
CREATING REFLECTIVE SPACES FOR CHANGE: BUILDING A MORE INCLUSIVE LEGAL CULTURE BY CENTRING WOMEN LAWYERS’ VOICES THROUGH STORYTELLING AND REFLECTIVE PRACTICE

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* The first two authors, alongside Dr. Beth Bilson, KC, are the original developers of both Resources shared in this article created through CREATE Justice (the Centre for Research, Evaluation, and Action Towards Equal Justice at the University of Saskatchewan). Dr. Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk and Lawren Trotchie are two women who were invited to the table to advance the conversation. Article written in honour of the late Dr. Beth Bilson, KC, first woman dean of the University of Saskatchewan College of Law and partner on the Resources who passed during the writing of this paper. We will terribly miss having her at the many tables she occupied, but her spirit lives on in the Resources. We thank Michael Bergen, third year University of Saskatchewan College of Law student for his research assistance with this article. Finally, we are grateful to those who provided feedback at the People-Centred Justice Symposium on May 29, 2025, in Vancouver, British Columbia, at which this paper was workshopped.

Abstract

Focusing on the impact of a reflective storytelling initiative, this paper explores how centring women lawyers' voices supports meaning-making and validation within a context of persistent gender disparity. Women, especially those from equity-seeking groups, continue to face systemic barriers in the legal profession.¹ Though we centre the voices of women lawyers collectively, we do not treat "women" as one homogeneous category. We recognize that gender is experienced through intersecting structures of race, Indigeneity, and institutional power. Women enter "the legal profession and private practice in record numbers," however, they also "leave private practice in disproportionate numbers."² This imbalance raises questions about how a more equitable, person-centred justice system could support a healthier profession and a fair and accessible justice system.

One promising avenue lies in creating reflective spaces that centre the voices of equity-seeking groups, validate lived experiences, and challenge systemic norms. To explore this, two initiatives were launched to centre women's voices: *Creating a Seat at the Table: Reflections from Women in Law* (2023) and *Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast* (2023–2024). We then conducted a survey (2024) evaluating their impact. Results of the survey found that ninety-four per cent of participants reported positive outcomes from engaging with the initiatives.

These results suggest that reflective storytelling is more than a tool for personal validation; it can serve as a catalyst for professional inspiration and broader systemic transformation. By amplifying women's and members of other equity-seeking groups' experiences, such initiatives have the potential to shift legal culture toward greater inclusivity, equity, and sustainability in the profession, and support the culture shift required for a healthy legal profession and healthy justice system, capable of providing access to justice for all citizens. This paper presents the original survey data, situates the initiative within a theoretical framework, and makes an argument about the conditions necessary—*vulnerability and authenticity, trust and safety, courage, and humility and empathy*—for reflective spaces to drive systemic change and how these elements relate to the book and podcast.

¹. Saskatchewan Justicia Project, *Workplace Policies and Practices for Lawyer Retention and Advancement: Results of Two Surveys of the Members of the Law Society of Saskatchewan* (Regina: Law Society of Saskatchewan, October 2016), online (pdf): <<https://www.lawsociety.sk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Justicia2016onlinefinal.pdf>> [Justicia Project].

². *Ibid* at 5.

I INTRODUCTION

*Stories . . . are a way that we can talk to each other without having barriers between us.*³

—Maria Campbell

Canadian society is diverse, with communities composed of a range of genders and cultural, ethnic, and racial groups. As such, Canadian law schools, law societies, and other justice-sector leaders and organizations have a unique responsibility to ensure their professions are sufficiently representative of the communities they serve. In Saskatchewan, as of 2024, only forty-two per cent of active lawyers were women.⁴ This figure is slightly below national trends, which reflect a near numerical equality, yet ongoing disparities in representation as senior leaders persist.⁵ Ensuring the legal profession is representative of Canadian society will help to foster a more inclusive justice system.⁶ In sociopolitical contexts, such as the legal profession, there exists a tension, shaping whose experiences are recognized and whose remain marginalized—highlighting the need for approaches such as the reflective spaces explored in this study. A more inclusive justice system is one that uplifts the voices of those often silenced, enhancing decision-making processes with different perspectives, experiences, and ideas at the table.⁷ Lawyers occupy influential leadership roles within legal institutions and across the broader justice system, shaping not only legal outcomes but also professional norms—improved client relationships, whereby clients may be more likely to trust and feel comfortable with legal professionals who understand their cultural or individual needs⁸ (i.e., gender-based) increases employee engagement and fosters a better workplace culture for all in the system.

An inclusive and equitable legal culture will lead to a more diverse legal profession. A diverse legal profession is a necessary component of improving access to justice (A2J). The judiciary and the legal profession are vital public institutions that rely on the public's trust to maintain their legitimacy.⁹ This legitimacy is premised on the notion that the legal

³ Maria Campbell, “What Reading and Storytelling Means to Maria Campbell,” on *The Next Chapter* (CBC Radio One broadcast, 1 August 2020), online: <<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/full-episode-aug-1-2020-1.5341254/what-reading-and-storytelling-means-to-maria-campbell-1.5341409>>.

⁴ Law Society of Saskatchewan, *2024 Annual Report Regulating the Practice of Law in the Public Interest* (Regina: Law Society of Saskatchewan, 2025) at 20 [Law Society SK Report].

⁵ See generally, Canadian Bar Association, “The Rise of Female-Led Law Firms in Canada” (2025), online: <<https://www.cba.org/sections/women-lawyers/member-articles/the-rise-of-female-led-law-firms-in-canada>>; Ruhana Chowhan, *Statistics Report 2022* (Ottawa: Federation of Law Societies of Canada, 2023), online (pdf): <<https://flsc.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/FederationStatisticsReport2022.pdf>>; Law Society of Ontario, *Annual Report 2024* (Toronto: Law Society of Ontario, 2024), online: <<https://lso.ca/about-lso/governance/annual-report/annual-report-2024>>.

⁶ Justicia Project, *supra* note 1.

⁷ See generally Joyce Green, ed, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Black Point, NS: Fernwood Publishing, 2007).

⁸ See generally Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics” (1989) 1 U Chicago Legal F 139 [Crenshaw].

⁹ Zoe Johansen-Hill, Larissa Meredith-Flister & Coleman Owen, *Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession* (Saskatoon: Dean’s Forum on Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution, 2019) at 3–4 [Johansen-Hill et al (2019)].

profession will protect the public interest and is also accompanied by the responsibility and privilege to self-regulate.¹⁰ Some of the key components of the legal profession that uphold this legitimacy include professionalism, civility, and equal access to the law by the communities the profession and institutions serve.¹¹ Ensuring and maintaining diversity is fundamental to these components because a diverse legal profession is essential to ensure access to the legal system by all members of the community and that each member and group is served equally.¹² A more diverse legal profession better ensures that the diverse needs of clients and communities are met, as firms and institutions are better equipped to understand these needs.¹³

Despite equal numbers of women entering law schools since the 1980s, women continue to leave the legal profession, particularly private practice, at disproportionate rates.¹⁴ This attrition is often linked to gender discrimination, systemic bias, and the challenge of balancing personal and professional responsibilities.¹⁵ These barriers are even more pronounced for women with intersecting marginalized identities, including Indigenous women, women of colour, members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community, and women with disabilities. These barriers reflect the history of Canada's legal profession as being "one of the exclusion of women, Aboriginal peoples, ethnic and racialized groups, and those from less privileged classes."¹⁶

¹⁰ Carman J Overholt, "Diversity and Professionalism in the Practice of Law" (2011) 44:1 UBC L Rev 91 at 94.

¹¹ Law Society of Saskatchewan Equity and Access Committee, "Promoting Equity, Diversity and Inclusion" (6 May 2021), online: <lawsociety.sk.ca/diversity-inclusion-equity/promoting-equity-diversity-and-inclusion> [perma.cc/9FAA-WRY4].

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ Hon Phyllis D Thompson, "Focus on Diversity: Why Diversity Must Matter to the Bar Admissions Community," online: (2020) 89:1 Bar Examiner <thebarexaminer.ncbex.org/article/fall-2020/why-diversity-must-matter-to-the-bar-admissions-community> [perma.cc/6UEH-9BUQ].

¹⁴ Beth Bilson, Leah Howie & Brea Lowenberger, *Creating a Seat at the Table: Reflections from Women in Law* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2023) at xxiii [Bilson et al (2023)]; see footnotes 3–4 at xx for some examples of the extensive body of research that now exists concerning women in the legal profession. There is a voluminous body of literature which is available to draw on (especially in the areas of feminist legal studies, storytelling and narrative, marginality in the legal profession, EDI, and racial dominance). See e.g. Task Force on Gender Equality in the Legal Profession, *Touchstones for Change: Equality, Diversity and Accountability* (Ottawa: Canadian Bar Association, 1993); Susan Robertson, *A Study of Gender and the Legal Profession: A Report to the Law Society of Saskatchewan 1990–1991*, (Saskatoon: Canadian Bar Association Saskatchewan Branch and the College of Law, University of Saskatchewan, 1992); Beth Bilson, Susan Robertson & Elizabeth Quinlan, *Women and the Legal Profession in Saskatchewan: National and Historical Comparisons: A Report to the Law Society of Saskatchewan, Canadian Bar Association, Saskatchewan Branch and the Law Foundation of Saskatchewan* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan, 2013) [Bilson et al (2013)]; Law Society of Saskatchewan, "Saskatchewan Justicia Project" (13 March 2023), online: <sk.ca/initiatives/saskatchewan-justicia-project> [perma.cc/758A-UYJR].

¹⁵ See generally Fiona M Kay, Stacy L Alarie & Jones K Adjei, "Undermining Gender Equality: Female Attrition from Private Law Practice" (2016) 50:3 Law & Soc'y Rev 766 [Kay et al (2016)]; Law Society of British Columbia, *The Business Case for Retaining and Advancing Women Lawyers in Private Practice* (Vancouver: Law Society of British Columbia, 2009), online (pdf): <https://www.lawsociety.bc.ca/getContentAsset/5c33d867-c627-41b1-b67c-f4851d41e37f/dfc3d011-8f63-43f6-9ed8-4b444333a1d0/Retaining-women-business-case.pdf>.

¹⁶ Joan Brockman, *Gender in the Legal Profession: Fitting or Breaking the Mould* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2001) at 3.

While the presence of women in legal spaces is no longer considered unusual, full professional equality remains elusive.¹⁷ Numerous reports, including those from, for example, our local regulator, the Law Society of Saskatchewan, have identified key areas for action: hiring and advancement, mentorship, consultation, and training.¹⁸ Yet, despite decades of awareness, profession-wide change has been slow, and many of the same barriers persist.¹⁹

This paper summarizes an initiative undertaken following the 2019 meeting of the Dean's Forum on Access to Justice and Dispute Resolution at the University of Saskatchewan College of Law (the Forum) that focused on "Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession."²⁰ During the Forum, some participants identified that "despite knowing this problem exists and wanting to address it for decades, there has been little profession-wide change over the years" and the "same barriers and disadvantages continue to persist."²¹ Following the Forum, three of the attendees launched two initiatives: *Creating a Seat at the Table: Reflections from Women in Law* (2023) and *Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast* (2023–2024) (the Resources). Grounded in three interrelated frameworks—reflective practice, transformative learning theory, and allyship—the Resources aimed to validate lived experiences, build community, and inspire systemic change. The initiative, further described below, was anchored in inviting reflections from eighteen women graduates of the University of Saskatchewan College of Law.

A. Summary of the Initiative

The initiative centred on publishing *Creating a Seat at the Table: Reflections from Women in Law* (2023), followed by producing *Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast* (2023–2024). *Creating a Seat at the Table* is a collection of works written by women who have graduated

¹⁷. There is an extensive body of research and commentary on the experiences of women in the legal profession. For further information on this topic, see generally Constance Backhouse, "Gender and Race in the Construction of 'Legal Professionalism': Historical Perspectives," in Adam Dodek and Alice Woolley (eds), *In Search of the Ethical Lawyer: Stories from the Canadian Legal Profession* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016); John Hagan and Fiona Kay, "Hierarchy in Practice: The Significance of Gender in Ontario Law Firms," in Carol Wilton (ed), *Essays in the History of Canadian Law, vol. 7, Inside the Law: Canadian Law Firms in Historical Perspective* (Toronto: Osgoode Society for Canadian Legal History, 1996); Kay et al, *supra* note 15 at 766; Fiona M Kay, "Crossroads to Innovation and Diversity: The Careers of Women Lawyers in Quebec" (2002) McGill LJ 47; Mary Jane Mossman, *The First Women Lawyers: A Comparative Study of Gender, Law and the Legal Profession* (Oxford: Hart, 2006); Fiona Kay, Christi Masuch, and Paula Curry, *Diversity and Change: The Contemporary Legal Profession in Ontario* (Toronto: Law Society of Upper Canada, 2004); John Hagan and Fiona Kay, *Gender in Practice: A Study of Lawyers' Lives* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Elizabeth Sheehy and Sheila McIntyre, *Calling for Change: Women, Law, and the Legal Profession* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2006); and Fiona M Kay, Stacey L Alarie, and Jones Adei, "Leaving Private Practice: How Organizational Context, Time Pressures, and Structural Inflexibilities Shape Departures from Private Law Practice" (2013) 20:2 L & Soc'y Rev 1223

¹⁸. Law Society SK Report, *supra* note 4.

¹⁹. Adam Dodek suggests that law firm diversity and inclusion initiatives have had, at best, limited success "because discrimination against those who don't fit the profession's image of a lawyer is deeply entrenched in the profession and in society." Adam Dodek, *Heenan Blaikie: The Making and Unmaking of a Great Canadian Law Firm* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2024) at 175.

²⁰. Johansen-Hill et al (2019a), *supra* note 9; Zoe Johansen-Hill, Larissa Meredith-Flister & Coleman Owen, *Follow-Up Report & Summary Notes: Diversity and Inclusion in the Legal Profession* (Saskatoon: University of Saskatchewan College of Law, 2019) [Johansen-Hill et al (2019b)].

²¹. *Ibid* at 7.

from the University of Saskatchewan College of Law. In 2019–2020, the Resource creators identified eighteen women who were graduates of the law school, which included an equal number who were well-established in the profession, some just starting out, and others mid-career. More recent graduates were invited to write a letter to their future self, or someone in the future, reflecting on the personal course they are anticipating, on what their experience in legal education and the legal profession has meant for them, and on how their gender may affect their experiences. Mid- and later-career legal professionals were, contrastingly, invited to write a letter to their younger selves reflecting on the course their career has taken and on how their gender may have affected their experiences. The stories share vulnerable experiences, hard lessons learned, career advice, and more. The central theme of the book is aptly described by the Honourable Beverly McLachlin in the foreword as follows: “What is it like to be a woman in law? That is the question at the heart of this book, a collection of candid letters written by women who have walked the walk and talked the talk of a profession in the law.”²²

The letters were compiled and circulated among the contributors in advance of a one-day workshop in Saskatoon in June 2022. Contributors were invited to examine both what they have in common with others and what is distinctive about their own experience, as well as to read about reflective practice in advance of the workshop. The gathering began with a writing bundle workshop with Maria Campbell, who reminded participants about the power of stories and storytelling. Contributors were also invited to engage in “transformative scenario planning,”²³ which involved imagining a five-year and thirty-year plan for change. Specifically, in small groups, contributors were invited to imagine a future where none of the challenges they identified in their letters exist, and what their hopes are for the future practice of law. After contributors completed the exercise, they were invited to post their list of aspirations on the wall. Once the small groups established what a possible future could look like, the Resource creators asked what this utopian scenario says about what the legal profession can and what it must do.

The discussion and ideas for next steps identified at the workshop were used by the Resource creators as the basis of our own contribution to the initiative, the introductory and concluding chapters of the book, which drew out the main themes arising from the stories and from the discussion itself and placed them in a social and historical context.

Alongside publishing the book in the fall of 2023, the Resource creators also obtained funding and started and finished Season 1 of “Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast” in fall 2023–spring 2024.²⁴ The goal in creating the podcast was to build on and bring the book “to life” to create space for brave and honest conversations. Most episodes feature one of the contributors to the book and a letters segment in which Dr. Beth Bilson, KC, responds to messages sent in by listeners.

This initiative, as a whole, supported an iterative process of reflection (the book), followed by the transformation of this reflective practice into active dialogue (the podcast), and then empirical research to assess its impact (the survey). This is the first time something like this

²² Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14 at xv.

²³ Adam Kahane, *Transformative Scenario Planning: Working Together to Change the Future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2017).

²⁴ Brea Lowenberger et al, “Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast: Sweeping Away the Cobwebs” (14 July 2024), online (podcast): <directory.libsyn.com/episode/index/show/2a2bf592-8b65-4182-bfcc-0bff9909a205/id/29932538> [perma.cc/KYA8-M773].

has been done in Saskatchewan. Given the evolutionary nature of this work, the survey (2024) revealed that the Resources resonated deeply with participants (ninety-one per cent women), offering emotional validation, professional inspiration, and a call for change. This paper presents our evolving story, active insights, and subsequent research through the following four sections: Section II, Our Why; Section III, Theoretical Foundations; Section IV, Data Insights on the Impact of the Book and Podcast; and Section V, Reflections and Conclusions on the conditions necessary for reflective spaces to drive systemic change. We intentionally break from the traditional presentation of empirical research and have chosen an illustrative lens through which to tell the story of this work.

Through the first two sections, we present the context, problem, and conceptual framing, with embedded participant quotes highlighting the power of this work, situating participant voices upfront. The final sections share an empirical lens, highlighting the methods, results, and a data discussion in more depth. This framing allows us to respect the arc of storytelling situating people first. The findings argue that reflective storytelling is a powerful tool for advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging in the legal profession, and explores how reflective spaces, created through storytelling, dialogue, and community, can support the retention, empowerment, and leadership development of legal professionals. The paper concludes with four conditions for reflective spaces for change—*vulnerability and authenticity, trust and safety, courage, and humility and empathy*—derived from interactions with the survey respondents, the participants, and the authors as a launching point for further reflection and action.

II OUR WHY: CELEBRATING THE SUCCESS OF WOMEN IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION AND INSPIRING ACTION TOWARD A HEALTHIER LEGAL PROFESSION AND JUSTICE SYSTEM

At the time of launching this initiative, the concept of wellness in the legal profession and justice system and its connection with A2J was top of mind. The three women who edited the book and created the podcast (the Resource creators) are all law school graduates who have had their own unique experiences and have practised law at some point during their professional careers, and thus they have a personal interest and connection to women's journeys through the practice of law. The Resource creators were also aware of the connections between the individual well-being of legal professionals, the health of law firms and organizations, and a healthy, well-functioning justice system that is accessible to all citizens.

The same year that the Dean's Forum addressed equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) in the legal profession and its relation to A2J in 2019, the Federation of Law Societies of Canada's annual conference highlighted a lack of well-being in the legal profession and an urgent need for systemic changes.²⁵ As findings from a related study that was launched following the conference, "Towards a Healthy and Sustainable Practice of Law in Canada" (2020–2022),

²⁵ Federation of Law Societies of Canada, "Wellness of the Legal Profession" (Federation of Law Societies of Canada, 2025), online: <<https://flsc.ca/what-we-do/wellness-of-the-legal-profession>>.

also known as the “Sherbrooke Report,”²⁶ would confirm, women in the Canadian legal profession scored in the highest levels of psychological distress (63.7 per cent),²⁷ anxiety symptoms (42.6 per cent),²⁸ and burnout (specifically, “[w]omen legal professionals under 40 years of age [67.4 per cent]).²⁹ As two survey respondents, one near the beginning and one near the end of their careers, noted:

I strongly believe that we have a problem in our profession with how we treat women and why so many women choose to leave the profession within a few short years of practice. The time pressures and stress of this profession has made me think about not being a lawyer in the future, particularly if I have children.³⁰

It’s a constant struggle and I feel like I’ve been in this career for as long as I possibly can and it’s time to pull the ejection seat. I guess this is what burnout feels like. In [province], there has been talk throughout my entire career . . . of the importance of retention of women in the practice of law, and yet, nothing has changed in over a decade. I still feel like I can’t succeed as a mother and a lawyer. For me, the choice is clear, and I will choose my family and mental health. The problem is finding an alternative position that will still financially support my family.³¹

The report highlighted the gender gap in wellness in the legal profession, finding that “[t]here is a significant difference between men and women for all of the mental health indicators used in this study—psychological distress, anxiety, depressive symptoms, and burnout ($p \leq .001$).”³² Findings confirmed “women in the legal profession may be more affected by mental health issues than their counterparts who are men.”³³

Legal professionals across Canada increasingly recognize that diversity, inclusion, and belonging are essential not only for equity within the profession but also for improving A2J. As the Law Society of Saskatchewan’s 2021 study revealed, a majority of members believe that challenges faced by equity-seeking groups directly affect A2J.³⁴ Similarly, the Canadian Bar Association has called for more inclusive judicial appointments, emphasizing that justice must not alienate those it serves.³⁵

²⁶ Nathalie Cadieux et al, *Towards a Healthy and Sustainable Practice of Law in Canada* (Sherbrooke: Université de Sherbrooke, 2022).

²⁷ *Ibid* at 27.

²⁸ *Ibid* at 34.

²⁹ *Ibid* at 47.

³⁰ *Ibid* at 166.

³¹ *Ibid* at 165.

³² *Ibid* at 185.

³³ *Ibid* at 185.

³⁴ Law Society SK Report, *supra* note 4 at 3.

³⁵ Canadian Bar Association, “CBA Joins National Call for More Diversity in Judicial Appointments” (14 September 2020), online: <<https://www.cba.org/news/canadian-bar-association-joins-national-call-for-more-diversity-in-judicial-appointments/?feed=2017>>.

Yet inclusion is not just about representation; it's about retention, well-being, and creating spaces where women and other marginalized professionals can thrive. This paper responds to that call by exploring how reflective spaces—through storytelling, dialogue, and community—can support women in law and catalyze systemic change. Through the *Creating a Seat at the Table* anthology and *Dear Beth . . .* podcast, this initiative offers a model for fostering belonging, amplifying voices, and building a healthier legal profession.

III THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS: REFLECTIVE PRACTICE, TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING, AND ALLYSHIP AS DRIVERS OF CHANGE

The Resources are grounded in three interrelated conceptual and practice-based foundations: reflective practice, transformative learning, and allyship. While we refer to these as interrelated foundations, we recognize that they operate at different levels: transformative learning offers a formal theoretical account of how perspectives change, whereas reflective practice and allyship function as applied frameworks that guide such learning in this context. Together, these concepts form a framework for understanding and addressing systemic barriers in the legal profession. Transformative learning enables individuals to critically reflect on and reframe underlying assumptions leading to intentional shifts and deeper meaning³⁶; reflective practice fosters self-awareness and collective insight³⁷; and allyship translates reflection and learning into sustained, equity-driven change.³⁸ Each is essential, not only for personal growth, but for building a legal culture that supports inclusion, belonging, and justice. The following sections define the theoretical foundations and how the Resource creators moved this work from “theory” to “action” through developing the Resources.

A. Reflective Practice

Reflective practice was first coined by Schön in describing how professional competence can be engendered through a dialogue of “thinking and doing through which [one] becomes more . . . skillful.”³⁹ The term has been further developed and refined beyond this original reflection on practice to include critical reflection, self-reflection, and collective reflection.⁴⁰

To briefly summarize, *reflection on practice* could involve the legal practitioner learning in action, whereby their technical competence is improved through reflection on experience and learning from their practice, including skill, technique, and expertise; *self-reflection* requires building a capacity for self-awareness and self-knowledge to strengthen one's professionalism; *critical reflection* leads to the creation of new professional knowledge through reflecting

³⁶ Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

³⁷ Donald Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think in Action* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

³⁸ Lucy De Souza & Toni Schmader, “When People Do Allyship: A Typology of Allyship Action” (2025) 29:1 *Personality & Soc Psychology Rev* 3 at 5.

³⁹ Michele Leering, “Conceptualizing Reflective Practice for Legal Professionals” (2014) 23:1 *J of L and Soc Pol'y* 83 at 85 [Leering].

⁴⁰ *Ibid* at 99–101.

on the role of law in society and unpacking assumptions through the deconstruction of current knowledge.⁴¹ Finally, *collective reflection* is “reflecting in community” by challenging assumptions and beliefs to create new understandings through dialogue. All three aspects of reflective practice are important:

A reflective legal practitioner integrates all three aspects of reflection through a continuous spiraling from one aspect to another, developing additional insight, knowledge and wisdom, enhancing professional competence, and fostering authenticity . . . The integrated reflective practitioner is self-aware and critically reflects on practice and theory as a self-directed lifelong learner, reflects collectively and in community, and takes action to improve his or her practice. Reflective practice becomes a “way of being.”⁴²

The concept of reflective practice has since been adopted by professions such as medicine, education, nursing, architecture, and social work, but it has only recently begun to gain a foothold in legal education, scholarship, and professional development in the legal profession.⁴³ Beyond other professions, reflective practice also has a place in cultures outside of this Western conception, including in Indigenous ways of learning.⁴⁴

In relation to the Resources, contributors and readers/listeners were invited to engage in self-reflection, critical reflection, and collective reflection on the topic of women in law. Individual and collective reflection has the potential to foster real change by taking the issue of diversity personally and reflecting on how behaviours, personally and organizationally, contribute to or even create barriers:⁴⁵

The capacity to reflect collectively with peers, colleagues, and others increases the rigour of reflection, interrogates assumptions, and supports learning from others. It also builds the capacity for generative dialogue to create new knowledge and envision new possibilities: this capacity is crucial for tackling access to justice challenges. A final component is “praxis”—making sure one acts on the insights gleaned from reflection.⁴⁶

At the 2019 Dean’s Forum, themes of reflective practice and leadership, “a new standard of professionalism and sense of accountability to each other,”⁴⁷ emerged as imperative to the culture shift needed to more meaningfully advance EDI in the legal profession. The follow-up report from the Forum, which was an impetus for our approach to the initiative, emphasized the role for reflective practice in improving EDI in the legal profession:

⁴¹. *Ibid* at 93–98.

⁴². *Ibid* at 105.

⁴³. *Ibid* at 85.

⁴⁴. *Ibid*.

⁴⁵. Johansen-Hill et al (2019b), *supra* note 20 at 8.

⁴⁶. Michele Leering, “Enhancing the Legal Profession’s Capacity for Innovation: The Promise of Reflective Practice and Action Research for Increasing Access to Justice” (2017) 34:1 Windsor YB Access Just 189 at 198.

⁴⁷. Johansen-Hill et al (2019b), *supra* note 20 at 8.

A strong theme of individual and collective reflection emerged. We hope that this theme will continue to resonate and build moving forward. We think that taking the issue personally and reflecting on how our own behaviours, personally and organizationally, contribute to or even create barriers for others is an important component of change. Blaming individuals, blaming society, or relying on future generations has not proven to create the changes necessary.⁴⁸

As indicated, thus far, “blaming individuals, society, and institutions, or relying on future generations, has not proven to create the changes necessary [to improve EDI in the legal profession].”⁴⁹ Greater integration of rigorous reflective practice across the legal education continuum (i.e., during and after law school) would better foster the development of a “reflective muscle” in law students and legal professionals, enabling them to learn from and act upon reflective insights, including transformative learning, and move toward active allyship.

B. Transformative Learning

Critical reflection further supports transformative learning, which in turn supports a “nascent inclination for social justice, helping law students [and professionals] develop a perspective on professional responsibility that includes a desire to increase access to justice.”⁵⁰ The transformative learning process involves transforming taken-for-granted frames of reference to make them more inclusive, open, capable of change (emotionally), discriminating, and reflective, thereby generating beliefs and opinions that prove to be more true or justified to guide action.⁵¹ Transformative learners become more critically reflective about their assumptions, more critically involved in reflective discourse with others, and better prepared to take action based on new understandings. Furthermore, some legal professors feel that “the more opportunities that there are for self-critical reflection, the more aware people will become of social justice and A2J issues.”⁵²

According to Jack Mezirow, transformative learning has ten phases: (1) disorienting dilemma—a person’s current meaning structure does not match a previous experience; (2) self-examination—learners do a self-test of their beliefs and understandings and think about how past experiences connect to the recent dilemma, whereby a perspective transformation may result when they realize their perspective may not be the only perspective; (3) a critical assessment of assumptions; (4) recognition that others have shared a similar transformation; (5) exploration of new roles or actions; (6) development of a plan for action; (7) acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing the plan for action; (8) trying out the plan; (9) development of competence and self-confidence in new roles; (10) reintegration into life on the basis of new perspectives.⁵³

⁴⁸. *Ibid.*

⁴⁹. *Ibid.*

⁵⁰. Leering, *supra* note 39 at 97.

⁵¹. Jack Mezirow et al, *Learning as Transformation: Critical Perspectives on a Theory in Progress* (San Francisco: Jossey Bass, 2000) at 7–8.

⁵². Leering, *supra* note 39 at 97.

⁵³. John M Dirkx, “Transformative Learning Theory in the Practice of Adult Education: An Overview” (1998) 7 PAACE J of Lifelong Learning 1.

How these phases unfolded in contributors' accounts in the Resources and in those who have engaged with the Resources is outlined in Section 3.

C. Allyship

Allyship refers to actions taken by individuals who belong to an advantaged group and is characterized as support where there is unequal status between individuals.⁵⁴ Allyship is an action oriented practice that expands beyond calls to action.⁵⁵ Allyship actions can occur at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and institutional levels. Intrapersonal *reactive* allyship focuses on self-regulation to address personal biases and aims to reduce the harm caused by one's own biases; whereas *proactive* allyship involves actively engaging with marginalized groups to broaden one's perspectives and aims to increase cultural competence.⁵⁶

Majority groups can be engaged, trained, and supported to act as "active allies."⁵⁷ Allyship is not a title, but rather involves taking action, which is necessary to shift individuals to be more inclusive and to transform systems into more equitable ones.⁵⁸ The Equity Ally Activation Model can be used to activate and support equity allies and aid in advancing the rate of change toward gender equity in male-dominated fields.⁵⁹ The model consists of four stages: *awareness* is the stage where individuals become aware of inequities to themselves or others; the *support-seeking* stage is where people will question and seek to understand their experiences with inequity; in the *realizing stage*, individuals may process past experiences, grow skills, and find community and acceptance over inequities they have witnessed or experienced; and finally, in the *leading change* stage, activated allies are skilled and motivated to practise inclusion and work to shift the perspective of others.⁶⁰ In reference to these four stages, the Resources contribute to the first three—awareness, support-seeking, and realizing—with the hope of readers/listeners moving into the fourth *leading change* stage.

In practice, this can take many different forms: leadership, allyship, mentorship, and collaboration. Raising awareness may require encouraging reflection on privilege and intersectionality⁶¹ via workshops or self-guided learning, with case studies or surveys as means of surfacing inequities.⁶² Supportive environments will help foster safe spaces to do this work and may involve providing access to therapy, peer networks, or cultural support.⁶³ Structured training and self-guided learning can help facilitate the processing and growth that occur in the realization stage.⁶⁴ Finally, allyship actions should be encouraged by amplifying marginalized

⁵⁴ De Souza & Schmader, *supra* note 38 at 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid* at 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid* at 9–10.

⁵⁷ Jocelyn Peltier-Huntley & Jovita Dias, "Insights from Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Allies: Results from the Second Phase of an Interdisciplinary Study on the Retention of Underrepresented People in Mining" (2022) [unpublished] [Peltier-Huntley & Dias].

⁵⁸ *Ibid* at 2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid* at 7.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* at 7–8.

⁶¹ See generally Crenshaw, *supra* note 8.

⁶² Peltier-Huntley & Dias, *supra* note 57 at 4–6.

⁶³ *Ibid* at 5–6.

⁶⁴ *Ibid* at 6–8.

voices, advocating for inclusive policies, and challenging discriminatory norms.⁶⁵ It is important that performative allyship is avoided and that substantive action is prioritized over symbolic gestures, which includes centring marginalized voices in decision making.⁶⁶

Legal professionals exercise forms of leadership through influence, decision making, and participation in legal systems. Within this context, reflective practice and transformative learning support critical self-examination and shifts in perspective, while allyship provides a relational framework for acting on these insights in ways that support others and contribute to more equitable professional environments.

IV DATA INSIGHTS ON THE IMPACT OF THE BOOK AND PODCAST

This presentation of data takes two forms. The first is in a collective account of contributions made throughout the creation of the book and podcast, and the second is through a survey, sampling a group of individuals who had engaged with the Resources once published. The Resource creators received feedback on the impact of the Resources from the contributors to the book at a workshop held in spring 2022. Informally, they also received feedback from individuals who reviewed the book prior to publication, from guests on the podcast, and in many personal conversations the Resource creators had with readers and listeners to understand their experience and inform their work. The Resource creators were also interested in more formally learning about the impacts of the Resources, however, and exploring what some “conditions” were for actualizing authentic “reflective spaces for change.” The survey was designed and launched to assess particular questions in the fall of 2024. This section summarizes the key insights gained from these various data points regarding the impact of the Resources, including the conditions—that is, *vulnerability and authenticity, trust and safety, courage, and humility and empathy*—identified for reflective spaces for change.

A. Positionality

The researchers, as creators and users of the book and podcast, occupy an insider position in relation to the work under study. This proximity shaped data collection and interpretation and was approached reflexively, with attention to potential bias and the limits of the data. Our positions are inherently a part of this work, and our interest in reflective practice as an instrument of change urged us to engage in a reflective cycle to analyze the impact of this work. We claim no bracketing from the interpretations or results, as we feel this proximity provides rich, contextual insight.

^{65.} *Ibid* at 7.

^{66.} *Ibid* at 2–4

1. Methodology and Scope

a. Phase 1: Collective Contributions—Preliminary Data Gathering (Informal)

The first component draws on a collective account of contributions and feedback generated throughout the development of the book and podcast, including workshop discussions, pre-publication review, and informal conversations with contributors and audiences. While this material provides valuable practice-based insight, it was not collected systematically and is therefore presented as contextual and illustrative rather than as formal empirical data.

b. Phase 2: Survey—Post Publication (Formal)

This portion of formal data gathering employed a qualitative survey, approved by an institutional ethics review board, to gather participants' perspectives on the impact of the book and podcast. Responses were analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis.⁶⁷ A limited amount of quantitative data was collected; however, given the scope of the dataset, these data are reported descriptively and used to provide contextual insight rather than to support statistical inference. The survey was voluntary and shared via email to a variety of networked members who participated in various initiatives related to the Resources. Participants were asked to describe the impact of experiences with the Resources, as well as general life experiences that led them to the point they're at today. The participants were also asked to provide qualifying statements or examples of experiences or connections to the book (stories, etc.). Lastly, participants provided input or recommendations to support further development of these and other materials for various stakeholders.

The survey was distributed to a purposive sample of approximately 100 individuals who had engaged with the Resources: book contributors, original book sponsors, law school deans/professors, law students, lawyers, podcast participants, related mailing lists, and via social media accounts of CREATE Justice and the researchers. We also asked justice organizations such as the Law Society of Saskatchewan and the Canadian Bar Association Saskatchewan Chapter to share the survey. We were interested in feedback from anyone who had read the book or listened to the podcast. A total of twenty-four respondents participated, the majority of whom identified as female ($n = 22$), with one male and one non-binary participant. Participants represented a range of professional contexts—including academic institutions (law and non-law), community organizations, law firms, and government—and varied in legal experience from non-lawyers to practitioners with over 30 years in the field.

2. Limitations

This study is limited by a small, self-selected sample, an unknown sampling frame, and limited quantitative data, constraining the scope and generalizability of the findings, though generalizing was not a goal. The researchers' dual role, as related to the book and podcast and as analysts, introduces the potential for bias in both data generation and interpretation. These limitations were addressed through a reflexive analytic approach that emphasized transparency, collective discussion about developing themes, reflection, critical self-awareness, and caution in our claims. Given that the purpose of this process was to reflectively examine

⁶⁷. See generally Virginia Braun & Victoria Clarke, "Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology" (2006) 3:2 *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 77.

our own work in relation to the theoretical framing and to share a narrative grounded in our practice, the close connection between researchers and the subject matter is both appropriate and methodologically intentional. What follows are data insights intended for those interested in the impact of reflective practice through meaningful allied action, such as storytelling and participation in collective/reflective discussion.

a. Initial Data Insights (Phase 1—Informal): Reviewers, Contributors, and Podcast Guests

This section provides a sample of data insights from reviewers, contributors, and podcast guests, linking these perspectives to the theoretical foundations of reflective practice, transformative learning, and allyship described in Section III, and illustrating the conditions necessary for reflective spaces to drive systemic change. Reflective practice approaches were used throughout the project: contributors to the book were provided prompts and invited to engage in a creative reflective writing exercise through composing a letter; contributors were invited to engage in collective reflection through the workshop; and readers were invited through the book to engage in reflective practice as well as collective reflection at book club events. The same can be said for those who appeared on and listened to the podcast and were invited to engage in individual and collective reflection.⁶⁸ As defined in Section III, the aim with a reflective practice approach is ultimately toward advocacy (for self and others) and allyship.

For example, a sample account of *collective reflection* that occurred at the workshop from a contributor to the book, Kate Bilson, highlights hope and greater *authenticity* in a more inclusive legal profession:

What I learned in the workshop, however, is that all stories are worthy of being told, including those that illustrate hope. As we reimagine what utopia might look like for the legal profession—ideally, it is one that embraces diversity and showers acceptance, support, compassion, and flexible thinking—my wish is that my own career story will thread the possibility of hope for a professional environment where every member, regardless of background, client base, or identity, can be a valuable part of the dance troupe.⁶⁹

Book reviewers also commented on the impact of how *reflective practice* was used in the book. Dr. Michele Leering stated, “[The book contributors’] candid reflections about their struggles and triumphs moved me deeply. I feel appreciative of how the power of presence and place created the space to reflect collectively, and how reflective writing became a catalyst for unearthing such heartfelt insight.”⁷⁰ Gemma Smyth’s response to the book also highlighted the promise of culture shift through the theoretical foundations used in the book: “Ultimately a hopeful book, the authors indeed invite us into a narrative about how ‘the power of individual and collective reflection [can] lead to action and change.’”⁷¹

⁶⁸ See generally Leering, *supra* note 39.

⁶⁹ Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14 at 173.

⁷⁰ *Ibid* at Front Matter.

⁷¹ *Ibid*.

The contributors' reflections in the Resources and readers'/listeners' reactions to the Resources align with the various *ten transformative learning phases* discussed previously.⁷² The first reactions received in relation to the book, for example from the Honourable Beverley McLachlin, speak to phase 2, self-examination: "[A] lot of women practising law will, at some point in their careers, ask themselves the big question: was I right to choose the law?"⁷³ Other reflections on the book, such as those of Dr. Jaime Lavallee, speak to phase 4, the recognition that others have shared a similar transformation: "Read this book to know you're not alone."⁷⁴ Professor Gemma Smyth's reflections speak to phase 6, an invitation into developing a plan for action: "*Creating a Seat at the Table* creates community through storytelling. . . . [T]he authors indeed invite us into a narrative about how 'the power of individual and collective reflection [can] lead to action and change.'"⁷⁵

Brock Melnyk, a law student and podcast guest, identified the conditions of *humility* and *empathy* and the transformative potential of *Creating a Seat at the Table*, stating: "I think these young males entering law school, you know, some of them have had no work experience. And so, they don't know what it's like out in the world . . . I think reading books . . . like this book, *Creating a Seat at the Table*, it's so pivotal for their transformation into who they should be as a legal professional in that sense."⁷⁶

The most obvious place where the Resources fit into the *Equity Ally Activation Model* is in the awareness stage. Through the sharing of experiences of women in law, both Resources raise awareness of the inequities faced by women in law. They also fit into the support stage, as they can help individuals better understand their experiences with inequity. Similarly, the Resources can assist in the processing of past experiences that are found in the realizing stage. Allies may also begin to find community through the projects, for example, through book club discussions of the Resources. Although the Resources may not neatly fit into the leading change stage, they nonetheless can serve as an example of what "leading change" might look like as we work to shift the perspectives of those in the field of law through multiple mediums.

Observations from male podcast guests suggested that the Resources *raised awareness about the challenges experienced by many women in the legal profession*. Reflecting on the impact of *Creating a Seat at the Table* as a podcast guest, Professor Dwight Newman observed:

Early in the book there's reference to the idea that stories are the way that we can talk about things and bring attention to things. In a way that reaches across between people. I think it's also a way that really might bring statistics to life . . . We've all read about statistics about women in the legal profession. But here we have actual stories of women in the legal profession and what it's like to be there. So, we're not just reading about statistics.⁷⁷

⁷² See generally Jack Mezirow, *Transformative Dimensions of Adult Learning* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1991).

⁷³ Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14 at xvi.

⁷⁴ *Ibid* at Front Matter.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*.

⁷⁶ Brea Lowenberger et al, "Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast: You Can't Self-Help Your Way Out of Inequality, Oppression or Exhaustion" (15 April 2024) online (podcast): <directory.libsyn.com/episode/index/show/2a2bf592-8b65-4182-bfcc-0bff9909a205/id/30808693> [perma.cc/YQ59-F7P2].

⁷⁷ *Ibid*.

Similarly, Brock Melnyk, a male law student and podcast guest, highlighting *humility* and *empathy*, stated:

I think it was just very interesting to see all the different perspectives from women from all different backgrounds, walks of life in different areas of life and then just understanding their perspective a little bit better, I mean, I'll never fully be able to understand, but it's just nice to be able to try to put myself in their shoes . . . [R]eading this book as a young male entering the law industry, it really helped me put a grasp more on what are the potential issues that I may run into or things that I may not have noticed beforehand.⁷⁸

The Resources also increased awareness around some of the additional *challenges facing Indigenous women lawyers*. Courtenay Phillips, a book contributor and podcast guest, discussed the hope she experienced from the *courage* of her colleagues' reactions to her contribution:

I've also been really impressed with my colleagues that have reached out and said, you know what, we should do better. Like I had no idea that that was the experience of Indigenous law students. And I thought it was very brave for them to reach out. And I thought it gave me a lot of hope, in terms of thinking, okay, well, if this is reaching non-Indigenous people in a way that they aren't getting offended, where they're actually engaging with the ideas and thinking about how they can do better as lawyers. And that gave me both, I would say it gave us both hope in terms of now we're closer as colleagues. And that was something that I didn't expect.⁷⁹

The Resource creators were also encouraged by feedback from reviewers, contributors, and participants suggesting that the Resources were having an impact on their *well-being*. Dr. Rachel Loewen Walker, a book reviewer, stated: "I found myself jotting down quotes on scrap papers, feeling my eyes well up at times, and wanting to photocopy entire letters to share with future students. These are stories of tenacity, failure, and resilience, of disappointment, disillusionment, and inspiration. They are a chorus of resonant experiences."⁸⁰ Gemma Smyth observed that "*Creating a Seat at the Table* creates community through storytelling" and the *trust* and *safety* conditions book contributors had modelled, highlighting the "vulnerability, honesty and nuance in narratives where practical career advice co-exists alongside personal tragedy, all told through feminist lenses that invite the personal into the professional."⁸¹ Michaela Keet highlighted the *authentic* elements of the initiative, describing the book as containing "the warm words of friends and mentors—as if we were sitting together over a cup of coffee, sharing the real stories of our own lives, affirming each other's experiences, releasing it all."⁸²

^{78.} *Ibid.*

^{79.} Brea Lowenberger et al, "Dear Beth . . . A Women in Law Podcast: The Otherside: What Does Being an Accomplice Look Like?" (15 December 2023) online (podcast): <<https://directory.libsyn.com/episode/index/show/2a2bf592-8b65-4182-bfcc-0bff9909a205/id/29091218>> [perma.cc/T85S-7K8S] [Lowenberger].

^{80.} Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14 at Front Matter.

^{81.} *Ibid.*

^{82.} *Ibid.*

The Resource creators were also informed that the Resources were being used by the University of Saskatchewan College of Law's Well-Being Coordinator, Dr. Judy Jaunzems-Fernuk, when meeting with students: "I recommend the read and the podcast to every young woman who pops in for a visit, especially if she feels isolated or alone. This series is powerful, and it gives me an anchor for showing young women who will be the world's future lawyers that they have a community."⁸³

Michif lawyer and part-time assistant Professor Lawren Trotchie also reflected on her reaction to the *vulnerability*, *authenticity*, and *courage* conveyed in *Creating a Seat at the Table*, particularly Courtenay Phillips' contribution to the book:

Prior to the podcast I read Courtenay Phillips' reflection. Little did I know that I would be peering ahead into a journal that resembled all too closely my own journey as an Indigenous legal academic and lawyer. It hit me personally. As I read Courtenay's reflection, I had several emotions, including feelings of resemblance and similarity, feelings of sadness and loss, but also feelings of resilience, hope, guidance, and perseverance. When reading Courtenay's piece, I felt as though I was not alone for the first time. Sadly, a feeling that is all too common in my own path as an Indigenous lawyer. I knew before going to the podcast that I was going to be meeting a legal warrior, a legal giant as we call them, but more importantly, I knew I was pulling a seat up to a table where a woman just broke over 50 years of silence.⁸⁴

These same feelings were encountered again by lawyer and part-time assistant professor Lawren Trotchie during "The Otherside" episode of the *Dear Beth . . .* podcast with Courtenay Phillips. While speaking with Phillips and reflecting on the reading in the podcast, Trotchie stated: "And it was the first time that I could pick a piece up and read it, and actually really relate to it as an Indigenous lawyer, as an Indigenous student."⁸⁵

b. Survey Data Insights (Phase 2—Formal)

Encouraged by the insights and observations shared by contributors, participants, readers, and listeners, the authors set out to more formally study and measure the impacts of the Resources and to further explore what some "conditions" are for effective "reflective spaces for change" in a survey launched in the fall of 2024. The survey focused on reader/listener professional and personal lives, as well as their potential to foster reflective spaces for change within the legal profession (or broader communities).

The 2024 survey evaluating the Resources yielded insights into the impact of reflective spaces on women in the legal profession. As one participant noted, "[r]eflective spaces create genuine understanding and empathetic conversations," with another stating, "[t]hese spaces are critical for mental health and inclusivity." As indicated, engagement was limited but strong. One participant noted the *authenticity* of the stories, that is, "comfort and validation from

⁸³. Beth Bilson, Brea Lowenberg & Leah Howie, "Creating a Seat at the Table: Reflections from Women in Law," Newsletter (Summer 2024), online (pdf): <<https://law.usask.ca/createjustice/documents/projects/creating-a-seat-newsletter-summer-2024.pdf>>.

⁸⁴. Lowenberg, *supra* note 79.

⁸⁵. *Ibid.*

shared stories, alongside frustration about systemic issues,” which prompts a reaction. Of the data collected ($n = 24$), seventy-eight per cent had read some or all of the book, eighty-three per cent had listened to podcast episodes, and nearly half attended events. Notably, ninety-four per cent reported positive outcomes. Although this is a small dataset, it is important to highlight the overwhelmingly positive connections to the materials. Respondents expressed interest in future applications, including the use of the Resources in classrooms and professional training, and in developing companion workbooks and presentations.

The limited set of quantitative data revealed priority themes, including mentorship and sponsorship (fifty-eight per cent), systems change (fifty-two per cent), confronting unconscious bias (forty-seven per cent), and self-advocacy (fifty-eight per cent). Qualitative analysis reinforced these findings, identifying six interconnected themes: emotional response, empowerment and autonomy, mentorship and community, transformative potential, diversity and inclusion, and recognition of both progress and ongoing challenges. Participants described, for example, the *vulnerability* and *authenticity* of the stories, feeling validated (“The book and podcast boosted my sense of self and worth”) and being inspired (“Women have the freedom to own their stories”). And “[a]s female practitioners, we should be each other’s biggest cheerleaders,” while also emphasizing systemic barriers and the need for inclusive, accessible spaces that amplify underrepresented voices. Overall, the results demonstrate that reflective storytelling validates lived experience, fosters empowerment, and creates momentum for cultural and systemic change within the legal profession.

V REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose and goal of the Resources were always intended to be action oriented and to be a useful tool going forward. To that end, we have continuously reflected on the following questions since the Resources were launched:

1. Did the Resource creators, achieve what they set out to do?
2. What do we, the authors of this paper, suggest comes next?

A. Did the Resource Creators Achieve What They Set Out to Do?

As outlined previously in Section IV, yes, the Resource creators did achieve what they set out to do. The Resources are being used for collective and individual reflection with the intended audience (legal educators, practitioners, and researchers interested in well-being, professional identity, and A2J within the legal profession), and the initiative had a marked impact on well-being. We are aware of the following uses of the Resources:

- Well-being advising in the College of Law (2023–present)
- Judicial training in Alberta (2024)
- EDI-focused in-house learning opportunities (2024)
- EDI-focused government learning session (2024)
- Added to corporate resource library collections (2024)
- Being discussed among colleagues in private and public practice (2024–present)

- Book clubs being hosted in Saskatchewan [law firm], Alberta [law firm], Vancouver [CBA Women's Forum] (2024–present)
- The podcast is consistently in the top fifty per cent of podcasts in Canada (more than thirty-two downloads within seven days of release means a podcast episode is in the top fifty per cent of podcasts).⁸⁶ For example, episode “Sweeping Away the Cobwebs” attained eighty-seven downloads the first week it was released (2024)

The extent to which the Resources can lead to a culture shift via reflective practice, transformative learning, and increasing allyship in the legal profession requires a longitudinal study; however, the data we have gathered to date suggests the Resources have the potential to do both.

B. What Do We, the Authors of This Paper, Suggest Comes Next?

To answer this second question, we invited a couple of other women, both of whom were podcast guests and University of Saskatchewan College of Law colleagues, to “pull up a seat at the table.”⁸⁷ Drawing on our study of the Resources’ impact so far, we further describe below some of the “conditions” for “reflective spaces for change,” grounded in our interactions with survey respondents, participants, and our own experience:

- *vulnerability and authenticity*
- *trust and safety*
- *courage*
- *humility and empathy*

These conditions warrant further examination in future research. They should also be explicitly integrated into teaching and learning within legal education, both during and after law school. Respondents expressed interest in expanding the Resources through classroom use, professional training, and companion materials such as workbooks and presentations, which could more intentionally foster integration of the conditions in legal education settings. Below, we synthesize our observations on the four conditions for reflective spaces for change to help inform what could come next.

Our findings underscore the transformative potential of storytelling. We have learned that sharing stories in a *vulnerable* and *authentic* way can lead to reflective practice and transformative learning, and activate allies and support individual well-being. Readers and listeners consistently expressed how impressed, surprised, and grateful they were for the *vulnerability*, *authenticity*, and related *courage* embodied in the Resources. Two of the book’s initial reviewers made the following observations, alluding to the conditions:

This book weaves together humour, hard-wrought wisdom, and vulnerability with political insights from inside the practice of law. The authors range in years of experience and come from different starting places, including being

⁸⁶ Buzzsprout, “Buzzsprout Platform Stats” (May 2024), online: <buzzsprout.com/stats?date=2024-05-01> [perma.cc/C4L4-BTRG].

⁸⁷ Although Beth is not a named author, this section and a final bonus episode of the podcast is inspired by many conversations the authors shared with Beth on this topic during our writing dinner clubs of Fall 2024.

Indigenous or LBGTQTIA2S+, and all are courageous and generous in these revealing chapters.⁸⁸

—Dr. Val Napoleon, Cree legal scholar, professor, and Law Foundation Chair of Indigenous Justice and Governance

This collection of intimately candid and vulnerable narratives by diverse women in the legal profession exemplifies the art of storytelling at its best.⁸⁹

—Angela Ogang, on behalf of the CBA Women Lawyers Forum

In a profession where *vulnerability* can be seen as a weakness and where *authenticity* may run counter to the traditional norms around “what a lawyer looks like and how a lawyer acts,” it is not surprising that many readers and listeners took notice of the *vulnerability* and *authenticity* running through many of the contributions to the Resources.

At the end of the book, the Resource creators asked the following question: “How will you claim your seat at the table, create a seat at the table for the women coming behind you, or build an entirely new table altogether?”⁹⁰ The question the authors of this paper are now posing is *how can the legal profession enable and empower its members to create and support creating the conditions for reflective spaces for change in increasingly turbulent times?*

One pathway to better understand others’ perspectives can be fostered through developing “story stewardship.”⁹¹ Story stewardship involves *humility* and *empathy*, honouring the sacred nature of story and recognizing that we have been entrusted with something valuable that should be treated with respect and care.⁹² It requires curiosity and the intentional building of the conditions of narrative *trust* and psychological *safety* with someone as they tell you about what it is like to be in their shoes.⁹³ Second, we are hoping that striving toward creating these conditions will contribute to women and other equity-deserving groups to not only claim a seat at the table, but to “take your place and take the floor”⁹⁴ and be an ally in supporting others in doing so.

To build this capacity, reflective practice, including the conditions of *courage* and *empathy*, as employed in the Resources, play an important role. Lawren Trotchie, for example, expressed story stewardship in honouring the path that Courtenay Phillips paved in her contribution to *Creating a Seat at the Table* during “The Otherside” podcast:

And it was nice to, it was nice for you to create that bridge for me and for other Indigenous students that are coming from the law school. So, I saw the risk that you put into that. I felt the risk that you put into that and it’s sad to

⁸⁸. Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14 at Front Matter.

⁸⁹. *Ibid.*

⁹⁰. *Ibid* at 256.

⁹¹. Brene Brown, “The Practice of Story Stewardship” (5 December 2021), online: <brenbrown.com/articles/2021/12/05/the-practice-of-story-stewardship> [perma.cc/WRJ2-68W2].

⁹². *Ibid.*

⁹³. *Ibid.*

⁹⁴. This quote is based on the title of an exhibit on chairs: *Taking Your Place, Taking the Floor* (2025) held at the Canadian Museum of History.

say this, but often what ends up happening is that when we want big change, it takes people who are brave enough like you to actually move that.⁹⁵

Trotchie came away with several thoughtful, *empathy-driven* questions after her experience in the podcast: “After the podcast, I kept asking myself, what do we need do as a legal profession to ensure that voices like Courtenay’s and my own are not silenced? How do we create safe spaces to amplify the voices of women and particularly Indigenous women in the legal profession?” While there are several avenues to explore in answering these questions, we can begin by advancing the conditions for reflective spaces for change. These conditions must be developed with an explicit recognition that, in minority contexts, expecting those affected to do the teaching places an unfair burden on those already navigating inequity.⁹⁶ This in turn prompts a critical question: *Whose responsibility is it to create reflective spaces for change, and what role do you play in shaping those spaces?*

“Vulnerability is the birthplace of innovation, creativity and change.”⁹⁷ This moment marks an opportunity for a meaningful cultural shift within the legal profession—one that prioritizes *vulnerability and authenticity, trust and safety, courage, and humility and empathy*—fostering both individual growth and systemic change. Building on our findings, this paper offers concrete suggestions for future directions, including the intentional integration of reflective storytelling spaces within legal education and professional development to support well-being, professional identity formation, and more equitable legal practice.

⁹⁵. Bilson et al (2023), *supra* note 14.

⁹⁶. See generally Joyce Green, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism* (Black Point: Fernwood Publishing, 2007); bell hooks, *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (Boston: South End Press, 1984).

⁹⁷. Brené Brown, “Listening to Shame,” TEDxHouston (2013), YouTube, online: <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psN1DORYYV0>>.