Centering Stories by Urban Indigiqueers/Trans/Two-Spirit People and Indigenous Women on Practices of Decolonization, Collective-Care and Self-Care.

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Trigger & content warning

Some content in this thesis may refer directly or indirectly to:

- Colonization
- Trauma / intergenerational trauma
- Death and dying
- After-death care and funeral services
- Child welfare system, the 60s Scoop, residential schools
- Physical/sexual violence
- Child abuse
- Emotional abuse
- Slurs, stereotypes, racism
- Addictions including drug or alcohol abuse
- Suicide and self-harm

Abstract

Centering Stories by Urban Indigiqueers/Trans/Two-Spirit and Indigenous Women on Practices of Decolonization, Collective-care and Self-care.

Melanie Lefebvre

Centering the voices of Indigiqueers, Trans, Two-Spirit (2S) people and Indigenous women shines light where we find radical thought, grassroots action and rebellious forms of care. This revolutionary practice ultimately disturbs the systems of colonialism and heteronormativity that work to oppress QTBIPOC (Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities. The gendered processes of colonialism in so-called North America have disrupted the balance of gender roles and leadership responsibilities/capacities traditionally held by non-binary, gender fluid and Trans folks in our communities. Government legislation and policy such as the Indian Act, the reserve system and residential schools have led to social and economic disparity for Indigenous peoples and forced diaspora to urban centres, where Indigenous community is now comprised of a variety of nations coming together in solidarity to share and support one another. Edited into nine podcast episodes titled *kiyanâw maskihkîwakan : Our Medicines*, this research-creation project centres storytelling by urban Indigiqueers, Trans, Two-Spirit people and Indigenous women on their life journeys and decolonization, collective care and self-care. Storytellers touch on experiences related to identity and belonging, (re)connection, trauma, cultural teachings, creativity, gender and sexuality, body sovereignty, role in community, and notions of and relationships with land. They reveal how we kindle and keep alight kinship relations with each other and ourselves on the land – whether urban, rural or cyber scapes – as we navigate these settled spaces toward possible Indigenous futures.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous, collective-care, self-care, story, storytelling, storywork, Indigiqueer, Trans, Two-Spirit, 2S, queer, non-binary, gender fluid, gender, sexuality, women, BIPOC, QTBIPOC, sovereignty, colonialism, community, podcast, research creation, Indigenous method, Indigenous methodology

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A quarter of the way through the podcasting process, the COVID-19 pandemic began to spread across the world. This was an intense process and I'm very grateful to everyone for helping me through this. This is radical collective care!

It is time, she said, we have strayed far enough and need a light to guide us home,
will you hold up your life so we can see?
(Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux, 2013)

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Introduction

Locating myself in this research

Tansi, nitisiyihkâson Mel. Windsor, Ontario nikî-nihtâwîkin kî-pipon. Epekwitk' êkwa Tiohtià:ke nikî-pê-ohpikin. Tiohtià:ke mêkwâc niwîkin. Niya âpihtawikosisân, ekwa Nehiyaw, ekwa Nakoda, ekwa Saulteaux, ekwa moniyâw. Niya oma tastawâyihk iyiniw. My name is Mel. I was born in Windsor, Ontario in the wintertime. I grew up on Prince Edward Island and Montreal. I live in Montreal now. I am Métis, Nehiyaw, Nakoda, Saulteaux, French, and Irish. I am a Two-Spirit/queer person. I am a mother, community worker, artist, writer and graduate student at Concordia University exploring community building and urban Indigeneity.

Moe Clark says that this process of self location is dynamic and nuanced, always changing, growing and deepening as we follow the lifelong path of reconnection to ourselves and our communities. With this in mind, I expect this self-location will changed and become more nuanced over time.

My father is Indigenous and disconnected, meaning he grew up without knowing his Métis, Nehiyaw, Nakoda, Saulteaux cultures; stories, ceremony and teachings connected to his ancestry were never passed down. My mother is Irish and since she was the primary caretaker and protector, my sister and I grew up knowing and practicing her culture. It was not until I entered my 30s, just before my grandmother died, that I (and by extension my father and sister) began to reconnect to my ancestors.

My grandmother Lilianne St-Laurent died in 2007 of old age and dementia. During moments of clarity, she could carry on a conversation and once we asked her what nation we belonged to and she struggled with that, through webs of memory, then told us we were Cree, Nakota, Blackfoot... listing many nations. We thought she was just confused; it was not in our

frame of reference that a Native person could be all those nations. Unbeknownst to us, she was recounting the story of our kinship relations: the peoples of the Plains to whom we belong, all those nations she named came together and created community, through trade, teachings, artmaking, bison hunting... After 15 years of research and reconnection, I have come to honor those few words my grandmother shared: She was directing us, even in her fragile state.

Identifying in this way and committing to how my ancestors performed kinship relations means that my first teacher is the Land. Our language was formed by our experience with it and on it. It is told to me that by speaking our language we truly know ourselves. I am in the extremely slow process of learning Nêhiyawêwin to better understand who we are as Nehiyawak. My father did not grow up on the territory of his grandparents – Manitoba – and was disconnected from the land, and so I learn these teachings from other Indigenous family that includes cousins, friends, Elders, and community workers, and by reading what other Indigenous thinkers share, especially those at the center: Trans, queer, non-binary, 2S. All these folks are nîtisânak – family – whether they are chosen or blood kin.

Most of my analyses focuses on Canada as this is where I have lived my entire life and am familiar with Indigenous and non-Indigenous culture, history, and dominant setter narratives. Settler colonialism and colonialism exist the world over, however my focus is on this country for now.

As a researcher and community member, I come to this process with over 20 years of experience as a writer, interviewer and community worker, adept at finding common ground with those I am engaging and asking questions in a respectful way, holding space for each person to tell their own story.

Research focus

Centering Stories by Urban Indigiqueers/Trans/Two-Spirit and Indigenous Women on Practices of Decolonization, Collective-care and Self-care.

Settler colonialism in so-called North America is a gendered process that has forced and reproduced heteropatriarchal socio-economic systems on/in Indigenous communities, and disrupted the balance of gender roles and leadership responsibilities/capacities traditionally held by Indigiqueers[1], Trans, Two-Spirit[2] people and Indigenous women (Jacobs, 2017; Reclaiming, 2019). Government legislation and policy such as the Indian Act and the reserve system have led to social and economic disparity for Indigenous peoples, as well as the disruption of Indigenous families and communities (Canadian Feminist, 2019; Jacobs, 2017).

Forced diaspora and lack of services on reserves have led many of us to live in urban centres where Indigenous community is comprised of a variety of nations coming together in solidarity to share and support one another. The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls supports the necessity to practice collective and self-care as it finds that the violence against Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people are a direct result of colonial policy and actions like the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights (National Inquiry, 2019) - the practices of collective and self-care counter that violence by creating community that fosters well-being, resilience and pride in being and knowing who we are as Indigenous people.

Edited into nine podcast episodes titled *kiyanâw maskihkîwakan : Our Medicines*, this research-creation project centres storytelling by urban Indigiqueers, Trans, Two-Spirit folks and

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[1] The term Indigiqueer was created by Thirza Jean Cuthand in 2004 as "Indigequeer" for Vancouver Queer Film Festival's Indigenous/Two-Spirit program.

[2] Two-Spirit / 2S – created by Cree teacher Myra Laramee who shared it with a gathering of Indigenous LGBTQI people from throughout North America, held in southern Manitoba in 1990 (Wilson, 2015).

Indigenous women on their life journeys and asks us to speak specifically to decolonization, collective-care and self-care. Storytellers were asked to speak on a variety of topics depending on their life journey and practices with common themes touching on growing up, professions and practices, kinship relations kindled and kept alight in city spaces, caring for ourselves and one another, and healing as we move through these settled spaces toward possible futures while in the context of our Indigenous traditions.

In this research I have sought to hold space for us to speak freely about our lives, offer insight into challenges regarding colonialism, build on the Indigenous knowledge base that informs about our roles and needs as Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ and women, present practices of how we are claiming our identities and wellness, and tell our stories through an accessible oral medium. Indigenous people are still here despite the structures in place that work to oppress us. We are governing our own bodies and minds in this effort to decolonize, survive and thrive (Vizenor, 2008; Hill, 2013), and create stronger kinship systems or *constellations of care* (Danger, 2019).

The methodologies and methods to be discussed and used to ground this work and engage with participants include the nêhiyawêwin principles of wâhkôhtowin (nehiyaw kinship ethics), miyo-wîchêtowin (care for others/collective care) and miyo-pimatisiwin (living a good life/self-care) (Cardinal and Hildebrand, 2000; Wilson and Naytowhow, 2019); research creation (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012); anti-colonialism and decolonization theory (Fanon, 2963; Smith, 1999); queer theory and queer Indigenous ethics (Tuck & Recollet, 2016; Simpson, 2017; Driskell, 2010; Wilson, 2015; Tallbear, 2019; Hunt, S., & Holmes, C., 2015; Danger, 2019; storywork (Archibald, 2012; Archibald, 1997); research as ceremony (Wilson, 2008); circle method (Chilisa, 2012); the conversation method (Kovach, 2010); and podcasting to share

Indigenous ways of being and learning through a contemporary medium that is perhaps more attractive and accessible to the urban community - particularly for those who may not be interested or able to engage with academic text - as well as various learners and learning styles (Day, 2017; Mitchell, 2017).

Literature & community knowledge review

Literature & community knowledge

The rigour through which academic literature goes is deeply appreciated, with many knowledgeable, dedicated and thoughtful creators ensuring robust research, analysis, critique, reflection and proper citation in caring for these wells of knowledge. Within an Indigenous framework, citing only literature that is deemed acceptable by the western academy is limiting: the experiences and knowledge that exists within our communities – urban, rural and on reserve – are as valuable and have faced a fire comparable to any academic peer review. Much of this knowledge is transferred through conversations, speeches, and sharing at gatherings – not necessarily as a written text with edits, but as stories that are told and retold, recorded in our minds and bodies. As such, some of these moments have been included in this review as vital sources of knowledge on this research topic.

This literature and knowledge review covers Nehiyawak (Plains Cree) kinship ethics as grounding this work; anti-colonial/decolonization theory and practice as it pertains to Indigenous ways of overcoming colonial policy through personal and collective process; Indigenous research paradigm/research as ceremony as ways in which Indigenous peoples build on the Indigenous knowledge base; Indigenous queer theory and practice as modes of returning to ourselves and being in relation; collective care and self care as in direct opposition to state-sanctioned heteronormativity; survivance and thrivance as continuation of our stories and flourishing into the future; notions of resurgence and sovereignty as potentially inaccessible to

diverse genders; and social media and digital media as unprecedented access to thought dissemination and collective action. Not included in this research is storywork with/by Indigenous children. A bonus episode is included in the podcast of my daughter who is learning Cree teachings from myself and community, however this research does not look in-depth at other young voices, as that is not the focus.

Beyond settler colonialism, Indigenous ways of knowing and being have existed and nurtured us since time immemorial. Nehiyaw (Plains Cree) kinship relations and care – relational ethics - holds that everything that comes from the land is related and as such, requires reciprocal accountability through relationship: wâhkôhtowin. In his book *Research Is Ceremony,* Plains Cree scholar Shawn Wilson points to our ways of knowing ourselves in connection to the rest of the universe and that these systems of belief directly impact "the tools we as researchers use in finding out more about the cosmos" (Wilson, 2008: page for direct quote). As leaders, philosophers, educators, and caregivers in this dominant settler society, Indigenous peoples have developed ways to decolonize and co-exist with the institutions that have sought to assimilate or disappear us. In the academy, where historically research has been done *on, to* and *about* Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2012: 1), our ways of being and knowing can shift *research* into *relationship*, to form an Indigenous research paradigm based on our cultural ways of being in relation: in reciprocity and accountability (Wilson, 2008).

We can look to African oral traditions where some of the first stories around decolonization were recorded, where cultures fought for self-determination and reclamation of land and knowledges (Lunge, 2017). As a concept in the social sciences, French West Indian psychiatrist, philosopher, and writer Frantz Fanon speaks about decolonization as "the basic claims of the colonized", the last becoming the first, a changing of the "social fabric" from

within, and the colonizer as one who "fabricated and continues to fabricate the colonized subject" (Fanon, 1963: 2).

As Linda Tuhiwai Smith presents in *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples*, decolonization is concerned with research context: in this case, Indigenous peoples and their communities and the western institutions and researchers throughout history that have implicated themselves in our communities to support the power and reach of imperialism that has sought/seeks to investigate, annihilate and appropriate our knowledges and lifeways (Smith, 1999). One can look to the ubiquity of Christianity, heteronormativity, capitalism, and state violence within and surrounding our communities as structures of white supremacy that require dismantling to save the lives of Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC).

In this effort to decolonize and dismantle, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson suggests in her book *As We Have Always Done* (2017) that decolonization is a personal and collective process of "returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a re-emergence, an unfolding from the inside out" (Simpson, 2017: 17-18). Simpson brings us to the self as a driving force for collective change where we reach back to our ancestors, remember how we lived and thrived, and bring that knowledge and action into today.

An integral aspect of this remembrance and contemporary practice that Simpson offers, Cherokee Two-Spirit queer writer, activist, and performer Qwo-Li Driskill sees the 21st century swelling with Indigiqueer 2SLGBTQ+ folks' embracing our traditional gender identities and roles as a method of critiquing and struggling against colonialism, and as a result, has bolstered our perspectives and allowed us to foster more robust, creative actions of decolonization as we

position ourselves as often central to decolonial agendas (Driskell, 2010). In embracing our roles in community, Indigiqueers and Trans folks, Indigenous women and girls are centred during or leading gatherings and protests, drumming and singing to call in our ancestors and enact our sovereignty in direct opposition to heteronormative settler government, state violence, land theft and resource extraction.

This acceptance of our varied, non-binary gender identities that have always existed is coined by Two-Spirit Cree scholar Alex Wilson as “coming in [which does not] centre on the declaration of independence that characterizes ‘coming out’ in mainstream depictions of the lives of LGBTQI people. Rather, coming in is an act of returning, fully present in our selves, to resume our place as a valued part of our families, cultures, communities, and lands, in connection with all our relations" (Wilson, 2015). (Re)claiming our identities and continuing to practice our traditions and strengthen our communities, reconnect ourselves as members of a forced diaspora, care for each other *as we have always done* (Simpson, 2017), we are not only in direct opposition to colonization, but dismantling it brick by brick and generating something new.

Indigenous kinship relations have undergone profound mutations under the weight of settler colonialism, genocide and environmental crises, that attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples to uphold the heteropatriarchal capitalist socio-economic structure we know today (Vowel, 2014). In conversation on the podcast *All My Relations,* Dakota scholar Kim Tallbear provides a critical perspective on decolonizing relationships as well as heteronormativity and "compulsory monogamy" as oppressive and as an upholding the hierarchical settler structure which seeks to individualize us, disrupting our community relationships, and keeping us dependent on the state instead of each other for support (Tallbear, 2019). Indigenous

epistemologies regarding how we care for one another – such as wâhkôhtowin– help us to understand being in many loving relationships – polyamory – and practicing "good relations" based on respect and reciprocity instead of ownership.

To challenge individualized heteronormative ways of being, Tallbear suggests the need for knowledge sharing between Indigenous and queer scholarship. Indigenous queer scholar Sarah Hunt and queer scholar Cindy Holmes discuss how *queer* is not merely a term referring to gender and sexuality, but extends beyond to *action* where we challenge ways of knowing and being entrenched into society by the settler state; the praxis of decolonization and queering are "active, interconnected, critical, and everyday practices that take place within and across diverse spaces and times" (Hunt, S., & Holmes, C., 2015). What do these everyday practices look like in terms of decolonization and care?

In their keynote at Concordia University's symposium *Communities of Care* in February of 2019, Métis-Saulteaux-Polish 2S artist and community worker Dayna Danger pointed to the multitude of ways in which we build kin and hold space for each other. Danger presents her art work and practice as opportunity: for consent within appropriate timeframes and Indigenous protocol as it relates to respect, responsibility and reciprocity; to challenge the assumption of ownership – the human subject the art portrays is more an owner than the artist themselves; to invite their muses to panels and participate in dialogue, challenging ideas of individualism; to explore and nurture romantic friendships as transformative kinship and constellations of care; to create sober spaces and respect boundaries; to cook in community and eat to nourish *before* dialogue; and to invite curators to be caregivers to artists and their work (Danger, 2019). Danger actively involves those she works with throughout the artistic process and holds collaborating institutions accountable to the same relational ethics they themselves practice.

Actions of self and collective care have been and continue to be discussed as essentials of decolonization, resiliency and *survivance*. Anishinaabe writer and scholar Gerald Vizenor refers to survivance as an "active presence", a "practice", and the "continuation of stories" in our contemporary context that can be, as he references anthropologist Dorothy D. Lee's observations of Dakota culture, a practice of relational responsibility wherein the Dakota are responsible for and in relationship with "all things", creating a communal sense of survivance (Vizenor, 2008).

Beyond survivance as our continuation, Kanyen'kehaka artist and curator Greg Hill posits in his story *Afterword: Looking back to Sakahàn* set in the year 2038 that Indigeneity spring from Vizenor's foundational survivance to "thrivance" (Hill, 2013). In comparing the first *Sakahàn: International Indigenous Art* (2013) exhibition with one in a fictional future present, Hill describes thrivance: a status-quo where Indigenous peoples' art flourishes, recognized by the artworld, where "Indigenous artists have asserted their aesthetic sovereignty and developed new forms of expression that maintain links to concepts and values of their heritage while also looking ahead" and together with curators, have created "a self-sustaining blaze" (Hill, 2013: 14). While Hill frames this as a fiction, he describes what is happening in Indigenous art and community today and relates it directly to the new generation who "are adept at navigating the irony, incongruity, complexity and fertility contained in the concept of indigeneity. They give it form. They embody it. Thrivance" (Hill, 2013: 17).

In the article *What Do We Mean by Queer Indigenous Ethics?* featured in *Canadian Art* magazine, Cree-Métis-Saulteaux curator and writer Lindsay Nixon speaks to Cree poet, scholar, and author Billy Ray Belcourt about decolonization and queer Indigenous ethics, pointing to Indigenous decolonization over the last 50 years as having a clear thrust of Resurgence philosophy which "often argues that Indigenous peoples must rise above colonialism by

asserting flattened conceptions of sovereignty and nationhood, thereby erasing women and Two-Spirit folks by centring solely activism that mirrors colonial-capitalist warring and legal scholarship," (Nixon and Belcourt, 2018: page). *Rising above* implies that all Indigenous peoples have the means and space to do so, excluding many Indigenous Trans, queer, 2S and women who often exist in precarious situations where the day-to-day is focused on surviving rather than planning potential futures within concepts of resurgence and sovereignty. Centering and holding space for Indigiqueers, Trans, 2S and women values their stories of daily care, disturbs heteronormativity, and shines light where we find radical thought and grassroots action related to intimately caring for one another.

These radical thoughts are being disseminated more broadly than any other time in history with Indigenous people having access to and control over dissemination through social media and broadcasting tools like podcasts that have contributed to decolonizing cyberspace and the airwaves, empowering QTBIPOC to connect globally, share ideas, rally together, create events, initiate change, practice solidarity, disseminate each other's work, support one another emotionally and financially, and shift the harmful narratives prevalent in mainstream media.

Kanien'kehá:ka visual artist Skawennati and Cherokee/Hawaiian/Samoan scholar Jason Edward Lewis have been collaborating in community to create Indigenous cyber presence and territory since the beginning of the Internet (Lefebvre, 2020). In 2012, Skawennati and Lewis developed AbTeC Island - Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) – gathering academics, artists, community activists and media technologists to research "how Aboriginal individuals and communities use digital media to tell our stories and in developing methods for encouraging greater participation by our people in the production of such work" (Fragnito & Lewis, 2012). AbTec seeks to activate the relationship between the digital world and Indigeneity as well as

how to "develop culturally-specific methods for teaching people how to be creative with digital media" (Fragnito & Lewis, 2012).

Indigenous radio (and subsequently Indigenous Internet broadcasting) has been a space of collective gathering and expression that is accessible as well as a site where Indigenous women (and Indigiqueers/Trans?) hold and create (and queer)[3] a generative space for each other (Buddle, 2008). We can look to Haudenosaunee host Mary Lou Smoke who first began Smoke Signals radio program in the early 1990s (Buddle, 2008) to today where a plethora of Indigenous radio shows and podcasts share Indigenous cultures and perspectives in-community[4] and with the broader public. Hosts such as Rosanna Deerchild (Unreserved), Lisa Charleyboy (New Fire), Dr. Adrienne Keene and Matika Wilbur (All My Relations), Candy Palmater (The Candy Palmater Show), Moe Clark (mâmawi musique, Radio Canada), Kaniehtiio Horn (Coffee With My Ma), Connie Walker (Finding Cleo), Chelsea Vowel and Molly Swain (Métis in Space), Lauren Crazybull (This is Blackfoot Territory), Ryan McMahon (Red Man Laughing; Stories from the Land), Courtney Skye and Hayden King (Red Road Podcast) are creating content, making our stories known and shifting the narrative.

For Chapman and Sawchuk of Concordia University who co-wrote *Research-Creation: Intervention, Analysis and "Family Resemblances"*, these types of research creation - and specifically creation-as-research - "involves the elaboration of projects where creation is required in order for research to emerge" and is the investigative process of "bringing together technology, gathering and revealing through creation" (Chapman and Sawchuk, 2012: 19). In line with Indigenous ways of sharing knowledge through creation, this method has allowed for

[3] Queering as non-binary thinking and practice where all are welcomed and nurtured.
[4] "In-community" here refers to sharing within and between Indigenous communities, including urban Indigenous communities.

collaborative meaning-making, intimacy and reflection as well as deep analysis and critique, which serves efforts to decolonize by centering the experiences of these storytellers, some of whom have been pushed to and exist in the margins of society. This decolonization is caring for one another through transformative actions to create extensive kinship relations within which, as Erica Violet Lee describes, “we find the knowledge to recreate all that our worlds *would’ve been* if not for the interruption of colonization” (Lee, 2016).

Gaps

There are numerous Indigenous folks creating and disseminating relevant and crucial work and I say kinanaaskomitinaw to them for their generosity and commitment as I reference some of them here and have read and listened to many more. Amongst all the fabulous works, I have yet to discover a podcast devoted strictly to Indigiqueers/Trans, 2S and Indigenous women's thoughts and practices of collective and self care. If this does exist, I apologise for not mentioning it here.

In this light, I feel that together with participants we are shining a vibrant light on stories that often go unheard and providing a resource on how we as Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ folks and Indigenous women care for one another and ourselves, not only in desperate times but as daily practice. Our community care is so necessary especially when considering the heightened violence, we experience (see MMIWG2S), especially those who are more racialized and/or more visibly existing outside the gender binary.

This research creation also demonstrates how any one of us can take control of media and use it to strengthen our communities and make meaning by centering our knowledge and perspectives. We do not have to wait for approval or permission from western institutions: we can get a recording device, have conversations, and post them online. That is not to say it will always be an easy process, but it is within our reach and it is happening.

Grounding framework

Grounding this research creation is the Nehiyaw teachings of kinship relational ethics: respect, reciprocity, responsibility and accountability to our human and more-than-human kin – past, present, and future (Wilson, 2008). Nehiyaw (Plains Cree) worldview and relational ethics requires this reciprocal accountability through relationship: wâhkôhtowin. As shared with me by Elders Mary Wilson and Joseph Naytowhow, Nehiyaw epistemology, cosmology and kinship systems are reflected in the Medicine Wheel, a representation of the life journey and the values that Nehiyawak live by in relation to all things: We honor and learn about the reciprocal relationships we have to the four directions, the seasons, the land, and our more-than-human kin (Wilson and Naytowhow, 2019). The stories told by Elders and Knowledge Holders include the land and what it has to teach in order to live in mino pimâtisiwin – a "conscious connection" with our human and more-than-human kin, including the land, to perpetuate balance (Wilson, 2015). Moving through the world in this good way is an act of decolonization.

Methodologies & methods

As research creation, this podcast is focused on co-created Indigenous knowledge through the experiences of Indigenous 2SLGBTQ+ and women outside of western academic modes of storytelling and dissemination. As urban Indigenous folks, we mobilize, engage with and (re)connect with our communities in creative ways to support each other in a commitment to justice and equity.

The discourse around and actions of producing knowledge by western institutions often excludes Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Settler intellectuals have studied us, put our belongings and bones behind museum glass, and deemed our epistemologies and how we embody those as primitive, lacking in scientific fact while profiting from their inherent value.

That knowledge-power dynamic is deeply rooted in Imperialism that sought/seeks to extract our resources and control our minds and bodies (Simpson, 2007).

"Indigenous Peoples have struggled for the legitimacy of indigenous knowledge and are wary, sceptical even, of academic attempts to over-determine [Indigenous Knowledge]...to ensure that it 'fits' existing academic regimes of control" (Smith et al, 2016: 132). Transmitted orally and through experience, Indigenous knowledges are passed down through generations, determined by our land and language and reflecting our bodies, minds and souls (NWAC, 2015). I see research creation as a flexible path through which we can tell our stories and keep our relationships – past and present, with the animate and inanimate – intact.

Podcast as research creation allows our beautiful and radical thoughts to be disseminated as storytelling more broadly than any other time in history. We have access to and control over dissemination through these social media and broadcasting tools that have contributed to decolonizing cyberspace and the airwaves, empowering QTBIPOC to connect globally, share ideas, rally together, create events, initiate change, practice solidarity, disseminate each other's work, support one another emotionally and financially, and shift the harmful narratives prevalent in mainstream media.

Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith says that Indigenous methodology and methods, i.e. process, includes respect and potential transformation in the form of education and healing and that our Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies should be "built in to research explicitly, to be thought about reflexively, to be declared openly as part of the research design, to be discussed as part of final results of a study and to be disseminated back to people in culturally appropriate ways and in a language that can be understood" (Smith, 2012).

For each of the eight interviews (the ninth is my seven year old daughter who gets an allowance regularly!), participants were approached with respect and offered an honorarium of

200$, gifted tobacco and handmade jewelry, offered the convenience of meeting in their homes (including my willingness to travel to Toronto and Virginia at my own expense to interview participants, although both trips were cancelled due to the COVID-19 virus). Participants also read and edited interview questions prior to meeting, and were provided draft episodes to provide feedback on and request changes to at their discretion before dissemination.

Within this creation process, I have listened to and reflected on the stories of Indigiqueers, Trans, 2S and Indigenous women to do what Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald has coined "storywork", the combination of these two words signalling the significance of this research and meaning-making through oral tradition and lived experience (Archibald, 2014). Archibald suggests an open-ended approach to storywork and has said that Indigenous stories invite us to listen, take time to reflect, and understand what they teach and what sort of action we can take: the story becomes a guide with the 7 principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, reciprocity, holism, interrelatedness, and synergy (Archibald, 2012; Archibald, 1997). Using storywork as methodology and method has provided guidance to stay connected to and present with participants during the interview process, remain grounded in the importance of storywork as it pertains to Nehiyaw teachings, and be flexible and patient with time and circumstances, especially during the pandemic.

As a member of the 2S queer Indigenous community, I chose to be interviewed for this research before the other participants so that I could experience the process, ensure a level of safety, be more empathetic to those I interviewed, and be vulnerable in sharing my own stories. I wanted to show my solidarity with those who told their stories as so often research is done *on* or *to* Indigenous people instead of *with* or *by*. I also interviewed my daughter for this research who I often invite to share in and collaborate with on my many projects. Although only seven years old, she was able to share her perspective on decolonization and caring, subjects we have spoken

together about and created around before. In Nehiyaw world views and practice, children have knowledge to teach us if we are open to listening. Being in community, developing lasting relationships and giving back through service has created a web of kinship that provides support such as those coming forward to offer their stories in an effort to build our Indigenous wells of knowledge. In return, this kinship – wahkotowin - requires me to do this research in a good way, with respect and humility, and ensuring the integrity of these stories moving forward.

Many of our stories have been erased or gone unwritten as heteropatriarchy ensures men are in positions of power, defining gender norms of "male" and "female", suppressing gender diversity and womanhood (Tuck & Recollet, 2016). Scholars Eve Tuck and Karen Recollet remind us that Indigenous women, queer, Trans and 2S people have been critical about colonialism since first contact and have identified the ways settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy are part of the same system of oppression that work to control us. We have had to reluctantly work within these systems to support ourselves and communities, essentially upholding them to survive, even in the face of the violence it perpetrates (Tuck & Recollet, 2016).

During a fish scale art and beading workshop at Native Montreal in December 2018 hosted by Nehiyaw/Michif artist and educator Jaime Morse, participants were told the story of beadwork as Métis mapping technology. Morse had attended a talk by Métis lawyer Kathy Hodgson-Smith where she described research with Saskatchewan Métis Elders for a land use and mapping study, and how Métis women gave testimony about traditionally beading maps onto the clothing of men before they embarked on months-long seasonal trade journeys. According to Morse, coats beaded with maps indicating various cache sites and reminders of particular duties could be taken off and consulted by those travelling long distances. I was told personally by prominent Métis cis-male historians that they had not heard these stories of traditional Métis

mapping and that they were, therefore, false. To date, I have yet to find this history recorded on paper or online, evidence of the unfortunate reality of the erasure of Indigenous women and gender-diverse voices, stories, and experiences.

Inviting Indigiqueers/Trans, 2S and Indigenous women to share their stories is a practice of centering and valuing their knowledge as experts, highlighting their experience and responsibility to their communities, from whatever Indigenous perspective/nation they are from and recognizing that parts or all of these perspectives are inherently existing outside of the colonial construct. Leanne Simpson writes about *Kwe As Resurgent Method* where Kwe cannot be understood through colonial thought; Kwe is "different than the word *woman* because it recognizes a spectrum of gender expressions and it exists embedded in grounded normativity" that is Nishnabeg, which "comes from the spiritual world and flows to humans through intimate relationships with human and nonhuman entities" (Simpson, 2017: 28). *Kwe As Resurgent Method* demonstrates that no matter the history of settler colonialism, we embody our traditions, our ancestors know us, and we can access this truth at any time. As a person who identifies as Indigiqueer, this method was appropriate to explore and be mindful of: The variety of genders and sexualities that exist within our communities and the range and potential of intimacies outside of the heteropatriarchy allow for transformative thought and openness in welcoming and approaching participants.

Scholar Bagele Chilisa speaks about these kinds of culturally appropriate research methodologies in a Botswanan context where circles are the basis of many community occasions and so as a research method, simply make sense when gathering to share knowledge. "...around a fireplace, during celebrations when they form circles to sing, or in games when children form circles to play. In each of these occasions, a person is given a chance to speak uninterrupted...the

circle symbolizes equality of members" (Chilisa, 2012: 213) - respect for another person's chance to speak and their ideas, in a "continuous and unending compassion and love for one another" (Chilisa, 2012: 213). Similarly, Cree scholar Margaret Kovach has identified the conversational method as a way to gather knowledge that is inherently Indigenous and based on Nehiyaw relational ethics as it values oral storytelling through dialogue, to pass on our collective memory and knowledge (Kovach, 2010). The values inherent in the circle and conversational methods were used in this research as a way to respect the participants' thoughts, boundaries and time. There was no time limit set for any interview. Questions were asked more as suggestions of topics to discuss rather than information participants were obligated to provide. Participants were encouraged to share at will and identify topics of interest to them: recorded conversations ranged from 40 minutes to three hours.

Process

The participants in this research are part of a vulnerable population as members of Indigenous communities, as am I as an Indigenous principal investigator, albeit with white-coded privilege, which I recognize and have a responsibility to in terms of dismantling white supremacy. I have worked with vulnerable Indigenous peoples through my community work with the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal where I am a board member, and in collaboration with Resilience Montreal, Native Montreal, the Native Friendship Centre of Montreal, Projets Autochtonne de Montreal, the First Nations Regional Adult Education Centre, The Elizabeth Fry Society and others. I believe I have been able to listen and learn from the participants as well as approach sensitive topics with care while checking in with and being aware of participants' comfort levels.

I discussed the study topic with community members and Indigenous scholars over the past few years to gauge interest, need, and support for the project before proceeding and received resoundingly positive remarks.

Once my thesis was identified and a proto-proposal written, three Indigenous peers who identify as women and/or queer/2S reviewed this work as an advisory circle before moving forward to ensure an informed and caring approach: Mi'kmaq-Mohawk-French scholar Natalie St-Denis; Syilx scholar and artist Mariel Belanger; and Métis singer and performance artist Moe Clark. They each received an honorarium of $100.

After completing my university research ethics successfully, I reached out to participants through social media, via email and in person with the idea and process in the fall of 2019. All the Indigiqueers and Indigenous women I asked agreed to participate; four Indigenous Trans folks were also invited, with one responding and agreeing to participate. During the COVID crisis, which is ongoing at this time, two participants had to decline due to health matters. With one participant, I found it difficult to schedule a time that suited both of us and then COVID grew into an emergency situation and I was unable to find the time to include the participant.

With only one of the four Indigenous Trans folks invited responding to my request for an interview, I questioned if this process could be safer and more inclusive. Perhaps those Trans folks who did not respond felt tokenized, or their capacities were at a maximum, or perhaps they simply were not interested. I have no judgement on this and do not want to speculate further as I feel it inappropriate to assume I know how Trans folks feel. I continue to adore them, and support and follow their work.

Before I began each interview, I introduced the podcast title and topic in full and got written consent from each participant to share and archive their stories. I informed participants of

the interview process and that they could stop the interview at any time and choose not to answer a question or discuss a topic and that I could delete the recording of said question or topic so as not to expose them in any way, even in their refusal. I have built trusting relationships with participants through our community work and scholarship, through online conversation and support, and so entering into discussion about sensitive topics was permitted by participants and they were able to share their discomfort on any given topic.

Nine interviews took place over three months in early 2020, including one in which I was interviewed. Most of the interviews took place in spaces where the participants were most comfortable. As COVID emerged, three in person interviews had to be cancelled and replaced by Zoom meetings. Interviews were subject to a draft edit then sent to participants for content approval. Minor changes were made to each and all were satisfied. Episodes were subsequently outsourced for sound edits. Tools and editing materials included the Zoom H2N Handy Recorder and Adobe Audition Software.

With their formal consent, transcripts and the podcast will be archived on my website at www.melanielefebvre.com and at the Centre for Oral History and Digital Storytelling (COHDS), a community of likeminded members who respect storytelling and where the podcast will be accessible to a broader audience. Ultimately, I would like to promote and disseminate the podcast/transcripts to Indigenous communities through social media, COHDS, the Internet, Indigenous organizations (e.g. We Matter; Native Women's Shelter of Montreal; Southern Quebec Inuit Association), Indigenous resources/departments in universities, community workers, etc.

All participants were provided with information for accessing psychological support by Indigenous professionals that I arranged and budgeted for: Cathy Richardson - Métis therapist

specializing in violence prevention and recovery; and Vicky Boldo - Elder, Aboriginal Student Resource Centre and community worker. Participants were able to contact them during or after their interview if they felt they needed support.

Some challenges in this research-creation process included:

- COVID and care – this was an incredibly stressful time within which to perform this thesis work. I lost my freelance income, my partner lost all their income, my children were and are still home from school, I still had/have two part-time jobs and another that has since started (all working from home) yet these combined contracts and roles do not total enough to support my family. At a certain point, the thesis interviews could only be done remotely and of course, I needed to take into account the availability and capacity of all participants while attempting to manage my own capacity and that of my family. I also wanted/needed to support community by organizing food pickups/drop-offs from my neighborhood to Resilience Montreal where the majority of homeless folks in Montreal gather during this pandemic as many of the city's services for them have been shut down. It has been a challenging time like no other.
- Funding – a Quebec Indigenous Mentorship Network award of $2000 was confirmed in the Fall of 2019 to cover the payment of honoraria – payment was received in July 2020. I also did not foresee outsourcing the sound editing and this was not in the budget but was found to be necessary especially since a few of the interviews were done via Zoom due to the COVID pandemic, resulting in less than satisfactory sound quality and a possible lack of intimacy.

Findings

In-depth interviews are the primary source of data for this research, which allowed for nuanced exploration with a small group of Indigenous people – eight Indigiqueers/Trans, 2S folks and Indigenous women, and one Indigenous child - on a particular topic. Face-to-face conversation – in person or over Zoom – (re)kindled our relationships, enabled a more sensitive and frank discussion, and provided robust, detailed information.

A range of topics were presented depending on the individual's personal journey and practices. Conversation prompts were:

- What is your name, nation and where are you from?
- Can you tell me about your work/practice?
- What are your views on decolonization?
- What is self-care for you/how do you perform self-care?
- What are you working on now and/or what are you plans for the future?

Common themes

While I did offer discussion prompts, conversations developed organically and were not prescriptive, with emerging threads of commonality, which follow here. Rather than paraphrasing podcast participants, I have chosen to give space to the storytellers to express themselves fully, through extended quotes.

Belonging/identity

Participants expressed struggle with and search for their identity yet at some point in their lives turned a corner with their uncertainty through varying degrees of self-acceptance in order to embrace who they are and "come to terms". When speaking about exploring identity and

searching for belonging, there was a running thread that vibrates with feelings of curiosity and fear, as storytellers grasped at different parts of a whole still unfound. And in parallel with their own self doubt, some were perceived and labelled by society as other, as racialized, as Indian or Black or mixed, and yet, they themselves could not confirm this identity. Others grew up knowing their identity clearly, living in community and belonging, only to be turned upside down by the outside world for their otherness. In some cases, other Indigenous people accused storytellers of being too white, too mixed, attacking with colonized ideas of blood quantum. And still for some, violence brought with it the cold reality of how Indians are perceived and treated in this colonized world. Overall, there was a definite sense of grounding when storytellers spoke about their cultures and how they have come to navigate, embrace and continue to cultivate that grounding. For those whose identity is a story of reconnection, there were echoes of relief at finding their kin, being welcomed by community and held in all their imperfections.

Nina: "It was a hard upbringing because I saw a lot of culture. I lived in China for years... And we traveled all over Mongolia and Russia, China, Hong Kong and Japan and the Philippines and Denmark. So I saw all these cultures, but when I would look in the mirror, I really had no idea who I was... or what it meant to be an Eskimo, back then it was *Eskimo*...It was interesting because, you know, in elementary school... there was a lot of racism. And what the kids called me was *contaminated*...I didn't know why they were saying I was... in the 70s, it was really okay to say that to a native person... internally I was still looking for who I was, really... I was searching for clues... And then when I was 18...that's when I first met my first native person at the Native Friendship Center in Montreal. It just like exploded... when I became part of my community, what I realize now is it's a natural part of the process. But I completely immersed myself in my community..."

Thirza: "I'm a light skinned Indigenous person. Some people kind of have preconceived ideas about what that must mean for me...my grandma was the one who is the white person. So, like everybody else was Indigenous. And so I grew up with Indigenous people, but it wasn't until I actually kind of my early trauma that I was I think I was 17 and I got jumped by these Indigenous girls in Saskatoon...I know part of it was like because I look like a privileged white girl...I kind of realized... I have privilege that other people don't have. And it can make people upset. And, you know, it's not it's not enough to just say I'm Indigenous. Like, there is this aspect of being mixed race where I have privileges and I have to like try to figure out how what that means for me to be both white and Indigenous, even though I was raised with, like Indigenous people pretty much. And I didn't really know anything about being white...it was coming to terms with being mixed race really is why I made that film...trying to embrace both sides, but especially in a country where there's so much animosity between Indigenous and white community on both sides and trying to figure out where I fit in all of that."

Moe: "I feel like this...self location and introductions, it's like a constant work in progress, you know, the more we learn, the more we want to integrate and kind of add to that, I guess, that dimension, that offering. So, I'm also just trying to use more Cree like embed it into the work that I'm doing and into my daily life more..."

Felicia: "Cherokee Freedmen is my heritage...descendants of slavery and pure Cherokee from North America...[working at the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal] was actually the first time that I was regularly surrounded by other native people...I have always grown up thinking, well, I guess I'm just an alien. And I just found imaginative ways to excuse me, not fitting in or to explain why I didn't want to be part of whatever was going on or brush off what I was feeling to

kind of just get through life. I kind of rejected the fact of the identity question because growing up, the questions that were always forced on me were *where are you from?* And you can't be native because you're Black. That can't be your mom because you're Black...I rejected the identity question because I just felt like [it was really imposed on me] this Blackness and to me Black is not in color...I got to this point where I realized how much identity was actually important, I had been rejecting it because I couldn't face it, because I didn't have answers or...I didn't have the tools...So there's this vast infinite identity world that I didn't know existed because I wasn't exposed to it and I was just always rejected. So that's where I was like, you know what, I do need to know about my biological father. I always, like, rejected him because my mom told me that she left him because he was a violent person. So I was just like loyalty and solidarity towards my mom, I couldn't want to know that part of my identity because it meant that I was kind of going against my mom and I had always protected her...But then at some point I was like, if I want to raise my daughter to know who she is, I need to know who I am."

Moe: "We didn't actually...come into our Métis identity until after my grandma passed. And one of my dad's cousins was doing research about scrip and genealogy and doing a little bit more work in that and found documents from my great granny who signed away her land and title, signed scrip and then kind of looking at, I guess, like the movement from St. Francois Xavier, Manitoba, Red River down into like southern Saskatchewan and then even into Montana and then back up into Alberta, which is eventually where my Métis relatives settled...A copy of my great grandmother's writing, Alma Banks, and...The first page is her describing their arrival onto the plains, onto this like their homestead. And her actually seeing the bison wallow in the northeast corner of the land with this giant rock and finding tufts of bison hair and seeing the trails of the bison on the land. And so, it's like this interesting, bittersweet kind of, having these

settler relationships and realizing, you know, OK, that's a big part of my identity, having a connection to that. But then also having this kind of beautifully strange, poetic glimpse into the life of this woman who was my grandfather's mother. And what that must have been like for her. And then also sort of looking at these other grandmas from my other side of the family and thinking about, you know, they're kind of namelessness, the unidentified ways in which they weren't documented and were documented and the names they were given, the names that were taken from them. So, it's an interesting kind of reclamation."

All participants discussed identity and belonging in some form or another, directly or indirectly. It seems to me that navigating these topics and sorting through all the noise that broader society pushes forward through mainstream media and colonial institutions is almost impossible to escape: The othering of our bodies and ways of knowing is a constant mind fuck that plays on our self-worth, our capacity to meaningfully connect and engage, and ultimately pass on what we have learned to others within our families and communities. There is also the lateral violence coming from within our own communities that upholds colonized notions of gender and blood quantum, creating more obstacles to reconnection for those who are dispossessed of their communities and lands. Those storytellers who seemed more grounded in their identity with a more robust confidence are those who grew up in their communities or surrounded by their family, are able to clearly identify their lineage and who have had access to their cultural teachings.

(Re)connection

The act of finding a sense of belonging and identity, piece by piece, and nurturing this is a (re)connection to culture and community. Navigating this (re)connection, participants tell stories about imposter syndrome, lacking the confidence to be who we are in community and in

our own families, (re)claiming, discovery and acceptance, of ourselves. This act of reclamation has given storytellers a chance to share with family and friends, creating a wider web of knowledge and resistance to the colonial paradigm, while at the same time, they shared the discomfort and fear expressed by immediate family members as the storytellers learn more, create deeper relations within the Indigenous community, speak more openly with knew knowledge, and become more of who they are. The reverberations of this deeper identity have meaning and consequences for family and friends too, as storytellers hold up the mirror that reflects love, lineage, responsibility, genocide, diaspora, resistance, reclamation and allyship. The ways in which we connect and reconnect to our cultures as Indigenous people are so rich and varied, from researching on the Internet to service in the community, to performance and prayer. Some storytellers found biological family members, others began to learn from community Elders, and still others relearn the songs and language of their cultures to build bridges to the past and future.

Moe: ″[I] started to meet some elders and community and just started sort of using art and using poetry and song as I guess, like a pathway to kind of go deeper into that and to sort of imagine what these relationships could be and imagine what my ancestors and relatives would have been doing...And what my relationship and role is...I have two sisters, one older, one younger, I'm the middle. And they both identify as well as Métis, but they're not necessarily as kind of connected or as seeking, I guess, as I've been. And so that has been difficult at times. And also, like kind of sometimes beautiful opportunities to sort of share. Who I am and what I know and what I've learned. But it's also been the point of much contention and challenge because there is, I guess, to some degree, this kind of feeling that I've somehow broken off from who we were raised to be and who we learned to be...Not necessarily having access to a direct family who is really

anchored in community and anchored in those values and those practices has made it difficult for me to not feel like I'm an impostor, not feel like *what am I doing? Why am I here?* And like, as if I should be claiming this identity and this culture. But then it's like, well, why can't I?...I don't think that that shame for me will ever fully go away...And am I enough...do I know enough... I went through so much of that when I first started writing Cree songs with Cheryl [L'Hirondelle] and Joseph [Naytowhow]...Do I even have the colors of the medicine wheel right? I don't even know how to say hello in this language. And it's like it's like you're met with this like a waterfall of information. Now you just have to slowly immerse yourself in it"

Mel: "So we didn't grow up with any teachings. It's really only when my grandmother started getting dementia...that I was kind of like asking her questions...I was probably 30...the funny story was, I'd ask her what nation are we from...and she'd be like, Blackfoot...Cree...Saulteaux...different nations...I was just like, oh, my god, she's like losing it, right? But in actuality, she was describing these kinship relationships that we had going, that somehow still remained in her that she could tell us about that."

Felicia: "I just recently met my biological father who is Cherokee Freedmen descent. So I've been able to ask him a lot of questions and to validate kind of, you know, this because it was still always an imposter kind of feeling...feeling so connected, but not wanting to own something that's not mine, you know. So, speaking with him, he told me lots of, like oral stories, you know, like how my great grandmother used to like draw spirits or singing. And so many things that I relate to, you know, I've been doing all my life. So, I was hoping that with him I have more stories about our Indigenous heritage but he was very much cut from that."

Mel: "I just kind of started sort of feeling my way around doing research and a lot of it online, at the library, talking to people, that kind of stuff. But then you realize, okay, there's one real fundamental in connecting to your Indigeneity, which is connecting to your community, you need to find those relations. And so, I did literally find my own connections, my own family, connecting to cousins, connecting to people just that I never knew. And then also finding community here in Montreal, the Métis crew here...then also just being at the shelter and volunteering there...that kind of grew into doing more community building for them, representing them whenever I would go out to build new relationships for the shelter."

Colonization/trauma

Storytellers concretely identify some of the ways colonization has manifested in society including capitalism, patriarchy and racism that work to erase QTBIPOC and break our ways of building relations with each other. We have been brainwashed to suspect each other and ourselves and simply accept the violence that our bodies and the land continue to experience. And yet, storytellers express their feelings and actions of recognizing that they have endured and how that endurance and resistance has strengthened them, bolstered their will to survive, work for their communities, demand change, have families and pass on what they have learned. Others are more matter of fact about the circumstance of colonization and although they push back against it in various ways, express a kind of soberness mixed with a sarcasm that seemingly acts as a salve. Many contemplate how we exist outside of colonization in the present, our lives beyond this imposed nation-state and the promises of the future.

Anna: "One thing that [Indigenous sex workers] would need is some organization to step in and work with us to, let's say, an emergency fund, because we have been facing legal resistance from

organization. [*Have you proposed that to some organizations here and you found resistance?]* Yeah...[*because? Egos?]* I don't know. It's been a long time I've tried...for the last two times that I organized...those retreats I didn't ask them because I've tried to build relations, I started years ago to start this relation but it didn't work out. They don't trust us [Indigenous sex workers] because I've been contacting folks to have a conversation about having this programming in their organization and it's just...it's so complicated. I don't know what to say...I was thinking this morning, all the people that are protecting the land and the water in solidarity with the Wet'suwet'en people, nation, and about reconciliation being dead. And I've been thinking about that in some of the sex worker organizations that don't have just at least an Indigenous council...in every city, there's people that are street based, working the Internet, in erotic bars...Indigenous folks are there!... some of our coolest...sex work organization are not there yet. They don't even do reconciliation, or they do reconciliation the same way as Justin Trudeau!"

Nina: "I was transported from Fort Smith to Montreal, Quebec in the 60s Scoop. I was stolen from my mother and father... I know I have six siblings... We were all separated. We were all adopted. We were all taken. My brother Matthew ended up in the Yukon. My other brother, John Paul ended up in Fort Francis in Ontario. My other sister, Diane... grew up in Thunder Bay. My older brother, Eric I think he was up in Nunavik. There was only one of us, Andy... the only one adopted into an Inuit family. He's the only one of us who speaks Inuktitut and has hunted...who grew up traditional...I have a copy of the adoption papers... You always think that they didn't want you. You just feel abandoned and not worthy. You're not good enough. But on this paper, my mother's name on the bottom and there's a huge X through where she was supposed to sign and she never gave her consent and proof in front of me right there...was the fact that I was stolen. And over the years... my father has told me the story of how I was taken, which was my

mother who brought me to a hospital because I had an ear infection...the nurses said...*come get her tomorrow and we'll take care of her tonight*. And when my mother came back the next day, and my father, I was gone."

Nina: ″When I first went to the Friendship Center when I was 18 was, I was learning so many beautiful things from different people during the daytime, but then on Friday nights I would see the destruction. I didn't understand that historical scope. For a while I still had like racist thoughts: why can't we just stop ? When I opened my mind and my heart to what had happened in our community and that I was a part of that, I was a part of having been taken away and they said you were one of the stolen ones. And so that pain they showed me transmitted itself into trauma that was then expressed through addictions.″

Wapshkankwet: "I think that there were a lot of things I grew up with that were very traditional and there were a lot of things I grew up with that were very polluted... I have, you know, spent kind of the rest of my life healing from and making sense of. And there was really there was a moment that was very impactful...I was kidnapped, and I was held for, they figure approximately 72 hours, three days. And during that time, I was assaulted and sexually assaulted. I was stabbed multiple times. I had a lot of burn marks on me. And I was, you know, beaten. I had some parts of my hair that were missing in the back, like where someone dragged me by my hair. There was a lot of violence that my body endured...And there was never an arrest made. I was treated at the hospital and my clothes were taken, you know. But their response was, you know, this happens, like this is just something girls like that go through."

Thirza on her film *Extractions*: "It's a look at the Canadian extraction industry and not just oil, but also diamonds and lumber and uranium and sort of how problematic the resource extraction

industry is, but also comparing it to the child welfare system where Indigenous kids are being sort of extracted from their communities and taken into these white foster homes where they've been abused, but are also used as sort of like, money-makers where they get so much money for taking care of these children that the original parents really were not ever able to get from the government, like the woman on welfare will not get very much money for her children to survive on. But someone somewhere is in a foster care home will get like two thousand dollars for the same children. So, it's about that. But it's also about sort of the personal like wanting to have children myself and getting my eggs extracted again to freeze for future, to have children in the future. And also, being afraid, like as an Indigenous person with, you know, like various strikes against me, is that going to happen to me? Like my children? And I spend all this money to make a baby that's going to end up going in care because someone just decides they don't like me or because I have to go to the hospital."

Mel: "I've come to sort of hate that word [decolonization]...it's really lost its soul...[what are we trying to] cultivate and build outside of that thing. Sort of like conceptualizing a new form of existence. You're working inside the institution, but you're imagining something that's outside of it. That's actually been existing...we do exist outside of that and our ancestors exist outside of it. Our ways of being and knowing have always existed outside of that. So, we're not trapped in there. And I get that: *Oh, you're so anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchy, but you're working in academia*. OK, well, I need a fucking job. I need to feed my family. It's not perfect, but you have to do something. It's better than just sitting back and criticizing and doing nothing. A perfect example is the child welfare system: There are people in there that are hurting, and it needs to be reformed. Immediate reforms. This is the only thing that you can do today. And so, you have to

go in there and kind of chip away at it. So, like decolonization, I'm not really sure I'm working on a new concept. I don't know what it is. Maybe it's a Cree word. I don't know."

Traditional teachings

Many of the storytellers expressed some degree of disconnection from their cultural teachings, even some who grew up in their communities or with their Indigenous relations. There was a variety of connection points which led to the topic of teachings such as death, gender and belonging, creativity, disconnection, reclamation and sharing on social media. One participant went into great detail, describing actual teachings received from an Elder, how they share through music and performance, and how as a reconnecting Indigenous person, this knowledge is a bridge for us to return to ourselves and our communities. Another storyteller spoke about teachings as the search for self and ancestors and that although there is much gratitude at being offered teachings from various nations, there is a certain quest to be fulfilled: To find one's own medicine. Of incredible significance is that storytellers have such dynamic, contemporary, brilliant, full lives, spanning so many interests and directions, imagining and building futures, that stereotypes of who Indigenous people are and what broader settler society tells us we should be doing, simply fell away, interview after interview, like a decaying shed skin.

*It should be noted that teachings are intimate points of connection to one's culture and some are never shared outside of community and/or ceremony.

Felicia: [their Elder told them] "I'm at a point in my life where I'm like I'm comfortable to embrace and to like say that I'm Indigenous, but I'm still learning what it is to be Indigenous to me. And I've met so many beautiful people who have just adopted me and loved me and their nation and families. But I know that I haven't found my medicine yet. So, it's a hard journey

because I've witnessed so much beautiful medicine. But I know, I just I feel that once I have found mine it will call me… [Elder Sedalia] told me to, she's like I can teach you everything you want but it's not your medicine and you know it, you know. And she's so right…I'm a person that I take all the teachings that comes anyway."

Thirza: [on Two Spirit roles in community] "I don't really know too much of our traditional roles of Two Spirit people... There are some who say, like we used to be the people who would like go back and forth between the women and the men and sort of like diplomats talking to them about things that they weren't able to talk to each other about. I've heard that we had certain ceremonies we were supposed to do. We had certain ceremonies, we had certain knowledges…I don't want to say it's all lost. I'm sure there's people who know what's up. But I think it's definitely like hard to access. It's not really a concern for me too much… I've [participated] in ceremonies in the past…it's not really something that I do a lot in my life, especially in Toronto…I live so far from my territory where the ceremonies I would go to are out there. I don't really feel like straight people would want me to be like talking between the women and the men. Like no one's ever asked me to do that for them! [laughing] So I feel like my role is just to be like Queer and Trans and have a good time and try to make it easier for other Indigiqueer and Two Spirit people…I think sometimes I'm disappointed that there are people who still don't accept Two Spirit people in their communities or understand…like in the prairies, there's a lot of stuff about skirts and wearing skirts and women have to wear skirts. And obviously that doesn't work for [some] Two Spirit people…there's like some really gendered stuff that goes on [Do you think that you would have more of a relationship with ceremony if it was different?] I think so, yeah, I think so.

Wapshkankwet: [on sharing traditional knowledge on social media] "I have mixed feelings about it because that's like the only way that my dad teaches right now...a lot of people are like *who do you belong to?!* on Twitter...*That's how you traditionally ask somebody*, like no you don't...really bizarre. Like *what tribe are yo*u? People who use their language and share things are targeted more. As far as sharing the knowledge, I think that there's definitely a fine line between sharing things and what is shared...I would say Twitter is not the best place to share things. But I also know that there are apps that anyone has access to just go download all the same information that's being shared...if you look in local communities, all the same information is being shared. Some of the things that are not shared and are closed off, those I've never seen shared personally in those spaces."

Moe: "I have well actually have three spirit names, but the most recent one is Singing Thunderbird Woman and that one was received at Sundance ceremony my second year of Sundance...My first Cree name was actually with Joseph [Naytowhow] and Cheryl [L'Hirondelle] in ceremony with Yvonne Chamakese who's one of Joseph's spiritual sisters and that was in a sweat lodge and that was *osawi kinosêw iskwêw* which is like golden like oh sounds kind of like a coppery orange color...Fish Woman. And it's interesting because the first Cree Elder I ever did ceremony with her name was Fish Woman. OK, so that kind of felt like...this I guess lineage. And my second name, Singing Thunderbird Woman [nikamo pihêsiw iskwêw] that also felt like it was kind of this extension of another Elder, Bob Smoker who's an Ojibway Elder whose name was Sounding Sky. So these kind of relationships, I guess, and I think of like kind of spiritual kinship and how those kind of bring us together and how we become like the bridge of some of those teachings and then, you know, carry them forward."

Mel: "We didn't grow up with any teachings... [my grandmother's] first language was French. So, it was kind of hard... And then to top that off [she had] dementia...she was describing these kinship relationships that we had going like that somehow still remained in her that she could kind of tell us about that...she was quite disconnected. She was the youngest of her family and she was the only one that was born [in Quebec]. And her mom died when she was quite young and she married my grandfather...[he was a] womanizer...So I think that just her mode was survival and just, you know, bringing up the kids as best she knew how within this really, you know, state of crisis that lasted her whole life. And so, my dad and his siblings, they all experienced that and were very disconnected from each other, but also from their parents...I think that's a story that lots of people share... So then to try to kind of find stories with her, you know, any kind of teachings...she didn't necessarily have the teachings..."

Moe: "[the performance and songs of] Feast of the Invisible, for me, that came out of a series of different songs and pieces that I kind of brought together...it's about feasting those relationships...Let's talk about maskwa...bear...this grandfather spirit, this energy who now gets the form of a bear. And it's a reinterpretation of Cree story about bear who takes this child...And in relationship to one of [Elder] Bob Smokers', because he was also a bear dancer, he received a series of dreams where he received different gifts. And in the final dream, the bear gave Bob his coat. And so, Bob would journey to communities and he would do a bear dance. And it was a healing dance to acknowledge the sacred directions and to bring healing to people through this energy and the spirit of the bear. And so, to open that piece in the performance, Bob gave me permission to play an excerpt of this makwa dodem, his bear song. And it basically is the song that bear sings and as he's going into his fasting ceremony into the winter and they hibernate. And it's *my eyes hurt because I see the way you walk on this land. My ears hurt because I hear*

*the way you walk on this land. And so I'm going to go and fast so that you will learn better ways and so that you will learn what you need to walk a better path...*it's in this continuum of relationships within my waking life with ancestral and animate and dreamed relationships. And the whole piece is...underlined by the journey with coyote. And so Coyote sort of arrives and brings these gifts, these offerings of this connection with the northern lights, these beads, these different symbols that help to align into a search, I guess for me as the primary vocalist, my relationship with those kinships and a return through these devices of shame and the colonial process and lateral violence to kind of transform those things into a deepened sense of place of belonging through these relationships and the teachings."

Role in and relationship with community

Serving the Indigenous community in roles such as social workers, advocates, protectors, mentors, aunties, facilitators, organizers and volunteers is a common theme through the stories, often influenced by and intersecting with race, class, gender and sexuality. Community work and giving is recognized as a value passed down between generations as storytellers take on and work towards righting the wrongs of colonization, supporting and healing others as well as ourselves, pushing settler institutions as well as Indigenous organizations heavily influenced or infiltrated by settlers to listen to and include racialized, marginalized Indigenous lives and perspectives. Some participants share stories of efforts to inspire younger generations, to let them know that creating and being successful at it, in all the forms success can take, is attainable. Through their own experiences of colonial violence, storytellers are compelled/motivated/moved to merge traditional roles with the contemporary while navigating settler society’s expectations and limitations.

Nina: "[My mother] had always been a defender of people...since I was 16 and I knew I was going to be a social worker and one of my first jobs...was working at the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal and I have that same instinct...for twenty five years, I was a frontline worker.... at the Native Women's Shelter of Montreal, I was so adamant, and I was so passionate about keeping mothers and kids together...I did a lot of healing for myself. So, you know, as much as I was their advocate, as much as I wanted to fight with them, they healed a part of me because they made me understand what had happened to my mother."

Thirza: "…it's supposed to be inspiring, that I can make a video that could go places without having to wait for my big break grab, especially to encourage, like young Indigenous and young queer filmmakers to make work. I'm with the Toronto Queer Film Festival and we do these workshops with Indigenous queer people to help them make their first video...I try to answer questions if someone wants to know how to do it. I'm trying to be supportive...I'm really not into the idea of teaching in a university, though. I travel so much so I can't really guarantee that I could be there for a whole semester. So, I try to provide educational experiences outside of university."

Wapshkankwet: "when my sister died, it was very, very unexpected. And my dad talked a lot about how there are not really any services for traditional burials for people...I went back to school during the process. I spent a lot of time going over my experiences with death and dying throughout my life. I had to process my own grief and really examine my experiences with the death of people around me...if you're on the rez, on any rez, you really see community come together in a way that you don't in on non-native spaces. That helped me see that there was a need for...a native person, specifically for me who is able to speak our language, who knows the

medicines and can meet needs for those who are passing on and want a traditional burial...I've gotten to experience different cultures in a way that has made me feel a little bit more kindred to others globally. Dealing with death and dying in mortuary science really challenged how I have looked at my entire life."

Anna: "Last summer, [Indigenous sex workers] had our first retreat. The need was really to gather...we're a small community where we find it difficult [to go] through mainstream sex worker organization [and] Indigenous organization to feel safe and included in those spaces and also in the advocacy around what we mean as Indigenous people working in those trades. So, we wanted to just have access to a bit of sharing knowledge around cultures, about our cultures and what we wanted to know more [about]. And also talk about the real shit that's happening in those sex industries...there's different layers. But in my life, I've been brought up in the sex worker advocacy movement. And for many, many years, I'm really an advocate for taking out the laws that target specifically sex workers in the criminal code so we can really implement some labour rights for a community that is over surveilled."

Felicia: [in relation to Black and Indigenous solidarity action in Montreal] "I think there's a certain type of hypocrisy. Yeah. But at the same time, the two communities are so busy trying to survive and taking care of their own shit that like...I saw a demonstration of solidarity like crazy between Black and Native when I was in Regina...it was people from all around Canada who were meeting for Canada Pride, all leaders from Canada who represent LGBT communities...I felt that there lots of racism going on...I decided to call a revolution. And so I went around and they went to individually see everyone...and I was like, so we need to talk, we need to come together...[translation: we were 30 people in a room] and there was Two-Spirit community also,

mostly Two-Spirit. I was with the POC because they had a lesser voice...they were like, we want you to speak for us...we broke the system that day..."

Mel: "[Chris Reid and I] actually just met with LeClerc Prison, which is a provincial prison, and they have a lot of Indigenous women incarcerated there...we're basically going to start ordering books for them [for a library]. And then we're trying to do the same thing at the federal prison. But there's a lot more policy legislation we have to kind of deal with. We're trying to get some post-secondary education in there, too. And that's also in solidarity with the Black community here. So, we're trying not to just focus on the Indigenous incarcerated folks, but like everybody that's there. Let's just bring post-secondary in so that once they come out, they have something that they can lean on."

Creativity

Creativity in all its forms has long been a practice within Indigenous cultures. Artmaking often tells the stories of our epistemologies, survival, reclamation, and identity as we carve out new spaces and places of connection, kinship and medicine. Post contact, this creativity also became part of our subsistence economies, providing us with modes of trade in an ever-changing world where some of our traditional methods of survivance dwindled or were eradicated altogether. Essentially, the connections we experience between land, culture, and community have shaped our art making processes and aesthetics.

Some storytellers speak about music - voice and instruments - as transformative, a bridge between present worlds and to other dimensions and ancestors, as alleviating anxiety, as welcoming within self exploration and into community, as legacy and mode of transferring stories/knowledge, as medicine, prayer and ceremony. Other forms of creation the storytellers work with include mixed media, digital and computation arts, and traditional tattooing as

reclamation of self, community and territory, as exploring new worlds of possibility, as points of connection and intimacy with and medicine for self and others.

Nina: "Music really let me open up and become more of who I was than I was in school because I played the cello and I was one of the older ones and I was more of a leader. And it really helped me learn how to socialize with boys or how to make friendships with people. And it was really a way for me to express myself...when I was 18, when I first met... my first Inuk... I started learning that drumming was a big thing. And I went to my first powwow and I did my first sweat and I heard throat singing for the first time...and it blew me away... But through throat singing, I've managed to show my girls who they are. And this is something that I never listened to when I was growing up. But they've heard it since they were in my belly because I was throat singing while I was pregnant with them. And they know how, and I perform now with my oldest daughter."

Moe: "Kinship is creating these systems of care and of nurturance and of sometimes deep challenges...more and more, I try to integrate ceremony and my ways of creating and maintaining balance within those processes...we are engaging in sacred work when we sing, when we play an instrument, when we are listening in that way. That's prayer. And that's an extension of those ancestors and that's an extension of this land and those relationships. And we're inviting people to be a part of that and in receiving that to also be connecting with their own lineage, our own background. And it's you know, and I think it's healing."

Skawennati: "For the last long while, you know, a couple of decades, I have been imagining Indigenous people in the future and making imagery about it...[in the 90s] Cyber Powwow was a combination chat space, online gallery and library and mixed reality event. That term 'mixed

reality event' was not a term yet at the time...The first thing that happened really was that I was shown this new software that was like unlike anything that came before it because it was a graphical chatroom...a collection of rooms...a palace...what was interesting about the palace is it was very customizable and they were trying to encourage community...it was so important for us to be in this space, in cyberspace...this is exactly the tool that native people need, like contemporary native artists. We're all spread out across this huge land; how can we connect?"

Mel: "My grandmother is always with me...I do actively call on [my ancestors]...before I'm doing a tattoo, for example. I was taught by Milo Lefort, who is an amazing human being. I love him. It's been really cool. the real reason I wanted to do it is so I could offer it at the shelter or just to Indigenous folks in general. And they don't have to pay...it's medicine. Certainly, recalling some old practices...I think a lot about Cree women's tattoos. And I've done some research and watched Skindigenous and read Dion Kaszas's PhD dissertation and looking at all these amazing traditional tattoo artists that have a lot of their stuff online...And then following the revival, traditional Inuit tattooing and then actually doing some for like Indigenous friends and non-Indigenous friends too. And then I do it on myself, of course, and I just find it super healing. It's really not at all like the machine. It's just so much more quiet and personal and intimate, you know, and takes more time."

Gender/sexuality

Storytellers discuss how colonization has impacted Indigenous bodies, gender and sexual identities, brought doubt into our Indigenous ways of being, how we are navigating these often challenging topics and our own identities as well as finding new ways of coming together intergenerationally and finding common ground.

One participant spoke extensively about their work in sex worker advocacy, laws and legislation that impact body sovereignty, and how to make room for conversations around sex work and the wellbeing of practitioners. Capitalism and patriarchy influence the ways in which we see ourselves, producing gender stereotypes, which we push back against through this advocacy as well as creativity and kinship.

Navigating, discovering and perpetuating healthy sexualities can be found in Indigenous language, within which binaries often disappear. One storyteller speaks on discovering a new word in their language that reframes Two Spiritedness as existing between the binary and explores ways of seeing this new word/concept as between worlds/dimensions, which ultimately feels freer and more filled with possibility. Traditional and contemporary ways of existing outside of the male/female binary, even to refuse to label ourselves, allows us to be potential bridges of knowledge and understanding between Elders and youth, to create saf(er) spaces, and connect with the land as our true selves.

Anna: "All industry does exploitation. The sex trade industries are not out of that. We have to deal with that. But having those criminal laws and those initiatives to surveil is really not good. But at the same time, what's happening is also the fact that with colonization and with the fact that we all have our bodies, our sexualities, our ways of thinking, have been a lot colonized. And we just started for a couple of decades now, we started back to reappropriate, share story that was long, long not tell, a couple of families and clan remember. And so it's getting really interesting to see how we can talk about sex, how we can talk about the sex trades and how people need support and sovereignty over their bodies and what we do with our time and especially now these days like in this capitalistic society and how we survive and make room for people. "

Thirza: [her *film Helpless Maiden Makes An "I" Statement*, Disney & queerness] "I was also thinking about Disney films and how there's always this evil queen that's like very sexualized and sexy...I don't say pornographic because it doesn't push it that much. But it's like, you know, the sexy queen that like as a queer kid growing up, you know, I had a crush on sexy queen...but she's always fixated on this like helpless maiden. So there's this like lesbian subtext, and then also later on I was learning about queer coding, which is this thing they do in children's entertainment where they take queer aspects and they put it onto the villain, kind of like I think it's almost like sort of to ward you away from being queer."

Thirza: "I started thinking that I wanted to get [the traditional chin tattoo] in 2007, and this is actually my last manic episode. I started thinking about it, but I knew it's a woman's marking. So, I knew thinking about I was comfortable wearing this because I do feel like a boy, but at the same time I'm gender fluid. So I had to wrestle with it for about eleven years before I could say for sure that I was going to do it because I wanted to know that I could wear it and not feel that it didn't belong to me...it's just a big decision."

Moe: "the new [Cree] word that I've learned is tastawâyihk iyiniwak, which means those who move between. And I really like that because I kind of feel like I never quite fully fit in. But I'm kind of in between. And so there's kind of this beauty of being in between that like you have access and you can hopefully use that access to reach people in other ways that maybe looking at things from like a binary or one side or the other, you can't always. And I think a lot of us are moving in those spaces. You know, as queer as like gender non-conforming, as Métis...people don't always have the same level of awareness or knowledge around to spiritedness, and yet we're safe spaces, you know? Is it up to us to bring that knowledge to Elders? Is it up to us to just

follow what they say without questioning it? Like, what are these nuances in how we're adapting and shifting and honoring and mixing forms?... [in relation to Land As Our Teacher, a Concordia University SSHRC funded project that brings Indigenous youth to land-based teachings] we're adapting our ways and we're doing our best to acknowledge protocol while also acknowledging the level of safety and openness that this process really requires from us and from our Two-Spirited youth and friends."

Felicia: "growing up and kind of realizing that I wasn't straight and, you know, trying to understand all that and where I situated myself. First, I was like, Okay, maybe I'm bi, really didn't like the term...It's very sexual, it's very binary. And so I was like, I'm still am not comfortable with that...for a while I was resenting more male identity so I was like, maybe I'm just lesbian and I wasn't comfortable with any of that...so when people ask me, like, *what are you?* I stopped trying to find a label and to say, you know, I'm me...I have two energies in me: I have something very masculine and something very feminine and I'm not talking necessarily in terms of man or woman, mostly sun and moon energies. I feel like a protector and I also feel I am a caregiver."

Mel: "I identify as queer. I've never really labeled myself. I've always been that. But when I was growing up, I didn't really hear that. Like, gay was really the word when I was growing up, like in the 80s. But it wasn't queer...[queer] was an insult. But I feel comfortable with it because I'm not a lesbian. I am bisexual, but that just feels like a really dated word or something, it's weird...since I've had Anne, she's seven now, my sexuality has changed a lot, I tend to most of the time feel quite asexual. It's all this fluid thing that's been happening."

Challenges related to practice

All challenges related to practice stem from oppression due to colonization. There are many moments we find ourselves restricted and unable to speak out due to repercussions: One participant edited out conversation about their work for fear of reprisals even though the discussion revolved around the necessity for change, accountability of the employer, racism and discrimination. As we navigate these colonial spaces, we are mindful of what is appropriate to share with the settler community, and as some storytellers are reconnecting natives, what is appropriate for us to explore, speak about and embody. One storyteller shared the challenges of low-income families and the homeless - those in our communities hardest hit by capitalism – as unable to afford even the act of dying. For others, the challenge is at the intersection of harm reduction and how to be well while being mindful of the necessity to stay connected to our lands, basic needs, addiction, HIV and MMIWG2S. Stereotypes, tokenization and representation came through in all the stories as obstacles to overcome – none of the participants addressed, referred to or seemed to feel these were insurmountable.

Wapshkankwet: ″it's a death care industry just like everything else under capitalism...if you look up the average cost of a funeral, it's upwards of ten thousand dollars. I can't afford to die right now. I know that was a huge reality when my sister passed. There's this whole other side to this reality that has to be faced that the amount of people who are in poverty or who are very, very working class and the reality of spending this huge amount of money with some sort of life celebration or funeral service is just not possible. When I went into this, I felt that the hardest thing for me was to work with someone who was homeless or who was unclaimed. I have seen spaces where the bodies are stacked because they're either unidentifiable or no one has claimed them. And sometimes people don't claim bodies because of money issues, financial reasons, and

a lot of cities and a lot of communities do annual or bi annual services, and I don't mean funeral service, I mean services where they cremate and do like a larger mass grave."

Anna: "I thought at first that [Indigenous sex workers] gathering as a collective would give us spaces to create something that we could put out there. But we're not there. Let's say like just be visible, maybe write an article, maybe do a mural. But then we were not there because our needs are so diverse. You know, some are like looking for an opioid substitution treatment. Some are looking to raise their new family. Some are looking to maybe spend more time in their territory, back and forth. And we all have our own level of insecurity with food and basic stuff. So we've been able to realize that and my reflection today talking with you is we need to cover some basics so we might later be doing some more creative stuff**...**we have been supporting a lot around financial support...emotional support...try to stay in contact to build our relation and build new relation and also be connected with our own communities because we are all also from other places...we have the sex trade and being Indigenous in common but also maybe we are living with HIV, maybe we're working with missing and murdered Indigenous women to raise awareness and support families."

Skawennati: "I never expected Mattel to give me a native Barbie. You know, when she started coming out, I started collecting her….I'm happy that consumers have demanded diversity in their products… but I guess from maybe from when I came up when I was born in my age group or just or just maybe being a poor person…I just didn't have a lot of expectation of me getting…what was targeted to me…thinking of Second Life [3D virtual world where users can create worlds and connect] as a place that you were supposed to contribute. You're supposed to make stuff for yourself and to give or sell to others…[the Indigenous youth] asked to work on

it…they were creating, for example, the head dresses worn in the Arctic episode. You know, created moccasins, you know, because nobody was selling moccasins…there's no like native content in Second Life."

Wapshkankwet: "I know that there are a lot of people who are very, very bothered by the idea of talking about death, period. It's a very natural process and transition. When you are done here, you will transition on, however you want to put it: You are dying. And at some point, those things have to be looked at. And I guess for me personally, I feel that I did have the opportunity, being part of a native community, to examine mourning and grief and to be able to honor that and to celebrate that and if don't face those things, you end up spending a lot of time with those who come after you healing or being in very chaotic situations."

Land/urban spaces/territory

Storytellers shared ideas of and connections to land as home and how that takes many shapes based on forced diaspora, ancestral lands, reserve land as well as land without borders, to live wherever we as Indigenous people desire, despite colonial impositions such as capitalism and property of territory and body. Colonization has forced us to understand and practice connection to land in new ways, to bring possibilities of reclamation forward for youth. It is a challenge for urban Indigenous communities to find what we traditionally deem to be “land” as in “the bush” and connect with the soil, trees, waters. We are creating these opportunities for ourselves and youth so that we can create and renew systems of care. We are also speaking about recognizing city as land: Underneath these seas of concrete lies earth that is still sacred. And many of us are comfortable here, our practical knowledge of surviving and thriving on the land lies dormant inside us. Whether we awaken those aspects of ourselves is often dependent on

accessibility and when so much of our land – the bush – is taken up by cottage country and owned by government, this can prove difficult. So how do we create access to safe, land-based experience especially for those who are most vulnerable? What does the future of territory/land look like? One participant considers and works extensively in/with cyberspace as territory, modelling lands with the intent of claiming and making space. Can virtual land offer Indigenous people respite from colonialism?

Felicia: "What is my territory? Because I was born here on this territory. Then my origins are also from, you know, like Oklahoma... but also like south of Ontario where lots of Cherokee went. But I haven't met many Cherokee. Most of the Freedman Cherokee are in the United States, you know. But I was still born here. I'm Indigenous to North America. So, it's like, how do you navigate that?...it's weird because I feel that my homeland is here. You know, like as a person born here and also from settler lineage…And it's weird by traveling sometimes I just I feel different connections, as if, you know, but like the origins... Most Cherokee Freedmen are in the United States."

Wapshkankwet: "My dad's response to that is *no one's gona tell us where to live!* and my rez is actually in Kansas where I'm enrolled now...So my family has really gone back home to very close, but not on our family's ancestral land, you know, where my ancestors and my dad and grandparents, where everyone was born even. So, it would be like Powers Bluff, Wisconsin, central to northern Wisconsin and not Kansas. The reason we're out here in Kansas, the Prairie Band Potawatomi was there because of a forced move that really pushed Potawatomi down all the way into Mexico, Kansas and Oklahoma. So if I went home, I would just be living with my family, not on the rez. If I did move back to a rez, it would actually be the Wind River rez. And I

guess if I went home, home for me would be...I don't know if it would be Kansas or Wisconsin or Wyoming. I mean, my older sister, who I had a really close relationship with for most of my life, is planning on moving here. I mean, it would kind of be roots here [Virginia] at this point."

Skawennati: "It was probably about two thousand five. I was presenting Cyber Powwow at Banff. And so, Celia Pearce...came up to me and she was like, how would you like to see native characters in video games? And I was like, I think I'd like that a lot! And so, there was this new pilot project grant available from SSHRC and it was for Aboriginal research networks...We want to have Indigenous people in cyberspace. And so that's how AbTec was born: Aboriginal territories in cyberspace. And that tagline came from cyber powwow, which I called an Aboriginal territory in cyberspace...[in Second Life, a 3D virtual world] we finally were like...I think we need our own island. And at that time, Second Life was offering educational institutions half price on islands...what we think is "hilarious" is that real Indians pay real money for virtual land."

Moe: "[Land As Our Teacher] is a five year land-based project to create more opportunities for urban Indigenous youth to come together and to learn about culture, about land, about ceremony, to meet one another, to connect with Elders. And I guess when I say land based, we really mean like being outside in nature, with and for and by and near the sources and places of land. And so, I guess reclaiming those kinships that maybe for a lot of youth haven't been super prevalent in their lives. They haven't necessarily had access for any number of reasons. And so part of the work is also to engage in conversations about these colonial practices and processes that have kept them from being able to have those connections so that they understand that they're not responsible for this disconnect and that now they have the opportunity to reconnect. And that can

mean any number of things. And one of the primary focuses is to really ensure safety and really ensure space for 2S and Indigenous LGBTQ+ youth to get access to those opportunities. Up until this point, there haven't been many. And so, you know, it's been beautiful and challenging...some of that really is based around ceremony and kind of coming back into a space where we can learn about spirituality and learn about those relationships and how we can cultivate them in our day to day lives and how we can do that as a community with the support of our Elders."

Collective care & self care

Mental health was a major theme running through many of the stories. Storytellers expressed how they navigate not only varying degrees of trauma directly associated with colonization, especially for those who are visibly QTBIPOC, but those more subtle veins of pain, imbalance and confusion. The disruption that capitalism has created within our bodies is evident and storytellers all work, in one capacity or another, to heal themselves and the broader community. What became very clear is the care, acceptance and ingenuity with which participants approach their own health and that of the community. Ranging from accepting to take medication and publicly validating that decision in support of others, to Netflix, hugging, tattooing, gardening and bringing harm reduction workshops into prisons, the pain storytellers have experienced has led them to more empathic modes of connecting and healing.

Thirza: "When I first got diagnosed with bipolar disorder, I was really resistant to it. I was like, no, I've only ever been depressed. And then obviously I was in a manic episode. I mean, you don't really like accept your diagnosis in those situations anyway. I remember when I first was on medications... well, first of all, my first psychiatric experience was not positive. There was like a lot of trauma involved...then like four years later, I had a second psychiatric

hospitalization...and actually I got a good psychiatrist who worked with me and was really good about like getting me on the right meds and not overmedicating me. So, I know a lot of people when they're creative people, they get worried, like medication is going to take away my creativity, I'm not going to be able to think of new things. And if you're overmedicated and especially if you're recovering from a manic episode it's really hard to recover from those, not impossible, but it'll take a good year to recover from a serious manic psychosis...it does feel really impossible that things will get better again. But I mean, I have been able to be creative, like on medication and even more creative because...when you're not always in crisis, like you're just able to do more things and think of more things. It took a while to accept being bipolar...even after I was taking the medication. There's still parts of me that were like, no, this isn't really true...there's a weird stigma."

Nina: "I've really enjoyed our conversations... it's really been so healing for me. Well, it's interesting because I'm such a social person. And I'm a hugger. I care a lot for my community and my friends. And every time I see one of my frontline worker friends, I always hug them, and I just hold them and I encourage them because I know what it is like to be on the frontline. And so, it's been very hard for me to not do that for them. You know, it's a real struggle because I also suffer from anxiety and depression, which is something that I don't normally talk about. But I need to also share with people that that's what I suffer from, but I also managed to go through it. So, the depression and anxiety has been overwhelming sometimes, but I'm very grateful and thankful that I have a home."

Thirza on tattoos as self-care: "They help me, they kind of mark scenes in my life, like the first ones were armbands that were about my mania. And then the rest of them they have this big

super meaning. And then in the last year, I started getting really silly ones. I got one on my stomach that's a piece of lemon meringue pie that says pie daddy. And I got like a sexy cupcake on my leg. I got like a cherry bomb on my butt."

Anna: "My involvement with the Black Indigenous Harm Reduction Alliance, which is a collective of different people, Indigenous and Black folks that got together to really put emphasis on all the needs to have self-determined health and wellness services, care, support, that is by and for us. I got involved in this collective and we are working in prison and we do a monthly workshop on harm reduction...we have large holistic discussions on harm reduction, what it is to take care of ourselves while we are inside...when we transit out of the prison and back to community... Harm reduction in...in prison I think for our collective member...we really believe that until all of us are free, that we can't be free ourselves too, and that people that are prisoners, that are detained and incarcerated...we need to be there to know that we care. We also have eyes and ears on what's happening and be there in solidarity when they need our support."

Anna: **"**We need our Elders, but I also am an auntie in the sex worker community...I have more than 30 years of experience. That's what they call me...I feel that these days I'm really reflecting on the fact that... our members, were so at different spaces right now. Whatever the role I'm in...I need also, like we all need support. And what it means to us might be different at this time than it was last summer and that it will be maybe next spring because I'm in auntie...I am also close to retirement. I've been through different stages...from the street to prison to escorting...to the Internet and back to whatever and crack houses...I've been all the way around in different cities over the last two decades. And so, I've realized that where my support right now as an auntie

needs to be a bit different. So, I'm looking for other aunties and I have aunties around...we all need different stuff. We're so diverse...we need an auntie gathering of collective care!"

Mel: "I've been riding my bike through the winter this year and it's been pretty awesome to know that I can do that. I like Netflix. It's like my friend, one of my best friends. I forgot to mention that it's my support system...I love horror and true crime...All things dark and scary...We have like a yard. So, we do some gardening, vegetable gardening and flowers and stuff that helps a lot. I like essential oils...Lavender is one of my favorites, that calms me down. Oh, and my antidepressants, of course, calm me down as well...every so often I go off them to see what's my baseline like, how am I doing. Because I started taking them after I had postpartum. I'm still postpartum. I think I'm always gona be postpartum...And so the last time I went off them it was a full crash and burn. So, it's like, no...my brain chemistry is not happening for whatever reason. It's no big deal...I just kind of accept it and take the pills."

Discussion

Process & methods/methodologies

The findings of this research process proved robust and nuanced regarding the experiences of and issues surrounding the lives of Indigiqueers, Trans and 2S folks, and Indigenous women. Participants were eager and open, sharing information far beyond the expected outcome. As conversations touched on issues such as identity, colonization, diaspora, trauma, embodiment, body sovereignty, creativity, healing, community, leadership and the future, it was evident through all of the stories that there was an appreciation of being heard and included in this process.

It is interesting and relevant to reflect on the fact that my thesis is a research creation project. During the podcast and in my first draft of this document, I made no mention of research creation per se, however, as an Indigenous person who exists, works, creates, serves through an Indigenous lens, research creation is simply the inherent nature of Indigenous ways of being and knowing. We work *with* community, merging creative and academic practices like knowledge sharing, music, song and art, to experience and experiment, innovate and support each other, finding new ways to tell old and contemporary stories. Research creation is embodied and unspoken.

The methodologies and methods chosen to frame this research grounded the work and aided in guiding each stage from conception to protocol and preparation, to meeting storytellers in conversation and reflection. Certainly Nehiyaw kinship relational ethics required this research be grounded in respect and responsibility: *wâhkôhtowin* prepared me to approach this process with care, understanding that our lives as Indigenous peoples are complex in terms of our histories, and how we move through, navigate and push back against this colonized world. Although we had many concerns and experiences in common, each of our individual lives is so

layered and dynamic, and each of our practices so different, it was necessary to sit in each storyteller's space, empathize deeply with their words and experience in order to truly hear their words and present them with dignity, during the process and after in dissemination. As Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, Indigenous research methods and methodologies have inherent transformative properties and the potential for education and healing (Smith, 2012) and together with participants, we delved and explored themes with care. Through and within this collective care, our voices sounded and the textures and nuances of our lives were touched as we unearthed new perspectives regarding our existence in and impact on urban Indigenous spaces/places. In the light of what Sto:lo scholar Jo-Ann Archibald calls *storywork* (Archibald, 2014), our conversations were open ended without time limits, allowing for intimate deliberation and contemplation. Participants were able to share what they felt was relevant and veer into a variety of tangential spaces, maintaining the spirit of storywork, which is to make meaning through traditional or lived experience (Archibald, 2014).

This work has shown Indigiqueers, Trans, 2S and Indigenous women to be powerful and caring, making meaning in our lives, finding our own individual voices and then implicating ourselves in and supporting community by sharing our practices, experiences and values as medicine for ourselves and others. We have shown ourselves to be reflective and analytical about colonisation and how we have survived this despite its efforts to erase us. Although we have been forced to adopt some of these systems in order to survive and endure the violence that comes with that (Tuck & Recollet, 2016), these conversations have demonstrated a kind of transcendence that is reminiscent of Leanne Simpson's *Kwe As Resurgent Method* where Kwe – different from the English *woman* – cannot be understood through a colonial lens as it reflects a "spectrum of gender expressions" and transforms how we understand ourselves and the

relationships we have with humans, more than humans and the Creator (Simpson, 2017). Through these transformative relationships with ourselves and community, we overcome, create, explore, take risks, fail, succeed, educate, learn our cultures and languages, find ourselves and our relations, heal, and inspire.

The care we take and the values we live by within these urban Indigenous spaces are similarly represented in the similar methodologies of Botswanan scholar Bagele Chilisa and Cree scholar Margaret Kovach are active in this research – respect, celebration, play, uninterrupted speaking/sharing, conversation, the passing on of knowledge and memories (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2010). Less active was their practical method of forming circles to share experience, especially in relation to the interviews done over Zoom due to the COVID virus. This was an incredibly stressful time and maintaining the schedule for this research while balancing all of the optics of COVID was intense. Although digital interventions proved useful during this pandemic period, they hindered somewhat the building of intimacy with participants during conversations and by extension, it is possible that the comfort felt by participants during this process may have been affected.

On a technical level, there are some jumps in the podcasts and conversations may not flow as one might expect: These were really the first audio edits I had ever done. Many of the conversations were long, lasting two to three hours in some cases; editing these conversations into far shorter episodes proved challenging. It was difficult to decide what information to highlight and share, as everything told to me by the storytellers was rich and captivating. Often this meant cutting out sections of conversation that linked to others, creating a kind of disruption. I was careful to include those moments I knew were most important to the storyteller. While listening and editing, I could hear myself very intrigued and invested in the conversation, to the

point where I would forget myself and voice my agreement or interrupt them to engage, which caused too many disruptions that needed editing out, causing more jumps in the recording. For these moments of interruption and lack of flow, I apologise to the listener.

Conversation as method proved very useful in gathering stories about Indigiqueer, Trans, 2S and Indigenous women's experience with decolonization, collective care, and self care. Sensitive topics were explored in-depth through conversation with an Indigenous listener who is part of the same community and this helped participants move through and reflect on challenging experiences. These voices would not have been listened to or heard in the same way through an impersonal survey or less intimate focus group.

Limitations

Limitations to this conversation/storytelling process included:

- Time: challenging to schedule and have the conversations, edit, distribute draft episodes for consent, re-edit sound and final version, transcribe, data analysis, reporting.
- Cost: Over and above the honoraria, sound edits were needed, and these were costly at approximately $1000, which was thankfully far below industry rates and generously provided by George Wesley @1devilishgrin on Twitter.

Expectations & reflections

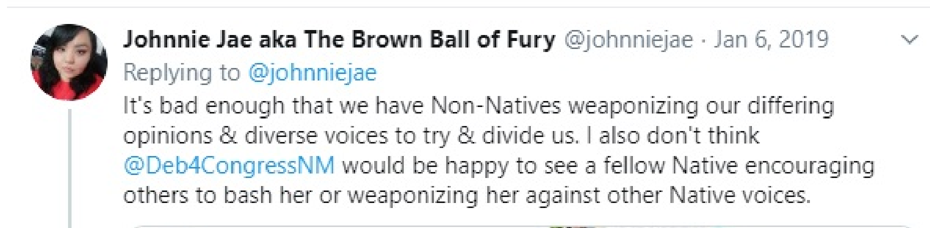
Research expectations were more than satisfied; the results have proven to be a meaningful contribution to the Indigenous knowledge base. Over and above the topics expected to be explored, some topics covered in these conversations that are not often heard include: Indigenous approaches to death and dying; Cherokee Freedmen perspective; Indigenous self care, sharing traditional teachings on social media, and the evolution of our languages to include

(re)surfacing gender identities. This research has added to Indigenous scholarship by telling our own stories through digital storywork.

Some of the participants chose to remain anonymous and asked that their full names not be used as they wanted to feel freer to express themselves and speak about their practices, politics, role in community and past experience. As Indigiqueer, Trans, 2S and Indigenous women's voices/experiences get pushed to the side or erased (see MMIWG2S Inquiry reports), and backlash, lateral violence in community and gaslighting is certainly a reality, requesting anonymity is understandable.

Described as a "colonial hangover" by Tasha Beeds, professor at the University of Sudbury's Department of Indigenous Studies, communities that are oppressed turn on themselves using the same colonial tools and tactics as their oppressor (Infocus, 2020). Research points to residential schools as the impetus for behaviors within Indigenous communities such as shaming, blaming and bullying, also known as lateral violence – we turn on each other out of anger and frustration (Bombay, 2014).

Often cropping up on social media, lateral violence is being inflicted within online Indigenous communities like #NativeTwitter as well as between marginalized communities such as Black and Indigenous, and within and between 2SLGBTQIA+ communities:



(Johnnie Jae, 2019)

(Sterritt, 2019)

The tendency to speculate and generalize on social media without knowing the motivations and experiences of any one person make lateral violence particularly harmful, as posts can go viral, spreading and bolstering the violence and causing victims to potentially feel more shame. Prominent Inuk singer Kelly Fraser posted on social media that she faced "a ton" of

lateral violence. After she took her own life in 2020, her family spoke out about her PTSD and experience with unrelenting cyberbullying (Sinclair, 2020).

Another version of lateral violence for urban Indigenous folks relates to their Indigeneity, views on being Indigenous and the Indigenous "experience" that are often undermined by those who say that real Indigenous "experts" are those who grew up in community/on reserve. Diné Charlie Amáyá Scott (@GrandmaSaidNo) points out that urban reserves exist and challenges us to think about the colonial lens Indigenous folks have been forced to look through, which colors our gaze with respect to kinship, respect, and gender and state violence (Scott, 2018).

Certainly these symptoms of lateral violence came up in the conversations directly related to identity and belonging, and colonization and trauma. Recognizing the colonial disruption or erasure of our communities has created generations of diasporic Indigenous peoples with a variety of experiences which may or may not mean connection to traditional teachings. Still valid and worthy, we need to create and accept new notions of expert and expertise based on our complex multiplicity.

Conversations around belonging and identity directly correlated with colonization in North America and the resulting trauma. As urban Indigenous folks, all the participants are diasporic albeit with varied stories on where they now live and how they came to be there. The struggle to find identity as an urban Indigenous person is a common story in the urban Indigenous community and one that is often rife with feelings of shame, guilt, loneliness and anger. Creating programming and spaces where urban Indigenous people can connect and reconnect with their Indigenous culture is paramount in finding self-acceptance and self-worth, which in turn creates a stronger community. The benefits of land-based learning, for example, range from centering Indigeneity and various gender identities, to regenerating intergenerational

teachings and increasing the spiritual and cultural well-being (Meyer, 2014; Radu, House, & Pashagumskum, 2014).

We would do well to open up and accept various ideas around and practices of engaging with land. Participants spoke of urban land, being landless, searching for land, trying to understand our relationship to land, engaging with land creatively, looking to our ancestors to invoke land... Urban land is land (Tuck et al., 2014) as are our spiritual, emotional, and intellectual dimensions (Styres, Haig-Brown, & Blimkie, 2013; Tuck et al., 2014). By bringing traditional and contemporary ideas together, we may be able to create more inclusive spaces that view all forms and experiences of Indigeneity as valuable.

It is evident that learning our languages and cultures gives us a more grounded sense of place and self as evidenced by participants who did possess traditional teachings and integrate them in to their traditional and contemporary practices – community work, music/song and death/dying services – whereas those who had less access to and knowledge of cultural teachings expressed a certain loss, self doubt, disconnection and perpetual search for meaning. Certainly within our creative practices and communities we have found solace and healing as well as in our individual expressions and reclamations of our genders/sexualities.

Undoubtedly more work needs to be done in this area in terms of inclusiveness of Indigenous gender-fluid voices and experiences. The knowledge base on Indigenous non-binary experiences in pre-contact communities is limited; we can propose that we instead look at the present and future as how we teach ourselves about Indigiqueer 2S LGBTQIA+ experience, needs and care: "I am interested less and less in uncovering a genre of experience from the graveyard of Indigenous history that we might call *queer*. This means that I am most curious now about what queer Indigeneity *does*: the sort of possibilities, affective spheres, intimacies,

modes of ethical life, paradoxes, and temporal and atmospheric disturbances it elicits" *Billy-Ray Belcourt* (Nixon and Belcourt, 2018).

As we move forward, podcasting as a method for Indigenous peoples has proven to be flexible, viable and accessible, for creators and as audience, to transfer our knowledges within urban centres and beyond. As my kin and I work within community with vulnerable populations existing on the streets, in shelters, in prisons, in low or no-income situations, podcasting is an easy way for us to get our stories out there for people to reflect on and empathise with, building a broader and stronger community that includes both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous accomplices. As more of us speak out on our lives, the harms we have lived and that were passed on to us, and to share our joys and possibilities, we can hope that our voices will travel further and become more relevant to broader society, informing and transforming the daily conversations and disseminations of life as Indigenous queers, Trans and Two Spirit folks, and women.

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