Hyatt, 2013). The focus is on healing and harm reduction through the deployment of cultural teachings and participation in ceremonial practices. An integral aspect of the healing lodge is creating a sense of community, which is further established as the inmates live in shared quarters where they partake in common

chores with one another. Another unique facet of the healing lodge is that because the number of inmates is low, they are able to provide individualized counseling such as job training, parenting classes, and education (Hyatt 2013). In these environments, inmates have the opportunity to heal spiritually, while being empowered through their increase in skill-set to help them obtain meaningful employment (Hyatt 2013). The creation and implementation of sweat lodges and healing lodges are constructed in an effort to create a physical space that resonates with Aboriginal offenders both on a cultural and personal level. The circular design and positioning of the healing and sweat lodges are believed to embody traditional holistic approach to healing, in that the circle represents life that is a never ending cycle of growth. In this way, traditional Aboriginal approaches are occurring in an environment that is culturally conducive to healing.

Sacred circles are a safe space where everyone involved is equal and equally important (Hyatt 2013). They allow inmates to explore the harm done to their spirit with Elders through both individual and group counseling. Inmates are permitted to discuss any issues they are experiencing and the Elder responds by offering guidance and relating to the problem, while offering traditional methods of healing (Waldram, 1997). According to Hyatt (2013), it is a space in which the inmates are taught to respect themselves, others, the community, and the spirits. In some instances sacred medicines can be used, such as tobacco or sweetgrass. These sacred medicines are important in the process of healing as they allow individuals to communicate and connect with traditional teachings. It is an empowering method of treatment as it allows participants to use these cultural tools whenever necessary, not just when they have access to an Elder (Hyatt 2013). However permitting access to these cultural tools is a grey area due to rules surrounding contraband and what is legally permitted in any given institution. For example, inmates in a medium or maximum-security prison would likely not have access to these

cultural tools. In some cases, even when these sacred medicines are available to inmates, the way in which they are handled by prison staff is in direct conflict with traditional teachings.

Perhaps the most common method of culturally appropriate programming that is readily available to most inmates across Canadian institutions is access to Elders. Certainly in the case of my research, this was the only connection my participants had to their traditional culture, and their access to this resource, was scarce at best. Elders appear to be vital to an inmate's healing, as they are a link to the Aboriginal community and a source of traditional wisdom. They are able to offer guidance based on traditional teachings and personal experience on methods of prayer and healing. Much of the healing that Elders provide is considered holistic, in that it addresses mental, emotional, and physical ailments while including harm done to the victim and community. Historical trauma is also an integral part of the process; inmates must acknowledge past experiences and grievances before the healing can begin. Elders create a safe space by building trusting relationships and offering familiarity. It is a mutually respectful relationship that is not based on a hierarchy or judgment.

Research and information regarding “what works” for Aboriginal offenders supports the programs listed above. However it is difficult to assess the outcome of these programs because they are not fully implemented. In addition, it is unclear how Aboriginal offenders perceive culturally specific programming, notwithstanding the general consensus among CSC and scholars that specific programming contributes to a more successful rehabilitation. There is a sense of mistrust stemming from historical conflict, which places a strain on the contact made between prison staff and Aboriginal inmates. Furthermore, correctional staff's pre-conceived notions, attitudes, beliefs and approaches are often in conflict with Aboriginal approaches.

Certainly in the case of my research, there are inadequate resources for programs and services both at the corrections level and at the community level for Inuit offenders.

It is evident that there are conflicts in the varying agendas held by the Canadian government, Corrections Canada and Aboriginal stakeholders. It is also evident that Aboriginal stakeholders and the government have completely different visions of what their relationship should look like. Zellerer (2007) asserts that in order to implement successful programming, differences must be recognized and compromises must be made through consultation and cooperation. If the proper policy is in place that will allow for culturally competent programming to be consistent throughout the nation, this will take away the frustrations and inequalities currently felt by Native inmates when they do not have sufficient access to their culture (Zellerer 2007). However, this initiative would have to be taken further by granting Aboriginal leaders and communities more autonomy over Aboriginal corrections.

Those who are partial to culturally specific programming are extremely critical of mainstream rehabilitative efforts that are imposed on Aboriginal offenders. Waldram (1997) notes a particular scholar, Reasons, who argues that ‘traditional’ correctional approaches are assimilationist by nature, as their framework seeks to “change members of a racial or ethnic minority so that they fit within the institutional structures” (as cited in Waldram 1997, 25). Furthermore, Reasons states, “the goal of rehabilitation has been to strip the convict of his previous identity and help produce a new person” (as cited in Waldram 1997, 25). In this context, Aboriginal inmates are forced to assimilate into the self-contained institutional community and state-imposed goals of a prison. These goals are achieved through a number of mechanisms that seek to isolate Aboriginal offenders and leave them with very few choices.

While Aboriginal peoples' lived experiences and worldviews differ significantly from the general population, Waldram (1997) believes that any attempts at assimilation, especially in prison, will be met with resistance. This becomes problematic when issues such as the outcome of rehabilitation and parole are based on the degree to which the Aboriginal inmate has allowed mainstream assimilationist programs to be effective. According to Waldram (1997) "the correctional system acts as a mechanism to increase the urbanization, and possible assimilation of Aboriginal people" (26). The solution to these assimilationist programs is to implement culturally specific programming that specifically addresses the spiritual needs of Aboriginal offenders. It is believed that through implementing these programs, we can reduce recidivism and by extension, high-incarceration rates.

A common theme found throughout the literature addressing culturally specific programming in prisons, stresses the importance of acknowledging that Aboriginal peoples share different life experiences from that of the general population which must be understood before effective counseling services can take place. In order for these programs to reach their full potential and to reaffirm cultural values, scholars suggest that an Aboriginal Elder or Spiritual Advisor must be the primary facilitator. It is believed that programs and rehabilitative efforts that are grounded in Aboriginal traditions, spirituality and culture, are better suited to heal the individual in holistic terms, and will improve engagement, participation and retention of the participant in treatment (Kunic et.al 2009).

The integration of Aboriginal spirituality in prison-based programming, seeks to recognize the interesting intersections among culture, spirituality, and community in maintaining the health of the individual involved, and by extension, the community (Kunic et.al 2009). McCormick (2009) reviewed a study examining an Aboriginal alcohol-counseling program in

British Columbia, which sought to determine the characteristics of recovery and personal meaning for Aboriginal people. One of the major themes that emerged from this research was that individuals involved valued and identified with knowledge of traditional Aboriginal culture (McCormick 2009). However, prisons inherently operate within a complex network of power relations, making it difficult for Aboriginal spirituality to operate within this space, as the foundation of Aboriginal culture is in direct conflict with overt forms of power and hierarchical structures. Thus, it is important to understand how Aboriginal people resist Western forms of assimilation and are able to negotiate the use and forms of traditional culture within a non-Aboriginal setting.

### **Chapter Three: Foucault, Power Relations and Prison as a Mechanism of Recidivism**

Within both the historical and contemporary context, the relationship between Aboriginal people and the Canadian government can be contextualized within Foucault's concepts of power and governmentality. While the government no longer uses the overt forceful tactics employed during the era of colonization, the current circumstances of Aboriginal people continue to be directly influenced by the state. This occurs through a number of hierarchical, state-imposed institutions that do not rely on the use of physical force in order to exercise power. Aboriginal people continue to be disproportionately represented in both federal and provincial prisons, are more likely to be sentenced and to serve their full term in prison. Aboriginal people experience systemic discrimination at all levels of our justice system. They are still required to register their status with the government, forcing them to formally authenticate their heritage. Aboriginal peoples are less likely to attain high levels of education and are more likely to experience poverty and adverse health issues than that of their non-Aboriginal counterparts. These circumstances subject Aboriginal peoples to more intense disciplinary efforts aimed at assimilating them to ideal Western concepts of health, education, status and behavior.

When discussing power relations in the context of the Aboriginal inmate in relation to provincial/federal prisons, Foucault's discussion of power, governmentality and the carceral is an effective, explanatory theoretical framework. Within this research, Foucault's notion of governmentality, bio-power and discipline, is applicable. In this case, the state, generally referred to as "government" produces laws and regulates bodies through disciplinary institutions that seek to produce "docile bodies", where individual movements can be controlled and in addition, involves the psychological monitoring and ultimate control over individuals. This is

not only carried out through intense isolation, but involves a number of state enforced programs that observe, diagnose, characterize and label offenders (Foucault 1977).

It is important to note that Foucault's notion of power does not account for individual agency or the various effects of power. In spaces like prison, power is a major source of social discipline and conformity, if one fails to challenge these multiple sources of power, one risks permitting them to exist (Dreyfus and Rabinow 1982). In the case of this research, what occurs is a form of power that is based on common ground and is a direct response to recognize and question socialized Western norms and constraints. Challenging power is not a matter of seeking absolute truth, it is a resistance to state imposed programming and a response to perceived assimilation tactics. This occurs when individuals who are not associated with the state (Elders) intervene in unremunerated labor and create a space conducive to creating common ground that give back a sense of agency to Inuit offenders. For Foucault, creating a sense of community in an institution that is imbued with various forms of power would still be considered a form of discipline. However what this research will show is that power means something completely different to the participants involved if it aids in their resistance to a post settler society. Thus, Foucault's work provides us with lens through which to view an institution by examining its guiding principles and practices.

Both power and governmentality are focused on interaction and relationships. According to Foucault, we are constantly exposed becoming objects of subjective power (Foucault 1977). Without interactions and relationships being forged between individuals, power would cease to exist. Further, Robinson (2011) points out that for Foucault, "no individual exists outside of power, even those engaged in concerted efforts to resist or oppose power are in fact only reinforcing the power relations which they are attempting to resist" (6). Foucault argues that the

ultimate goal here is to create docile bodies, individuals that will unarguably and diligently comply with state enforced rules and regulations. In order to create docile bodies, certain tools are required to maintain control and discipline without the overt use of physical force. These tools exist within the primary mode of power: surveillance through its various forms; which are based around medicine, general education, and religious direction. Through these forms of power the state is able to model the ideal body through modification of behavior and the procurement of skills that is intimately linked with the formation of power relations (Foucault 1977, 295). Power in this form can be exercised through these programs, where the goal is to produce a particular state envisioned ideal, one that is technically supervised and submissive (Foucault 1977). Together, both discipline and power produce a body of knowledge and behavior that subsequently dictates what is considered to be normal or deviant behavior.

For Foucault, governmentality is a technology of power, where we are not only to conceive of power as hierarchical but also as a form of social control. According to Robinson (2011) “Governmentality is a mechanism of shaping actions of people without the use of force, and is exercised through a broad range of institutions and organizations” (6). Instead of the direct use of force, the state works through seemingly benevolent institutions, such as prisons, in order to gain control of a population that actually disciplines and polices itself. The ultimate goal of this disciplinary power is to re-educate and enhance individuals, in order to make optimal use of their abilities, which directly corresponds to the state’s imagined ideal. Governmentality has now become the regulation of mentalities; the effort to shape the minds of a given population is completed through what seem to be transparent institutions (such as prisons). Thus, we are not only to think of the conventional modes of power such as hierarchical and top down approaches of the state, but we are encouraged to think of power in terms of social control, in disciplinary

institutions, as well as through the production of various forms of knowledge. In this way, the state's goal is to have everyone operating under the same set of norms, where physical bodies are subjected and made to behave in certain ways as a microcosm of social control. In the context of this research, Foucault would perceive Elders as agents of the state, working to produce forms of knowledge that would in essence, create docile bodies. However this perspective does not consider the various ways in which people reclaim control of their circumstances, particularly in assimilationist settings, in projects of self-transformation. These projects of self-transformation are not conceptualized as a form of social control or conformity as it occurs on their own terms, through practices and principles that are compatible with their way of life.

In addition, it is also crucial to consider Foucault's conception of discipline within this context. Foucault encourages us to conceive of punishment and prisons as a complex social function rather than a repressive mechanism (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). Discipline becomes a mechanism of power, which regulates the behavior of individuals through the regulation of space, time, and activity. Prison is just one unit of similar disciplinary institutions such as schools and hospitals that seek to regulate and arrange bodies within a particular space. Like prison, these institutions are assembled much in the same way, in that they all have educational, medical, and productive attributes. In prison however, "isolation provides an intimate exchange between the convict and the power that is exercised" (Foucault 1977, 237). The basic goal of disciplinary power is to produce individuals who could be treated as a 'docile body' (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1982). This technology of power and discipline is aimed at producing a certain kind of individual, one that is useful, docile and productive. Power is often thought of as operating under negative forms, however Foucault understands power differently. In order to control the population, governments go beyond the threat of death as a mechanism of control and

emphasize the protection of life. Isolation becomes the primary mechanism of power so that the offender is separated from the external world and everything that motivated or facilitated the offence.

In line with Foucault, the modern prison has been built upon a platform of disciplinary punishment; in which, according to Waldram (2012) “various professionals such as judges, parole boards, psychologists, and psychiatrists play a significant and increasing role in determining the fitness of the accused/criminal to remain in, or rejoin, society” (29). In this way, offenders are left within a network of permanent observation and surveillance, enforcing the notion of power relations (Foucault 1977). As institutions of formal social control, prisons can essentially be viewed within the perspective of the history of assimilationist efforts and the lack of acceptance and/or acknowledgment of Indigenous spirituality and culture.

According to Zellerer (2003) “at a pragmatic level, Corrections Canada has certain institutional demands and the focus has typically been placed on order and security” (14). This may result in certain aspects of policy implementation, such as the security or custodial mandate in therapeutic prisons to maintain control of the individual inmate, thereby protecting other inmates, staff members, and by extension, the community (Waldram 2012). This becomes problematic because it exists in direct tension with the ‘care’ mandate of treatment staff, thus these two mandates do not coexist easily (Waldram 2012). In addition to this, inmates engage in both resistance and self-regulatory practices. The inmates live within a web of “self-generated power relations as part of their maintenance of a ‘moral community’” (Waldram 2012, 30). Coupled with the staff, this causes an integrated heightened mechanism of surveillance. In this environment, therapeutic intervention works in tandem with disciplinary punishment.

In his early work, Foucault (1973) suggested that the development of medical science was intimately linked to discourses of dominance and oppression. In light of this perspective, some scholars argue that ‘politically or culturally’ neutral therapy does not exist, and that oppressed people perpetually respond to and resist assimilation (Waldram 1997). Waldram (1997) argues that “Aboriginal spirituality as a form of symbolic healing can be understood within the discourse of oppression, liberation and cultural repatriation” (217). It is evident that the environment in which any form of rehabilitative programming, culturally sensitive or not, is operating within a strict network of discipline and surveillance. This alone would have a direct influence on the effectiveness and impact of these programs.

In an article about violence against women, Merry (2001) discusses three different programs that deal with said violence, which all share a common theme. All three employ similar technologies of the self that seem to be geared towards the creation and maintenance of a new identity. In the three approaches, clients were consistently taught to think of themselves as valuable because of some core identity, such as an Aboriginal person, as opposed to the usual understandings of class, status or power (Merry 2001). This approach is directed at the creation of a specific self that is conducive to modern society. While they encouraged different versions of the self, they commended the person responsible for maintaining, knowing, and mastering their feelings (Merry 2001).

However, Merry (2001) asserts that those who end up participating in these self-management programs have failed to establish themselves according to the demands of modernity; stating “they are in some ways living outside the disciplinary confines of modern society” (44). The participants were unable to mold themselves to the confines of socially acceptable behavior, and thus find themselves in programs or institutions that seek to modify

their conduct by teaching them to learn to manage themselves and their feelings. Programs such as these seek to create a specific individual, one that will eventually be released and become a productive member of society.

These changes are employed to tailor the individual to fit within the modern nation and economy (Merry 2001). Despite the perceived differences in institutionalized programming by advocates of culturally competent programs, Merry's main conceptual argument is that there is a growing similarity in technologies for producing and encouraging the self (Merry 2001). While modernity allows space for difference in culture and ethnicity, Merry argues it is a colonized space, one that may acknowledge the possibility of variation based on religion, "yet promotes a hegemonic modernist definition of the person and personal change" (Merry 2001, 46). Merry's findings can be applied to that of the mainstream Western programs available to the Inuit offenders in this research. They are, in essence, state regulated and imposed methods of attempting to produce an individual that is productive, useful and docile. While some aspects of the programming were found to be useful, participants generally did not identify with the core principles, as they were perceived to be in direct conflict with their core values. In addition, projects of self-transformation are difficult to engage in, in spaces where power is exercised through varying technologies.

### The Prison Industrial Complex

Before reaching the ethnographic content of this manuscript, it is important to acknowledge that in the discourse of "what works", prison as a state imposed institution does not effectively work to rehabilitate or reintegrate offenders, regardless of their background. Traditionally, prisons are believed to serve as a deterrent to lawbreakers through three main functions: to punish the prisoner through deprivation of individual liberty and in turn, to protect

the public and to ultimately rehabilitate the offender. The intended outcome of prison is believed to serve as a general deterrent in that the visible use maintains law-abiding behavior, that the punitive experience will encourage the offender to reform his or her own behavior, and that the incapacitation of an offender will protect the public at least for the period of the sentence. In this way, prison stands as the fundamental symbol of the power of the state to enforce the conformity of its subjects with the law, in order to sustain social order (McGuire 1995, 11).

Foucault's concluding argument in *Discipline and Punish* is that the prison system is an institution that regularly and objectively, produces and reproduces criminality and recidivism. However, it is conceptualized as an institution that works as a mechanism for transforming individuals to a state envisioned ideal, while simultaneously robbing them of any agency and self-concept. According to Foucault (1977), we, as a society are aware of the inconveniences of prison, yet we cannot conceive of a way to replace or reform it. In reality, prison does not reduce crime, nor does it alter criminal behavior. Incarceration fulfills very few of the criteria known to be necessary for punishment to be an effective method of behavior change (McGuire 1995). As Foucault contends, punitive sanctions actually have a net effect of increasing recidivism. McGuire (1995) believes that "the notion that punishment can reduce the rate of crime in society is little more than an irrational and unfounded hope" (14). Rehabilitation as an aim does not fit within the punishment emphasis, which is one of the main principles of prison. The very circumstances of a prison sentence—long-term isolation from community, positive relationships such as family and the rest of the prison community would be detrimental to any offender. Furthermore, prison has become somewhat of a dumping ground for those with mental health issues, addictions, and those living in poverty.

## Chapter Four: Introduction to Participants

### Disclosure

I would like to provide some context to the information and narratives collected and used in the preceding sections. First, all of the participant's names have been changed in order to protect their identity and the information they provided. Second, it was crucial that I let the narratives speak for themselves. Having previous experience working within a prison setting and inmates, I was aware of the implications of asking an individual the details of the crime(s) they have committed. Aside from being irrelevant to my research and not wanting to create an awkward dynamic, I did not want their crimes to precede the importance of their lived experience. Finally, these interviews were very informal, insofar as I allowed the participants to dictate the amount and content of the information they were willing to provide. They were provided with my Letter of Information prior to the interview, which outlined what kind of information I was hoping to gather along with my methodologies. Aside from opening the interview with a summary of the Letter of Information, I attempted to ask very few questions. I found that I gathered the most valuable information when I asked the participants "Is there anything else you would like to say?"

### Karl

Karl grew up in Kuujjuarapik and other than speaking the native language, believes he does not know a lot about Inuit traditional culture or teachings. According to Karl, his father never taught him to hunt or camp and despite his deep desire to reconnect with his cultural roots; believes that others in his community have looked down on him for not possessing traditional

knowledge. When sentenced, Karl was required to serve his time in St. Jerome, a detention center in Montreal, far removed from the familiarity of his home and family. Karl placed a lot of emphasis on the difficulties of travel and serving his sentence in an institution that was so distant from his community. Once incarcerated, family contact was seldom. It was difficult for Karl to keep in touch with his family because he was not able to put the financial onus on them to make a collect call. In order to speak to his family without the associated cost, he had to first contact social services, if he was able to get ahold of someone, they would then schedule a call. Karl pointed out that if, on that day, there were other inmates who were attempting to use this privilege, contacting one's family was made even more difficult, as they were put on a waiting list.

According to Karl, the first contact he encountered with his traditional culture was made while he was incarcerated. Approximately every three months, Elders from Inuit communities would bring traditional food and visit with the inmates. For Karl, this was very therapeutic, as it was not just about the feast but a lesson in traditional teachings and how to get on the path to healing. Elders brought wisdom and invaluable experience to these gatherings. However the visits were not as frequent as Karl would have liked, and he explained that it was very difficult for Elders to make the trip to St. Jerome, as it is done on a voluntary basis.

When discussing the impact that traditional Inuit culture had on Karl, he got very passionate. Karl believed that these visits created a greater sense of community, not only among Inuit inmates, but other Aboriginal peoples as well. Elders not only taught inmates how to pray, but also provided strategies in managing their anger. In this particular environment, discussing past and present actions and behaviors that led them to prison, created a stronger connection among the participants. A connection Karl highly valued.

For Karl, the healing process began by identifying the trigger that caused his current circumstance and what methods he could use in the future to keep him from those behaviors. Although other mainstream services were offered such as AA and Anger Management, Karl made a conscious decision not to attend, as he found the meetings with Elders to be the most effective. Karl believed that if he focused solely on those meetings, praying and regularly exercising self-control, that he did not need to attend other programs.

The infrequent contact with both family and Elders, coupled with the lack of culturally specific programming, left Karl feeling as though there were not enough resources in place to allow for his successful rehabilitation. Making things even more difficult was the lack of continued support upon his release. According to Karl and the other informants, there are no support groups or counseling that inmates can attend at the community level upon their release. Karl also noted the lack of job opportunities and social activities as a source of tension in his community. Causing further aggravation to his rehabilitation is the fact that he lives in a small community where everyone is aware of his criminal history, which, according to Karl, made the process of reintegration very difficult. Even though Karl does not believe he has a strong connection to his traditional culture, he stressed the importance of the link between healing and nature.

### Gordon

When I spoke to Gordon, he was being held in a local jail, waiting to travel back “down south” to serve his sentence. According to Gordon, he has been going “back and forth from prison” for quite some time. He admitted that he was not proud of his criminal past and that he was trying very hard to change his life for the better. “I can’t keep coming back to prison cause I have kids to raise and I’m missing a lot because my kids are missing my knowledge and they

need it too”. Family is a crucial part of Gordon’s life, along with the ability to pass on traditional knowledge to his children. Traditional culture had a great impact on Gordon growing up. He was proud to inform me that he had to learn the traditional hunting grounds himself. Elders were also an integral part of Gordon life; they shared knowledge of hunting stories from the past, along with traditional methods, such as food preparation. To this day, keeping these traditions alive, possessing these skills and passing those down to his children are very important to Gordon. However the consequences of Gordon’s criminal past and present has put a great strain on many of his close relationships.

Gordon expressed his anxiety in anticipation of the long and strenuous travel he had ahead of him. Sounding defeated, Gordon described this journey as extremely taxing on both the body and mind, equating it to feeling “tired”. According to Gordon, there was a time in his life where he was required to make this journey four times in one month. This trip was very difficult on his mental and physical well-being; the experience of being escorted by guards, to being surrounded by other criminals who had committed more serious crimes was a stress inducing thought. Gordon seemed to view the process of travel as a measure of the punitive process.

Once incarcerated, Gordon attended anger management because he believed that it would help him in his efforts to become a better person. He believed that these programs helped him learn more about himself and how to deal with his emotions more constructively. While other programs were offered, Gordon stated that it was sometimes awkward for Inuit offenders to engage in them, as they do not identify with their core principles. Interestingly though, Gordon felt that the amount and content of programming that was available was sufficient and that it was not necessarily important to have culturally specific programming, as long as the facilitator was experienced and possessed knowledge of Inuit culture. While he stated that a culturally specific

programming option would be ideal, for Gordon, sometimes the individual's issue far outweighed the need for culture as a cure.

Throughout the interview, communication with Gordon was quite seamless. Neither of us had to repeat ourselves for clarification, I didn't really feel like there was a real language barrier between us. However when I asked him about his overall treatment while incarcerated, he seemed to overtly dodge these questions by answering with completely different content. For example, when asked whether he felt that Inuit people experienced different treatment from the rest of the general population, he answered with a discussion about his uncertainty about culturally specific programming in the prison setting. When I tried to pose the question in a different way, his answer was the same.

One issue that Gordon seemed to be very passionate about, besides his family, was continued care and a more localized justice committee. Gordon was aware of a community that consulted with Elders in the sentencing process, something that he would like to see in his own community. After being released from prison, Gordon felt completely helpless and overwhelmed because there are absolutely no resources or support in place at the community level. Gordon pointed out that there were many others like himself, repeat offenders, charged with the same, if not similar offence, being transferred to and from a distant prison.

Gordon believes if there were resources in place at the community level, people in his community would be less likely to reoffend. Gordon stated that upon release, it could be very difficult to apply the skills taught in these programs to real circumstances. He also mentioned the importance and value of having family involved in the healing process. Gordon believed that it would help form a reciprocal understanding of what each party is experiencing and how they could work together to create constructive and healthy relationships. This view stems from the

feelings of isolation that are felt by both parties when the offender is sent far away from their family to serve their time.

### Kat

Kat was also familiar with the strenuous travel involved with incarceration, as she was charged and sentenced on more than one occasion. The distance from her hometown to the prison was long and meant that she had to leave her children behind, in the care of a family member. In the beginning of the interview, Kat was hesitant to discuss her experiences, the slight but present language barrier likely contributed to this hesitation. However, once my critical perception of Canada's justice system was clear, the dialogue became much more productive.

Kat also grew up in Kuujjuarapik, where she was raised on traditional methods of hunting, sewing, and camping. Kat placed a lot of value on family traditions; her children speak Inuktitut fluently and she made a point of emphasizing the importance of teaching Inuit children their traditional language. According to Kat, elements of Inuit traditions, most specifically language, should be integrated into the school curriculum up north, as she believes this skill is lost in Inuit children when they are sent to school.

It was clear that family was very important to Kat. However while incarcerated, it was extremely difficult for her to keep in touch with them. Visitation was not really an option as it was very expensive and far for family members to travel. To add to the difficulties of communication was the fact that a simple phone call in prison proved to be an obstacle. Inmates can only call their families' collect, which costs money, an expense that many families cannot afford. Kat stated that if inmates were working they would get a privilege once a month to make a phone call, but if they were unable to obtain a job, this privilege was revoked.

Kat indicated that the only contact she had with Inuit traditional culture was offered every three months when Elders would voluntarily come into the prison with traditional food. Over a feast that included meat gathered by Inuit hunters, participants would pray and discuss their difficult journey that led them to prison. Kat explained that upon these visits, Elders would offer their wisdom to participants and encourage them to confront their issues in order to begin their journey of healing. Kat felt that she benefited greatly from these meetings, however there infrequent occurrence and the fact that they only lasted an hour and a half was not enough.

When asked if there were many Inuit women serving time during her sentence, Kat indicated that in her experiences, the female Inuit population far outnumbered that of the general population. This stressed the importance for more frequent contact with traditional culture and access to Elders. Kat seemed to be frustrated by this and the fact that Church services in English were only offered every two weeks. Church services were held in French, a language she and many other Inuit women are not familiar with. This language barrier proved to be an issue for Kat throughout her sentence. According to Kat, most guards only spoke French, making it very difficult for those whose primary language was Inuk and secondary language was English, to communicate with one another. One particular instance Kat recalled, occurred when she was sick upon being arrested and incarcerated. Kat stated that she tried to reach out to see a nurse or a doctor, but had no success communicating her illness to corrections staff. According to Kat, in order to get a doctor's appointment, she had to write a letter to her doctor in order to schedule an appointment upon her release. Apparently, this was not an isolated incident; Kat also said that a fellow Inuit inmate encountered the same problem. Kat attributed incidents such as these to not only a language barrier, but to over discrimination towards Inuit inmates.

Drawing from her personal experiences, Kat believes that Inuit women share a far different experience from that of their non-Inuit counterparts. Their inability to communicate with a prison staff that is mostly composed of French speaking Canadians leaves them feeling further isolated, with no one to talk to. For Kat, this evoked feelings of distress. What frustrated her further was the feeling that no one was doing anything to help. Kat recalled a story she heard in the news about a former Aboriginal inmate complaining about the conditions and lack of resources in Canadian prisons, only to have a political figure fire back that they should expect nothing more because they are criminals. This suggested to Kat, that Inuit offenders are disposable. According to Kat, all of these negative experiences have a detrimental effect on ones healing process. With a sense of urgency, Kat states, “they don’t know who to ask for help because it seems like there is no help”.

### Simon

My interview with Simon was the shortest. While his input was extremely valuable, his answers were very short and concise. Having already been briefed on my research through my contact, it was as though Simon knew exactly what message he wanted to convey and did not want to stray from that. Simon, a native of Kuujjuarapik, feels that he has a very strong connection to his community and traditional culture. Growing up, Simon’s father passed on traditional methods of camping and hunting, both of which he still practices today. It was unclear how much time Simon has served in prison or how many sentences he has served. However he was incarcerated in St. Jerome, the same detention centre as Karl and Gordon.

Maintaining contact with his family once incarcerated also proved to be difficult for Simon, due to his financial situation. Being completely disconnected from his community and family exacerbated by the fact that it was difficult to call home, greatly frustrated Simon. Once

incarcerated, visits from Elders and the subsequent feast with traditional food was very important to him, as this was the only instance where he could feel connected to his community and traditional culture. Simon believed that the visits from Elders were far too infrequent, and felt as though he and other Inuit inmates would have benefitted greatly from more contact with Elders and traditional foods. However he also acknowledged that while the experience of praying and eating with Elders from their community was integral to healing, the environment in which it took place was completely at odds with his traditional culture.

Simon attended some of the programs offered by St. Jerome, like AA meetings and anger management classes. However he was unable to completely identify with their core principles. While they proved to be somewhat helpful in his rehabilitation within the prison setting, he felt as though it would be difficult to maintain what he learned in these programs once he was released back into his community. Simon believed that in order to help Inuit offenders in their rehabilitation, they should be allowed to partake in a vision quest accompanied by Elders. According to Simon, some of the Inuit offenders could not communicate with “white people” [guards and prison staff] and he felt that most “white men” don’t care about Inuit culture. When asked if there was anything else he wanted to contribute to the interview Simon ended with this powerful comment: “I just wanted to add this, I was just hoping they could hire someone to go camping with them you know? To be out in the land for a couple of months, that’s how I feel. Instead of being in a prison, a white man’s land. Some people are losing their cultural life because of that”.

## **Chapter Five: In Prison—Narratives of Inuit Culture and the Hardships of Travel and Communication**

The underlying issues affecting healing and the rehabilitative process among Inuit and Aboriginal offenders are multifaceted. In order to understand them, it is crucial to consider what culturally sensitive programming currently exists and how Aboriginal offenders experience it on a personal level. While CSC insists that the availability of culturally specific programming is made available to Aboriginal offenders throughout the nation, in many cases, this is simply not true. Some of the major issues affecting the healing/rehabilitative process of Aboriginal and Inuit offenders include differing world-views and life experiences, which prevents mutual cooperation.

Poor socio-economic conditions place a further strain on Aboriginal offenders and by extension their families. This includes, but is not limited to, their ability to maintain contact with their families while they are incarcerated, the ability to foster and maintain healthy relationships with their communities and family members (often due to trauma) and the inability to seek or receive therapeutic help or counseling upon their release. This brings us to the point of the building capacity within communities; there is absolutely no involvement after incarceration at the community level, which elicits no commitment from Aboriginal communities to provide solutions.

For the participants involved in this project, the primary goal was to convey Inuit perspectives of their lived experiences of incarceration and how they were able to negotiate adapting to a space completely removed from the familiar. Several themes were identified throughout the narratives and there was significant overlap across many of these themes. This

perhaps reflects the value of a holistic perspective, where significant aspects of life are viewed as intertwined rather than isolated affects (Krall et.al 2011). For example, “communication” cannot be effectively separated from “family” or “food” and it is difficult to separate “family” from “community” and, by extension, contact with “Elders” who effectively serve as the only concrete connection Inuit offenders have with their traditional culture and community while incarcerated “down south”.

What occurs on this journey to and through incarceration is complex and imbued with feelings of isolation, assimilation, and barriers to communication. In most cases, there is a resistance to partake in mainstream programming as they, along with prison, are seen as attempts to further assimilate them. Although the contact is minimal, all of this ultimately leads to a strong and meaningful connection that is made with Elder(s). It is imperative to direct attention to all of the identified themes, as they are important factors in understanding the detriment caused to the overall well-being of Inuit offenders and by extension their communities. While the most significant narrative was the connection and common ground Inuit offenders were able to sustain with Elders, this connection must be understood and situated within the context of other narratives, in order to understand how this common ground is created.

### Hunting and Traditional Foods

While traditional Inuit lifestyles have been significantly impacted by the legacy of colonization and residential schools, the values that underlie family and community life continue to be profoundly rooted in traditional worldview (AHF 2006). Every interview began with narratives of the importance of Inuit traditional culture, which, for the participants, primarily included hunting, camping, traditional food and connection to the land. For each participant, tradition is found in the landscape, language and social organization that they are surrounded by.

Within Kuujjuarapik, there is continuity in traditional practices rather than a complete rift between the past and the present. According to Gordon, his traditional culture is an integral part of his life;

I had to go out hunting and learn my traditions. We really had to get to know the area around us, the hunting grounds. It really made an impact in my life because I got to go out hunting; I really had knowledge of the area. Elders, they give us good tips about the area, about what they did in the past and we get to do what they taught us. That's what I've been doing for the past few years, I've been out hunting and uh, it made a big impact because I got to have a knowledge about the area and about the food, so it's been good.

Having a connection to the land and knowing what areas are the most plentiful for hunting is highly valued knowledge among Inuit people. It is an integral part of their identity and is one of the few things that connects them to their past. When asked about hunting, Simon exclaimed, "I love hunting! Caribou, seal, geese, tarmagin, and fish too"! These connections to the land are created and maintained through the practice of hunting, camping and through the consumption of food. Inuit notions of "being on the land" exceed the individual's physical relation to the land and extend to human animal relations and connections that are made between people and by extension, the community. Thus "being on the land" is not just interpreted in the literal and cosmological sense, it is an experience that encompasses a web of connections and relations that are situated in the past and present. Being on the land has many kinds of significance in this context. Narratives that point to the land and its food resources are evidence that the Inuit have always been able to support themselves and continue to do so (Kirmayer et.al). In addition, being out on the land and hunting with a trusted companion allows people to express issues in an open and safe space, which helps to put things into perspective, while simultaneously promoting a spiritual connection (AHF 2006).

Hunting and fishing for food remain an integral part of the Inuit diet and almost every participant who has the ability to spend time on the land, engages in these traditional practices.

The transmission of Inuit traditions from one generation to another is essential to maintaining them, not just because it is an integral part of Inuit identity, but in an effort to preserve traditions that were practiced by their ancestors before European contact. Kat was adamant in teaching her children the same traditional skills that were imparted to her as a child:

“Hunting, sewing, camping, and um, a lot of fishing too. My family is still hunting a lot for food like caribou, fish, seal, duck and we still go berry picking too...and it’s important that my kids learn these things too”.

The transmission of Inuit culture is a communal effort in that it becomes the responsibility of parents, relatives and Elders. When Simon was asked who passed on traditional knowledge to him, he explained, “Mostly my father, he stopped hunting though, so I started following other people, like Elders”. Interestingly, those who did not directly experience the transmission of traditional Inuit culture from a parent, relative or Elder consider themselves as outcasts. Upon discussing the transmission of traditional Inuit culture with Karl, he added,

It impacted my lifestyle cause people that I try to get to teach me traditional culture, some of them sort of look down on me because I really don’t know about all the traditional stuff. So it’s kind of a disappointment, because I don’t really know as much about my traditional culture.

Despite feeling fragmented from his traditional culture, Karl spoke Inuktitut, both of his parents are Inuit and he grew up in Kuujjuarapik. Thus, for Inuit people like Karl, there exists a troubling dichotomy of perceiving themselves as not “having” traditional culture due to the absence of experiencing the “passing down” of Inuit traditions, even though he speaks Inuktitut fluently and was raised by his Inuit parents in Kuujjuarapik. Not possessing traditional skills and knowledge contributed to feelings of cultural inferiority.

### Available Programming in St. Jerome

Preliminary research into first hand Aboriginal accounts of culturally sensitive programming yielded very few results. Thus, before delving into more descriptive narratives, it is important to consider the programs that were available to Inuit offenders who participated in

this study. This discussion provides insight into how Inuit offenders perceive available prison programming and whether they are fully informed of the benefits of the programming by prison staff. Much of the available literature hinges on measuring the success and limitations of culturally specific programming by analyzing recidivism rates, which is perplexing considering the high recidivism rates among Aboriginal offenders. How these participants understand the programming that is available to them will contribute to a greater understanding of how these programs are actually experienced, and little is known about this experience. As a result, the following quotes will stand-alone:

There was like AA meetings, either in English or French, umm Art therapy and it was mostly for French, but we were allowed to speak in English because I can't speak French.

When asked if those programs helped and whether she could relate to them, Kat replied

Umm...I don't think so; I would have felt like I was more understood with my traditional fellow. But after doing Art therapy, after taking out your feelings and how you felt, I think it helped sometimes. (Kat)

They were giving me programs, the kind of programs that I really needed in my quest to become a better person. I went to such a program and I went to uh anger management and over there they have AA program and anger management program. So I took the anger management program and that really helped me to get better and to work on my problems and never to hurt. It's never easy to find something like that and uh I was lucky enough to get involved in that program. Before I came out I learned a lot about my anger issues on my personal side. It helped me a lot...But it was awkward for them [referring to some Inuit inmates] to take that kind of program...If culture can be shared in the program it would be very nice to have an Inuit person to run these programs. Having a knowledgeable person about the culture would be very nice to have. (Gordon)

AA meetings, violence meetings [Anger Management], that's about it". When asked if he attended any of those programs and whether they helped Simon stated, "Yes, they helped, but not in my tradition, you know? (Simon)

There was one for anger management and one for alcoholics anonymous, and um, I think there were others, but I can't remember. I didn't really go to them...I believe that if I prayed daily and nightly, it would help me, so I focused on myself more and controlling myself. (Karl)

It is important to understand how available programs are perceived by Inuit offenders in order to assess their willingness to participate in them. In addition, it is also important to assess

the level to which they identify with mainstream Western programs and which methods they believe to be most effective. Whether they prefer a blended approach, by which they choose the mainstream program they find most effective in conjunction with culturally specific programming, or whether they solely prefer contact with Elders. It is important to understand how they experience treatment, as the way Aboriginal offenders experience treatment likely affects what they gain from it, and little is known about their experience in this context.

### Travel

*“It’s not easy to travel to very far places to face justice”-Gordon*

Isolation begins when an Inuit offender is required to travel from their hometown of Kuujjuarapik, which is only accessible by air and in late summer by boat, all the way to St. Jerome detention Centre in Montreal. Once they have been sentenced, offenders are housed in the local police station until a scheduled plane arrives. Inmates board this small plane at the Kuujjuarapik airport, which then takes them to Val-d’Or; this is approximately a three and a half to four hour plane ride. Once in Val-d’Or, inmates get in a small cramped van that makes the long, seven-hour trip to St. Jerome detention center. The total time of the trip is approximately eleven hours and does not include the inevitable delays associated with air travel. Karl recalled how arduous the journey was,

I had to attend to court here in town, and once court went through, I had to go to the police station and had to wait in the police station in town for the plane to come along with the other inmates. We travel up to Montreal to St. Jerome, and also, uh, before, we actually went to Val-d’Or, from there, we take a van and it’s a 6-7 hour ride from there to St. Jerome. This van is so tight with all of the inmates, um, if we were going to, uh, St. Jerome by van we barely had breaks. The heat was bad in the summer time because there was no air in the van. The guards wouldn’t let us have a break to get air and uh, we stayed in the van till we got to St. Jerome.

Without prompting, each participant recalled their experience with striking similarities in the negative emotions associated with the length, space and distance of travel. The length of travel was highlighted by each participant, all placing emphasis on the methods (air and van) and the

various changes in space from the police station, to court, to Val-d'Or from Kuujjuarapik, to Montreal and the final destination, St. Jerome Detention Centre. Space was also discussed in terms of the participant's surroundings during travel and the perceptions of these spaces as being oppressive and tight, while also noting the temperature of the given environment. Each participant indicated the negative impact these factors had on their overall well-being and associated the effects with Inuit notions of "weight" and "heaviness". Distance, another important similarity discussed by all participants, was perceived as a dissociative process. It is interpreted as being forcibly removed from familiar surroundings and environment, in order to serve their sentence "down south".

Part of the prison experience and the punitive measures associated with a criminal conviction is that offenders are taken away from their families and communities to serve their time. Depriving offenders of their freedom is perceived as a way of ensuring that they pay a debt to society for their crimes. However, in this milieu, travel is an additional punitive and isolating measure that has a detrimental effect on the prisoner's mental health and well-being, before s/he even arrive at prison. Travel also serves as a liminal space where Inuit offenders begin the transition of being removed from their land and transported to a world that is completely removed from their own. While the purpose of a prison sentence is punitive, it is within this liminal space that Inuit offenders begin the process of separation from their culture. In this context, the liminal space that is travel is defined as the threshold or passageway between two places, one that is particularly agonizing, both physically and mentally. Inuit offenders are aware that when they board the plane to leave Kuujjuarapik, access to basic needs such as family contact and traditional foods, both of which are central to Inuit life will become scarce. Psychologically, the act of travel and the anticipation of leaving the familiar produces an effect

that also situates liminal time into the course of travel. Liminal time is the process by which an individual changes from one mental state to another while simultaneously transitioning from one space to another. The discourse of time associated with traveling “down south” is a dominant narrative that is imbued with feelings of anticipation and fear. Thus, liminality must be understood within the context of space, time and one’s mental state.

Inuit offenders perceive the distance and direction of travel as entering a completely different world. As Simon pointed out, “What frustrated me the most was that I had to be sent so far away down south and be away from my family. That’s the most terrifying experience”. To travel anywhere other than within the Arctic is quite literally understood as entering a completely different space, one with a vastly different climate, landscape and ethos. It is an area where practicing Inuit traditions that are integral to everyday life, such as hunting, does not function in the same capacity, as it would “up north”. Evidently, traveling “down south” and leaving family behind invokes intense feelings of fear and frustration. This experience could be likened to a modern-day residential school experience. In this case, adults are forcibly removed from their land and taken to an institution that operates on Western ideologies of law, punishment, rehabilitation and health.

While they are permitted to speak Inuktitut (an integral part of Inuit identity), English and French are the dominant languages, forcing those who are unfamiliar with either language to adapt, so that they may communicate with staff if and when necessary. Simon believes that by traveling down south to serve their time “some people are losing their cultural life”. In this context, travel is not just the beginning of isolation but it is also a process of assimilation, making it a traumatic and troubling experience. Once sentenced, Inuit offenders recognize that by traveling “down south” to serve their sentence, prison not only puts a great distance between

them and their community, but also between them and their culture. Furthermore the mental and emotional harm that travel inflicts on Inuit offenders is counterproductive to both Aboriginal concepts of healing and CSC's mandated responsibility to rehabilitate offenders before they are released back into the community.

When recounting his experience of travelling from Kuujjuarapik to St. Jerome, Gordon started to get emotional,

They have been sending me to St. Jerome, back and forth a lot and it's very tiring cause it's a long trip, it's about 13 hours of travelling and 7 hours on the road and it was pretty hard on my body, I was getting very tired of it. I, I can't, I, when I think about it, I can't afford to go back to the same place because the travelling is pretty tough on my body and my mind, it was very hard on me. But I went back and forth in one month for four times and it was not easy.

Coupled with the perception of travel removing and relocating people to a different space, it is also considered as taking a toll on people's body, mind and spirit. This occurs through Inuit notions of 'weight' on a person's overall wellbeing and health and maintaining balance.

According to Aboriginal Healing in Canada, "that which is heavy or light is fundamental to the characteristics of misplaced experiences and descriptions of pain". For Gordon and other Inuit inmates who are forced to serve their sentences at St. Jerome, traveling is a painful experience. Travelling is understood as imposing a heavy weight on ones psyche and further disrupts the balance of mind, body and spirit. To experience a negative shift in one's balance is perceived by the Inuit as being in poor health and would require traditional methods of healing. Gordon explained further,

It's not easy to travel to very far places to face justice. It's never easy for anybody who travelled from here and uh, I noticed that I met a lot of Inuit who get to be very tired who come from even further communities, so they have to travel farther and it's never easy. It affects the mind and body and they get to be very tired.

Participants in this research recognized and accepted responsibility for their wrongdoings and made absolutely no excuses for their actions, but the mere thought of having to travel to St.

Jerome to serve a sentence elicited intense negative emotions and frustration. This is further exacerbated by the fact that once incarcerated, it is extremely difficult for Inuit offenders to maintain contact with their families and communities, causing further cultural fragmentation.

### The Hardship of Communication with Family and Its Isolating Effects

According to AHF (2006) “While Inuit lifestyles have been greatly altered, the values that underlie family and community life remain deeply rooted in a traditional worldview” (84). This value was a common narrative among all four participants; family is vital to their life, however once incarcerated, contact would be minimal. Once Inuit offenders arrive at St. Jerome to begin their sentence, they are officially separated from their family and culture until they are released. Family members or spousal visits are made impossible due to the distance and methods of travel required to get from Kuujjuarapik to St. Jerome. Aside from being difficult to coordinate, airfare prices below two thousand dollars are difficult to find. As a result, Inuit inmates are left with the option of calling their loved ones. Generally, inmates are permitted to make phone calls between the hours of 8am and 10pm if they have the money to purchase a calling card, or they are given the option to make a collect call. While incarcerated, maintaining family bonds is particularly difficult for Inuit inmates, primarily due to socio-economic factors coupled with the sheer distance required to travel from Kuujjuarapik to St. Jerome. According to Simon,

Collect calls cost a lot you know? It's like three dollars a minute and that's too much. But once or twice a month, we got our, uh, how do you call it? Officer [Social Worker] they let us three-way call. Like once a month.

Placing the financial onus on an inmate's family member is not an option for these participants. There is a sense of remorse for being incarcerated in the first place, to then ask their family to accept the astronomical cost of collect calls is unfathomable. Those who participated in this

research all indicated that calling home was not always an option for them due to the associated cost.

It wasn't easy for me cause uh, my dad doesn't work so I can't make collect calls and send him bills. So at the beginning they used to give me like one privilege, like once a month to call but, um, the last time I was there, since I wasn't working, I wasn't given that privilege.  
(Kat)

It is understandable that inmates would have to work to earn money to use at their disposal; however, Kat also pointed out the difficulty Inuit inmates faced if they wanted to get a job, stating, "A lot of Inuit don't understand French...Because I couldn't speak French, I couldn't do things like laundry". Availability of positions aside, Inuit offenders face the additional barrier in that many do not speak French, yet are incarcerated in a French institution with a primarily French speaking staff. This is not only limiting their ability to fill positions that require the offender to have a working knowledge of French, but also their chances of earning a phone call home.

In some instances, participants indicated they could avoid this cost if they were able to get in touch with a social worker; however this was a complicated process that would not always yield immediate results. Karl recounted how difficult it was for him to keep in touch with his family,

When we call social services to talk to our parents or our children, or anyone we want to contact, we would ask them to talk to them, and social services would ask if uh, what time is the best time to call back so that we could talk to them. Or sometimes, we would set up different date because there are too many people calling or sometimes the messages wouldn't go through.

The process of contacting a social worker to avoid the cost of a phone call is not entirely clear to me, however what was clear is that it is undoubtedly a complicated one. Within the prison setting, making a phone call, as Kat pointed out, is a privilege. Only those who possess the funds to procure a calling card or have family members that are able to incur the cost of a collect call

are able to maintain consistent contact with their loved ones. It is easy enough to understand that imposed time restrictions would be necessary for each inmate, however for Inuit offenders who aren't making local phone calls, the sheer cost makes communicating with family on a regular basis an impossibility.

While discussing the hardships of communication with family while in prison, Kat stated, "I would have loved to talk to my dad and my children at least once every month, it would have helped me, but they wouldn't even give me that". Thus, isolation and cultural fragmentation is further exacerbated by the fact that it is very difficult for Inuit inmates to maintain important social bonds and relationships outside of prison. According to the AHF (2006), family relations with both immediate and extended family are central to Inuit life, and therefore are a crucial part of the healing process. For those who have children, like Kat and Gordon, the inability to make frequent phone calls to family members was devastating. Not being able to regularly communicate with their children, Inuit offenders are left in the dark about their day-to-day life and are unable to provide physical or emotional support to them. Causing further frustration is the fact that they are likely to miss life milestones or impart traditional knowledge. When discussing the lack of communication with his children while incarcerated, Gordon pointed out,

I have kids to raise and I'm missing a lot because my kids are missing my traditional knowledge and they need it too. Before I came back to prison, I was starting to take them out to my camping areas and we were camping a lot.

It is important to note that Gordon is not trying to evade responsibility for the actions that led to his incarceration. His responses, like the other participants are out of frustration and anxiety that stem from being completely inaccessible to their loved ones. Passing on traditional knowledge to children is a crucial Inuit value. Consequently, while incarcerated, Inuit offenders not only feel like they are losing their culture, but they are unable to pass it on to their children who are

not accessible. Again, this bears striking similarities to the historical trauma caused by the residential school system. In a sense, prisons seek to assimilate Inuit offenders by imposing abstract laws and notions of rehabilitation created and carried out by Western institutions. Incarceration does not just isolate Inuit offenders, it requires them to serve their sentence far removed from their land, isolating them from their culture, communities and families, while preventing them from practicing the most basic of Inuit traditions and values. These effects of isolation and trauma are not just felt by the Inuit offender, but also by their families. As family relations are central to Inuit life, the lack of communication with an incarcerated family member would likely cause overwhelming feelings of distress. Family members are left with the uncertainty of how their loved one is adjusting and coping to the foreign and unfamiliar surroundings of being incarcerated down south. In this way, incarceration elicits many of the same emotions and trauma that were associated with residential schools.

“After that I didn’t know who to call no more. I think they should have an Inuit worker” –Kat.

Narratives of communication were not limited to family alone. The inability of Inuit offenders to communicate with corrections staff was also a contributing factor to feelings of resentment, frustration and isolation. Communication and social interaction are basic human needs. While both of these are manifested differently in prison, being housed in an institution where the language and culture are vastly different from your own, does not create an ideal environment for healing or rehabilitation. In the context of this research, the deep divide in culture and language also contributed to the sentiment of us vs. them within the prison setting. Simon touched on this issue stating, “Some people can’t communicate with white people you know? That must be hard for them”. One would think that communication between inmates and staff would be crucial in this context for a multitude of reasons. The communication of medical

or health issues with prison staff or an individual's ability to participate in therapeutic or rehabilitative programs are prime examples. Prison is an intimidating place as it is; being unable to communicate with the guards or support staff would unquestionably contribute to feelings of anxiety, loneliness and in some cases could have a detrimental effect on one's mental or physical health.

When discussing Inuit women and healing within the prison setting, Kat despondently pointed out "We don't know who to ask help to. We don't know who to ask for help, because it seems like there is no help". Aside from obvious language barriers between Inuit offenders and prison staff, the complete lack of culturally sensitive resources within the prison is perceived as a blatant disregard for Inuit people, their lived experience and worldview. "Most of the white men don't care about our culture and culture stuff" (Simon). Once Inuit inmates are incarcerated in an institution down south, there is a shared visceral sense of social abandonment. Inuit inmates are clearly situated as the "other", leaving them on the periphery of prison sub-culture and fragmented between their own culture and one that was imposed on them. Drawing from her own personal experience, Kat stated "It's just that sometimes, I could see that other Inuit women, they had a very difficult time and umm, I think when they are having a very difficult time, they don't have anyone to talk to, they're all alone". Inuit offenders are forced to adapt or remain on the periphery of social abandonment to experience further isolation. What Aboriginal offenders are being offered under these circumstances is assimilation as a form of rehabilitation, to which the participants of this research were resistant. If something is going to be accepted as having a positive effect within the confines of the prison setting, it must come as a development of self-transformation. In other words, Aboriginal people must accept it, on their own terms, as

something that will be constructive to their journey of healing. This is something that occurs when connections are made with Elders who voluntarily visit the prison.

## **Chapter Six: Creating Common Ground—Contact with Elders and Affective Labour**

For the participants involved in this research, visiting with Elders was an incredibly meaningful experience. During these brief visits, the isolating effects associated with being incarcerated down south, temporarily fade from the consciousness of Inuit offenders, while a provisional community is built on shared experience and common ground. This occurs not only in resistance to assimilation but because of profound connections that are made between offenders and Elders that extend beyond the personal, to form a visceral sense of interconnectedness among all of those who are involved. In this context, Elders not only serve as a connection between the past and the present, but they also function as a link to the Inuit community. These connections and deep sense of community not only rely on the presence of Elders, but also the traditional food that they bring with them.

When discussing the importance of Elders with Kat, she indicated that they would visit every three months and stated,

There used to be two people coming in, sometimes even three Elders were coming in... They would like, uhh, pray before eating and talk with us about how to try and feel like, do better when we get out and try to deal with the things that we had to face in jail.

Elders fulfill various complex roles during these visits. They act as spiritual guides, blending traditional methods with Christian practices, which can be seen through the act of prayer before a traditional Inuit meal. In this context, prayer not only works to obtain support from a higher power, but also comforts participants, which in turn, creates a safe space for listening and communicating (AHC 2008). Through shared experiences and language, Elders create a safe space for Inuit offenders to express the difficulties they are facing both in prison and in their personal lives. They are not only active listeners but also provide guidance based on traditional

knowledge. According to AHC (2008), listening is a “process of non-judgmental engagement” that focuses on the narrative of the offender in a comforting and shared social space.

Elder’s take a holistic approach in that they associate illness and distress as a symptom of an individual being out of balance. Thus, Inuit healing focuses on restoring this balance using traditional methods that center on behavior, rather than labeling the individual with a diagnosis based on the Western bio-medical model. Although questions pertaining to criminal charges were avoided, some participants voluntarily shared information. When asked how his journey of healing began, Karl stated,

Oh, well the first thing that I ask myself is what got me there, and it was me, it was my choice to take that alcohol. I kept consuming it through me and there was a point where I didn’t remember [things he would do] so I thought if that put me there, might as well stay away from that alcohol. It was more of a will power I would say.

Karl did not confer himself with a label such as “alcoholic”; instead, he identified the behavior of over-consumption as problematic and unwanted, simultaneously acknowledging that it was a choice he independently made. The same approach can be seen in Gordon, “They keep sending me back to prison, that means I have some issues I need to work on. That is usually me being angry and I’ve got to learn to control myself”. There was no denial of responsibility among all four participants, they acknowledged the behavior that landed them in prison and wanted access to resources that could help them change, but that they could also identify with.

Elders bridge the gap between what is perceived as lost and what part of the traditional culture has been nurtured and maintained. They hold the knowledge of the proper ways in which healing methods, ceremonies, and traditional cultural practices should be carried out. As Kulchyski et.al (2003) point out, “They are the keepers of cultural events and ceremonies such as the sweat lodges, songs, Sundance’s, and pipe ceremonies” (7). Elders play a vital role in the

transmission, preservation and maintenance of traditional culture. Through sharing their wisdom and knowledge with inmates, Elders play a crucial role in the continued development and preservation of Inuit culture. In discussing how Elders impacted Inuit offenders in St. Jerome, Simon stated, “They talked about how to live a traditional life, how to do it, how to pray, and how they hunted and everything”. Within the healing milieu, how to live a traditional life included acknowledging the collective trauma inflicted by the legacy of colonialism and how it could be understood as affecting an individual’s current circumstances. Once behavior is contextualized within the past, it can be dealt with in the present and the individual can accept and acknowledge responsibility for their conduct. Contextualizing the present within the past is the first step for most Inuit offenders in their healing journey. This effectively takes place in the presence of an Elder and those who understand the trauma, which in turn is comforting and contributes to healing.

Living a traditional Inuit life also encompasses practices such as hunting and being out on the land, both of which cannot function within the confines of prison, often resulting in feelings of distress among many of the participants. According to Kirmayer et.al (2009) spending time on the land provides a healthy space that promotes tranquility, while the skills associated with living off of the land are perceived as a source of “strength and resilience relevant to surviving in the modern world” (292). Waldram (1997) points out that, “the Aboriginal way is a difficult way to follow, in prison more so than anywhere else” (169). When asked about what needs to change for Inuit offenders in the prison system, Simon stated “Let them go camping or something for a couple of months with Elders”. Notions of camping and hunting among the Inuit are inextricably linked. Camping suggests moving away from sedentary life that was somewhat imposed on them and to live off of what the land provides. Laugrand and Oosten (2010) maintain that, “Inuit

identify themselves as hunters, and they perceive hunting as the foundation of their existence” (103). Aside from being therapeutic, the cosmic connections that are maintained by hunting and the rules associated with it establish connections on various levels. It places people in relation with one another, with the land, with the animals and with their past. Karl pointed out “The hunter has the outdoor for himself and he can do anything, through that, you can do a lot of healing because you are in nature”. This cosmological web of connections allows for healing to take place, as the individual is able to let go of what is causing distress and embrace practices that were once practiced by their ancestors. While incarcerated Elders help maintain the link between Inuit offenders and the land by discussing hunting practices. Gordon opened the interview stating,

We get to meet Elders and uh, we get to talk to them and they make inspiration speeches and it really does help a person who is over there. Cause they get to talk to an Elder and uh they give great information and it really does help. They are more calm and understanding of what the prisoners are going through.

In order for the Aboriginal offender to heal, Elders and spiritual guides depend on stories, shared cultural activities and traditional ideology to re-connect the individual to their culture and community (Kunic et.al 2009). They aim to create an environment where concepts of interconnectedness are central to the healing process and the development of self-possession, spiritual self-awareness, alertness, caring, endurance, patience, resilience, and discipline are all areas of focus to assure a responsible way of life (Kunic et.al 2009). They seek to create meaningful relationships that are inextricably linked to their sense of identity and social responsibility. In this respect, traditional Inuit methods are considered essential in healing the individual in holistic terms, and the ultimate goal is to prepare the Inuit offender for a successful return to family, community, and Inuit society. According to Waldram (1997) this particular

form of healing is dependent on the use, interpretation and negotiation of cultural symbols as central to the process of healing (71).

One of the most dominant narratives when discussing healing and maintaining health while incarcerated, was the availability of “country food”, otherwise known as traditional Inuit food. Including caribou, fish, game bird, walrus and seal. Elders bringing these traditional foods into the prisons was crucial for participants, as it is an integral part of maintaining their health. According to Karl,

We didn't have traditional cultural activities there [in prison], but there were traditional foods coming in for us, and there are also Elders from Inuit communities coming in to visit all the inmates, to bring some traditional foods so that, uh, we won't have cravings for our own food.

Inuit diet consists mostly of wild animals and plant species that are procured from the local environment through hunting, fishing and trapping. In this way, traditional food is imbued with meaning as it not only satisfies one's hunger, but it also satisfies the need and the desire to maintain a connection with the land. If food from the land is not available, it can cause feelings of weakness, and lethargy which, within the confines of prison, often extend to emotional states of irritability, uncooperativeness and generalized depression (Kirmayer and Valaskakis 2010). Cravings for traditional foods are exacerbated by the lack of sustenance that is offered in prison food. Gordon emphasized the importance of Elders bringing traditional foods with them on their visits:

When they come monthly it really helps, because we get to eat what our culture provides us, lots of caribou, lots of fish, in our bodies and systems, we missed it and it's not good to be hungry after we eat. Every time when we eat from prison served food, it's not the same for our bodies, nothing can really beat traditional food when you really need it.

Food that is served in the prison is perceived as unfulfilling and leaving one with an empty feeling. Cravings are not only understood as fulfilling a nostalgic need, but a very

important physical one. Kirmayer and Valaskakis (2010) found that Inuit people identify an inextricable link between food, blood and emotional well-being. When Inuit people must leave their communities to face justice down south, they are essentially being fed bloodless southern food (Kirmayer and Valaskakis 2010). Lack of country food is seen as directly affecting ones health through the circulatory system causing weakness, which can only be remedied through the consumption of raw meat (Kirmayer and Valaskakis 2010). Furthermore, prolonged periods without access to country food causes 'food sickness' as Western foods do not contain as much protein as found in an Inuit diet (Samson 2013). Country food is integral to healing both emotional and physical ailments. Aside from Elders, food is a tangible cultural connection Inuit offenders have access to while incarcerated.

Discussing the importance of connections that are established through visits by Elders, Karl stated:

Once they visited in with inmates, first they would feast with us, once we are done feeding, or while we are eating, we all start talking about how we got in prison, how we can manage not to go back there once they are out of the prison...They would show us how to manage our anger and uh through prayers of our elders, it's, I find that it's really helpful, they also talk to us for about an hour or over an hour about how we feel and it brought us closer together to talk to each other.

Beginning these visits with prayer and feast lessons the gap between people and creates an environment conducive to sharing lived experiences. In addition to guidance from Elders, sharing personal experiences with other people who have endured a similar history serves as a therapeutic exercise. It allows people to sympathize with one another and share healing practices, which in turn creates a deeper bond and sense of community among participants. This environment escapes the hierarchical structures of mainstream programming, placing everyone equal to one another in a judgment free space. Elders are then able to contextualize these lived

experiences and behaviors that led to incarceration within the milieu of traditional healing so that they may share best practices.

The presence of Elders in conjunction with the consumption of traditional country foods creates a deep sense of interconnectedness among participants. When asked how the visits from Elders impacted him, Karl began to get very passionate, stating, “Inmates are all over from Nunavut and uh, there were times when, um, there were people region against region, community against community, it sort of put all that away once the Elders came, we became more of a family”. Differences in geographical locations and community are set aside so that connections can be made between individuals and Elders in order to create a familiar environment among a group of people who share the same language and lived experience. In these settings Elders play an integral role in their visits as they not only facilitate and maintain connections to the community, but they also preserve culture through dialogue and distributing country food upon each visit. The connections that are established during feasts point to the inseparability of sociability and physical healing in Inuit models of healing. The collective need for country food places people in relation to one another and creates commonality amongst participants. This in turn lifts the spirits of participants and creates an ideal environment for sharing.

It is also imperative to address narratives of cultural deficiency within the context of Elder and offender relations. Karl, for example, discussed experiencing cultural deficiency because he was unaware of certain key elements of his own spirituality. Despite speaking Inuktitut and growing up in a community up North, contact with Elders was the first major connection Karl had ever encountered with his traditional culture. However, even for those who strongly identify with Aboriginal spirituality, prison can be a difficult setting in which to practice

those traditions. Inmates have also provided personal accounts “of sacred objects being mishandled by staff, of sacred spaces being intruded upon during ceremonies and of being disciplined for simply trying to follow traditional Native ways’ (Zellerer 2003, 257-258). These situations are further complicated by the fact that contact with Elders is not consistent, but is perceived as not occurring frequently enough. Waldram (1997) claims that those who have little or no pre-prison knowledge of their Aboriginal spirituality are “searching for their Aboriginal cultural roots and identity, and are willing to allow the Elders to define a world-view for them” (166). This was certainly the case for Karl who stated, “It helped a lot because the Elders, when they come in with the traditional food, they also feast with us and also talked about how we should be more careful with the new system there”. When asked what the new system was, Karl replied, “umm...I’m not quite sure, but uh, law, and uh these drinking habits and the Elders were supporting us not getting involved in that when we are out”.

Programs grounded in Inuit culture work regardless of the inmate’s perceived relationship to their traditional culture. According to Waldram (1997), offenders who strongly identify with a specific Nation are not concerned about the content of the spirituality being offered (164); they actually acknowledge the fact that a form of pan-Indianism exists, but believe that all Aboriginal spiritual traditions overlap and that there are only minor differences in practice. Gordon shared this same sentiment stating, “I’m willing to take any program even if a Mohawk runs it, as long as there is some form of [Aboriginal] culture. I would be willing to go even if it’s not from my [Inuit] culture.” When offenders are matched with an Elder or a Spiritual Advisor, the initial interaction becomes a search for the most basic common denominators that connect their cultures and lived experiences so that healing and rehabilitation are given a good chance (Waldram 1997). Within this particular milieu, there is also a shared

resistance to assimilation that is felt being incarcerated in an institution down south. It essentially becomes the responsibility of both the offender and the Elder to redefine the crucial aspects of their own culture in order to create common ground where productive healing can take place.

Through the literature and the narratives collected from participants, the effects Elders have on creating connections and building common ground in a space that inherently is not conducive to Inuit notions of healing is imperative to the overall well-being of Inuit offenders. However, another interesting theme amongst the narratives collected was the general consensus among participants about the frequency they would come into contact with Elders while incarcerated. This could possibly be due to the fact that the Elders do this on a voluntary basis, or the varying time at which the offender served his or her sentence, or the subjective perception of time that is experienced during long-term incarceration. Nevertheless, there was a general desire for more frequent visits.

For Kat, it was typically the language barrier that made her long for more frequent contact with Elders stating, “I think there should be more meetings with Elders you know? There’s not even an English, uhh, praying, there is no English church there it’s all in French. Except for one Sunday school, once every two weeks in English”. For many Inuit peoples, a balance between Catholic faith and traditional culture is integral to their present way of life. Filling the void between visits from Elders by attending church would have been therapeutic for Kat, but this was not an option for Inuit offenders who were not familiar with the French language. Simon emphasized his disappointment at the frequency of visits stating, “Twice a year. There are always Elders coming in with the country food eh, that’s like every six months”. Simon was much more concise about the Elders’ schedule and discussed the frequency of visits

by Elders, emphasizing the importance of food and time. By repeating the time and contextualizing it in two different ways, “twice a year” and “every six months”, Simon was emphasizing his frustration with how infrequent the contact with Elders and access to traditional food was. This account was in direct conflict with Karl’s experience of how often Elders came to St. Jerome, “uh, they came about once a month, or uh, every other month, it was between those periods that they would come. I think it would have been more helpful if they came more often”. In Karl’s account, it sounded like Elders visited more frequently and as time permitted. Gordon shared the same experience as Karl. When asked how often inmates had contact with Elders he stated, “They get to see Elders uh, about every month and if the Elder makes a plan to go and visit”. While the perception of time slightly varied between participants, one thing was clear. Each participant believed that they and other offenders would benefit greatly from more contact with Elders. Participants did not fault the Elders for the infrequent visits, they were aware that they were done voluntarily. However they did fault the infrequency as another shortcoming of the criminal justice system.

In order to facilitate effective and successful programs, Elders from Inuit communities play an integral and invaluable role in the process of healing and maintaining traditional culture for inmates. Liza Mosher, an Elder of the Bear Clan on Manitoulin Island relates the problems in Aboriginal communities to the loss of the stories and traditions of the Elders (Kulchyski et.al, 1999:141). If consistency and frequency of contact between Elders and inmates were increased, perhaps this would inspire and aid in more effective recovery. Both the guidance and direction provided by Elders is not just about ‘factual’ knowledge as understood in Western research paradigms, but it is also about Aboriginal lived ‘reality’ within their traditions and history (Castellano et.al 2006, 21). This is considered to be a culturally appropriate approach to healing

and differs from the bio-medical model as it teaches people to understand how their experience of trauma and intergenerational trauma has affected their current experiences (Hyatt, 2013, Waldram 1997). In contrast, the bio-medical model upon which mainstream programming is based on seeks to pathologize and label the problem as something within the inmate that needs to be eliminated (Hyatt, 2013). Thus, for rehabilitation to be considered successful, the problem must become completely absent from the inmate.

### Elders Engaging in Affective Labour

The lack of government responsibility and resources dedicated to deal effectively with the unique situation of Inuit inmates who are serving time down south, leads to feelings of social abandonment and displacement. In this way, prison becomes a zone of social abandonment, where Inuit offenders struggle to make and remake their subjectivity. According to Biehl (2005), zones of social abandonment are spaces that lack medical and governmental intervention and are often used to house those who are on the margins of society. As a result, members of the community, in this case, Elders, reclaim responsibility for these individuals on the margins, in a movement of affective labor, to aid in the process of healing and creating a sense of community (Biehl 2005). In the case of Inuit offenders, remembering, recollecting and healing occur in spaces created by groups that rely heavily on the participation of Elders. Although inmates have access to social workers and therapists, they rely heavily on Elders who volunteer in order to maintain consistent communication and ensure that the participant has constant access to required resources and emotional support. These relationships that are created within zones of social abandonment rely on a marriage between proper affect and action toward productive Inuit citizenship; where a safe space is created that bounds strangers to strangers through affect, in order to improve aspects of the participant's life while incarcerated.

There was a general consensus among the participants in this research that the infrequent visits from Elders was due to the fact that they work on a voluntary basis. Carl explained “To those who were voluntarily going into the prison to visit the inmates, I think it would have been more helpful if it was more often”. Their visits not only center on the availability of funds and time, but they are also working within the confines of a punitive institution that houses a criminalized population. In this context, it is crucial to understand the motivation of Elders who, through the concept of affective labor, create a productive social world where profound connections are made within an institution imbued with power relations. For Elders engaged in affective labor, one of the main motivators is a movement towards further resistance to assimilation. It is a resistance to state imposed social structures and an undertaking to create interpersonal relationships in unfamiliar surroundings.

According to Hemmings (2005) “Affect broadly refers to states of being, rather than to their manifestation or interpretation as emotions” (551). In this setting, the feelings and frustrations felt by Inuit inmates associated with being down south are set aside so that meaningful connections can be made and elective projects of self-transformation can occur. It is an adaptable state where individuals can reclaim autonomy in response to new and unfamiliar surroundings that are imbued with power relations. Through these connections, a safe space is created that allows Inuit offenders to remake their subjectivity within the confines of prison. Through the practice of traditions such as praying and eating country food, Inuit offenders are not only connecting with Elders, but they are producing internal connections that are facilitated by engaging with culture and others who share the same lived experiences. Thus, affect provides Inuit inmates with a degree of control over their state of being, rather than passively accepting their circumstances (Hemmings 2005). In essence, they are adapting to an unfamiliar space on

their own terms. Furthermore, when affect is successful, such as within the context of this research, it creates a positive environment for healing to take place, as it gives offenders agency to narrate their own inner life both to themselves and to others (Hemmings, 2005). Affect places the individual in a state of receptiveness and openness rather than at odds with others. For Tompkins (1962), affect does just that, it places people in relation to one another and allows for meaningful connections to be made. Affect of this nature has a contagious effect as it is easily relatable both internally and externally, which in turn provides Inuit offenders with a sense of agency in an environment that is counterproductive to their way of life.

Hardt (1999) and Tompkins (1962) view affect as a corporeal experience that is produced through a series of actions and reactions to internal and external stimuli. Through the connections that are facilitated through proper affect, Inuit offenders are able to reconnect, remember and heal; which, according to Biehl (2007) “take on new and special import in the zone of social abandonment” (27). The collective need to engage in proper affect in zones of social abandonment such as prison is felt on a more profound level as it produces social networks, a form of community and, according to Hardt, biopower. According to Foucault, biopower is a mechanism used by the state to control over its people in order to promote life. Hardt (2007) extends this notion to situate it within the capacity of affective labour; moving away from the traditional perception that biopower is a mechanism used by the government to manage populations and recognizing biopower from below (98). Hardt (2007) argues that “what is at stake in power is life itself” (98). Within this movement of affective labour, biopower becomes the ability and desire to reclaim autonomy over one’s own life. This allows individuals and groups to produce and reproduce their subjectivity in order to escape government regulation.

Affective labor is needed in order to restore humanity by placing people in relation with one another. It restores and strengthens cultural and community bonds through healing by ensuring an inclusive membership where no one is considered to be disposable; and where the unwaged participation of citizens in affective voluntary action is believed to be critical to societal stability. This labor functions not only because people feel compelled to work with those on the margins, but it serves as a movement aimed at assuming responsibility where the government has failed to do so. Voluntary work of this nature is valued by the state and unites community members who do not view it as work, but as a necessary commitment and are motivated by dutiful response. Through the commitment of Elders, they are able to provide support, assistance and healing to those who are separated from family, community and culture. A dominant narrative among participants was the concern for what occurs after they have served their term and released back into their community without any ongoing support or state-funded institutions. The stigma often associated with being an offender is often impossible to escape, especially in small communities like Kuujjuarapik, stigma further perpetuates the idea that offenders cannot be rehabilitated. While feelings of displacement are temporarily alleviated when Elders visit Inuit inmates, these zones of social abandonment extend beyond the prison into their own communities upon their release.

## **Chapter Seven: Barriers to Prison Programming Through the Lens of an Inuit Offender**

*“I didn’t keep in touch with the Elders...these Elders, I, I think they have been going there [St. Jerome] for a couple of years, volunteering there I think, with the inmates, and I have not since then contacted each Elder”. —Karl*

In this study, Inuit experiences of facing justice down south elicited ‘heavy thoughts’ which according to Kirmayer (2009), “covers a very broad range of problems and situations ranging from ordinary worry and preoccupation to profound depression” (300). Most of the narratives indicated that leaving family so far behind, the long trip down south, the lack of communication with family and isolation associated with serving a sentence far removed from home was a terrifying experience. Inuit notions of well-being, family, communication and traditional Inuit cultural values and practices were perceived as the most important characteristics of well-being, while their absence was associated with depression. Difficulties in communicating with prison staff and lack of traditional Inuit foods exacerbated the already present feeling of isolation, deepening the frustrations felt by participants. However, these feelings dissipated upon the arrival of Elders. While contact was infrequent, Elders served as a conduit to Inuit communities and by extension traditional culture. Through the provision of country food, prayer and imparting their wisdom, Elders created an ideal environment that allowed for a web of meaningful connections to be made. Regional and small cultural differences were set aside so that, in that instance, members could feel like they were part of something that they could identify with and make sense of, in an environment that is ultimately nonsensical to the Inuit inmate. It is these experiences that had an invaluable impact on Inuit offenders, thus the dominant narratives of the desire for more frequent visits were not surprising.

Participants generally favored a blended approach, by participating in mainstream Westernized programs such as AA and/or Anger Management, while simultaneously being involved when Elders visit. However, for individual healing to effectively take place, it must be supported within the community upon the release of the offender, as a socially acknowledged goal (AHC 2008). Individual healing is less likely to occur without the necessary resources or the effort of the community. Many of the narratives regarding the availability of community resources were negative and proved to be a great barrier to an inmate's successful reintegration. Participants like Karl realized that the lack of available community programming maintained the cycle of recidivism, stating:

From my own personal experience, it would still be good to have a program about and available in the communities. Um, because we all have issues that we still need to work on, even if we are released and when we find ourselves with nothing available it's never easy to find something like this and we still keep committing crimes it's the same kind of crime in the last few months and it's not easy.

While programs that are offered in prison such as AA, Anger Management and contact with Elders are perceived as being of value and use to participants, the constant transition from isolation to group interaction required in programs, is not ideal for the retention of learned skills and behavior modification. Furthermore, being released back into the community without any continued support makes it extremely difficult to apply these learned skills and tactics in real settings. Regardless of the length of the sentence, the travel alone imposes great stress on the Inuit inmate upon release. Compounded by the prolonged isolation and lack of communication with family makes reintegration overwhelming, especially considering the lack of community resources. This often leads to the transference of frustration and isolation felt in the prison, into the community. In a discussion of continuing community support Gordon stated,

Umm there's no such a program after being released from prison in my area. I wish they had that but they don't offer anything, anything, there's no such programs besides what we took in prison, they are great. They were really good programs and they helped us, but there is nothing when we get released and that's the problem. If such programs were around in our area, uh in my community, that would really help um if there was a program or uh, or AA or anger management, those things would really help me and really help in our community for sure.

Gordon's frustration at the lack of community support was palpable; he recognizes that in order to break the cycle of recidivism, programs at the community level are critical. Not just for newly released offenders, but for victims and family members as well. According to Aboriginal Healing in Canada (2008) "The collective effort to situate healing within a supportive community context creates adequate conditions for individual reflection and work" (104). Many community members are dealing with residual grief from unresolved losses and traumatic experiences such as family violence, alcohol, and suicides. Thus, contextualizing healing within a social rather than individual transformation is a productive approach to traditional Inuit social organization, where maintaining positive community connections are fundamental to Inuit identity (AHC 2008).

Familial ties are also crucial to Inuit identity and as a result are critical to maintain in the process of healing. Along with the lack of community resources were narratives of the change in the family dynamic. There were reports of less talking and lack of understanding between spouses and children causing further fragmentation of self and of the individual social relationships, often a consequence of painful and traumatic past experience. Prior to colonization kinship was at the center of Inuit social organization, however its legacy has dramatically impacted Inuit family structure and communication (Krall et.al, 2011). When discussing the difficulties of reintegration and family issues, Gordon stated,

I know it's not easy to do this stuff on my own, even if I learn a lot from the programs that I went to I tried to use the ones I learned from programs and I tried to control my anger in the ways I learned from anger management but uh having it available in our community would be nice. Going through it on your own is difficult; I wish I could show my spouse and go through this with her so she could learn that it's not an easy program to go to and try to change my life with that. I wish I could let her see what I go through but it's not easy because they don't get to come with me and uh share the program experience.

The need for healing is often conceptualized through the fragmentation of the self and the family. It is clear from Gordon's statement that relational life is paramount for Inuit conceptions of well-being and in order for healing to take place, it must extend beyond the individual (AHC 2008). According to Krall et.al (2011), "In a collectivist culture, personal change is directly related to community change" (434). Thus, upon release, individual change is rendered meaningless unless a collective approach is taken that involves community and family members. By involving the community, this approach is effective in that it also works to eliminate the stigmas that are often associated with crimes and criminals upon their release. This was a problem that Karl encountered upon his release, "There aren't much people once you're back home; they look at you like 'that guy just came back from prison'. Never mind, nothing, people are sometimes like that so basically you are on your own once you're out."

There were two narratives among participants that accounted for the lack of community resources and programming. Karl's statement that "there aren't much people once you're back home" refers to the lack of people who are willing to support those who have just been released. This causes the collective feelings experienced in prison, such as frustration from lack of communication and worst of all isolation, to resurface. In this way, Inuit inmates who are attempting to reintegrate are thrust back into a liminal space, they are desperate to feel a sense of belongingness however they feel as though their own community does not accept them. Kat echo's this sentiment, exclaiming,

Nobody is doing anything for us! I heard one time on the news, that uh, somebody was trying to complain about CSC and then this person from another community said that they don't wanna do nothing about it because it's the criminals.

Northern communities are caught in a cross-cultural dilemma where they are governed by the Canadian state and are required to abide by Western law and attend Western schools. However, the government feels no obligation to provide these communities with necessary funding to allocate to community programs or half-way houses. Participants in this research were well aware of the neglect and lack of funding on the part of the Canadian government. When asked about what could be done to help offenders once they are released Gordon stated,

I think just to have some kind of program going on outside of prison in their community would be very nice. But I always heard from the program organizers that it costs a lot of money to run something like that and there's no such money available for it in our community, that's another thing.

In a local news article regarding the opening of a halfway house in Kangirsuk, a community in Nunavik, community leaders used this as a platform to reprimand the Quebec government for failing to take more immediate action. An Inuit justice task force report completed in 1993 recommended that more local resources be made available, however the halfway house wasn't opened until 2006 (George 2006). These occurrences are commonplace among Aboriginal-state relationships, as previously discussed in this thesis. The article concludes with a quote from a community leader "I'm looking forward to the day when we won't have to send people down South to be incarcerated" (George 2006). Halfway houses are seen as the best course of action for Inuit corrections, as prisons are seen as the "worst of white man's culture" (George 2006). When asked if there was anything else he wanted to contribute about his experience, Simon concluded with this statement:

I just want to add this, I was just hoping that they could hire someone to go camping with them you know? To be out in the land for a couple of months, that's how I feel. Instead of

being in a prison, a white man's land. Some people are losing their cultural life because of that, being sent down south.

It is clear from the collective narratives of the participants in this research, that Western institutions like prison are detrimental to Inuit people's way of life, especially when they are located so far away from their communities. While Inuit people are known for their ability to adapt and integrate technologies that are outside of their own culture, they are unable to identify with purely punitive and isolating measures that are imposed by the state. It is important to acknowledge the prison industrial complex here, in that prison, in essence does not work as a rehabilitative measure for any one from any background. However the fact that they conceive of going down South as entering an entirely different world and equating prison as a "white man's land" should warrant funding for community based institutions.

Another important narrative regarding community based corrections and healing were notions of being on the land. Going out or being on the land blends the traditional with the modern, while strengthening inter-personal and community connections. On a more intricate level, the land is associated with a web of meanings and a collective history indicative of the strength and spirit of Inuit people (AHC 2008). Along with the obvious physical connection to the land, there are also cosmological meanings in the sense that the land emphasizes relations to God, the land, and animals (Stuckenberg 2005). These all foster and maintain a strong sense of self and community. An individual's relationship to the land and animals is still a necessary factor for people's well-being and spiritual health, making it crucial to maintain these connections to the land (Stuckenberg 2005).

Aside from issues of reintegration are issues that affect the entire community, unemployment and suicide. In a concluding statement, Karl pointed out,

I think what is most important is that there are limited, very limited places to go to for an example, let's say there is a hunter and a non-hunter well the hunter has the outdoors for himself and he can do anything, through that you can do a lot of healing because you are in the nature. But for the non-hunter, is let's say is staying in town or rarely has places to go to for social activities for any programs or uh not much available jobs too either so I think it builds up in themselves more damage, or more of uh, more um bad things happening to them.

While the community provides opportunities for social interaction, it can also have detrimental effects that manifest themselves in suicides, domestic violence and drug and alcohol abuse (Stuckenberg 2005, 211). Thus, organizing camps out on the land and hunting trips are considered an established method of healing for those in need. According to Archibald (2006), "Today, Inuit suicide rates are among the highest in the world... Unemployment, low levels of educational attainment, sexual abuse and violence within families have been identified as serious issues" (74). Community level resources are not only a requirement for the successful reintegration of Inuit inmates but also for those who have been victimized and those who are suffering from mental health and/or substance abuse issues. For participants like Karl, many of the frustrations stem from lack of job opportunities in the community and the inability to effectively provide for one's family.

### Recommendations

Hugh Brody's report conducted in 1971 entitled *Indians on Skid Row* offers an interesting perspective on the socio-economic position of Indian (Aboriginal) migrants, which he argues, are dislocated from both mainstream economic opportunities and traditional or pseudo-traditional Indian life (Brody 1971). Brody (1971) argues that jail "barely qualifies as part of social rehabilitation, despite the protestations by social workers to the contrary" (57). Furthermore, if the socio-economic position of Aboriginal communities remains the same, power relations within and beyond the institution of prisons will likely perpetuate the current situation of their

over-representation and high recidivism rates. In the conclusion of his report, Brody offers both immediate and long-term recommendations, which are applicable in the case of Inuit communities and will be applied to this research.

It is clear that the most immediate need in Inuit communities such as Kuujjuarapik is expanding existing “Community Outreach/Recreational Centre” or constructing them in communities that do not already have them. They should be organized and established in a way that would allow them to tackle a range of issues. Organizing programs such as: camps and hunting trips out on the land, workshops aimed at enhancing job skills, legal services, individual and family counseling, community-based AA and anger management meetings and recreational activities for both adults and youth. According to Brody (1971), they should also provide well-publicized advisory services that should lie firmly outside the model of ‘rehabilitation’ “or any other moralistic framework (77). All services and activities should be organized and run by Aboriginal peoples and community members (Brody 1971, 77). To this end, this Outreach/Recreational Centre should ultimately be a place for community members to come together to engage and interact with one another. This will not only sustain and create individual self-confidence, but it will also help to restore familial and community ties.

There are also more fundamental social processes that need to be addressed in order to ensure the stable socio-economic conditions of the community and its individuals in the future. Focus on economic development within Inuit communities needs to be made a priority, as it would alleviate many of the frustrations felt by the residents. For Brody (1971), one solution may lie in combining industrial and agricultural development with Aboriginal-owned and Aboriginal-run enterprises in larger cities (78). Another change that needs to be made that was outlined by few of the participants in this research and Brody is further developing the existing

educational system in communities. Many report being “ill at ease” in school because they are not maintained and do not encompass the spoken language of the community (Brody 1971). Not all of the teachers need to be Inuit or Aboriginal, however they should have some knowledge of the local language, customs and awareness of the issues that the local community members face. Brody (1971) believes that it is crucial that teachers have the ability to identify with the past and present situation of their pupils. One thing is for certain, the misconceptions that non-Aboriginal mainstream Canadians have of Aboriginal and Inuit communities need to be addressed. As Brody (1975) points out;

“There is an essential contradiction at the heart of much administrative endeavor in the Canadian Arctic. There is, on the one hand, a conviction that Eskimos are in need of this and that material or social provision, and therefore the Whites must provide it. On the other hand, it is said that the Eskimos should not have everything done for them, because such a dependence is morally and socially corrosive” (119).

This is an unfortunate sentiment that is still present in the minds of many non-Aboriginal Canadians across the nation today, one that must be eliminated through education and providing Aboriginal peoples with more autonomy. Strong political institutions and local political leadership must be established and encouraged in all Aboriginal, Inuit and Metis communities. Only then will they have the ability to influence the quality and direction of their lives. Sometimes, the most meaningful thing one can do is to listen without judgments that are often associated with crime and Aboriginal communities. At the end of each interview, I was shocked to learn that the interviews had not only served as a method to gather narratives, but was also somewhat of a therapeutic exercise for the participants.

It’s nice that gave me the chance to give my knowledge, it would be great to know if it made an impact. Thank you very much for, um, how do you say that? It was great that you got to question me on my knowledge and I got to share it, for that, thank you. (Gordon)

“Thank you for your caring... Thank you so much”. (Kat)

For both you and I are helping each other out cause uh you have your own research and I have my thoughts, which I have been keeping to myself. From this it is certainly helping by letting it out, so I would like to thank you (Karl).

“Thank you for listening to what I had to share”. (Simon)

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