

## CHAPTER 14

# Indigenous Masculinities: Carrying the Bones of the Ancestors

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*When the Seventh Cavalry invaded our communities [in the late 1800s], our people were appalled with their behaviour. They were drinking and swearing and being violent toward our women. This was totally foreign to us.*

*The turning point for me was when I realized that I had become a Seventh Cavalry man, and that I had to relearn how to become a Lakota man.*

—Marlin Mousseau, October 19, 2010

## Introduction

The meeting room in downtown Toronto has about 20 Indigenous<sup>1</sup> men and a handful of women seated facing each other around long tables. They are here to take part in a provincial training program, *Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin* (Ojibway phrase that translates to “I Am a Kind Man”), an initiative of the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres (OFIFC), and part of the Ontario-based Strategic Framework to End Violence Against Aboriginal Women. These individuals are but one cohort of the Kizhaay initiative, which currently has almost one hundred facilitators who host community-based workshops and other activities aimed at building community engagement to end violence.

For their week-long training-of-trainers, the OFIFC has brought in Marlin Mousseau, an educator and consultant with 30 years of experience in working to end violence against women. Mousseau is Lakota and from the Pine Ridge Reservation in South Dakota, and speaks from his own experience of family violence and recovery through relearning about traditional Indigenous masculine identities. After talking about the long history of violence against women in European history, Mousseau teaches that settlers often remarked on the absence of it in the Indigenous cultures they encountered in North America. He explains that Indigenous societies were not patriarchal and that the respect and authorities held by women precluded the kind of violence and abuse that we see today. The training participants listen closely, hungry for knowledge about masculine roles and identities that defy those based in dominance and violence. It seems a time has come for change, and Kizhaay facilitators may be at the forefront of a grassroots

movement that involves not only addressing violence in Indigenous communities, but also seeking change in Indigenous men's roles, identities, and masculinities.

As Indigenous scholars<sup>2</sup> committed to the healing of our peoples, we have partnered with the Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin program and the OFIFC to explore Indigenous masculinities in the spirit of what Mousseau described as relearning what it means to be an Indigenous man.<sup>3</sup> This is a process of thinking about how and why patriarchy was introduced to our communities, of considering how it has contributed to violence and social dysfunction among our peoples, and of looking to our traditional cultures to dig up what we can about healthy Indigenous masculinities.

The first step in our research project has been to interview Elders about Indigenous men's roles and responsibilities. We asked: What roles and responsibilities did Indigenous men have in the past? What happened to our men's identities and masculinities as a result of colonization? Where are we at today? What do our men need to move forward in terms of being healthy Indigenous males? We interviewed the following 12 Elders across Canada to begin this dialogue: Jim Albert, Anishinaabe, Ontario; Wil Campbell, Métis, Alberta; Reggie David, Nuuchah-nulth, British Columbia; Ray John, Oneida, Ontario; Jules Lavalee, Métis, Manitoba; Albert McLeod, Cree, Manitoba; Rene Meshake, Anishinaabe, Ontario; Joseph Morrisson, Anishinaabe, Ontario; Ray Peter, Quw'utsun, British Columbia; Tom Porter, Mohawk, New York State; Ted Quinney, Cree, Alberta; Dominique Rankin, Algonquin, Quebec.

This chapter presents our findings from the Elder interviews and serves as our entry point into the study of Indigenous masculinities in Canada.

## Colonization and Patriarchy

*I believe we had quite a few matriarchal systems in our tribal affiliations. And so, perhaps a lot of our problems came in trying to live the European patriarchy.*

—Jules Lavalee, Métis Elder, Manitoba

As Jules's quote suggests, explorations of Indigenous masculinities inevitably bring out a connection between colonization and patriarchy. Indigenous feminists have long made this connection (Suzack, Huhndof, Perrault, & Barman, 2010, p. 1), and maintain that Indigenous women's issues are distinct from the issues that inspired second-stage/settler feminism because of it. They note that pre-contact gender relations were based on equity and balance, and that male dominance in the areas of governance, social relations, economics, and spiritual practices were introduced by settler society as a way of breaking down Indigenous families and communities (Anderson, 2000; Green, 2007; Mihesuah, 2003). As Andrea Smith has documented, Western patriarchy was used to dismantle

traditional kinship systems and introduce a gendered order of violence (Smith, 2005). In recent years, queer theorists have built on Indigenous feminist scholarship by writing about the relationship between colonialism and heteropatriarchy (see, for example, Driskill, Finley, Gilley, & Morgensen, 2011).

The literature on Indigenous masculinities is relatively sparse, but growing, and it often speaks to colonization and patriarchy as well. The bulk of these studies have emerged out of the Pacific region; scholars in New Zealand, Australia, and Hawaii have focused on issues that include identity construction (Calame, 1999; Hokowhitu, 2008; Jolly, 2008; Morrell & Swart, 2005; Tengan 2008a, 2008b; Walker, 2008), family violence (Brownridge, 2010; Chester, Robin, Koss, Lopez, & Goldman, 1994; Haaken, 2008), addictions, substance misuse, and suicide (Brown, 2010; Lowery, 1998, McCalman, Baird, & Tsey, 2007), health and healing (Krech, 2002; Towney, 2005), youth (Guttmann, 1997; Hammill, 2001; Martino, 2003; Ogilvie & Van Zyl, 2001; Ricciardelli, McCabe, Ball, & Mellor, 2004; Simpson, Mcfadden, & Munns, 2001), fatherhood (Bender, 2005; Lefler, 2005), leadership (Holmes, Vine, & Marra, 2009; Kempf, 2002), queer/two-spirit issues (Adams & Phillips, 2009; Brown, 1997; Callender & Kochems, 1985; Thomas & Jacobs, 1999), sports (Collings & Condon, 1996; Hokowhitu, 2004a, 2004b, 2007, 2009; Jackson & Hokowhitu, 2005), and labour (Curtis, 2005; Herlily, 2005). Within a Canadian context, University of Victoria researcher Jessica Ball (2009, 2010) has implemented a wide-ranging research project focusing on Indigenous childhood development in which Indigenous fathers' involvement in child care and participation in out-of-home care is one component.

Whereas this Indigenous masculinities literature represents a large, diverse, and international sample of Indigenous peoples, it is important to note that themes of colonization, patriarchy, and the revitalization of tradition cut across the literature. We found these common themes in the research we did with our Elders as well. The Elders were from very distinct and widespread cultures and geographies across Canada, but many talked about how colonization disrupted gender relations and introduced disrespectful behaviour toward women. Jim Albert's (Anishinaabe, Ontario) comment that "the newcomers had their own attitude toward women, and they were quite consciously destructive of what they found here in terms of women's roles," was typical of the Elders' comments on gender and gender relations.

Several of the Elders spoke about the need for balance and respect between different genders and age groups in land-based communities of the past, stressing that good relations were critical to the survival of the people. Ted Quinney (Cree, Alberta) emphasized that patriarchy brought in "a whole hierarchy system," adding that "it was their failure to understand equality." He commented that in land-based societies "no one is supposed to put themselves above the collective whole, because the moment you do that, you put yourself and the collective in peril." Albert McLeod (Cree, Manitoba) talked about how homophobia was introduced as part of Euro-Western gender relations. He made reference to scholarship in this area, (e.g., Jacobs, Wesley, & Lang, 1997) stating that "there is evidence

that two-spirit people were integrated in and integral to [our] societies.” Albert talked further about the losses that occur when the collective begins to exclude or define people:

When you enter the Eastern doorway [at birth], that doorway’s open to everyone and we can’t say who can come in and who cannot come in. Because the strength of culture is based on whoever enters that doorway, we have the strength to accept that person and relate to that person. (personal interview, September, 2011)

With reference to the homophobia found in many Indigenous communities today, he added, “For a long time the doors have been closed because we don’t feel that we have that strength, because we are still reclaiming our culture, our traditions, and identity.”

Whereas men and women held distinct roles and responsibilities in traditional societies, the Elders noted that gendered roles and responsibilities did not involve the male dominance associated with patriarchal gender regimes. Ray Peter (Quw’utsun, B.C.) remarked, “[Europeans] came in and looked at women as just chattel ... Their [women’s] job was to stay home, keep the house clean, keep the clothes clean, cook and bear children.” He asserted that “our people [were] not that way. They were never that way. And so that’s one of the things that was broken.”

Gendered roles associated with labour in land-based communities were determined by practicality; typically men hunted large game while women managed the resources of the family and community. Yet unlike patriarchal gendered roles associated with labour, one role was not considered more valuable than the other, and there was a fluidity and flexibility that came from a necessity of survival (Anderson, 2000, p. 59). Tom Porter (Mohawk, New York State) made a comment about “men’s work” and “women’s work” that demonstrated that principles of flexibility held throughout the twentieth century, in spite of the introduction of Western ways:

We don’t really say this is a woman’s stuff and this is a man’s stuff, because if a little baby is falling in the water, you don’t say this is a man’s job or a woman’s job. You pull them out! You just jump in and don’t worry about that part ... When push comes to shove, you just do it. And when I was growing [up], our mother and grandmother told us that we have to know how to wash dishes and wash it good. We have to know how to make biscuits and donuts and whatever food to cook, just like the women. And we got to know how to keep the house clean. (personal interview, August, 2011)

Balance and respect for the different roles people played was key to fostering the health and well-being of family and community.

As women were typically responsible for managing family and community, men were responsive to the direction they provided in this domain. A number of the men referred

to “matriarchal” ways in which men would answer to the authorities women held in managing the home territory. Thinking back to his childhood community in Manitoba, Jules Lavalee (Métis, Manitoba) said:

... We must have been following some kind of matriarchal society in my community. Because I remember when we were assigned our duties for the day, it was always done by the women in our family. They would say, “Jules, today, you’ll make sure we have lots of water because we’re going to be cooking or washing, doing laundry.” And “Lawrence, make sure we have lots of wood. Because today, this is what you do.” They never asked us. The women never asked us. They always told us. But if a man wanted a woman to do something, he always asked her. (personal interview, May, 2011)

Rene Meshake (Anishinaabe, Ontario) remembered that it was the “old ladies” who managed the homelands of his childhood community. His reflections show the difference between patriarchal notions of “a woman’s place in the home” and holding authority for managing the community. Elsewhere, Rene has described the difference between the “old ladies” system of governance in their traditional homelands in Northwestern Ontario, and that which ensued after they were forced to move onto a reserve in the 1960s (Anderson, 2011, pp. 134–135). Speaking generally about the old ladies’ authority and how this related to typical masculine symbols of power, he said:

I was really impressed with, tough, tough, tough uncles. They were in shape, you know, Uncle Pete, and Uncle Willie, and Uncle Moses, Alphonse, all those guys ... I was impressed by these massive men, my uncles. And they would defer to the grandmothers! All this power deferring to grandmothers. When Grandmother said something, that was it, they’re in charge. And seeing this as a kid, “Hey, that’s the way the world works,” you know. (personal interview, June, 2011)

Rene’s comment denotes a community in which men respected the authority of women and did not feel a need to control or dominate. What would the authorities, roles, and responsibilities of men look like in such environments? We explored this question by asking the Elders about Indigenous men’s traditional roles.

## Men’s Traditional Roles

*Before [the men’s] job was to carry the bones of ancestors ... That’s a big responsibility. It involves teachings. It involves hunting, fishing, and it involves ceremonies of all kinds. It involves songs by the hundreds and hundreds. It involves where the*

*stars and the constellations of stars are moving, and when and how it coordinates with what is growing and what's [available for] hunting and everything. And [we] have lost that connection.*

—Tom Porter, Mohawk Elder, New York State

In terms of the traditional/historical roles and responsibilities of men in Indigenous communities, Tom Porter's response speaks to men's labour as well as social, spiritual, and ceremonial responsibilities. This response reflects the connection that many Indigenous peoples make between identity and notions of responsibility. In Indigenous land-based and collective-focused societies, "who you are" is often defined by "what is it that you have to do" (Anderson, 2000, p. 229). Community members carry responsibilities that contribute to the collective and nourish relationships with all of creation. Tom's words are provocative in that they inspire us to explore the magnitude of Indigenous men's roles, identities, and the responsibilities that define them—a job, however, that is beyond the scope of this paper and the introductory work we have done. But they offer a place to conceptualize non-dominant male roles and identities that are grounded in contributions to the well-being of the people and the cosmos.

If you ask people in "Indian country" about the "traditional" roles and responsibilities of men, they will typically say that it was the men's job "to protect and provide." Many of the Elders we interviewed gave this response, noting that men were responsible for bringing in food and resources through hunting and fishing, while also protecting their families and communities from harm. Principles of non-interference and non-coercive relations meant that everyone was honoured for their responsibilities, and thus the role to "protect" and "provide" ensured a sense of purpose, belonging, and identity that did not involve having power over others—human, animal, or environment. The Elders demonstrated this in their discussions about what it means to protect and provide.

## Providing

*I grew up in a Métis community [where] traditionally the men were the providers. The men were the hunters. Men were the fishermen. Men were the trappers. Men went out and worked and brought home, either goods or money to be able to provide for the family.*

—Jules Lavalee, Métis Elder, Manitoba

In the childhood communities of the Elders, men provided resources for their families and communities through hunting, fishing, and trapping as well as through waged labour. Joseph Morrisson (Anishinaabe, Ontario) remarked on the security, pride, and sense of identity this provided young males, stating that, "as a boy, you looked up to

that. Your father, grandfather, they would go out and get meat, provide the food ... [It was] that ability to bring in the food, to keep the family healthy.” Many of the Elders talked about how disempowering it was to be pushed out of hunting and fishing territories and to have to rely on the goodwill of settler farmers and/or abide by federal regulations. “We needed permission,” said Rene Meshake (Anishinaabe, Ontario), “so this whole independence was taken away from us guys, you know, that were supposed to be stewards of the land.”

Indigenous women also fished, hunted, trapped, and engaged in waged labour, as it was essential for the survival of land-based communities. But the distinct protocols and practices related to men’s resource procurement allowed for identity development based in the sacredness of “providing” responsibilities. Formal and informal rites of passage for boys were often connected to their ability to contribute in this way. A boy’s first catch or first large game kill would be celebrated, an act of independence would be tested, or graduated skills would be recognized, and some of the Elders remembered these experiences fondly. Dominique Rankin (Algonquin, Quebec) told a story about asserting his skill and independence when his father launched him out in his own canoe for the first time at seven years of age. Dominique has also written about his 12-year-old vision quest, which required that he stay in the bush alone until he trapped a bear. This event took nine days, from which he emerged “a man” (Rankin & Tardif, 2011, p. 98).

Ray Peter (Quw’utsun, B.C.) talked about graduating from learning how to walk in the woods to earning the right to use a small rifle at the age of 12. There were also ceremonial protocols related to becoming a fisherman, which Ray remembered:

They brought me to a creek, right here in Cowichan ... just two of us, me and my older cousin. We fixed a codfish hook, tied it on a branch, a little bit thicker than your thumb. And we got a sack, and cut it, tied half around us, open flap. And gaff them, dropped them right into our sack. And when I got four, he said, “Okay, come with me.” So he brought me over—there was a place where we had to go and there was a huge boulder, and he started talking in our language—I don’t know what you call it, praying or whatever—naming me. And I had to grab each of my four trout, eh? Bite the head. Put them aside ... and he wrapped them up in another gunnysack. Gave them away to four special people. And, you know, he took me and he told me what it was all about. And that was just so that I could make personal contact with all the trout, all the fish there, you know. So that whatever was there would not affect me. Would not attack me, as they say. And the water, he said, the water will not bite you, you know, the freezing cold, would not bite you. Don’t do this, don’t do that. They had to go up the mountain, and bathe up the mountain. No soap, used hemlock branches and balsam. (personal interview, May, 2011)

In this story, we can see how Ray's sense of purpose and identity were confirmed. He received the spiritual grounding needed to carry out his responsibilities, and the name that validated his new-found identity as provider. His relationship with the fish was validated, as were his responsibilities to the collective through the guidance and mentorship of his older cousin.

Both Albert McLeod (Cree, Manitoba) and Wil Campbell (Métis, Alberta) talked about the loss of such rites of passage for boys today. As Albert put it:

I think that's [one] thing that is missing in terms of the Aboriginal male identity. Now it's like you have sex with a girl, you get your car, you drink. So those rites of passage are Westernized. [But we have to consider], traditionally, what would it be? (personal interview, August, 2011)

Some of the men expressed concern about how gangs are filling a need for young Indigenous males, with their rites of passage, initiations, economies, graduated "skills," and communities of men and "mentors." Ted Quinney (Cree, Alberta) talked about his work in trying to reintroduce Indigenous cultures in place of gang culture:

We had one young guy that wanted to drop his colours. [He had] no cultural education, nothing. But I'm sure he could have educated me beyond a shadow of a doubt, in regards to gangs and gang culture ... I said, "Look, you drop your colours; we'll give you new colours that you can carry. There's colours in our traditional way of being, and those colours have meanings. We call them print, flags, protocol. We will teach you about those colours. I can give you five immediate colours that you can carry at all times. You'll use these colours when you go to our ceremonies, our Sun Dances, sweat lodges. This is a total[ly] different way of being from what you have been exposed to in regards to your colours as a gang member. Leave this gang and join this gang and be a real warrior. Then you will be able to set that foundational base that you can build on. (personal interview, October, 2011)

The connection between providing and feeling part of a community was essential to Indigenous men of the past, and as the comments on gangs indicate, continues to be a need among young men today.

Some of the men talked about how waged labour simply couldn't compare to the way traditional occupations fulfilled their need for community and a sense of purpose. Reggie David (Nuu-chah-nulth, B.C.) pointed out that low-paying and seasonal waged labour also often distanced Indigenous men from their communities and cultures. Young males were not able to be mentored by the older males in their communities, as they often had to leave home to support their families. Like many of the young



Indigenous men of his generation, Reggie left his home and community at 15 to work in logging camps and commercial ocean fishing.

It is important to note that Indigenous men were displaced from participating in traditional economies as well as waged labour through colonial processes. With little education, Aboriginal men in western Canada in the early twentieth century, for example, were confined to low-paying, labour-intensive seasonal employment that served non-Aboriginal interests. In the immediate postwar years, racism prevented Saskatchewan veterans of World War II from attaining employment in towns surrounding reserves and Métis communities other than the same types of jobs that had been available to them prior to the war (Innes, 2004).

Three of the Elders interviewed talked about how devastating it is for men to lose their ability to provide and then become reliant on welfare. Wil Campbell (Métis, Alberta) made the connection between this colonial process and damage to Indigenous masculinities:

The treaties said take away the gun and the horse; give them rations. From that day forward, where did the men fit in, in this society? They didn't. We've had 10 generations of total demasculation of [our] men, and we wonder why. They even put laws in place that men couldn't work; they couldn't pray; they couldn't be themselves. How can he provide when he doesn't have the ability to provide and that's taken away from him by law? (personal interview, October, 2011)

Wil connected this loss to the struggles of Native men today, remarking, "And then they wonder why we are in jail."

## Protecting

*We are the man; we are there to protect the medicine.*

—Dominique Rankin, Algonquin Elder, Quebec

Historically, the notion of the Indigenous male as warrior has been active both in the mainstream imaginary as well as in Indigenous societies. Very few of the Elders we interviewed talked about men as warriors, but Ted Quinney (Cree, Alberta) gave an interesting example of Indigenous men's historic roles as warriors in relation to identity formation. He talked about Wandering Spirit, a late-nineteenth-century Plains Cree War Chief who is typically viewed as a murderer due to the killings of nine Canadians at Frog Lake on April 2, 1885. From a Plains Cree perspective, however, Wandering Spirit's actions reflect his responsibilities as War Chief to protect the people from any perceived threat. Ted discussed the process involved for Wandering Spirit to attain the position of War Chief and how devastating it must have been when he was dispossessed of his role in the takeover of Indigenous territories in western Canada:

Wandering Spirit had spent his life learning and being taught the old ways right from when he was small. Why? Because this was his dream to be a War Chief, to lead the warriors, to defend his tribe, his people, to the death if it [came to that]. At least you die with honour, and you will be remembered. So this is the way he's brought up ... Then all of a sudden, the Europeans with the Native chiefs and headmen negotiate Treaty 6. It clearly states in Treaty 6 that we are not allowed to take up arms against the Canadian government or any other foreign government, thus it would break the treaty. Well, [he had] just spent 30 years or more of [his] life jumping all the hoops, and everything else, and finally made the position of War Chief ... [But] the European society did not care about this position, and what it took for Wandering Spirit to obtain it. (personal interview, October, 2011)

Ted highlighted the honour-bound duties that War Chiefs were tied to but also noted the likelihood that Canadian officials lacked the proper cultural context to understand Wandering Spirit's roles and responsibilities. Ted's story draws our attention to the sense of honour and life purpose that were lost along with the traditional warrior role. There were other examples of restrictions on the ability to protect due to the invasion. A few of the Elders talked about the dispossession of lands in the nineteenth century and how parcelling Indigenous peoples onto reserves meant that they had little mobility or power, namely, of the management of their traditional territories. As Wil Campbell (Métis, Alberta) pointed out, "How can he protect if he has nothing to protect?"

Gendered roles came into the discussion of protection of territories and environment, as many Indigenous cosmologies frame the earth as the great mother. Dominique Rankin (Algonquin, Quebec) learned that it is the men's job to protect the earth mother, as well as females, who embody creation:

We are supposed to protect the medicine, and when we talk about the medicine, we talk about the women. So the man is supposed to protect the medicine, all medicine: plants, fruits, everything, and the first woman. We keep. We are managers to everything in the forest. To protect your river, to protect our creek, to protect our animals, birds. So to protect that, that's man-given teachings. (personal interview, October, 2011)

Dominique recalled witnessing the gender relations between his mother and father as a youngster, and reflected on the lessons they taught about men's role as protector. In the springtime, it was his father who led the teachings and ceremonies to mark the change of season. Dominique noted that his mother didn't give the teachings because she represented the medicine that his father had a responsibility to protect. He gave other examples of how this teaching was manifested in ceremonies, talking about how women entered the sweat lodge first "because medicine goes first and the men after."

These early lessons underpin the enactment of Dominique's responsibilities as a medicine man today. "I can't take decisions, just myself," he said. "If I want the medicine in the forest, I'm going to ask my wife. So sometimes in the end of October, there is going to be nice medicine there, beaver medicine. So every year I ask my wife." This principle of asking is also evident in Dominique's description of hunting, where he emphasized, "We never say I'm going to kill moose, bear—never! It don't exist that, "kill," [in] Anishinaabe language. We ask, spare it, if it's possible to give it to you, medicine."

Most of the Elders talked about how men traditionally had a role to protect their families and communities. In a comment that was reflective of what we heard from many, Jim Albert (Anishinaabe, Ontario) said, "Men have always had the responsibility of being the protectors of the people. [They protected] other men, younger and older, younger and older women and the children." He added, "[B]ut how do we help men realize that that's a very powerful, important responsibility, and they can take a little piece of it?" Jim pointed out how incongruent the "protector of the family" role is, given the disproportionate levels of family violence in Indigenous communities today.

Scholars have repeatedly pointed to residential schools as the cause of much of the dysfunction and family breakdown experienced in contemporary Indigenous communities.<sup>4</sup> It is worth exploring the effect of these schools on Indigenous masculinities, as generations of Indigenous men must have felt powerless to protect their children, families, and communities when their children were removed and placed into these state institutions. In turn, boys who attended residential school lost the ability to protect themselves from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse. Equally devastating was the loss of the boys' ability to protect younger siblings, cousins, and other community members, which in kin-based societies is paramount.

A number of the Elders talked about the power of the priests and the church to silence any efforts that were made by the children to stop the abuse. Dominique Rankin (Algonquin, Ontario) noted that when he tried to tell his parents about the abuse he had witnessed in residential school, they told him, "You can't talk like that about the missionaries. They represent God, Jesus Christ." This silencing had personal consequences for Dominique, who said, "Nobody wanted to hear what happened to us ... so that's why I took to alcohol."

Albert McLeod (Cree, Manitoba) talked about the impact on boys of witnessing sexual abuse on the part of the priests, but not having the ability to stop it:

I was told in one of the schools in the north, the priests would go in the dorm at night, and they would masturbate the boys. And so it's dark, you don't know which priests, you don't know which boys. Other boys would hear it, but no one would talk about it. It would just be this ritualized oppression ... [Then] the children become complicit in the lie, because they're pretending that this didn't happen. And it's a part of colonization to suppress the people, oppress the people, create secrets, create lies, keep secrets. (personal interview, August, 2011)

Albert contrasted this situation to another story his mother had told him about a grandmother who got a priest kicked out of the community for the attempted sexual assault of her granddaughter. He noted, “[T]hat really spoke to the power of the women at the time. They were able to expel these perpetrators,” adding, “[L]ater on, I don’t think that was an option.”

Some of the men told stories about Indigenous boys’ and men’s efforts to protect children from the abuses they suffered in residential schools. Ray John (Oneida, Ontario) pointed out that his mother had an advantage in that the school she attended was close enough for her father to visit after hearing that she had been given the strap:

He got his wagon, and they went up there. They went to the door and talked to the principal, [and] he said, “From what I understand, you’re here to teach. That’s what you’re going to do.” Then [the teacher] tried to say “Well I have the power and this and that.” [Grandpa] grabbed him by the throat and put him against the wall. He says, “This is where that part is going to stop.” He said, “It doesn’t matter what you think you have, that don’t give no right to get after these children ... We have different laws and different understandings. We don’t hit those kids.” (personal interview, August, 2011)

Dominique Rankin (Algonquin, Quebec) has written about how he and the other boys tried to protect younger children once they reached adolescence in the residential school he attended. They trained themselves by hitting their arms with trees so they would not feel the beatings so badly, and took to observing the younger boys closely to determine who might have been abused. Collectively, they would segregate the perpetrator from other staff after mealtime, and denounce and then humiliate the person publicly in front of the other children. Dominique and the others knew they could take on these small acts of vigilante justice because the priests would not want the police or other authorities to open any kind of investigation into the school. Unfortunately, the power of these boys was limited; the abuses continued and the feelings engendered by this powerlessness led to suicidal feelings for Dominique (Rankin & Tardiff, 2011, pp. 105–107).

Dominique’s story demonstrates that, even in residential schools, boys and young men made efforts to maintain traditional kinship responsibilities for the protection of younger community members. These duties can be more broadly seen in the mentoring that men did in the childhood communities of the Elders.

## Mentoring and Role Modelling

All the Elders spoke about the roles of men in their childhood lives as mentors and role models, emphasizing how healthy relationships with older males contributed to positive identity development. Fathers, siblings, cousins, uncles, and grandfathers were involved,

along with other men in the community. As Jules Lavalee (Métis, Manitoba) said, “there was always a man taking us under their wing and teaching us how to be good hunters, good trappers, and good fishermen.”

Rene Meshake (Anishinaabe, Ontario) recalled feeling that “Whoa, I’m a big guy now!” when his Uncle Peter invited him to go hunting for the first time. At 10, he had trouble keeping up, but his uncle demonstrated patience, clearing aside branches to make his path easier. “Seeing that,” Rene remarked, “was a very powerful image of what I would become; setting the pathway to be an uncle to somebody else.” Rene also told a story about identifying with “Richard,” an older boy in his community:

Just as he was leaving on a pickup truck [one day], I remember he said, “Hey Rene, come here.” He handed me his slingshot ... Then I went hunting. I imagine I’m Richard in the bush, hunting partridges. Eventually I picked up that knife and carved my own crutch. Like I was Richard, but after my crutch making and the carvings and all that, and adding my own nicks and scratches—that was my slingshot—then I became Rene. And it was my turn to pass this down to my younger cousins that hadn’t known even how to draw a knife. (personal interview, June, 2011)

Rene also talked about watching his Uncle Peter build canoes, a skill associated with manhood in his community. He noted that his uncle would leave tools out so he could pick them up after observing how they were used. He then compared the tools his uncle used to the kinds of “tools” and modelling that some children are exposed to today:

There’s a huge difference between what I saw [with Uncle Peter’s tools] and what some see today. They see empty cases of beer. Beer bottles on, under the table, here, there, on the table. Whisky bottles and vodka bottles. What kind of tool is this bottle, you know? It’s a permanent imprint on a little guy, [could be] two, three, four, five, six years old. Those tools, it’s a different kind of dangerous path-setting tool that’s in front of them. And they pick that [up]. (personal interview, June, 2011)

Rene linked this loss of positive role modelling to the residential school system and the generations that were systematically “derailed.”

Many of the Elders stressed the importance of men taking active roles as fathers, and several shared memories of how significant their own fathers had been as role models, teachers, and mentors. Several expressed concern about the absent fathers of today.<sup>5</sup> “Young men are growing up without fathers,” Wil Campbell (Métis, Alberta) said. “Where are the fathers? They’re out there and they’ve got two or three families going, or they’re sitting in prison. They’re not participating in the children’s lives.” He concluded,

“[T]here’s a lot of work to do to put back into place what has been broken down.” In general, these Elders were frank but sympathetic to the reasons why some Indigenous men might not play an active role in their children’s lives. After commenting that “to make babies is great, but if you can’t feed them and you can’t give them spiritual [grounding and well-being], then that’s criminal,” Tom Porter (Mohawk, New York State) added, “but they didn’t do it intentionally and it was a learned behaviour.”

A few of the Elders linked absent fathers to misguided masculine identities. After talking extensively about residential schools and the disruption they caused to Indigenous kin systems, Joseph Morrisson (Anishinaabe, Ontario) said:

One of the things that I feel we have failed to [do is] provide groundwork for [young men] about being responsible. Being responsible for family ... So they say, “All right, I can go here and get a woman pregnant and have a child.” You know that sense of responsibility as a father is not there. So they can go out and brag about all the children that they have, but they’re not actually a father. (personal interview, October, 2011)

Joseph pointed out that the “bragging” about fathering children while not taking responsibility is the result of dispossessed masculinity. “You lose your pride and then you try to generate that pride by bragging, you know, about the number of children you have.” He added, “[B]ut you don’t fill that pride because you can’t provide for them.”

Providing, mentoring, and role modelling was thus significant, especially considering that kin relations were the foundation for everything in land-based Indigenous societies. But these elements continue to be significant in terms of identity development, health, and well-being for boys and men. Reggie David (Nuu-chah-nulth, B.C.) lamented this loss of intergenerational contact, saying:

It’s so hard now, you know, [young men] not talking to us, everyone as they are growing up. Like, we used to be talked to every day. I remember my grandfather sitting with me by the riverbank talking to me. He’d ask me to come down with him and we’d sit there and he’d talk to me all about life. Yeah. (personal interview, May, 2011)

## Conclusion

Work on Indigenous masculinities in Canada is new, but growing. The OFIFC Kizhaay Anishinaabe Niin initiative demonstrates momentum on the part of Indigenous men to foster non-violent, non-dominant identities in themselves and others. This requires exploration of traditional, non-patriarchal roles and responsibilities; of enacting Marlin

Mousseau's vision of relearning what it means to be an Indigenous man. Our intent has been to contribute to this process by seeking knowledge from our Elders about the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous men in the past.

As a starting place, the stories from these Elders can help us to conceptualize what it means to "protect" and "provide" in non-patriarchal ways, and to think about how these responsibilities can be translated into the modern world and the increasingly urbanized Indigenous populations. They allow us to see how Indigenous men have always had a role in protecting and providing for life, all life. It is no small affair to be charged with "protecting the medicine" or "carrying the bones of our ancestors," and men were traditionally honoured for these sacred responsibilities. The Elders remind us that they were also nurtured and mentored to do so.

Moving forward, we can reflect on how to provide similar nurturing environments for our boys and men. If we do, notions such as "protecting" and "providing" will take modern forms; forms that Indigenous men will articulate and act on as they heal and decolonize from the violence of patriarchy.

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## Notes

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- 1 In this chapter we will use the terms "Aboriginal" and "Native" when referring to the First Nations and Métis peoples in Canada, and "Indigenous" in a broader, more international context.
- 2 We are Cree-Métis (Anderson), Cree/Saulteaux (Innes), and Anishinaabe (Swift).
- 3 This research is one component of a project funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council and the Ontario Federation of Indian Friendship Centres titled *Indigenous Masculinities, Identities, and Bimaadiziwin* ("the good life").
- 4 For in-depth explorations of residential schools and their negative impact on First Nations people in Canada see Miller, 1996; see also Milloy, 1999.
- 5 According to Statistics Canada figures, 58% of Aboriginal children 14 years of age and younger live with both parents, compared to 82% of non-Aboriginal children. Also, more than twice as many Aboriginal children (29%) than non-Aboriginal children (14%) live with lone mothers. However, it is significant to note that twice as many Aboriginal children (6%) than non-Aboriginal children (3%) live with lone fathers (Statistics Canada, 2006).

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