LAKOTA GOVERNING STRUCTURES WITHIN AN URBAN CONTEXT: RAPID CITY

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS SERVING A LARGER COMMUNITY

by

Caitlyn Shoulder

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As members of the Master's Committee, we certify that we have read the thesis prepared by:
                    Caitlyn Shoulder
titled:

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and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the thesis requirement for the Master's Degree.

Lindsay Montgomery
_____   Date: May 20, 2020
Lindsay Martel Montgomery

Melissa Tatum
_____   Date: May 20, 2020
Melissa Tatum

Ronald L. Trosper
_____   Date: May 20, 2020

Ronald L Trosper

Final approval and acceptance of this thesis is contingent upon the candidate's submission of the final copies of the thesis to the Graduate College.

I hereby certify that I have read this thesis prepared under my direction and recommend that it be accepted as fulfilling the Master's requirement.

Lindsay Montgomery
_____   Date: May 20, 2020
Lindsay Martel Montgomery
Thesis Committee Chair
School of Anthropology

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Dedication

To my relatives and ancestors who have struggled and endured so much to ensure I was given the opportunity to do this work. I dedicate this to you, to your resiliency in the face of uncertainty and to your strength to speak your truth regardless.

And to the future generations, may this inspire you to believe in the wisdom of Indigenous knowledge to push the boundaries of what can be, especially, in places not meant for us.

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Abstract

This study addresses the levels of cultural inclusivity a Native American led social organization can have within an urban environment. Providing space for conversations and dialogue to occur by using talking circles, Rapid City Community Conversations is a social organization addressing deeply rooted issues of colonization that manifest themselves in various forms in contemporary Rapid City, South Dakota. The organization's use of Lakota dispute resolution mechanisms provides for a culturally inclusive approach for the Native members when discussing heavy and often triggering issues. The voices of Rapid City Community Conversations' members are showcased in this work as they provide the body from which the data for this project was studied. Analyzing storytelling as lived memory or embodied knowledge validates the events and experiences Rapid City Community Conversations has been a part of from the perspectives of its members. Rapid City Community Conversations has started to bring healing and awareness of the relationality shared by the citizens of Rapid City. A cultural shift has begun to occur from within the Native community in Rapid City in part due to Rapid City Community Conversations. Both the structural approach and the efficacy of the social organization add to the strength it has in serving the Native community in an urban environment indicating the need for a culturally inclusive approach.

Preface

When I first began thinking of how to write this thesis, I wanted to highlight the atmosphere of Rapid City. I want the reader to feel the existing tensions between the citizens who live within the city boundaries and its surrounding areas. I want the reader to understand how the deeply rooted history of colonization that occurred here can be shifted, creating a new narrative. Through highlighting the ingenuity and strength that can come from Native Americans who live in urban areas when they utilize cultural teachings and values to create a new idea of community, one where unity is developed through meaningful conversations and dialogues reaching to the depth of emotions that get triggered and cause reaction. I wanted to show how sharing in our experiences can provide space to heal from the trauma of this shared history. To do this, I decided storytelling would be the best way. -Caitlyn Shoulder (2020)

<u>Introduction</u>

Having grown up in Rapid City, hearing the news of the 2019 graffiti incident merely added to my preexisting repertoire of Native and non-Native interactions in the Black Hills and surrounding area. Disheartening, I know. The sacred beauty of the Black Hills, its spiritual presence known by the Lakota people, whose ceremonies give gratitude and honor to their homelands. How these perceptions and beliefs stemmed from a deeper, richer contextualization of its history since time immemorial. The colonialist disruption, permeating Lakota wichoun (Lakota way of life), stretching its reach far into their homelands through war, massacre, militarized force and extraction. Looking first at the past can inform the path taken for the future.

During the summer of 2019, the community of Rapid City, South Dakota, found racially charged vandalism plastered across playground equipment located near Lakota Homes, a Housing and Urban Development neighborhood for Lakota and other Native American families residing in the city. Lakota Homes is a subsidized housing community that was created during the Relocation Era as part of the Relocation program in the 1950's. The Relocation program worked nationwide to entice Native American families to move off reservations and into urban communities, much like Rapid City. The Vicki Powers Playground where this vandalism occurred is within a mile of Lakota Homes. The explicit words graffitied on the playground invoked racially charged hate speech towards Lakota and other Native American families living within Rapid City (Lockett, 2019).

In response to this incident, Rapid City Mayor Steve Allender stated that, "it is important to acknowledge feelings of racism exist in this country wherever there are human beings and Rapid City is no exception" and "Well it is not safe to assume that there is a bonafide white supremacist who felt that the best target to attack was a lightly used park in North Rapid on playground equipment" (Lockett, 2019). Elaborating on the incident, the Mayor's opponent Natalie Stite Means, as it was a re-election year, commented that "Average citizens went out to express their own protest that this isn't what Rapid City's about, so we're going to clean this up right away. But at the same time, it is not simply an issue that you can clean up and wipe away, it illustrates some deeper issues going on in Rapid City" (Lockett, 2019). Allender and Means' comments reveal a tacit acknowledgement of the existence of racism while simultaneously minimizing the scale of the problem by referencing the personal failings of individual perpetrators or by highlighting the general public's objections to such hate crimes. Both responses expose the contrasting frameworks that exist in Rapid City when Native and non-Native exchanges occur.

A 2012 news article sheds light on the ongoing gravity of these issues, "The entire Rapid City community as a whole has been divided into so many factions concerning race relations that it is often difficult to decipher which direction things are going" (Eagle, 2012). This one example exemplifies both the tensions and the frameworks that influence everyday relations within Rapid City. It illuminates the complexities of having varying levels of assimilation experienced by its Native American community members. These varying impacts of assimilation influence the responses brought out by Rapid City's Native American community. The article can also be utilized to elaborate upon the purpose of this thesis. The current literature on Urban Native

Americans is limited in scope but growing slowly, yet the rate at which Native Americans living in or near urban spaces is up to 7 out of 10 according to the Urban Indian Health Commission in 2007. As Native American families increasingly moving into urban spaces, cultural exchanges become inevitable. These exchanges create opportunities to engage and learn from the various cultures present, including Native American cultures. Emphasizing the plurality of Native American cultures alone gives way to the varying degree of cultural exchange that takes place within urban contexts, adding in non-Native cultures and the vastness of diversity becomes apparent.

Rapid City, South Dakota, and the recent events that occurred there, provide opportunity for exploring the levels of inclusivity of Native American families and their cultural practices in urban communities. Rapid City is both an urban city nestled up against the Black Hills and a border town to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud Reservations located in the south western part of South Dakota. The historical relations between the *Oceti Sakowin* (Seven Council Fires), the Lakota, Dakota and Nakota, who make up the majority of Native American populations in the South Dakota area, including both on and off the reservation, and non-Natives have long standing racial tensions deeply rooted in the colonization efforts made in the area.

This thesis approaches these issues by exploring the efficacy of Rapid City Community Conversations (RCCC), a Lakota grassroots organization. Rapid City Community Conversations' aim is to unite the community through talking circles and provide healing for the racial tensions that are prevalent in the Rapid City community. Under this framework, this thesis works to evaluate the structure and efficacy of Rapid City Community Conversations through storytelling in the form of experiential knowledge, surveys and interview analysis of its

participating members. The scope of this project aims to analyze the levels of inclusion Native American, particularly Lakota, governing structures have within urban contexts. Along with the structural analysis, the efficacy of Lakota cultural practices of dispute resolution through talking circles and mediation will be evaluated. With the growing movement into urban spaces, Native American cultural practices and governing structures can offer valuable knowledge in urban contexts and the ultimate goal of this thesis is to provide data to assist in this endeavor.

This thesis is the culmination of internal conversations within the author indicated through italicized text, communal input, mentorship guidance, and scholarly research. It is important to note my positionality in this project as it provides insight into the ways in which this research has been collected, analyzed and interpreted. I have included italicized paragraphs at the beginning of each chapter to give another level of transparency that can come through storytelling and illuminate some of the internal thought processes I engaged in during the writing of this thesis. Coming from the Rapid City community, I have a unique insider position that provides me a level of built-in trust with the organization I am researching. However, I must also acknowledge my position as an outsider coming back to my community in the capacity of an academic scholar and researcher. The concept of research can cause some apprehension within Native American communities stemming from a long history of objectification as the "other" by numerous anthropologists (Hartigan Jr., 2015). Being a participant in collecting and disseminating this information in this thesis places me as an author and primary investigator into a position of power in relation to those who have participated in the project, creating a new level of relational accountability. As the researcher of this project, I work to shift the power back into

the hands of the responding members as the data analyzes the experiential knowledge shared in their responses to address the questions posed in this thesis.

Relational accountability stems from cultural understanding of responsibility. This reciprocal process places responsibility in the hands of all parties involved, thus everyone in the relationship is accountable for maintaining good faith amongst all (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). Starting prior to the conceptualization of this project, I first began forming relations with Rapid City Community Conversations as a community member in 2016. As such, this understanding of relational accountability propels the work done during this research project. In doing so, I established myself within the community prior to coming back with this research project. How I maintained and upheld this relationship throughout the research processes and after the conclusion of this project is another measure of relational accountability. By including the italicized sections, I attempt to maintain good faith by illuminating the questions and thoughts that propelled the writing and analysis of each chapter or section.

Margaret Kovach eloquently explains the necessity of keeping an insider voice present within Indigenous research, "Through reflexive story there is opportunity to express the researcher's inward knowing. Sharing one's own story is an aspect of co-constructing knowledge from an Indigenous perspective" (Kovach, 2009). Taking this understanding and approach, "I" and "we" will be used throughout this thesis with the exception of developing the methodologies and theoretical frameworks used. I will also use Native American, American Indian and Indigenous interchangeably to identify Native peoples throughout this work and, when applicable, I will refer directly to the Lakota and Dakota people when referring to the specific participants involved. Using Lakota and Dakota recognizes the particular cultural and historical

experiences that exist for these communities and which are distinct from other Native American and Indigenous groups.

Chapter one begins by discussing key points of the historical context and then moves to exploring some of the key policies that influenced many families to move from nearby reservations into Rapid City, including the legislative policy leading up to the move of Oceti Sakowin families off the reservations and into urban communities. Some of the major events of the area include the Massacre at Wounded Knee in 1890, the AIM stand-off with FBI in 1973 at the same site, the on-going debate over land rights of the sacred Black Hills and protective rights with respect to Bear Butte located 33 miles outside of Rapid City. These events were influential in contributing to the heightened racial tensions that still persist today. Understanding the events and the constant interactions that have occurred between the Oceti Sakowin and non-Natives provide context critical to explain the heightened racial tensions that still persist within Rapid City today.

Chapter two includes a brief discussion of social organizations as a social mechanism, and how they can often serve as an avenue to social change or reform before turning to focus more explicitly on RCCC as a social organization and how it is utilized in such a capacity. Throughout the approximately five years of its existence, Rapid City Community Conversations has created a space within Rapid City for community members to come together across race, age, professions and a multitude of other barriers influencing the relational disconnect while holding space for open discussion and conversation to take place. Along with the background, I will explore RCCC's importance and contributions to the community thus far, as it is important to

understand the influence RCCC has had within Rapid City and how it serves the whole community.

Chapter three provides the theoretical framework underlying this thesis. Native American ideology situates itself within story and experience, learning from and understanding the complexities that work towards helping us, as individuals, understand and navigate the world around us. As such, chapter three elaborates on how I use the experiences of RCCC members to provide evidence and validate the current existence of the organization. As part of doing so, the interviews and surveys conducted were created in a manner that allowed participants to share openly their experiences and how they view the efficacy of RCCC. In this chapter, the discussion of relational accountability and positionality will be furthered as these themes also heavily influenced the process taken in completing this work.

Chapter four will be an analysis of the organization and an evaluation of the efficacy of RCCC as determined by membership experience. The analysis and discussion will derive from the survey data, interviews, and the few meetings I attended in the position and role of researcher. In the surveys, members are asked to define their ideas of success and apply this to RCCC in both its structure as an organization and its added value and contributions to the Rapid City community. In doing so, this provides a more robust and authentic analysis of RCCC as it comes from members who interact with and within the organization. To keep the survey structure more open for responses I am allowing the participants to deem the importance of the information they choose to share. This is echoed within the interviews, allowing for the levels of knowledge dissemination and shifting of power to be determined by the participants and not by me the Primary Investigator.

The Conclusion will provide a summary and wrap-up of the project along with recommendations based upon the results of the data analysis. Part of this project was to address the efficacy of RCCC. The other part is meant to provide recommendations or suggestions for RCCC to be more successful in its mission to bring unity to Rapid City. As policy has played such a crucial role in the process of urbanization of Native peoples, utilizing the current policies can also be how Native peoples increase the success and inclusion within these same urban spaces. In maintaining relational accountability towards RCCC, I gave time and space for the responding members to provide feedback and critique prior to the finalization of this thesis. Upon completion I intend to provide a report that will be brought back to RCCC and the Rapid City community to utilize and implement at their discretion. RCCC is meant to be an inclusive organization working towards a more unified community and through this report, the voices of RCCC will be amplified and showcased for such purposes.

Chapter 1: The Historical Context

It's the 'fit a square peg in a round hole' situation as colonization manifests in the programs offered to Native Americans dating back to their initial interactions. From ways of living to where one lived, the Federal government had its hand in decision after decision when dealing with the 'Indian problem'. I highlight the shared history and legal policies implemented on behalf of the U.S. federal government as they showcase the opinions and attitudes held at the time. Rhetoric is often passed down through teachings and the sharing of lived experiences to expand upon old ideas and create something new, but it can also be used to divide and separate groups of people.

"[T]he large amount of Native people in Rapid City for example were predominantly of Lakota heritage, they still believe that they are within their homeland" (Interview 001). The origin story of the Lakota people centers the Black Hills and speaks about an emergence from Wind Cave located in its southern region (Wo Lakota, 2013; National Park Service, 2019). The significance of the Black Hills to the Lakota people can be extrapolated within their creation story, having been passed down since time immemorial.

The conflicts between Native and non-Native individuals in the Black Hills and surrounding areas go back to the 1800s. By 1890, the Ghost Dance had made its way to the Great Plains tribes, drawing military attention and heightening the U.S. government's agitation as they worked to outlaw Native American religions. Those who took part in the Ghost Dance were identified and tracked down. Hunkpapa Lakota holy man and leader Sitting Bull would be shot and killed by the Indian agency police on the Standing Rock Reservation as part of this "round-

up" by the military (Starita, 1995). Many Lakota leaders who embraced the Ghost Dance were targeted during this round-up. Chief Big Foot's band, the Miniconjou, would learn of Sitting Bull's death as hundreds of Hunkpapa Lakota began arriving at his camp on the Cheyenne River Reservation. Days prior to their arrival, Chief Big Foot had received word by some of Red Cloud's warriors that he was requested to settle disputes on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Chief Big Foot and his band would set out for Pine Ridge the winter of 1890 (Starita, 1995).

Sixteen miles out from the Pine Ridge agency, Chief Big Foot's band was stopped and forced to set up in the army camp. They were to make camp in a ravine off Wounded Knee Creek, while soldiers lined a hill overlooking Chief Big Foot's people. On December 29th Colonel Forsyth of the Seventh Cavalry gathered all the Lakota in camp around Big Foot's tipi and ordered the surrender of all their weapons (Starita, 1995). During the seizing of a gun from a medicine man, an accidental discharge of a gun went off and was met with a barrage of soldier fire aimed at the unarmed men, women and children corralled together. The massacre of over 300 innocent Lakota men, women and children that took place at Wounded Knee in 1890 is a crucial point in the shared history of the Black Hills. This spot would be a site for another pivotal moment in the long-shared history of Native and non-Natives in the area, while also highlighting the extensive militarized attempt of colonizing the Lakota people.

Conflict again reached a heightened point in the 1970s when the American Indian Movement (AIM) led a militarized occupation on Wounded Knee, the same location as the Massacre of Wounded Knee 83 years earlier, adding yet another layer to the racial tensions prevalent in Rapid City today. AIM, an Indian-led civil rights movement, occupied Wounded Knee in a stand-off with the FBI for 71 days over the U.S. government's continual disregard of

treaties, demanding that the U.S. honor these treaties as well as Native American rights and sovereignty (Hudson, 2019; Interview 006). The turmoil and aftermath of the 1970's occupation at Wounded Knee is evident in the attitudes and feelings expressed by families whose relatives still recall their experiences and involvement from personal memory (Interview 001-004; Interview 006). As such, experiences and racial tensions existing within Rapid City can be attributed to having come from a complexity of historical layers that interrelate and converge in this urban context. The shared history adds to the depth of emotional investment that exists among Native and non-Native Rapid City community members.

Resource extraction has also added to the prevalent tensions found in Rapid City. The Gold Rush of 1874 brought in thousands of European settlers hoping to make it big with the discovery of gold in the Black Hills. The mass appearance of gold miners violated the Treaty of Fort Laramie which gave the Oceti Sakowin ownership of the Black Hills, something that has been of controversy as well. As the gold rush continued, the settlers illegally made their home in the Black Hills, while extracting over 40 million ounces of gold worth over a billion dollars (BH Visitors, n.d.). This is but one instance where the U.S. government has gone back on a treaty obligation with a Native nation. In doing so, the U.S. government along with the extraction industries have continued their attack on Lakota religion and culture as the Black Hills resonate spiritual power for the Lakota. These same economic and extractive attitudes continue to influence the push for resource depletion seen in the Black Hills today. Some newly proposed gold mining and coal mining sites now threaten the drinking water of Rapid City citizens causing a shift in attitude for some of the non-Native residents and serving as a reminder of previous experiences for the Native community members (Interview 001).

Today as more and more Native Americans find themselves living in cities, towns, and other urban spaces, the connection between culture, community and the individual is strained. As of 2018, 78% of Native Americans no longer live within reservation boundaries, and 72% are now living in urban and suburban communities (Whittle, 2017). According to the 2018 Census data, Rapid City's population sits at 75,443 community members with 11.3% identifying as Native American alone and 5.7% identifying as two or more races (U.S. Census, n.d.-c). The Pine Ridge Reservation is home to 14,309 residents with 92.5% identifying as Native American alone and 1.6% as two or more races, and the Rosebud Reservation has 11,418 residents, 83% of whom identify as Native American alone with 5% indicating two or more races (U.S. Census, n.d.-b, U.S. Census, n.d.-a) The current demography of Rapid City can largely be attributed to the effects of colonization and assimilationist legal policies which sought to break up the relational organization of tribes and integrate Native Americans into the dominant Euro-American society. The Indian Reorganization Act of 1934 played a particularly important role in accomplishing these goals and has directly shaped the urban American Indian identity.

The Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934 came at a time when Congress's policy in regard to Native Americans favored tribal sovereignty. The IRA was Congress's attempt at the time to "protect, preserve, and support Tribal art, culture, and public and social organization" (Wilkins & Stark, 2018). If tribal nations opted into the IRA, and each tribe had the choice, they would regain the ability to form their own governing structure and grow their own economic development. These goals were somewhat undermined by the administration's implementation of the IRA, which included creating a boiler-plate template for a tribal constitution that was heavily promoted for use by tribes across the United States. This template exemplified Western

frameworks of governance as best practices and, while it did work for some tribes sharing similar traditional governing structures, it did not always fit within other Native American cultural frameworks, including the Lakota's.

As noted by Robertson, Jorgensen and Garrow, the Lakota people have experienced tension due to the mismatch of governing structures drafted under the IRA model constitution which favored Western, centralized forms of government with no independent dispute resolution mechanism and the traditional, decentralized governing structures of the Lakota which maintained an external and independent advisory council for dispute resolution (Robertson, Jorgensen, & Garrow, 2004). Based on a decentralized governing structure, the Lakota style of governance can be seen as complex and often situational, "provid[ing] notably effective systems of parliamentary-type structures in which leaders gathered in council selected multiple executives to carry out administrative functions and an independent society resolved disputes and provided for law and order" (The Harvard Project, 2008; Howe & Katz, 2015). Prior to contact with Europeans, the mobility of Lakota people created another dynamic that added to the suitability of a decentralized and situation-based government (Howe & Katz, 2015). The previously drafted and proposed models of reservation governance put forth by the Oglala Sioux Tribe favoring a more decentralize-style model were rejected by the federal government and only by a narrow vote did the IRA model receive approval (The Harvard Project, 2008).

Another important piece of legislation which influenced the contemporary cultural layout of Rapid City is the 1956 Relocation Program (Lobo, 2002: Luna-Gordinier, 2014; Molholt, 1996). During the Termination era which spanned the 1950s-1970s, the aim of the U.S. federal government was to terminate services and funds allocated to tribes whom the government

deemed no longer in need of a 'special status' in hopes of abolishing the reservations. The

Relocation Program had radical implications for the urbanization of Native Americans. As part

of this attempt to get rid of reservations and assimilate Native Americans into Western society,

the Relocation Program advertised assistance in moving off the reservation and into urban

spaces. The outcome had mixed results for many Native American families; some transitioned

into urban life with little assistance and were able to provide a life for their families, while others

involved in the program did not fare as well. Lack of assistance outside of initial moving

allowances left many Native Americans and their families struggling in urban contexts to create

a life (Lobo, 2002; Molholt, 1996). As Nancy Shoemaker points out, many Native Americans

living in urban spaces found themselves in a position that threatened their rights as tribal

members, but more importantly for this thesis, in a position which disrupted their connection to

their cultural practices (Shoemaker, 1988). Understanding the objectives and impacts of the

Relocation program is essential in evaluating the "success" of social organizations like Rapid

City Community Conversations. Gaining an understanding of the definition of success is also

influential in understanding the work done by a social organization such as Rapid City

Community Conversations.

Community centers and social organizations are indeed acts of resistance to the relocation

policy and termination. As the Relocation program was meant to speed up the assimilation

process for Native Americans to become "civilized" members of mainstream society, community

centers and, I argue, social organizations as well can be seen as defying the programs' attempts

at ridding Native Americans of their cultures and relationships. During the early years of

urbanization, many Native Americans found community in Indian bars, community centers, and

social gatherings that brought together the Native American families living in isolated spaces within urban environments (Molholt, 1996; Luna-Gordinier, 2014).

Susan Lobo, a scholar studying urban Indian identity, specifically in the San Francisco Bay Area, provides part of the approach used in this thesis to look at the organizing of community in the context of urban spaces. Lobo's approach identifies community centers as spaces of cultural inclusion and their use in creating community within a larger context. Another scholar whose work will be drawn from is Anne Luna-Gordinier whose research shows urban Indian community centers to be acts of cultural resistance to the dispossession of cultural practices that were caused through legislative policy. Luna-Gordinier points out as part of adjusting to urban life in the early years of Relocation, Indian community centers served as cultural hubs and communal ties in assisting with the culture shock created in urban spaces (Luna-Gordinier, 2014). Several points of importance can be ascertained from the framework provided by Lobo and Luna-Gordinier. The work done by community centers exhibits culture-match and will be cited as providing resources to aid the Native population being served throughout this work.

Chapter 2: Rapid City Community Conversations: A Lakota Social Organization

The importance of a dream and a choice. I wanted readers to understand the importance of Lemoine's dream. The importance he placed in it. This caused him to move to action. This action set in motion the conversation that would occur in the following months leading to the creation of a social organization whose mission was to address racial conflict through grounded conversations. Understanding how his story is influential to the creation of Rapid City Community Conversations is essential, and I must showcase this. Looking at how even during its inception, RCCC it is deeply rooted in Lakota understandings of meaning and social change.

Luna-Gordinier and Beck argue that Native American leaders living in urban spaces are creating organizations that are both addressing community concerns, typically through advocacy work on behalf of community members in need, while also serving as acts of resistance to assimilationist efforts (Luna-Gordinier, 2014; Beck, 2002). The transition into urban communities has created new challenges for Native Americans and their families, including a limited system of support to draw on. The organizations Native American leaders created that Luna-Gordinier and Beck speak of were often culturally responsive to the needs of Native Americans in ways that allowed the continuity of people's cultures to be practiced. In this way, the Relocation program and the federal government's efforts failed to assimilate Native Americans and dissolve their cultural practices by cutting off community access.

Instead, Native American leaders came forward and acknowledged their communities' needs and tried to alleviate them through culturally identified methods known as culture-match.

Culture-match is defined in *Rebuilding Native Nations* as "a fit with the shared norms of the community. It is this cultural grounding—a critical element in legitimacy—that makes wielding governmental authority a sacred trust, a sacred responsibility to serve the people and their interest in an appropriate way" (Jorgenson, 2007). Under this framing of culture-match, importance of restoring and maintaining cultural groundings within urban practices for Native Americans becomes evident. As urbanization becomes more frequent within Native American communities, it is necessary to evaluate the culture-match of social organizations and community programs meant to serve in this capacity.

When considering the significance a dream or vison can have in Lakota culture, one only has to look to *Black Elk Speaks* by John G. Neihardt. Vine Deloria, a well-known Dakota scholar, articulates the importance of a vision in the Forward, noting its heavily emphasized use in American Indian theology within academia, as well as how young Native scholars see it as a nexus of spiritual guidance, social identity and political insight (Neihardt, 1932). For Rapid City Community Conversations, a Lakota man was moved to action by a dream he had. The dream's significance indicates the political insight and social identity that not only surrounded the context of the dream but would lead to Rapid City Community Conversation.

RCCC formed as a response to a confrontation that took place in Rapid City in late December of 2014. Allen Locke, a Lakota man with metal disabilities, was shot and killed during a police interaction with him (Bolstad & Cook, 2015; Journal Staff, 2014; Interview 001; Interview 002; Interview 004 & Interview 006). Tensions and emotions were already heightened as this confrontation occurred on the day after a rally was held to bring awareness of ongoing tensions between Native Americans and the Rapid City police within the community (Journal

Staff, 2014). Outrage from Native Americans of the community came as a result of the way the police handled communication about the case,

> When asked by Native Sun News at the Press Conference…if Officer Meirose had other alternatives such as a Taser to protect himself besides a gun, Captain Rud replied, 'Well, of course our officers are equipped with that. But from what we understand of the situation last night, there was no time for that. And there was not a viable option, Taser, OC spray, whatever. It was not a viable option. (Richards, 2015)

One of the founding members of RCCC, LaMoine LaPointe, a Lakota man and former Rapid City community member, was deeply affected when he heard about this incident. Located in Minneapolis at the time, LaPointe sought out the advice of two men close to him, after he kept having dreams of the horrific event, on the ways to handle this incident. LaPointe along with his confidantes got in touch with individuals in Rapid City to host a conversation and to give space to those who wanted to express their concerns surrounding the event. What LaPointe thought would be a small group of concerned individuals attending this conversation turned out to be a room of 40-50 people ready to address the underlying issues (Interview 001 & Interview 006).

Another point raised by Beck that warrants some discussion is the idea of intertribal cooperation, which has been a focus of community development predating urbanization among Native American peoples (Beck, 2002). Extending his point further, the intertribal cooperation now sought in an urban context expands across tribal nations to include the diversity of cultural representations found within that community. Faced with these complexities, urban Natives grapple with creating a space for the existence of a culturally inclusive community within the larger urban environment while simultaneously finding ways to coexist with the various other cultural backgrounds present. Social organizations founded through Native American frameworks culturally creates space for Native families and individuals to voice their concerns

and be heard in a space whose values are shared and the individuals feel safe enough to participate. RCCC is considered open to all and all are meant to feel welcome creating a dynamic of inclusivity (Interview 001).

Rapid City Community Conversations is a Lakota grassroots organization that aims to unite the Rapid City community as a whole by addressing colonization and mending race relations. Rapid City Community Conversations uses Lakota values of honor, respect, and the safe keeping of all in the community to foster a dialogue between community members from different cultural backgrounds. The dialogue in which RCCC partakes surrounds the extensive history of Native American and non-Native conflict in the area as well as the institutionalized and individual experiences of racism within the community (RCCC, 2019-b). With the goal of transforming the Rapid City community, RCCC utilizes talking circles and interjection of elder input to disrupt and dissolve conflict while using it as an educational moment for bringing an awareness to cross-cultural and positive forward-thinking solutions (Interview 004).

The approach RCCC takes in including talking circles and grounding the members in Lakota values prior to the start of conversations invokes Lakota cultural understandings and protocols for solving disputes. This cultural-match which Lobo speaks about in her assertion of community centers serving as cultural hubs, I would articulate, can be seen in RCCC while it utilizes not only Lakota governing methods of distributing power back among the community members, thus decentralizing it, but also brings forth Lakota cultural approaches of a Council of Elders, grounding in values, and talking circles (Interviews 001-006).

The organization has taken on varying structural approaches within its 5 years of existence. During the first few years of RCCC, a core group of individuals consisting of

community leaders, Native and non-Native community members, and LaPointe with his two colleagues who first proposed the plan to Rapid City planned out the structure and mission of the organization. The positive visualization of community members was divided into four phases: Discovery, Dream, Design, and Delivery (4D's); the initial participants met once a month over the span of four months beginning in February 2015 to plan out and design the goals of the organization (Interview 001-006). Out of these conversations came what's known as the Host Team, consisting of leaders identified from each subgroup of RCCC along with elders and community members engaged in creating change. Along with the Host Team, the subgroups known as Community Innovation Teams (CIT) are made up of community members who see value in the goals of these groups. The Host Team and subgroups stemmed from the four phase planning meetings, each with an objective identified by engaged community members as needing to be addressed (Interview 001-006).

Working in a decentralized and fluid structure, Rapid City Community Conversations takes an umbrella structural approach. The whole of RCCC sits as the "umbrella top"; this is where the conversations as a community occur. The Host Team would get together and exchange information regarding the CITs' activities as well as act as moderators during the larger group conversations. The CITs derived from the core group but worked independently of each other as each CIT developed a proposal identifying key concerns brought forth by the attending community members through the 4D's process during the first four months. Initially, there were five CITs: Education, Technology, Mitakuye Oyasin, Wasuyapi, and Healers and Transformers (Grunze-Swanson, 2017; Interview 004 & Interview 005). Currently, only three groups are still

functioning and active: Mitakuye Oyasin, Healers and Transformers and Wolakol-Kiciyapi which has taken the place of Wasuyapi.

In its early years, Rapid City Community Conversations was grant funded for a brief period of time, starting in late 2015. Part of this grant money was awarded to RCCC by the Barbara Snyder Foundation to utilize critical intervention tactics regarding police involved shootings to help address the relations existing between the Native community and the Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) (Interview 006). The Barbara Snyder Foundation contributed money until the grant funds ran out. Mark Anderson, one of LaPointe's colleagues he confided in from MN and brought along when he first pitched the proposal of RCCC to the Rapid City community, was the fiscal agent in charge of keeping the books for RCCC regarding another grant they had independently secured. At the same time RCCC had been working to secure an external grant through an organization in California. RCCC was awarded the CA grant in 2016 and, as part of the grant stipulation, the money would be spent within 12 months. Partly due to questionable spending decisions made on behalf of some of the Host Planning Team leaders leading to an internal conflict arising among them, RCCC is currently working without grant assistance. However, volunteers from the community and several partnerships with RCCC work to keep it going. Some of these partnerships include the Barbara Snyder Foundation, Rural American Initiatives, Mniluzahan Okolakiciyapi Ambassadors, Rapid City Collective Impact and I Am Legacy, to name a few (RCCC, 2019-c).

In its current state, RCCC continues to operate with a decentralized structural approach with three working subgroups: Mitakuye Oyasin, Healers and Transformers and Wolakol-Kiciyapi. To address some of the internal strife caused by the disruption among the leaders and

caused the dissolvement of the Host Team, an elders council known as the Council of Elders was created and took over the position of Host Planning Team. The Council of Elders currently works to serve as an advisory group and as dispute intervention team (Interviews 001-006). Of the three remaining CITs the Healers and Transformers group helps organize and put on events for the community, while Wolakol-Kiciyapi engages with educational standards and restorative justice and Mitakuye Oyasin works towards community projects such as highway clean-ups and the planting of trees with the goals of showcasing the relationships that exist to all (Interviews 001-006; RCCC, 2019-a).

Chapter 3: Methodologies and Theoretical Framework

Reading about it. Seeing the results. To me, these do not hold the same weight or depth of meaning as having lived it, experienced it first-hand, asked to recall it at a later date. As a researcher and scholar, I hold the validity of storytelling and embodied knowledge to the same emphasis Western science validates the use of empirical data. Whether through story or lived experience, an embodied knowledge exists within each of us. The concept of the individual coexisting and intertwining with others, creating the shared history influencing the atmosphere of Rapid City today, this is how I view the RCCC members. The experiences and stories shared by members will speak to the validity of Rapid City Community Conversation and influence the evaluation done through this study.

This thesis uses the lens and thought processes of Indigenous methodology to present a project that identifies and highlights the voices of RCCC's member and their embodied knowledge, bringing forth the efficacy of RCCC in its application as defined by its engaged members. At its core, Indigenous theory is premised on the belief that interpretation cannot be detached from one's cultural position. In *As We Have Always Done,* Simpson showcases how Indigenous theoretical frameworks are intrinsic to living everyday life. Not only are the theoretical underpinnings of Indigenous methodology lived, they are also driving forces for intentional living. We embody lessons and teachings through modes of story-work, teaching, and lived experiences. Indigenous frameworks are applied and validated through lived experience, embodying the theory and putting it to practice. This belief fundamentally contrasts with

Western theories and approaches, which push for objectivity. Instead, Indigenous theorists

contend that identifying and analyzing in one's own biases creates a deeper understanding to the

work they approach and engage with (Smith, 2017; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008).

      Positioning myself within my thesis project allowed for a level of transparency when

approaching RCCC members to be research participants. The position I hold as researcher is

external to that of the Rapid City community and to RCCC, placing my responsibilities in line

with the academy and academic obligations to obtaining a master's degree. Simultaneously, my

internal position as a Lakota *wiyan* (woman), a community member of RCCC and the lived

experiences I shared throughout my childhood in the Rapid City community as a whole provide

me with a varying set of responsibilities and obligations towards the community. Jo-ann

Archibald, Q'um Q'um Xiiem, Jenny Bol, Jun Lee-Morgan, and Jason De Santolo (2019)

describe the complexity of sharing both roles in their edited work *Decolonizing Research:*

Indigenous Storywork as Methodology,

> As Jo-ann Archibald (2008) points out, in Indigenous storywork the insider-outsider
> positionality is intimate and layered…the inside-out quandary also points to the varied
> cultural expectations and ethical considerations (beyond those required by academia) that
> we must try to adhere to if our research is to be respectful and truly transformative for our
> communities. (Archibald, et. Al., 2019)

      The insider-outsider complex gives way to varying responsibilities and varying levels of

relationality towards each one. Linda Tuhiwai Smith also acknowledges these complexities in

her discussion of the insider-outsider complex. One point she makes is the continuous need to be

reflexive of one's research, "[R]esearchers have to have ways of thinking critically about their

processes, their relationships, and the quality and richness of their data and analysis" (Tuhiwai

Smith, 2012). I am a member of RCCC and a Lakota member of the community; these roles in

themselves offer multi-layered responsibilities. As a community member I share in experiential knowledge of the place, the history for the last two decades of the land and an understanding of cultural atmosphere. As a Lakota *wiyan (*woman)*,* I have responsibilities to the Lakota and Native communities that exist within the city, such as cultural protocols that must be acknowledged and adhered to as I work with Native community members who hold knowledge of RCCC. For example, tobacco offerings to elders are a practice I include in this research that aligns with Lakota protocols and establishes respect for and honor the elders.

This thesis draws on Simpson and Shaun Wilson's (2008) concepts of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and methodology and seeks to implement these constructs in the study of the RCCC.

Ontology

The continuity and interrelatedness of one concept with the others exemplify the Indigenous worldview of relationality (Wilson, 2008). Relationships make up the Indigenous worldview; therefore, one's relationship to the truth or perceived reality determines how the world is then translated through those eyes.

Following Lakota ontology, the understanding of respect and reciprocity is clear, and a vital aspect of maintenance within everyday life. *Mitakuye Oyasin,* we are all related, is an integral point in guiding Lakota ontology. This way of knowing exemplifies the interrelated connections among all beings: human, winged, four-legged, finned, and plant. It also alludes to the understanding that relationships are embodied by the individuals or beings involved and, in this way, become reciprocal. As such, "[t]he normative cultural values encompassed by *Mitakuye*

Oyasin are the very foundation of kinship, relational ontology, and the overarching interspecies collective, of which humans are only one hoop, one *oyate* 'people, nation, tribe', in the company of many others" (Posthumus, 2018; emphasis added). Positioning Lakota ontology within this research and framing the *oyate* as an urban community, relational accountability towards diverse cultural knowledge and experiences feed into the collection of data, the analysis of themes found within the data and the conclusion of sharing the knowledge back with the community.

Epistemology

While there are multiple Indigenous ontologies, the epistemology is the relationship that an individual holds with the idea or concept,

> The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them…. Indigenous epistemology is our cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship. (Wilson, 2008)

How we interpret meaning and form existence of the individual is placed within a relationship, whether it be to the land, sky, water, plants, two-legged, winged, or finned; the relationship one shares with these entities is how they position themselves within the world. The richness and depth of the relationship can often be lost in translation from an Indigenous language to English, as English emphasizes the concept or idea and not the relations surrounding and influencing these ideas. Thus, working through a Lakota epistemology creates a deeper level of engagement and reciprocity with the individual, object, concept or idea.

The maintenance of relationships is at the center of Lakota epistemology and is a key feature of my thesis research. This is what Shaun Wilson refers to as relational accountability;

the concept of working towards maintaining accountability to the relationships that are developed (Wilson, 2008). Relational accountability is a collaborative approach to research developed primarily within the field of American Indian Studies by Indigenous scholars (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The idea of relational accountability stems from cultural-grounded understandings of responsibility. This reciprocal process places responsibility in the hands of all parties involved, including myself. The responsibility to maintain good relations is deeply rooted within Lakota ideology and is looked at as a core value. Being a Lakota researcher, this responsibility is not regarded lightly and is practiced throughout the entirety of this project.

Building upon Archibald et. al's work, as a researcher and an academic, I have relational accountability to the knowledge keepers in my community. While I am the primary investigator and lead researcher on this project, it is not my work that will ultimately be showcased through this thesis, but rather the work of community members and elders who choose to participate in and voice their understandings of the RCCC organization. I, as investigator and researcher, am merely a speaking tool through which the voices of the community organization RCCC will be heard. In this way, my relational accountability will be to ensure their voices are heard and interpreted to the best of my abilities. I retain a responsibility to make sure their voices come through clearly and fully, for as Wilson articulates, "We as Indigenous scholars who wish to participate in the creation of knowledge within our own ways of being must begin with an active and scholarly recognition of who our philosophers and prophets are in our own communities. These are still the keepers and teachers of our epistemologies" (Wilson, 2008). The foundation of my thesis work stems from the voices of the community members who are engaged and working

within RCCC, and as such, it becomes essential that I look towards these members for knowledge and understanding of the organization itself.

Tying in Simpson's articulation of Indigenous thinkers and thought processes, the experiences shared by the members engaged with RCCC are influential in utilizing Indigenous methodology by understanding the inner workings of RCCC. As engaged members, they have experiences and embodied presence, that I, being far from the community and in my role of researcher, do not hold or possess. Thus, it is part of my accountability to the community members of RCCC to engage in my research and create a project that emphasizes and highlights their experiential knowledge within the organization, and in doing so, the research itself will be influenced by experience and action and become situated within Indigenous methods and Indigenous methodology. It will also produce an understanding of place and positionality of RCCC within the larger community of Rapid City.

Axiology & Methodology

Storytelling is a method Indigenous peoples of North America have used since time immemorial. Oral histories for Indigenous cultures pre-date written history. Stories and storytelling are a reciprocal relationship; the storyteller conveys message and meaning embedded within the story and the listener must be engaging with the story, deciphering, contemplating and interpreting the meanings they derive from it. Jo-ann Archibald et al articulate how story work is utilized much the same in research,

> Engaging in holistic meaning-making involves using the heart (emotions), mind (intellect), body (physical actions), and spirit (spirituality), as well as recognizing the relationships of these realms to oneself, family, community, land/environment, and wider

society. Telling stories in a research context provides time and space for the research participant to tell the story that is pertinent to the situation. The meaning-making process continues when the researcher searches for ideas, seeking an interrelated understanding of historical, political, cultural, social, or other contextual impacts upon Indigenous Peoples, their stories, and their communities. Developing, sharing, and representing these storied understandings requires a synergetic action on the part of the researcher to use applicable Indigenous storywork principles. (2019)

This deep level of understanding and participation with all parties involved develops and creates a reciprocal relationship of trust. My participation in the relationships developed with the members of RCCC is to contextualize their experiences within the historical, political, cultural, social context that surrounds them. I also hold responsibility as a researcher to create space for the members to share how their experiences are influenced by the external contexts that add to their involvement in the organization and the larger community of Rapid City.

The stories collected in this research take varying forms. Through the more Westernized approach of data collection, the surveys and interviews are meant to serve as springboards for experiential knowledge to come forth. Keeping the surveys more open-ended, with few quantitative questions, and asking for participants' definitions of concepts such as "success" allows for more personalized and organic responses among the participants. The interview questions ranged from broad conceptual understandings of the cultural context that makes up Rapid City to some more directly relating to RCCC and its work. Through this approach to Western data collection, Indigenous storytelling was kept in mind as I worked to formulate and pose questions. A key point of the interviews allowed for one-on-one storytelling to occur between the interviewee or storyteller and me, the interviewer and listener. Allowing silence and space for the interviewee to share what they deemed appropriate gave power back to each participant. In following more traditional Lakota approaches to storytelling, the meetings

attended by myself were formed by talking circles, where everyone had the opportunity to speak if they wished. Allowing for all input by present members showcases the importance of relational accountability by emphasizing the respect shown towards all in giving them space to share their opinions.

Prior to introducing this study to the RCCC members, I ensured the IRB process included culturally inclusive measures such as offering of tobacco, as well as articulating in the IRB that the members of RCCC are who truly own this work. I am merely a speaking tool through which their voices can be heard. Along with the general IRB, a special persons' section was filled out as this study engages with Native American participants. By doing such, another layer of cultural awareness was created on behalf of academia to foster a more positive experience for participants. In being transparent about my relationality to RCCC first and foremost, it was also pointed out that my mother would act as research assistant throughout the duration of the study. Her roles including advertising the study information, distributing and collecting consent forms and surveys, were intentionally kept minimal to add to the anonymity of the responding members. The returned data was then coded, and the recorded interviews transcribed prior to being analyzed. The responses gathered from both open-ended surveys and interviews with the members of RCCC were used to assess my assertion that Native American social organizations serve an important role in the inclusion of Native Americans within urban spaces. They also assessed my assertion that Native American social organizations work by creating a sense of community through culturally inclusive methods.

My role as researcher is innately that of a listener to a storyteller. I may be writing and defending the thesis proposal and the thesis, but the knowledge that the thesis derives from is not my own; I will need to engage with the audio and responses that stem from the surveys, talking circle and interviews. While Western modes of research aim for objectivity and unbiased analysis of said collected data, an Indigenous approach understands the inevitable bias that will come from my positionality as a researcher. Being intentional to minimize but remaining transparent about these biases allows for a deeper understanding and approach to the research. It positions the relationship of myself to my project, the individuals I engage with, and the outcomes upon completion of the project. Utilizing an Indigenous methodology in research also creates a differing approach to the power dynamics of researcher and participant; by working to maintain a reciprocal relationship with the participants the power shifts to a more balanced contribution of effort. The RCCC members who contributed their knowledge and insight to this project possess experiential knowledge that I do not. By telling their stories through this thesis, I aim to apply Indigenous methodology in the process from start to finish of my project and, in doing, so I am contributing to the embodied knowledge of Rapid City and the space in which it exists today.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

How in my position as researcher do I articulate another person's experiences and use them to validate the claims I have made while maintaining relational accountability? What does this accountability look like? How do I express the position of others while maintaining my responsibilities to the nurturance and continuation of those relationships? As a Lakota researcher, I hold my relationality to the RCCC members as deeply important and an essential practice to maintain. Pushing back on Western sciences use of empirical data, I use storytelling and embodied knowledge as my main approach. In this way, I become merely a microphone in which the RCCC members can speak through and be heard from.

The twelve RCCC members (n=12) who participated in the survey included members from the Council of Elders (COE), active members, and a few former members. Of the twelve participants 36% were Native American. Two of the former members who were non-Native indicated their reasons for leaving were not tied to the organization but to other external life circumstances, while one non-Native noted it did involve matters related to the organization. The six interviewees (n=6) were chosen based on the roles the individuals held within RCCC. The body of interviewees consisted of a Lakota elder from the COE, two of the founding members, one Lakota and the other non-Native, who are still somewhat active in the organization, a current non-Native member who has been with the organization all but the first two months, and three former members all of whom are non-Native. I was intentional in selecting interviewees as I was attempting to get a robust group of responses from the limited number of current membership to fully understand the rates of inclusion for Natives and non-Natives alike. The diversity of the

interview and survey groups, I believe, balance each other by filling in the gaps of the others to give a better understanding of the expansive outreach RCCC has in serving its mission and goals.

The interview and survey addressed different questions relating to the social organization. The survey consisted of 16 questions that focused on the member's experiences with some 1-10 scaled quantitative questions assessing RCCC's efficacy in completing its mission. The interviews were structured to follow a more fluid approach, similar to that of a conversation. In the interviews the attempt to be fluid and keep it conversational was done to create space for the interviewees to feel comfortable in sharing but also to not feel restricted by the questions posed. As a result, the interviews range from 40 minutes to approx. 120 minutes. The wide range of interview times will be useful in supplementing the survey questions as they provide lived experiences presented through storytelling, analogies and oral recollections of events. Along with the interviews several members utilized storytelling and lived experiences as means of response in their analysis of the social organization on the surveys as well; Native and non-Native members recalled events and experiences they had while participating in RCCC.

As a means of methodology, the use of the members' analogies and lived experiences are pertinent to this study in understanding the efficacy RCCC has in serving its members in a way that allows for inclusion and the promotion of relationship-building. As I have worked through the data, my role of researcher bears addressing once more. In an attempt to utilize storytelling as a research method, my role as listener in analyzing and reiterating these experiences will be ultimately met with critique by the participating members. To limit this my aim for this data analysis was to highlight the responses of the members and extrapolate themes without deterring
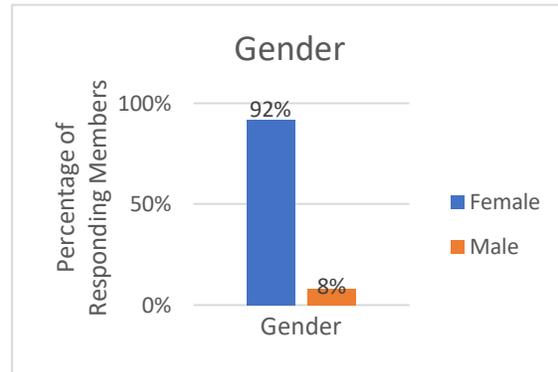
from the original meaning. In utilizing more culturally inclusive research methods by keeping many of the questions open-ended, I wanted to allow for more detailed experience-based responses. I structured the interviews to be more free flowing, imitating a conversation, which has allowed me to obtain a more robust and deeper analysis of RCCC as an organization through conversation points not raised by interview questions but developed naturally throughout the conversations. My positionality must also be analyzed once more as the responses given could be culturally tailored for some; by this I mean my relationality as a young Lakota woman asking questions of my elders. The responses given by the Native members may be influenced by these cultural mechanisms but can serve to provide unique insight when analyzed with the non-Native responses as well.

The added layer of relational accountability to RCCC and its members in this analysis emphasizes my understanding and implementation of certain Lakota values such as respect, honor, wisdom and truth. Respect and honor come by limiting my extrapolation and interpretation of members' experiences, i.e. understanding the themes that arise are shared but still remain inherently unique to each responding member. Wisdom and truth are the fact that I, the primary researcher and academic, have come to RCCC bringing with me my own external biases of the organization as both a participating member and as a researcher. I understand and must articulate that, while my positionality has influenced the direction of the questions posed in both the surveys and the interviews; it has also made me more critical as a researcher of the social organization in conveying that data.

When gathering basic demographic data as illustrated in *Figures 1 and 2,* the participating members were identified as being primarily women; 92% of the responding members indicated "female" with 8% responding "male". This gender imbalance becomes a point of

Fig. 1. Gender Breakdown of Responding Members

interest later on in the analysis and again in the conclusion. The responding members ranged in age from 34 to 80 with an average age of 64 and the median age being 70.
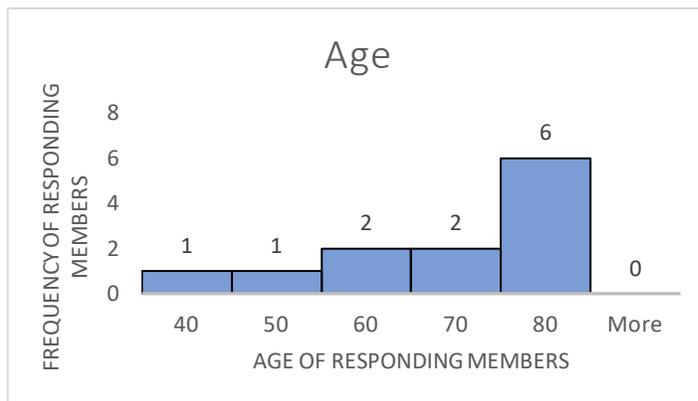
Fig. 2. Age Distribution of Responding Members

The demographics of the responding members were limited only by participant involvement; I kept the age limit open to anyone over 18 as I

wanted to gain an understanding of what influence RCCC has om different age groups. Yet what the data has shown is the current participating members are of an older age group with a few younger members; of the participating members, only 3 were below the age of 60. When looking at the ethnic make-up of the group, 43% of responding members identified themselves as White, 36 % as Native American, 14% as African American and 7% as other. The represented tribes as identified by the responding members include Oglala (3), Standing Rock (1), and Sisseton-Wahpeton (1). Interestingly enough, RCCC works through a Lakota oriented structure, but the majority of the participating members identified as White. A possible reason for this could be due to the current direction of RCCC. While the respondents were able to choose more than one

ethnicity, only two chose more than one, with the remaining participants identifying as one

ethnicity. Of the two who chose more than one ethnicity, one acknowledged her position of a

Hunka sister to another individual in the Rapid City community. I highlight this here because it

elevates the importance placed on not only the sacred relationship that exists between *Hunka*

sisters, but also the value acknowledged and given to this Lakota ceremony by a non-Lakota

individual. The *Hunka* ceremony binds individuals to each other by ties of fidelity stronger than

friendship, brotherhood, or family, deepening the relationship (Sacred Texts, n.d.).

Values and Structure

Working to understand the internal structure of the organization, I integrated questions

into both the surveys and interviews regarding the structural approach and the current model's

efficacy in reaching its goals. It must be pointed out that the organization has experienced a shift

in the structural orientation. By this I mean, two models have been implemented over the 5-year

period of RCCC's existence, with the current model being a result of internal disputes within the

group. Shifting from the older model that included a larger overall group, the Host Planning

Teams and the individual CIT sub-groups, the Council of Elders (COE) was created after this

internal dispute left the group without a Host Planning Team and lacking leadership in 2016. The

COE consists of 7 elderly women from Native and non-Native backgrounds who serve in an

advisory capacity and are often called upon to mediate disputes for RCCC. The first four women,

all Lakota, were chosen to be a part of the COE by consensus of the participating members

during one of the meetings following the major internal dispute. I must note that one of the

Lakota elders has passed on and the COE is currently looking to fill her seat with another Native

American, male or female. The other three women were chosen by the first four based on leadership, mediation, and spiritual qualities. Of the three, none of whom is of Native American descent, two are White and one is African American (Interview 002). The diversity of COE works to address the social and racial issues brought forth by looking at the dispute from an external position where emotional investment is not at the same heightened levels for the individuals involved. While the COE is said to be an external advisory group, the reality of the influence they hold in RCCC and the surrounding Rapid City community has made them a symbol of RCCC. I circle back to this later in the discussion as the influence of COE and the time when it was implemented have been pointed out in the surveys and interviews as having caused a disruption in the internal flow of information and communication of RCCC.

Illustrated by the interviewees, RCCC currently works through an "umbrella" model approach. This umbrella approach as described by the participants works to provide a dissemination of power from the larger overall group which serves as the "umbrella top" and places it within each of the sub-groups created underneath. The smaller sub-groups created underneath the larger group are results of member discussion and design and are designated as 'Critical Innovation Teams'. Each of these Critical Innovation Teams (CIT) targets a key issue that the RCCC members identified as areas of concern during their first initial conversations back in 2015. Wolakol-Kiciyapi, Healers and Transformers, and Mitakuye Oyasin are the current CITs of RCCC and still hold meetings today. However, due to low sample size of returned surveys targeting each CIT individually and the lack of interview questions addressing the smaller groups directly, the CITs were not able to be evaluated for their efficacy in the work they do. Therefore, I suggest for the future a further exploration into each of the individual CITs to

gain a better understanding of the work they do. While the individual CIT surveys are not able to provide conclusive data, the individualized responses and references made by the responding members can be loosely interpreted to provide a glimpse into the work that is being done.

I provide a brief recap here of the first four meetings leading to the development of the CITs. This is for a couple reasons, but primarily due to the frequency with which the 4Ds is spoken about during the interviews and noted in the surveys. Because of the high number of mentions regarding this design phase it has been suggested and I would to relook at and implement this process again within RCCC. The four-part plan was turned into a four-part conversation that was held each month for the first four consecutive months, the first phase, Discovery took place in February of 2015, the Dream phase following in March, the Design phase in April, and the Delivery phase in May (Interview 001; Interview 006). During each of these conversations that took place, the participating members worked towards a goal, from identifying community issues and dreaming up solutions to designing and implementing these dreams into workable action-based proposals called "provocative propositions" (Interview 001). The first four months and conversations were spent envisioning and coming up with the goals and mission of the social organization.

At the end of the four months, RCCC had formed their mission statement, "Community innovation to reverse institutional and individual racism through conversations focused on relationship-building and shared values" (RCCC, 2019-b). As one of RCCC's main objectives is to build community by addressing racial issues through conversation and shared values to bridge relationships, it becomes apparent that dispute-resolutions are needed in wading through the

intense work of building these relationships. This is particularly important for the area of Rapid City as the historical recency of many racially charged events like Wounded Knee in the 1970s can still be spoken about in first-person accounts. These historical moments feed the conversations RCCC members work to address. As such, when asked what mediation tactics are used, the interviewees responded with talking circles, the use of talking sticks, elder disruption and input, and all external disputes the COE has been involved with and advisory to (Interview 001-006). Some of these methods are culturally inclusive to Lakota dispute resolutions. One way in which Lakotas address dispute resolutions is by creating space for everyone to participate and share their concerns or issues. With talking circles, each member is given the opportunity to speak their piece rotating in a cyclical manner, until it comes back around at which time anyone may add on to someone else's previous comment. Talking circles work by giving space to each individual to speak her or his piece and indicating the importance of her or his input by positioning everyone's attention and eyes on the individual sharing as everyone is situated in a circle.

Another method Lakotas have utilized for large group discussions and is now being utilized by RCCC is the talking stick; the person holding the 'stick', whether that might be an eagle feather or an object on hand, is allowed the floor to speak on what matters they deem necessary. The talking stick is utilized in a similar fashion as the talking circles, with all eyes and attention directed towards the individual holding the stick. Responses by both Native and non-Native interviewees as well as some taken from the survey indicate the intensity that would erupt during some of the more heated and emotion driven conversations. Their responses noted intervention, particularly on the part of elders or a designated moderator, was a common means

to disrupt the argument and diffuse the situation. In some instances, the need for members to leave the conversation and rejoin when they had had time to calm down was also encouraged (Interview 003-Interview 005). As such it seems that a multiplicity of methods, including several Lakota approaches, were employed during some of the more intense conversations RCCC had. This seems to fit the understanding of complex and inherent juxtaposition that comes with diversity among community members. However, it seems RCCC was able to utilize these methods and also incorporate Lakota means of dispute resolution in ways which add to the efficacy of the work being done.

During some of the meetings, interviewees mentioned, prior to the start of conversations members in attendance would ground themselves by identifying a Lakota value they felt when entering the meeting. I would assert this grounding serves an essential purpose in placing everyone in a shared and similar mindset prior to engaging in these intense conversations. After interviewing a couple of the members who were influential in the formation of RCCC, the extent to which Lakota values were interwoven into the conversations and mediation techniques employed was intentional and crucial in their eyes. As a Lakota-grassroots organization, invoking Lakota values and decentralized governing approaches within RCCC was deemed inevitable in order to bring Native Americans' voices into the conversations. I would articulate that it not only gave space for Lakota and other Native Americans to speak in RCCC, it has amplified the resounding echo Native American voices now have within the overall Rapid City community.

The data from both the surveys and interviews indicate the strong presence of Lakota values and governing approaches in structuring the social organization. Each interviewee was asked to give their conceptual understanding of the structure, and how it worked in fulfilling its goals as an organization. All interviewees noted the presence of Lakota values being exemplified in the organization's approach to dispute-resolution and relationship-building, "[S]ome personalities are stronger than others, louder than others and they tend to take the stage or talk too long and forget that we're basically a Lakota-minded group with respect for each other and to listen to each other" (Interview 003). However, both a Native and non-Native interviewee noted a need for consistency in grounding members in values prior to the start of conversations. As a non-Native member noted on the survey when asked for ways to improve RCCC, the organization needs to '[get] back to the basics' in approaching conversations. I would assert then by grounding in the values prior to each conversation or meeting, the members can all work from a common starting point rather than bringing in with them a disruptive frame of mind that might be influencing them in their other daily activities. Focusing the group within these shared values initially allows for the external daily activities to take a rear-seat to the conversations being held and for members to be fully present during the conversations.

Another question I asked the interviewees if they hadn't already brought it up was if they "viewed the current structure to be working?"; 33% responded yes, 17% replied no and the other half of the interviewees replied with a neutral response noting it worked in varying situations depending on the size of the group and the personalities present during the meeting. Within the neutral responses two of whom were Native, and one non-Native noted the need to "readdress the 4-D's because they had gone astray" (Interview 001-003). The 4-Ds relate to the four-phase

plan: Discovery, Dream, Design and Delivery. When asked on the survey how RCCC could be improved, 41% of Native and non-Native responses suggested reassessing the organizational structure. In looking at the four-phase plan indicated, each phase provided space and time for members to discuss each part of the planning process and goals for the CITs created. The CITs had target goals and a proposal of how to obtain those goals tailored by the individuals who developed the initial plans. This is particularly critical as the strengths and attributes contributed by members can change over time and with low membership RCCC should consider reevaluating the current members' opinions of the CITs still functioning. It seems to be indicated by the responses to this question that the current events and projects being done on behalf of RCCC are not addressing the goals or desires of the current group. By taking a moment and reintroducing the 4-Ds, RCCC can take an internal assessment of where they are and where the members wish to go.

Two of the survey questions asked the members if they believed RCCC needed to be restructured in some way. Each question targeted a different area I believed to be of importance, inclusion and accessibility. I chose inclusion due in part to RCCC's mission to foster relationship building in the community, understanding that, in order to do so, creating a space for Natives and non-Natives to come together would be of importance. To that effect, 50% of the responding members indicated 'yes', 33% were neutral and 17% indicated 'no' as shown in *Figure 3*. Of those responding 'yes' all but one were non-Native, a majority of the neutral
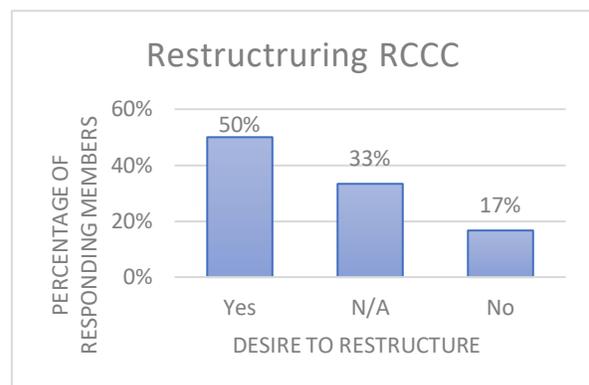
Fig. 3. *Restructuring Assessment of Responding Members*

answers came from Native individuals, and the 17% responding 'no' was split between Native and non-Native. This could possibly be due to a continued lack of inclusivity felt within the larger Rapid City community by the responding Native members. Asking each of the members as a second part of this question to elaborate on why they felt the way they did, the Native responses included the need to recruit more members, keeping the diversity strong and expanding the conversations beyond Native and White. Non-Native members indicated similar responses regarding low numbers adding that, due to low numbers for meetings and conversations, RCCC cannot sustain its current structural design. I further address the issue of membership later in the discussion, but the common thread of membership is seen as having adverse effects on the organization's ability to fulfill its mission.

During the duration of this study, interviewees noted the IT group for RCCC had dissolved, creating a gap in the distribution of information to members and the general public. The lack of IT support hinders the amount of publicity and information being sent out on behalf of the organization. A non-Native interviewee used a metaphor to describe this issue, noting that the heart and brain are great but cannot work alone in functioning as a body without the use of appendages such as arms, hands, legs, and feet, indicating that the low numbers are also contributing to the number of things the organization can do internally. The other question I asked on the survey assessing the need for restructuring was in regard to the accessibility of RCCC. By this I mean the ease of hearing about and getting to meetings. Of the responding members, 83% answered yes while 17% chose not to answer. When asked to elaborate on their response with an explanation, some of the Native members responded with the common answers that included better publicity of meetings is needed such as flyers and social media posts, an

increase in appeal to youth and other groups of people and an increase in recruitment efforts. One of the non-Natives also highlighted a need for consistency of meeting spaces.

Another aspect of the structure of RCCC I wanted to address is their current lack of a permanent meeting space. Due to this, RCCC is ultimately at the mercy of external sources when securing a meeting space. I was curious about the response to this question: two-thirds of the interviewees came back saying 'yes' the lack of space was affecting the success of RCCC and the other third indicating 'no' it does not. Of the third that responded no, a Lakota interviewee elaborated on her or his choice by saying the inclusion of outdoor meetings adds another cultural component and another chance to ground one's self within the natural environment of Rapid City as it sits within the Black Hills landscape (Interview 001). This individual is referring to the lands of the Black Hills, a sacred space for Lakotas, and still considered homelands by many Lakota people today. This conceptualization of grounding into the natural environment brings all of the members, particularly Lakota and Native American members, closer to and increases the intimacy of the relationship they hold with the land. For Lakota members, this is not an unfamiliar concept, rather it validates the lived history that was spoken about in the first planning phase of the 4-Ds.

Those that responded yes, both Natives and non-Natives, note that 'bad blood' and unwelcoming spaces have been used in the past as meeting spaces by RCCC, and has also contributed to their growth of the organization. Half of the interviewed members noted the use of Monument Health facilities, part of the health care system in Rapid City. While one Native interviewee noted the graciousness of making these facilities available, the other Native and non-

Native interviewees pointed out that some Native American members felt uncomfortable meeting there, the distance to travel to these meetings posed a problem for some and experiences there have left individual members feeling unwelcome. Two non-Native interviewees explained that consistency is seen as more advantageous than permanency to the organization. Noting that the continuous changes in meeting locations has caused confusion for members, adding to the lack of effectiveness of RCCC.

What has come out of the surveys and interviews is a need to readdress the structure of RCCC. Native and non-Native responding members find value in maintaining the cultural approach RCCC has taken in structuring its operational processes through Lakota governing approaches of decentralized power and power placed back within the hands of the community, but feel a reassessment of the current functioning processes is in order. The percentage of respondents that noted the structural approach taken by the initial Lakota leaders as advantageous to the organization speaks to the efficacy a culturally inclusive Native American social organization can have in an urban space. As such, it becomes crucial in continuing to work towards RCCC's mission, of building relationships between the Native and non-Native community in Rapid City, that RCCC continues to utilize culturally responsive dispute methods such as the talking circle and external advisory input by elders. As one Lakota member noted, "there's a need for [RCCC] to take a pause now and to mobilize again", looking back to the four-phase plan, grounding the meetings in values bringing awareness to the group dynamics and reevaluating the strengths and assets of its current membership (Interview-001; Interview-005). I support this recommendation that the organization take time to pause and reassess the target goals RCCC wants to work towards and what that's going to take. The types of mediation tactics,

such as talking circles and large-group conversations, are extremely important to a social organization such as RCCC, whose mission is to build relationships while tackling deeply seeded issues rooted in colonization and work to overcome tense moments of the shared history of Rapid City and of members involved with RCCC.

While the importance of Lakota values and governing approaches has been highlighted for its success in working towards RCCC's mission, issues such as meeting space and accessibility must be looked at in order to increase the levels of inclusion. Creating a space where members feel safe enough to place themselves in a state of discomfort is necessary for the type of work RCCC addresses. When the Native American community or other groups of RCCC members do not feel comfortable attending a meeting due to its location, this works directly against the mission of RCCC. By finding a suitable meeting space that provides all members a level of comfort and safety to do the work required in building these relationships will benefit RCCC and begin to build the bridge between the Native and non-Native communities in Rapid City. Members have noted finding an inclusive and suitable meeting space has proved to be challenging and if resources permit, RCCC could benefit from funding a meeting space that could suit the needs of the organization. Another considerations RCCC might be to include times when meetings take place in an outdoor location within Rapid City. This not only works to ground the members in the landscapes around them, but it also is a visible representation of community building for any passerby to see and take in.

Community

In working through the interviews and survey questionnaires that were returned, I found the concept of community and building community to be echoed in one way or another by every responding member. Both Native and non-Native participants noted the desire to build community with each other and with the rest of Rapid City citizens through RCCC. With this understanding, RCCC has become a nexus for Native and non-Native relationship building to take place. Predominately Lakota, the Native community in Rapid City has been disenfranchised and denied a voice within the larger community for many years as a direct result of historic assimilationist legal policies and land disputes with the non-Native neighboring communities, resulting in division among its current community members. These disputes and tensions continue to exist today, and therefore, I was interested in analyzing how RCCC works to rectify these divisions and to build relationships to create a more unified community. From the perspective of RCCC, community does not include merely Native Americans, rather all the citizens living in Rapid City and, as one of the founding Lakota members of RCCC noted in an interview, "[Y]ou need to have an action-oriented plan that takes all the people collaboratively and creatively into a future that we envision together" (Interview 001). Positing the idea that, while RCCC stems from the Native community taking action, it is open to all and works to be inclusive of all citizens in Rapid City, no matter their age or ethnic make-up.

Interestingly enough, when asked about the organization, two of the interviewees and a small section of the surveys, Native and non-Native, reiterated the fluidity of RCCC as a social organization to bend and morph to the needs of the group members. The assertion brought out from these comments points out the idea of RCCC existing as a "living organism" and that "rest

periods" occurring naturally with the seasonal changes are needed and should be incorporated. The members who noted this, some of whom were non-Native, included the understanding of Lakota societies prior to the establishment of reservations, which were often situationally based and during the winter often took periods of rest (Howe & Katz, 200; Interview 002 & Interview 005). Again, the emphasis on Lakota culture is shown as well as a level of respect and influence showcased by non-Native critique. Coming from a Lakota perspective, the slowing of activities in the winter noted by several responses on the surveys and two of the interviewees is not uncommon or cause for alarm. Rather, during this time of rest, reflection of the organization can occur; evaluating the work done for the year and reassessing the use of this rest period could work to the benefit of RCCC.

Another concept that came across in the data was the idea of consensus and abstention. The Lakota framework of consensus and abstention guide the meetings and conversations. In order for projects or plans to be implemented, a consensus of the group must occur. However, those who oppose but do not wish to voice this may abstain and not take part in the vote. A non-Native interviewee described a lived experience of this happening to she or he; rather than spending the duration of the meeting going back-and-forth, chose to abstain to keep the conversations moving forward (Interview 004). Again, this idea of community involves

everyone's participation and, thus, a social organization utilizing consensus does not proceed

forward with plans until consensus is created.

When asked to rate the levels of how inclusive RCCC is on a scale of 1-10, the median

response was a 7.5 with an average of 6.7 as shown in *Figure. 4*. Of the responding members

Native members found it to be very

inclusive with the majority of their

numbers ranging from 8-10; only one

Native member indicated a 1 creating

an outlier for this question. The non-

Native members aligned with the

average more so, with their range being
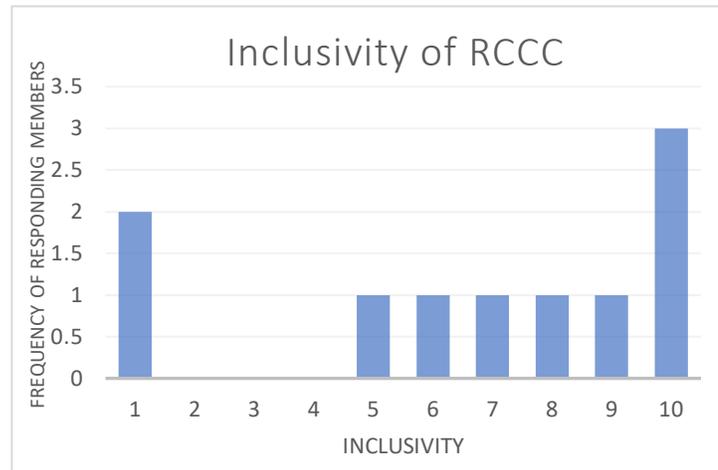
Fig. 4. Inclusivity Distribution of Responding Members

5-10, but again with one outlier responding with a 1. This would indicate that the surveyed

members find it to be somewhat inclusive but not at a rate that would be met with consensus.

One reason for this could be that inclusivity may be felt in some meeting spaces and not in

others. Of the responding members, two gave RCCC a 1, three gave it a 10, two abstained, and

the other five each indicated 5, 6, 7, 8, or 9. The extremes, 1 and 10, were selected most

frequently by responding members which can be interpreted to mean some of the members feel

that they are being listened to and heard while those that selected 1 feel as though RCCC is not

fulfilling its mission to be inclusive. The overall response finds RCCC to be mostly inclusive.

The following question on the survey asked to further their explanation depending on the rating

they selected. The resulting answers indicated a need to readdress consensus, recruit a wider

range of membership, and that low numbers create limited inclusion of voices and ideas.

Membership was raised by almost all of the responding members in both the surveys and interviews. When asked how to improve or restructure RCCC, a third, Native and non-Native, of the responding members indicated membership of some sort, with responses including: work with all in Rapid City, more involvement of the public, more numbers means more ideas offered, and finding ways to involve younger people and a larger cross-section of Rapid City demographics. With this, the responding members also noted the internal breakdown that has occurred as a result of low membership numbers. A Native interviewee shared an experience of a low attended CIT group; yet the lead member of this CIT continued to show up to these meetings even with few or no attendees. The interviewee noted the CIT leader saying, "If you say you're having a meeting and not show up, of course they'll say these people don't know what they are doing, they don't care enough to be here. So, the leaders have to show up even if the members do not" (Interview 003). The interviewee indicated two points of importance that need to be noted. The first is the value the lead member finds in continually showing up regardless of attendance, which speaks to the work being done by RCCC and the commitment brought by some of its members. The other point noted is that consistency is not the only problem for RCCC, as even with consistency for this particular CIT, the number of people attending influenced its work. The number of members participating in this study also speaks to the limited membership. I began the distribution of surveys with the help of my research assistant in December and collected the last of them the following March; to my surprise, despite keeping an open window of four months, only 12 members had filled out and returned a survey.

Another layer adding to the issue of membership comes from the demographic make-up of participating individuals in RCCC; of the responding members to this study, two were under

the age of 60, the majority of them between 65-75 with two being older than 75. The work envisioned by RCCC becomes harder to see to fruition when the age of membership is so high. The older generation's involvement speaks to the importance they place on RCCC; a non-Native interviewee relayed a messages shared with them by another Lakota member, "— said that's significant that [grandmothers] are coming because they represent their whole family. That means people trust the process. They want to be involved in a serious way." (Interview 006). The non-Native member speaks to the importance of the older generation's approval of RCCC particularly through a Lakota perspective. As the interviewee pointed out, the level of trust is being built within the Native community and by members who are still able to recount events such as Wounded Knee in the 1970s and the racialized incidents that followed through embodied knowledge and lived experiences. As such, the building of relationships between the Native and non-Native communities is occurring as well as the dissipation of racialized tensions. Nevertheless, it is indicated by both Native and non-Native responding members of RCCC that Rapid City is 'having a long ways to go' still (Interview 001-002 & Interview 006). While the older community members are more involved, the younger generations have not had the same presence. Potential reasons for this could be related to the internal conflicts that emerged from the Host Planning Team or from a lack of awareness about the organization.

Coming through the member responses, the limited number of active members hinders the type of work that can be done, but also, an internal breakdown among groups. Much like for the low attended CIT analogy, the input and suggestions become limited and the idea of community is lost when community involvement lacks. If there are no members to work towards the goals of RCCC or the individual CITs, RCCC cannot fulfill its mission in working towards a

unified community by addressing the racial tensions through conversations and dialogue in
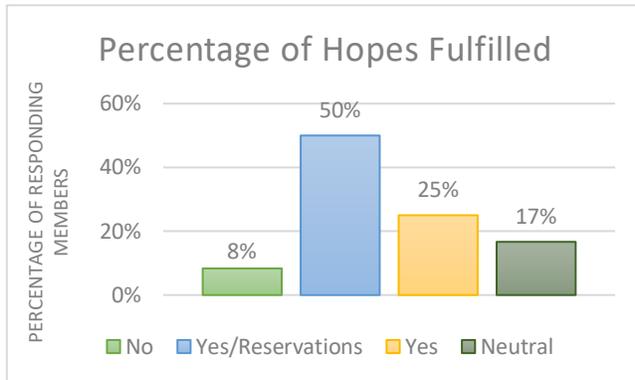

Percentage of Hopes Fulfilled

Fig. 5. 'Hope' Levels Breakdown of Responding Members

Rapid City today. When asked in the survey if members believe RCCC is fulfilling its mission, 25% noted 'yes', 50% said 'yes' but with reservations, 8% believed 'no' it was not being fulfilled and 17% chose not to answer illustrated by *Figure 5*. The 8%

indicating 'no' was Native while two-thirds of the 25% 'yes' were Native. This indicates that

while some of the issues identified by Native members are being fulfilled, some still believe this

to be untrue. The 50% who noted yes but with reservations, including Natives and non-Natives

expanded on this with reasons including small numbers, a decline in active members, hopes were

fulfilled but happening slowly due to membership, and members must be committed in the first

place. The members have indicated that without individuals to do the work, RCCC is not able to

fulfill its mission at the rate the members believe it can or to do so in a timely manner.

Interviewees echoed these responses and included other points such as access to the

organization's email list serv, personality clashes leading to CIT dissolvement and the spreading

of the overall group to thin when working on projects. As such, this has contributed to the overall

success of RCCC as viewed by its members.

However, a Native interviewee provided an example of a positive experience they had

had regarding recruitment efforts. The interviewee spoke of an experience with a vendor booth

table during a conference. A couple of RCCC members chipped in to buy a table at a conference,

and while no one was physically present at the booth, a sign-up sheet was left there. The

organization received a number of individuals who had signed up to receive emails and be more involved, and interested in the work being done by RCCC (Interview 003). As it can be ascertained from this embodied knowledge, citizens in Rapid City want to become involved in the conversations, but there must be active attempts to recruit members on behalf of RCCC. This was a common thread brought forth by responding members in both the surveys and the interviews. The expansion in diversity when recruiting members was also noted on the survey as a suggestion of improvement for RCCC by Native and non-Native responses. A main hinderance that is being brought forth by the responding RCCC members concerns the lack of hands to fulfill the large goals set out by the social organization as well as the number it takes to create a unified community.

Another problem with the members is the consistency in attending conversations and CIT meetings. The lack of consistency of members does not necessarily mean the lack of commitment, but it does extend the duration of time taken to complete the projects and the number of projects RCCC can take on during a period of time. A commitment of members should be considered when proposing and planning goals and projects for RCCC. This would help to ensure the work that needs to be done has been committed to by those members. and then they need to be held responsible in completing their goals. As with every project assistance should also be made available on behalf of the rest of the RCCC members if they are able to contribute.

Despite RCCC's problems with the number of participating members, when asked on the surveys to describe their hopes for the organization, 30% responded with a desire to build community in various capacities including a growth in friendship among all citizens in Rapid

City, an appreciation of Lakota culture as well as all others, a bridge for the Native American community and again the idea of inclusion. The interviews added to these suggestions by highlighting trust levels among its members. Two non-Native interviewees noted the unwelcoming atmosphere of some of the meeting spaces, indicating a lack of trust by city officials and the Rapid City Police Department (RCPD) which was echoed in several surveys as well. Another interviewee noted the need to rebuild trust between the Native American community and Rapid City officials along with the RCPD, which they mention has slowly begun to take place (Interview 002 & Interview 004). As another interviewee pointed out, when you gain the trust of certain key members, a ripple effect takes place and more and more citizens and officials become more aware and can choose to become involved and participate as well (Interview 006).

Furthering this idea is an analogy one of the non-Native interviewees recounted when asked about the race-relations in Rapid City. The interviewee recalled how, during the mid-1970s, after Wounded Knee when basketball teams from Pine Ridge were not welcome in Rapid City and other towns to play the local teams due to what took place. Upon learning of this, the Lakota community decided to host their own tournament which resulted in the well-known Lakota Nation Invitational (LNI) that still takes place today and has expanded to include other sports, a knowledge bowl, and traditional hand games. During the early years of LNI, it was met with scrutiny, particularly when it was held in Rapid City due to the growth of the tournament. The interviewee pointed out how during these early years, a strong racial prejudice existed and during the last couple of years, the RCPD have escorted some of the teams to the Rapid City Civic Center where the tournament is held (Interview 006). I include this analogy to highlight the

growth that has taken place in Rapid City and the surrounding area involving Native and non-Native relationships. When RCPD escorts teams in, it shows a level of respect and honor that begins to bridge these long-standing trust issues on all sides.

Looking at other ways to create relationships with the larger Rapid City community, responding members, both Native and non-Native, suggested outreach to external organizations. Among the CIT sub-groups of RCCC, a few have split off and become independent external entities. As members have pointed out several groups that have done this, an opportunity to collaborate with these groups exists by tapping into membership networks to pool more resources as well as bodies to do the work. As the work to build relationships between the Native community and with city officials and across the larger community is part of the mission of RCCC, celebratory events were highlighted as an approach RCCC has taken to do so. A non-Native interviewee described several events, including the Solstice, which they noted was their favorite event put on by RCCC. This interviewee noted the communal atmosphere and unity experienced at this event in celebration of the Solstice (Interview 002). Celebrations like these are ways in which RCCC can collaborate with other organizations and expand its outreach to the overall Rapid City community.

One point in regard to external organization involvement needs to be noted as it was brought up in both the interviews and the surveys. The involvement of Monument Health, the predominant health care system in Rapid City, has been cited by several of the responding members as a point of concern. In the surveys this was noted in suggestions for restructuring the organization and in the interviews it was noted by an interviewee when asked for her and his final thoughts or changes to RCCC and another member noted it when asked if the lack of

permanent meeting space had an effect on RCCC and its overall mission (Interview 002 & Interview 004). To ensure anonymity the specific reasons of members were not included in this section. Whether RCCC chooses to readdress its relationship with Monument Health is ultimately a decision that must be made by RCCC members; I would recommend a re-evaluation be done while the organization looks at other possible outreach and partnering opportunities. Along with this I would include an evaluation of continuing to utilize their spaces as well, as it has been noted to hinder the progress of RCCC.

The experiences and responses noted in the surveys in tandem with the interviews allude to the importance of creating and maintaining the relationships among Natives and non-Natives. When originally posing some of the questions asked, I made an assumption of the limited involvement I witnessed in a few of the meetings I sat in on, that this would pose a problem not only for collecting data for this project, but I assumed this would hinder the overall goals of RCCC. As has become evident in the data and responses of the participating members, the low numbers have indeed affected the goals and speed at which these goals are accomplished. Not only have the numbers been low, members have indicated this has limited the diversity of work that could be done by RCCC.

As well, members have indicated that much like older Lakota societies, periods of rest in tune with the changing of the seasons can serve as a positive approach for RCCC, whether this takes the form of a rest period for the organization while still engaging in collaborative efforts with other organizations or RCCC reevaluates how these rest periods could serve a positive role in membership recruitment. RCCC needs to take time to address their recruitment efforts and devise an approach that brings in the diversity current members are speaking about, even if these

new diverse members are one or two key members who can create a ripple effect within the community. In order for RCCC to embody and fulfil its mission, the number of members needs to increase to include a larger portion of Rapid City citizens. Looking at it from a relational approach, the building of trust and camaraderie among the new and existing members creates relational goods and deepening the layers of success had by RCCC. Unless it can find an approach to do this, RCCC will not be able to succeed in its goals and plans to their fullest potential.

Communication

One final theme that came out of the data looks at RCCC's lines of communication. The disruption of RCCC's communication both internally and what it sends out to the general public seems to be a large part of RCCC's limitations and, thus, prevents it from fulfilling its mission. When the COE was formed, the Host Planning Teams to whom the CITs originally reported to dissolved and a lack in transparency with communication lines transpired. The clarification of who the CITs should give progress reports to has not happened, and this has been a huge reason for the breakdown in internal communication noted by the participating members. This disruption may also have influenced some of the internal personality clashes that have been cited as reasons for a decrease in membership numbers. This was not a theme I had initially perceived to have been a contributing factor to the overall efficacy of RCCC, but as the data has shown, the breakdown of communication has greatly influenced the work of RCCC and how members view the efficacy of this work. As such, the data has come to show how influential the COE is among the RCCC members and the Rapid City community. If the COE serves RCCC in an advisory

role, the necessity of a Host Planning Team to be reinstated should be considered and a

clarification of communication channels is needed. If RCCC wishes to continue with its current

structure, the COE will need to expand its role to that of communication hub as well. The current

structure is similar to this and as the responding members have indicated, it is not working to the

benefit of the organization at this point.

The responses of both Native and non-Native members involve a mix of positive and

negative commentary when discussing the success of the organization. A Native and non-Native

interviewee noted the RCCC members can sometimes fall into thinking only of the deficits and

not of the accomplishments that have come out of RCCC (Interview 002 & Interview 003). To

elaborate upon this, when asked on the survey to give their definition of success, 46% of the

responding members saw it as accomplishing goals or objectives, 38% noted success meant

being inclusive, and 15% saw it as meeting the needs of its members, though these needs were

not identified as shown in *Figure 6*.

*Fig. 6. Success Definition Breakdown of Responding Members*

Native members responded with either accomplishing goals or inclusion; none of them noted success as meeting the needs of its members. Taking this into account, when asked to rate RCCC on a scale of 1-10 by how the members viewed RCCC in succeeding, the median response was a 7 and the average was a 6.7. The Native members' responses fell all over the range, including 1, 6, 10 and one choosing not to answer. The lowest number scored was a 1 with two 10s at the other end of the range, while most of the responses tell between 5 and 7 as illustrated in *Figure 7*. The members' ideas of success have indicated that when thinking of the accomplishments of RCCC, their view of success falls a little above a neutral rating. This could
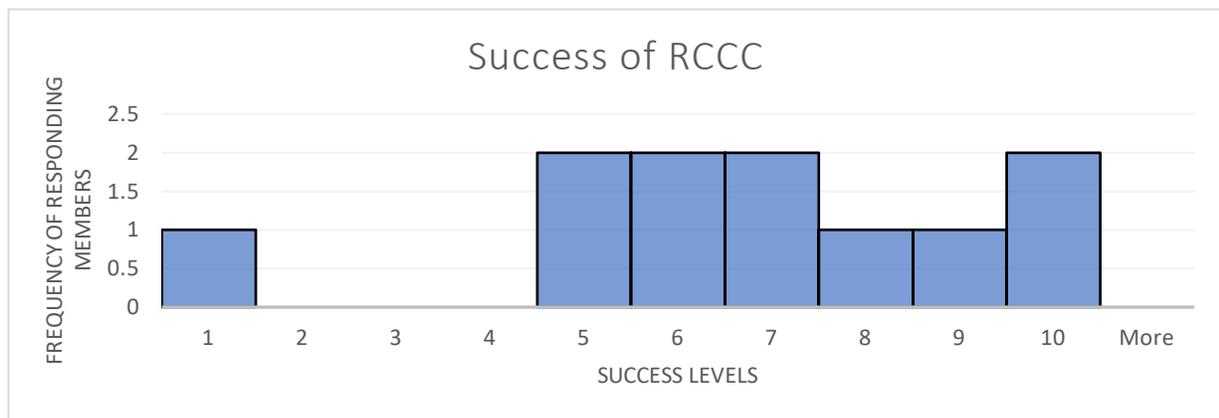
Fig. 7. Success Distribution of Responding Members

be due to how the members conceptualize the work being done on behalf of RCCC. While the neutral ratings indicate moderate success, understanding how members define success can be indicative of their responses.

Another question posed on the survey asked for a rating of the effectiveness members

believed RCCC had in fulfilling its mission is illustrated in *Figure 8*. The members indicated an
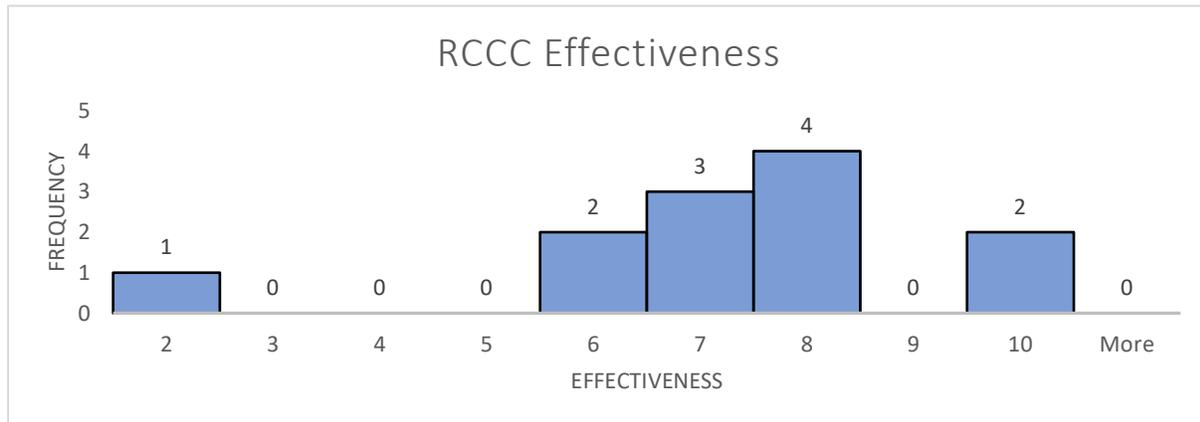
Fig. 8. Effectiveness Distribution of Responding Members

average response of 7.1 with the median being 7.25. Native responses showed a higher range in

rating the effectiveness of RCCC, noting two 10s, a 6, and a 7. There was one response

indicating 1 while most of the range fell between 6-8 with 2 indicating a 10. Again what is

indicated by the responding members is that RCCC is effective, but not to the extent or hopes of

some of the members. The responding Native members overall felt RCCC to be effective in

working towards its mission. Remarks added by some of the responding members to their

rankings included making and executing goals, staying true to the goals of the organization and

still functioning after leadership and change and overcoming obstacles, signal that there are

internal measures that are impeding the success of RCCC. Noting the 50% who rated the

fulfilment of RCCC as 'yes, with reservations' is also necessary to include here as well as

fractured communication and toxic leaders hindering the social organization were iterated by

members as needing to be addressed if RCCC is to fulfill its mission. Both Native and non-

Native interviewees mentioned smaller scale projects were easier to manage due to the size of

membership group, but the larger goals of addressing large scale race relationships in Rapid City have yet to be done. The (1) that was given by a non-Native on the survey indicated a similar response, noting on a small-scale fulfilment was happening but not on a larger, community-wide scale.

However, as half of the interviewees pointed out, negative perceptions and looking at merely the issues still existing has clouded some of the members' understanding of the work RCCC has already done within the first 5 years of its existence. In the interviews I raise the question 'How would you describe the atmosphere of Rapid City?' and to my surprise a 50/50 split of the interviewees noted a shift or not much change at all. As one of the Native interviewees recounted Native American leadership is occurring in Rapid City, giving two stories of various Lakota and other Native American individuals stepping into leadership roles or being asked to do so (Interview 003). The interviewee indicated a shift in attitude has begun to take place among the Native American young adults who are deciding to stay home or return after completing their higher education, "I see more and more…getting their masters and doctorate degrees and wanting to stay home and make a difference for our people which is commendable" (Interview 003). Another story provided by the interviewee highlighted the important roles these Native American leaders are having in the larger community. This interviewee noted, "[W]e see a cultural shift that is happening and it is mainly on the Lakota side…A lot of Lakota women and men who want to change things and are doing it in a good way". This sentiment was echoed by a non-Native interviewee commenting, "[I]t's because of leadership from the Native community, it's not because of city hall or the business community. It's because the Native community reached out to them, that's, in this conversations process,

that's what's happened" (Interview 002 & Interview 006). Both of these members indicate an importance of this newly empowered leadership coming from the Native community in Rapid City. Identifying the empowerment coming from the younger people as they return from their educational pursuits and stepping into leadership positions, a noticeable shift can be seen taking place within Rapid City.

To further this point, both Native and non-Native members have identified work that has come out of RCCC as aiding in addressing socio-cultural issues facing the community. One interviewee, a non-Native, discussed the example of Wasuyapi now known as Wolakol-Kiciyapi, a CIT under RCCC. Some of the initial members to this group splintered off when a small group decided to take an idea that originated in their CIT conversations and made it into an external entity to gain 501 c (3) status. This external entity, One Rapid City, was part of conversations stemming from Wasuyapi's desire to address housing issues in Rapid City. While another interviewee, Native, noted One Heart, another external entity whose foundational ideas arose from RCCC conversations as well, works to bring awareness to homelessness and provides resources and services to the homeless community in Rapid City (Interview 002 & Interview 003). Both of these examples showcase the breadth of reach and opportunities that have been influenced by the conversations taking place at RCCC. The strengths of RCCC in serving its community should also include these organizations that to do the work have branched off to pursue a particular endeavor further. A main component of the work done in CITs means addressing a particular issue, including the means to make that happen however long it may take or the path to it.

As has been briefly mentioned in other areas of this analysis but will be discussed further here are the comments made regarding the internal flow of communication. When asked on ways to improve RCCC, 29% mentioned the communication of RCCC. The members' responses on ways of restructuring the organization also indicated the interpersonal squabbling and community factionalism. While it is nearly impossible to rid a community organization of all interpersonal squabbling and internal communication problems completely, there are steps that can be taken that addresses such issues, but it will be up to RCCC's members to decide what these steps look like and how they will be enforced. RCCC's shift to an Elder council was necessary for the organization to continue its mission; however, when this shift occurred a severance of communication happened as the Host Planning Team also dissolved. The Host Planning Team was responsible for being the communication hub and distributing news within the organization regarding all of the ongoing CIT's and overall conversation work. The COE and the RCCC members need to address this problem as they look at a new internal system of communication, but also as they look at how to provide external information to the larger Rapid City community.

Non-Native members also suggested in the improvements question on the survey the need to utilize reports from the CIT groups, documenting the work being done and an overall monthly report that would disseminate all organizational information and happenings to all the RCCC members and the email listserv. Documentation of the conversations into 'proposals of action' and documentation of the actions taken by the group were also included. Members are indicating the need for a better archival system of actions taken by RCCC. With the loss of IT personnel, I would point out the importance for RCCC to include temporary people to fill these

positions as they come together and prepare the future direction of the organization. The temporary people filling these positions are essential in recruitment efforts for the organization in sending out information to the community and for keeping the current members informed as well. The archival system also works to address the high turnover rates in membership, creating a continuity among the transition of participating members.

Which brings me to the final point of discussion, the advertisement and current PR of RCCC has been noted by a third of the interviews and by multiple members in both the restructuring and area of improvement sections on the surveys. The indication of limited information being related amongst the group is also apparent in the minimal amount of information being sent out to the public and the rest of the Rapid City community. This poses a problem if RCCC is working to increase its membership numbers. A diversity of membership cannot be recruited if there is a lack of information available, highlighting and showcasing the work of RCCC; one of the Native members suggested reformatting the Facebook page to be engaging and showcasing work that would entice younger demographics. A newsletter in some format was proposed by a couple of interviewees and would be useful in keeping the members who are less active informed and updated on what is happening with RCCC. I would further add that a newsletter of some form could serve RCCC in a beneficial way when making connections with other external organizations. The collaborative efforts made on behalf of RCCC indicates its attempts in working towards its mission by unifying across the community.

Overall, both Native and non-Native responding members of RCCC indicated that communication problems have influenced the success of the organization in completing its

mission. The internal communication breakdown can be identified as disrupting the fluidity of information dissemination to all members of RCCC and to any external parties. Their lack of access to the organization's listserv as they are working without IT support hinders their outreach efforts and opportunities to re-engage less-active members. The lines of communication must be cleared up, particularly when addressing whom to report to and who is responsible for then culminating and dispersing information to the rest of the membership. A consideration for reimplementing the Host Planning Teams or creating a new intermediate group to help alleviate this disruption should be discussed. The Native members find the organization to be effective in addressing its mission while non-Native members find the organization to be somewhat effective in fulfilling its mission and believe it to be successful when working on a smaller scale, but not on a larger one as of now. The non-Native responses could indicate that their conceptualizations of success are not congruent with the way Native members view success. Another possibility is that the non-Native members do not interact with Native community members in the same capacity as the Native members of RCCC. The hopes and suggestions of improvement identified by the members indicate a desire to continue the work but an increase in membership size and bridging in communication lines is needed.

The external information being sent out is also a crucial component in making the general public aware of the work that RCCC is committed to doing. Some members have pointed out a need to look at the positivity that stems from RCCC, noting One Heart and One Rapid City as examples. These external entities are working towards areas of concern that stemmed from conversations held in the individual CITs of RCCC. As the responding members indicated, while these efforts are not actively being pursued by or attached to RCCC, the social organization has

had a hand in creating the entities and have noted support as they continue the work independently of RCCC. RCCC was helpful in identifying key individuals who are dedicated to these particular issues and are committed to seeing them to fruition. In this regard, RCCC served as a platform, soundboard, and network system for the community to discuss and create innovative proposals to approach the work. RCCC has a limited number of hands but should consider investing time into their PR and recruitment approaches. Highlighting this in a newsletter or bulletin that is displayed on their social media sites and sent out to other organizations will draw in membership as exposure rates increase.

Conclusion

Coming full circle, tying it back to the importance of culture-match. A newer word for the author, but a feeling and understanding that has existed for years. How colonization has impacted Native thought, assimilationist efforts have created a cultural disconnect among many urban Native Americans. This is my story. Reflected back to me through the echoing of words brought forth by community members and lived experiences shared in Rapid City. This becomes my contribution to minimization of stories like mine. Highlighting the importance of work that can be done by social organizations like RCCC.

The influence of legal policies in the migration of Native American families off reservations and into urban spaces can be seen as yet another intentional attempt at colonization. The early years of the 1950s were the start of another big push by the U.S. federal government to assimilate Native Americans into a Euro-American way of life. As Native American had not assimilated at the increased rates the U.S. government was hoping for when instituting the boarding schools, the need to separate and isolate Native Americans by thrusting them into foreign urban contexts became the next approach taken by the U.S. government. Implementing the Relocation Program as an incentivized program enabled the federal government, with the help of the BIA, to move Native Americans off reservations and away from their cultural connections and communities. As part of the Relocation Program, in separating Native Americans from their communities and cultures by placing them in an alien environment with

little to no support, the U.S. government hoped to force them to assimilate if they were to survive.

During its early years of the program, many Native Americans, single or with a family, believed this program would assist them in providing a means for economic security. Yet, when the early Indian Centers that were set up by the BIA as part of this program were not addressing the needs of the Native community there, Native community members created their own centers. Native American community centers created by Native leaders in the community began to spring up and serve the need of the Native American populations represented in those urban communities; subsequently, the BIA began to withdraw its support given to urban Native families (Strauss & Valentino, 1998). If the program was not assisting in assimilating Native Americans and their families as they moved into urban communities, the BIA and the federal government did not view it as successful. Although the BIA and U.S. government viewed the program as a failure, the move from reservations to urban environments has only continued since the program's beginning in 1953. Today, 78% of Native people are no longer living on the reservations and instead reside in urban communities (Whittle, 2017). The concept of urbanization within Native American literature today has become much more complex as the discussion has shifted from assimilation efforts to how American Indians are integrating their cultures within the urban contexts. The diversity of Native American cultures has created a unique contextual approach to community centers, and I would assert, social organizations as they work to serve the needs of the Native community in the urban environment.

The shared history tied to the Black Hills and the surrounding area is influential and serves as a contributing factor to the continued existence of colonization present in the socio-

cultural interactions among Rapid City community members today. In order to fully grasp the contextual surroundings of everyday life among the diverse citizenship represented in Rapid City, it is first crucial to understand the historical events impacting the interactions of Native Americans, particularly the Lakota, had with non-Natives. By understanding this shared history and the Lakota people's acknowledgement of the Black Hills as a sacred homeland, an awareness of the tensions and racial conflicts that occur in Rapid City can be contributed to this. Sitting in close proximity to the Pine Ridge and Rosebud reservations, Rapid City is a central border community for these reservations and experiences the movement of Lakota families in and out of its city limits as families travel there to live or to obtain various amenities not found on the reservations.

The traveling of some Lakota families and the residential permanency of others have influenced the current relationships existing in Rapid City. The clashing of Lakota and other non-Native peoples have found an epicenter in Rapid City and, thus, cultural conflict is apparent and often more visible. The recency of these historical events adds to the existing tensions on all sides, as some individuals can recite lived experiences and embodied knowledge of these moments. This closeness heightens the division and feelings existing among all of Rapid City's citizens. Thus, the purpose of this project was to identify if Lakota governing practices and dispute resolution approaches would serve the Native community in Rapid City. What came out of this study indicates that RCCC works through an inclusive approach, noting all are welcome to join and participate. In the early years of the Relocation program, Native Americans found community through community centers and Indian bars that established spaces for individuals to

feel safe in practicing their cultures as well as created a connection to community among an ethnically diverse environment.

As a community center addresses cultural inclusion through the services provided, I asserted that social organizations structured through culturally inclusive measures can serve in similar capacities. The data gathered during this study indicates that social organizations that use culturally responsive methods to meet the needs of Native American constituents in urban context are generally effective. The Lakota members involved in the survey noted an increase in opportunities to voice their concerns, take part in conversations regarding the well-being of their community, practice culturally responsive dispute resolution methods in a safe space for all and allowing for a deeper community conversation addressing issues of colonization. Brought out by some of the non-Native members however was a need to acknowledge the diversity of citizens within Rapid City.

While RCCC operates through Lakota governing approaches and a distribution of power among all CITs and groups, non-Native members described a need for more inclusion of diverse voices. It must be noted this organization came about in response to police violence towards the Native community in Rapid City and, therefore, a major component for the organization is creating relationships between the Native American community and city officials and the Native American community and the RCPD through conversations and dialogue. The work RCCC has done to address these issues relating to police violence is evident in the stories recounted by members, and evident in the ratings Native members gave to the efficacy of the organization. A shift in the inclusivity of Native Americans in all levels of the city's public offices has begun to happen, and several of the members, both Native and non-Native, noted the importance RCCC

has had in contributing to this shift. The stories of successes the members speak of showcase the importance and value in continuing the work of RCCC within Rapid City.

With all of that, identified through the study was a need for pause and reevaluation to occur on the part of RCCC. An internal reactionary change occurred in RCCC with the dissolvement of the Host Planning Team and the implementation of the Council of Elders, yet a reassessment of communication lines both internal and external has not occurred. It may also serve RCCC well to address the concerns expressed by the non-Native members regarding inclusion. As inclusion was highlighted in the study, RCCC exists as an act of resistance of Native American peoples, but also as a bridge to address deeply rooted issues of colonization, displacement, and racially charged incidents in an inclusive context. RCCC is unique as it works to create space for Native Americans in an urban setting by dissolving previously held racial barriers and existing attitudes through discussion-based practices. While some non-Native members might feel a lack of inclusion, the conversations center around Native American experiences and provide the space to do so. As it works to address these long standing issues, an awareness of allowing each other to share in this growing process must occur, but those who are non-Native should also give space to the Native members as the social organization we created with such a purpose in mind.

The culture-match used for dispute resolution, including talking circles, work by creating a space for Native Americans and others to come and share in their experiences while an emotional awareness and development can take place for all participating members. Part of building relationships within the community means addressing some deeply rooted issues of colonization and racial discrimination. The talking circle in tandem with grounding individuals

in Lakota values creates a unified space identified through values that is culturally inclusive to Lakota members, other Native American families and to non-Native families as well. Rapid City Community Conversations shows us some of the challenges that arise for any social organization. Communication is a key component to a successfully run organization, from the top down; keeping the active members informed will only work to the organization's benefit. The ability of Rapid City Community Conversation to really begin to hold these deeper discussions surrounding colonialism, the shared history of the land, and begin to work through some of the more confrontational experiences had by all who attend will be dependent on the external communication that comes from RCCC. The work done on behalf of RCCC should be showcased in their advertisement and PR which would draw in membership as exposure rates increase.

The work that is taking place through Rapid City Community Conversations highlights the ability of an organization to utilize culturally responsive approaches to work with the Native communities existing within cities and urban spaces by providing a platform for them to speak about the experiences they have had to face. When an organization opens its doors to all the community, it must be prepared to face a diverse group of people and a diverse reaction to the work being done. Consensus can be a tool for creating a unified community, but the process to reach consensus can often be long and strenuous. The success of a group of individuals coming to consensus and working towards common goals can often seem daunting, but the rewards and capabilities of a group of people all working towards a shared goal can create positive forward thinking solutions and changes that some of the RCCC members who participated in the study spoke of. It becomes a matter of willingness of a social organization to be self-reflexive in its

approaches and be willing to restructure into an approach that suits the needs of the organization and the members it serves. Urban Native social organizations are acts of resistance against the extensive history of colonization and showcase the strengths of Native American peoples to continue to adapt and integrate their cultural traditions and practices into the ever-changing environment. Urban environments create added layers as these spaces often serve as a nexus for cultures to collide; Native American social organizations are one way in which Native Americans are creating connection to their cultures and cultural practices as they continue to live and exist in urban environments.

Appendix

Appendix A- Survey Questionnaire

Survey #_____

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your sex? _____

3. What is your gender? _____

4. Please specify your ethnicity:

   - White
   - Hispanic or Latino
   - African American
   - Native American or Alaskan Native
   - Asian/Pacific Islander
   - Other _____
   - If Native American or Alaskan Native, specify tribal affiliation _____

"Our mission is to foster a citizen dialogue that collaborates with community leaders to design innovative approaches to steadily reverse the long history of institutional and individual racism in our community. Native and non-native citizens are co-creating a new community that reflects our shared values and honors, respects, and keeps safe all of the people who live here"

5. In terms of their mission statement and values, how effective do you find Rapid City Community Conversations?
   (Rate on a scale of 1-10; 1=not effective at all; 10=effective)

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

6. What are your hopes for Rapid City Community Conversations to do for Rapid City?

7. Do you see these hopes being fulfilled as of now by Rapid City Community Conversations? If not, why?

8. How do you view the success of Rapid City Community Conversations?
   (Rate on a scale 1=not successful at all; 10=success)

   1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

9. What do you define as success? Successful?

10. How would you improve the success of Rapid City Community Conversations?

11. Do you find value in keeping Rapid City Community Conversations going?

12. Do you feel Rapid City Community Conversations to be inclusive to everyone?
    (Rate on a scale 1=not inclusive at all; 10=inclusive to all)

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

13. Do you feel Rapid City Community Conversations is inclusive in including and following through with peoples' ideas?
    (Rate on a scale 1=not inclusive at all; 10=inclusive to all)

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

14. Should Rapid City Community Conversations be restructured to be more inclusive? If so, how do you see that happening?

15. Do you feel Rapid City Community Conversation is accessible for all?
    (Rate on a scale 1=not accessible at all; 10 accessible to all)

    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

16. Should Rapid City Community Conversations be restructured to be more accessible to a wider audience? If so, how do you see that happening?

Appendix B- Interview Questions

Interview Questions
(order not rigid, jumping around will occur)

1. How would you define Urban Indian?
2. Does this differ from your understanding of a Native American in general? Why or How?
3. How would you define the atmosphere or culture that exists in Rapid City?
4. How are race relations within Rapid City?
5. Do you feel that the RCCC addresses social issues around race relations, etc. within the community and if so how?
6. How would you describe the structure of Rapid City Community Conversations?
7. Do you find this structure to be working or beneficial?
8. What is your understanding of Lakota governing protocols?
   (Read List of Protocols, not intended to be a complete list)
   Follow-up question:
9. Do these come across in the meetings for Rapid City Community Conversations?
10. What kind of actions are used to defuse a heated discussion or intense situation?
11. Are these actions effective?
12. If there was anything you could change about Rapid City Community Conversations what would it be? Why?
13. Is the lack of permanent meeting spaces contributing to the overall goals of Rapid City Community Conversation?

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