Wawêsiwîn: The Act of Dressing Up
A Research Cree-ation Project

Caeleigh Lightning Long

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By: **Caeleigh Lightning Long**

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Signed by the final examining committee:

Prof. Jason Edward Lewis	Chair
Dr. Miranda Smitheram	Examiner
Dr. Pippin Barr	Examiner
Prof. Jason Edward Lewis	Thesis Supervisor(s)
	Thesis Supervisor(s)

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

_____

Dean of **Faculty**

Abstract

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This thesis aims to redesign the nostalgic, early 2000's dress-up game from a Cree perspective. Video games and digital media often reflect negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples if they are included at all. The ability of Indigenous creators to use these tools to tell their own stories allows Indigenous peoples to take back and rewrite the narratives so often forced upon them. Examining projects and literature from Indigenous scholars provides context and guidance as to how others incorporate Indigenous values into their works. Other examples of independent dress-up games are examined to provide additional context as to how other creators subvert the genre with unique game design. Limitations of this research include the possible use of archival documents containing clothing designs belonging to other peoples and Nations, as well as considerations for Indigenous knowledges and values being incorporated respectfully. These issues highlight the importance of examining other works and guides by Indigenous creatives, as well as being grounded in Indigenous values like miyo-pimâtisiwin -in order to conduct this work respectfully and in conversation with others to hold the researcher accountable to community. *Wawêsîwin,* the videogame produced through this research, is grounded in miyo-pimâtisiwin and is meant to be a joyful and nostalgic experience for Indigenous players, where they can see themselves in both the aesthetics and the design of the game itself.

Keywords: Indigenous futurisms, dress-up, survivance, experimental game design

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This research-creation thesis was conducted in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal) on the traditional and unceded territory of the Kanien'keha:ka, the original and current stewards and protectors of this land. As a guest on these lands, it is essential to not just acknowledge this fact but to hold myself accountable in the ways in which I act and have benefitted from living on this territory. I extend my gratitude to those who take care of this land, past present and future, as well as the incredible work of Kanien'keha:ka scholars, artists, and activists who I have had the benefit of learning from during my stay here, who show their love for their territory and their people every day.

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Ay-hiy.

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Position Statement

kihew awasis nitisihikason maskwacisihk ohci niya. My name is Caeleigh Lightning, my nêhiyaw name gifted to me is kihêw awâsis, meaning eagle child in English. I am mixed Irish and Cree and a member of Samson Cree Nation in Maskwacis, Alberta, Treaty 6. Growing up, although I knew I was Cree and was proud of it, I did not really know what that meant. It was not until my sister began learning more about Cree culture and language that I also began to learn more, though her. Since then, I have learned so much about Cree knowledge and ways of being from many incredible people, and there is still so much for me to learn. I am only in the beginning of my learning and reconnecting journey, and I expect it will last for my lifetime. This thesis and creation project has been an opportunity to reconcile the knowledge I have learned with the passions of my younger self, who knew next to nothing but was still so proud to say she was Cree.

This thesis aims to redesign the nostalgic, early 2000's dress-up game from a Cree perspective. Video games and digital media often reflect negative stereotypes of Indigenous peoples if they are included at all. The ability of Indigenous creators to use these tools to tell their own stories allows Indigenous peoples to take back and rewrite the narratives so often forced upon them. Examining projects and literature from Indigenous scholars provides context and guidance as to how others incorporate Indigenous values into their works. Other examples of independent dress-up games are examined to provide additional context as to how other creators subvert the genre with unique game design. It discusses the importance of examining other works and guides by Indigenous creatives, as well as being grounded in Indigenous values like miyo-pimâtisiwin in order to conduct this work respectfully and in conversation with others to hold the researcher accountable to community. *Wawêsiwîn,* the videogame produced through this research, is grounded in miyo-pimâtisiwin and is meant to be a joyful and nostalgic experience for Indigenous players, where they can see themselves in both the aesthetics and the design of the game itself.

1.2 Summary of Chapters

This thesis is organized into 5 chapters. Chapter 1: Introduction, includes an introduction to myself, an overview of the thesis contents, and a discussion of how I came to be interested in this topic. In Chapter 2: Literature Review, I begin by explaining the genre of dress-up games, the history behind the genre and its inspirations. Then, I give context and history to Indigenous presence in cyberspace, highlighting key figures who have contributed to the field. Indigenous video games, as well as literature written by Indigenous game developers will also be discussed, with a focus on how these game developers incorporate their specific cultures into the games they create. I then explore modern Indigenous fashion, including designers that inspired the clothing

and accessories in the game I created. Next, in Chapter 3: Methods I explain the methods used to conduct this research as well as the conceptual framework that guided me. In this research project, I use mixed methodologies; research-creation, survivance, and miyo-pimâtisiwin, or the Cree concept of the good life. In Chapter 4: Research Creation Discussion I will discuss *Wawêsiwîn*, the process of creating it including inspirations and conceptual development, instructive challenges that arose during the process, and the main takeaways that I learned, including next steps of how this game could be taken further. I close with Chapter 5: Conclusion, where I reflect on the entire research-creation process and suggest trajectories for future research exploring further how digital media like dress-up games can further our attempts at survivance and miyo-pimâtisiwin. Documentation of the research-creation project can be found at *https://kihewawasis.itch.io/wawesiwin* using the password 'wawesiwin'. On this page is a download of the game, as well as supporting material such as screenshots, a walkthrough video, and a summary of the exploratory work discussed in Chapter 4.

1.3 Indigenous New Media

The research-creation work herein is driven by the realization that, as digital media becomes increasingly used by Indigenous youth, a unique opportunity has arisen. Lameman et. al. suggest that, "due to the radical decrease in the costs of the means of production and distribution, video games and virtual worlds present Indigenous people with a powerful opportunity to widely (or narrowly) communicate stories in which we shape our own representation" (Lameman et. Al., 2010). Digital media in general, and video games specifically, is a new space for Indigenous people to occupy, tell their stories, and reimagine how to bring tradition into the present (Lewis & Fragnito, 2005).

However, there are damaging views of Indigenous peoples that are portrayed in many video games. Harmful ideas seen in old Hollywood Western films, such as the view of Indigenous people as primitive or savage enemies, have continued into modern mainstream media where Indigenous peoples are labelled with stereotypes such as the 'Noble Savage' and 'Bloodthirsty Indian' (Lagace, 2018). Video games often reflect these images seen in movies, graphic novels, books, and television shows, depicting Indigenous peoples in a negative light if they include them at all. Often these Indigenous characters are decked out in deerskin, bone jewelry, with either a single feather in their long flowing hair, or an inappropriate headdress. The ability, then, of Indigenous people today to create our own games means taking control of the narrative that so often did not value our input. Digital media offers an increasingly accessible method for Indigenous peoples to assert digital sovereignty, giving Indigenous communities the tools and abilities to push back against harmful tropes (Lagace, 2018).

At the same time, the compatibility of Indigenous worldviews with cyberspace and digital media is an open question. Maize Longboat discusses the limitations of using technology created by non-Indigenous people to serve Indigenous needs in his thesis, *Terra Nova: Enacting Video*

Game Development Through Indigenous-Led Creation (2019). He references Audre Lorde's presentation *The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House* (1983) where she states how using these tools may allow for temporary benefit but ultimately cannot lead to genuine change. In *Preparations for a Haunting,* Jason Lewis discusses the inherent bias coded into modern computer systems and technologies, further reinforcing and perpetuating various forms of oppression (Lewis, 2016). He states the need for Indigenous people to become increasingly involved in all layers of these technologies—the 'stack'—infusing them with alternative imaginaries: "[t]he step after that is for Indigenous people to participate in the design of alternative stacks, ones that are better able to accommodate Indigenous epistemologies, ontologies, and fields of action" (Lewis, 2016).

Hopkins argues that cyberspace has now been occupied, appropriated, and transformed by Indigenous peoples, creating a space where Indigenous peoples can explore these technologies how they please (Hopkins, 2014). She quotes artist and activist Jimmie Durham:

> Traditions exist and are guarded by Indian communities. One of the most
> important of these is dynamism. Constant change, adaptability, the inclusion of
> new ways and new materials is a tradition that our artists have particularly
> celebrated and have used to move and strengthen our societies" (Hopkins, 2014).

Hopkins further supports this, describing how embracing new technologies is not a threat but a continuation of what we have always done in making things our own.

1.4 Avatar Customization
Growing up the youngest of 4 video game loving siblings, I often enjoyed and even preferred watching my older siblings play, cheering them on or heckling as I saw appropriate. As I got older and later developed my own interest in games, I noticed a pattern where I was drawn to games with extensive avatar customization. As someone with severe anxiety, feeling disconnected from both my physical body and my mixed cultures, I would seek out games where I could create a persona of sorts to embody and experience this world as. I would of course use braids and vaguely Native-inspired patterned clothing to make my avatar as 'Native-coded' as possible with what was available. These characters I customized were definitely not culturally accurate, but they still brought me a sense of joy and pride to see my limited perception of my culture and identity in the digital world. I have heard this sentiment echoed by many Indigenous gamers, the bittersweet nostalgia of having to force ourselves into visibility (even if only noticeable by ourselves) in games that did not intend to include us, and yet we still look back at them with fondness (personal communication).

Avatar customization and character creation are an important part of many video games. Even games with a focus on competitive battles like Fortnite (*All Fortnite Skins / Outfits - Fortnite.GG,*

n.d.) offer players opportunities to change their appearance with what is called a Skin. Players can have their avatar appear as popular characters like Spiderman, Lara Croft, and even real people like Ariana Grande. A play experience that concentrates on these elements lead to a genre of its own called the dress-up game, focused specifically and usually exclusively on customizing and dressing up a character. Originating in physical paper dolls (Considerations, 2017), the dress-up game is usually a simple 2D drag and drop game where players drag their preferred clothing and accessories onto a character. Examples include dressing up a Disney princess or creating a Star Wars character; there is even a modern version of a 1910 historical fashion paper doll named Erté (ibid). These games often have a theme that the clothing corresponds to, such as a princess theme or creating an outfit for a specific occasion like prom or a concert.

With my proclivity for creating customized avatars rather than playing the base game itself, it makes sense that I would love dress-up games. A game genre entirely dedicated to customization with none of the other mechanics like stressful battles? It was perfect. At the time, this type of game was extremely popular and abundant, with several websites like *girlsgogames* and *dressupgames.com* containing pages and pages of different dress-up games (Considerations, 2017).

Despite the popularity of this genre, I was surprised to find a scarcity of literature concerning the phenomenon. Existing literature mainly discusses the ways in which this genre often targeted and impacted young girls, as well as the emphasis on gender binary and Eurocentric beauty standards (Naziripour, 2014). These are important aspects of this topic that I will discuss more in depth later, however I wondered about the lack of discussion about the potential that the medium offered, or the ways in which creators were subverting and using the genre in new ways.

1.5 Area of Research

As more and more Indigenous peoples use digital tools to develop their own games, the more variety is seen in the types of games being made. I was intrigued by the empty gap in the crossover between Indigenous video games and dress-up games, especially when I thought about the large variety of beautiful Indigenous material culture across Turtle Island. Each nation could have their own dress-up game with their specific cultural designs and each game would be totally unique. The more I considered the intersections of these topics the more I began to see a Cree dress-up game take shape in my mind.

Through the creation of my own video game, I intend to explore what a reimagined dress-up game informed by Indigenous perspective and material culture could look like. Reflecting on these nostalgic pixel dress-up games had me imagining what they could be like with a Cree aesthetic, with an urban Cree character to dress-up in ribbon skirts and shirts, beaded earrings, jean jackets and moccasins. As a Two-Spirit femme myself I also became interested in how this could be expanded with regards to gender and body types. The dress-up game provides a clear

and simple template with several features that can be expanded on, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter 2: Literature and Media Review

2.1 What is a Dress-Up Game?

Avatar customization and dress-up are common components of video games. The standalone dress-up/character creator game, however, constitutes its own genre and is relatively rarer. The digital dress-up genre, also known as pixel dolls or Dollz, comes from a long history of physical dolls, usually made of paper (and later plastic Barbie dolls) and marketed towards young girls (Naziripour, 2014). The dress-up drag and drop game (see Figure 1.) became extremely popular in the 1990s and early 2000s and were usually also marketed towards young girls using bright pinks and glossy interfaces, where the goal was often to make your character fashionable through customizing your character or preparing your virtual doll for a date (Weil, 2014). Often featuring a thin blonde woman, these games had a clear focus on Eurocentric beauty standards.
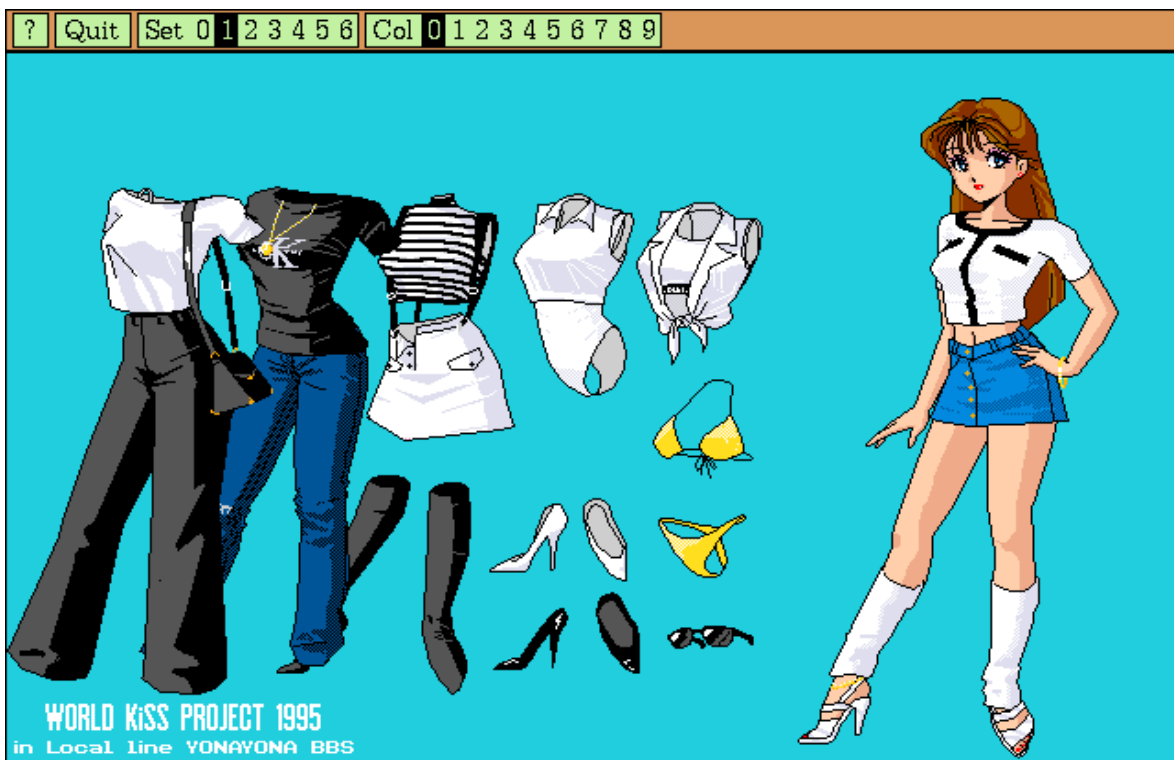

Fig. 1. *KiSS*, 1995. (Naziripour, 2014).

Although I view these games fondly from nostalgia, even as a child I was weary of the oversaturation of pink sparkles, makeup, and dresses. Much of the existing literature focuses on the values taught to young girls and the very gendered way these games were marketed. In their article *Dress-up and What Else? Girls' Online Gaming, Media Cultures and Consumer Culture*, Giovanna Mascheroni and Francesca Pasquali discuss the emphasis on consumerism that exists in

these games, and how they reinforce stereotyped representations of young girls (Mascheroni & Pasquali, 2013). This context provided me a jumping off point for considering how to create a new dress-up game incorporating Cree values.

Paper dolls are possibly the oldest form of the dress-up game that closely resembles the modern, digital version (Considerations, 2017). A paper doll set consists of a two-dimensional figure, or 'base' doll drawn on paper, with accompanying illustrated clothing and accessories to layer and dress it up in. These dolls were most popular in the period of 1930 through the 1950's, however their popularity never really died. I, a child of the 2000s when digital dolls already existed, have faint memories of owning a paper doll book as well as a magnetic version. Even today there is a thriving community of paper doll collectors and artists still sharing their creations.

With the rise of the internet, paper dolls were adapted to fit into the new digital context. Before the 2000's boom of Flash games (Richner, n.d.), one of the first specialized programs made to be able to display and create dress-up dolls was called KiSS- short for Kiseakai Set System (Figure 1). Inspired by 'Kisekai' (to dress, in Japanese) paper doll sets and released in 1991, the program allowed for anyone to create and upload their own dolls and clothing (Naziripour, 2014).

In 1996, Adobe Flash player was first released. It was originally intended for simple animations and web graphics, however upon the creation of its own programming language (ActionScript) in 1998, people began to use it to make games (Hoffmann, 2017). Due to the user-friendly design, people with zero experience with code were able to quickly make games as simple or as complex as they pleased. Websites like Newgrounds made it easy for users to upload and immediately publish their games, and allowed anyone to publish their games, studio or publisher not required (Richner, n.d.). The subsequent Flash game boom from 2000 to the mid-2010s made it so there were hours of unique Flash games to scroll through on websites like addictinggames and girlsgogames (*Free Online Games at Addicting Games*, n.d.; *Girls Games - Play Free Online Games for Girls*, n.d.) The ease and creativity of Flash and support from websites like Newgrounds meant people were rapidly producing and playing a variety of games, from experimental games, incredibly violent games, activist games, and everything in between (Richner, n.d.).

The dress-up genre was a very popular genre of Flash games, with entire bright pink websites dedicated to hosting thousands of these games. (*Classic Flash Dress-up Games [Full List]*, n.d.). The simple concept of dragging and dropping clothing and accessories to customize a character, along with Flash paving the way for non-coders to create games, made it incredibly appealing to creatives of all skill types and levels. Just like in any media genre, many of these games were carbon copies of each other in bright blinding sparkles. However there were also pockets full of imagination and creativity that has continued today as people continue to push the boundaries of the dress-up game.

With the 'death' of Flash in 2020, (Richner, n.d.), most ActionScript-based games were made unavailable or had to be re-created using different methods. Many games only exist in snapshots on sites like Internet archive and DollDivine (*Software Library*, n.d; *Classic Flash Dress-up Games [Full List]*, n.d.).

Although the popularity has died down in recent years, dress-up games still remain an incredibly popular genre, with many people returning to them in their adulthood to experience the joyful nostalgia of their favourites. This is shown in the popularity of the recently released online dress-up/avatar creator Everskies. With a small, slow growing userbase, it was not until the site went viral on the social media video-sharing app TikTok that the user base jumped from less than 10 to nearly 3000 in just a month (Zimmerman, 2021). Released in 2020, around the same time as the death of Flash and in a time where many people were stuck indoors due to the global pandemic and revisiting childhood nostalgia, the game quickly grew in popularity as users shared their unique avatars online (Molinaro, 2022). Vienne Molinaro describes finding solace in the familiar, nostalgia-filled forums of Everskies while mourning the loss of her favourite games after Flash was discontinued and finding like-minded individuals with similar experiences. To her and many others, dress-up remains a familiar safe space that stuck with them through adulthood.

2.2 Why Dress-up Games?

The moment inspiration struck for this research creation project happened by accident, during my first year of MDes in 2022 as I was in between school assignments and doodling for fun. While practicing my pixel art, a style I had only recently began experimenting with, I felt a mix of nostalgia and deja vu and realized the pixel figure I was drawing reminded me of the pixel doll games that I played as a child and had not thought about in years. This sent me into a nostalgia-fuelled deep dive, looking into the games I used to play on websites like girlsgogames.com and dolldivine.com (*Girls Games - Play Free Online Games for Girls*, n.d.; *Classic Flash Dress-up Games [Full List]*, n.d.), and what people were making today. I was certain that with the influx of Indigenous video games and game designers someone had to have made an Indigenous dress-up game by now! After scouring the internet, I came out empty handed and confused, maybe even a little offended. I saw this as another digital space that we deserved to take up space in, deserved to play in. The few 'Native" dress-up games I came across were filled with stereotypes, such as *Tribal Princess Dress-Up* and *Native Beauty Dress-Up* (*Tribal Princess Dress up Game*, n.d., *Native Beauty Dress Up - Girl Games*, n.d.). One game features a girl named Jessica, who has, "… gone to an Indian Reservation on one of her projects. She now wants to dress up like one of the Red Indians, with their traditional gear. Can you help her? If you don't know how native American Indians dress up, play this game and get an idea." These games were clearly made with a non-Indigenous audience in mind, watering down and misrepresenting cultural clothing and accessories for non-Indigenous consumption. This only further cemented in my mind the empty gap where an Indigenous-made dress-up game created *for* Indigenous people should be.

While thinking through whether to focus on a Cree dress-up game, I began to wonder about younger me. Why was I so attracted to these games even now, as an adult? I felt such a sense of excitement and fondness despite my complicated relationship with everything they represented: the rigidly gendered way they were marketed, the exclusion of certain bodies and people, and an emphasis on Eurocentric beauty standards did not align with my personal values and what I usually enjoy in a game.

Knowing myself a bit better now as a Two Spirit adult, I can see that these games were a space where I could explore and experiment with clothing and accessories that I found scary in real life. Uncomfortable with any sort of self-expression that would make me stand out to my school peers, dress-up games were a space where I could appreciate and enjoy feminine and 'girly' items on a body that was not my own, with no real-life consequences. Even as a child I felt disconnected from 'girlhood', feeling like an outsider with the girls at school and even more of an outsider with the boys. Some days I barely felt human. It felt like neither gender truly fit for me. Now, older and a bit more able to articulate these feelings, I think of gender as a performance. I adorn my physical body in ways that reflect how and what I am feeling and embodying, or what I *need* to embody on that day to feel comfortable in my own skin. I am most often perceived as a woman, which is not necessarily incorrect, however I do not always feel that way. Playing with my style and the clothing I wear allows me to feel more comfortable in my own skin.

This experience reflects into video games. In some games I can shape-shift into a tall, willowy plant being (*Guild Wars 2*, 2012), or personalize my cute *Animal Crossing* (2001; 2020) character in pink frilly dresses or overalls. With dress-up games, I could play with gender, fashion and style in the ways that I did not allow myself to as a child and still feel hesitant to today as an adult.

Besides my personal feelings about this genre, I also saw this type of game as something with a lot of untapped potential. The ability to customize a character using body types, skin tones, hair, clothing, and accessories using a simple drag and drop interface provides an accessible and entertaining opportunity for players to use their imagination. The simplicity appealed to me as it offered a variety of ways to develop and play with the genre while still having a clear structure to follow.

2.3 Playing with the Genre

An important aspect of research to guide the creation of my game was to see how others have been expanding on and pushing the bounds of the genre. Many dress-up games, particularly the older ones I enjoyed when I was younger have clear biases and limitations. These include the lack of body diversity, as the games often featured thin women, with no other body types to be seen. Although there were sometimes options to change the skin colour, the options presented were often limited, especially with darker skin tones. These games have been heavily criticized for the

lack of diversity in terms of body types, genders, race, and hair types (Naziripour, 2014). The vast majority of popular dress-up games often feature exclusively thin, caucasian women, offering a very narrow and Eurocentric view on beauty standards and fashion. Additionally, the games had a strong emphasis on the gender binary, with many of these games featuring a woman and almost never a man to dress up (Considerations, 2017). This extended to the outfit choices and game themes as well, as the genre was so heavily advertised to young girls, each game was covered in pink and glitter to appeal to their assumed demographic, with themes like weddings, dates, shopping, and makeovers (Naziripour, 2014). As time went on the genre has shifted and transformed, with increasingly creative games being made. Nowadays, you can find a dress-up game for just about any scenario, including superheroes, fantasy, sci-fi, and popular series like *Game of Thrones* and *Lord of The Rings* (Considerations, 2017).

Modern games in this genre that push outside of these limitations provide inspiration and guidance for ensuring my game addresses some of these concerns. The website *DollDivine*, home of thousands of unique dress-up games, has several games that are outside the box (*Dress-up Games*, n.d.). *Three Of Us* stands out by having three persons to dress up together, including a male and a plus sized woman. Their other games, such as *Dinogeddeon*, offer choices like three body types, as well as a plethora of skin and hair colours and textures (Naziripour, 2014). *Dinogeddeon* and *Three Of Us* break the mold and make the effort to include customization options for those who too often do not see themselves represented in this genre.
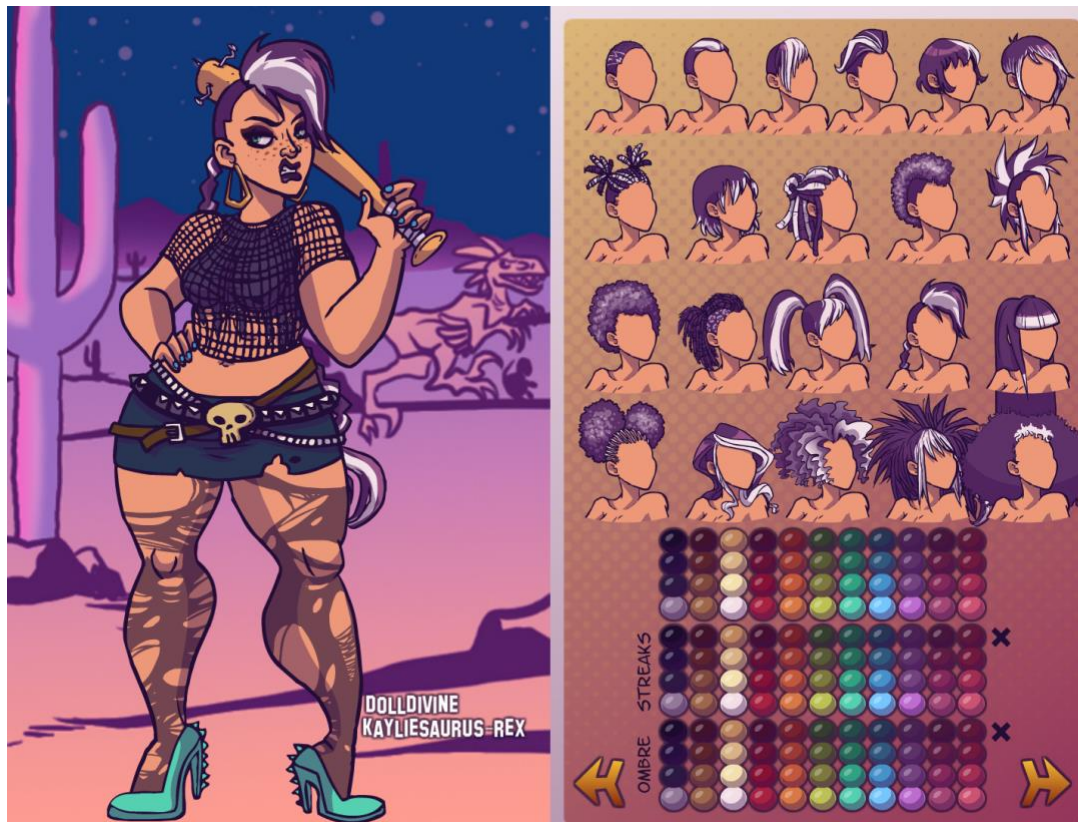
Fig. 2. DollDivine, Rinmaru Games. (Johnson, 2015).

Another example of a twist on the genre is *Femmepocalypse* (Johnson, 2015). The player customizes the face of a genderless, world-conquering entity. Instead of human skin tones, the options are much more fantastical, such as green or blue microchipped skin, or binary code. Created at Dames Making Games Toronto's Feb Fatale game jam, the exclusion of the body and focus on the face customization appeals to a wider audience of all genders. Designer Alto Punk created a controller in the form of a mask that the player looks through and touches to change the corresponding parts of the face on screen. Alto describes the message of the game as "fashion is something that is universal, which means everyone should be able to enjoy this template for games" (Johnson, 2015). *Femmepocalypse* offers a distinctive look at how the dress-up genre can be twisted and played with to represent more abstract ideas of gender and expression.

Fig. 3. *Femmepocalypse*.

(Try to) Dress-up is a game born from the creator Nivetha Kannan's experiences growing up with in a rural Indian family with conservative parents who heavily monitored her clothing choices (Kannan, 2015). Like any other dress-up game, the player can choose from a closet of outfits, however the real challenge of the game is choosing an outfit that will not get you stopped by your parents on your way out the door. Kannan describes the social expectations of women in her culture (and virtually every culture) as the reason her style was so censored. She says in her game description, "Dress-up games gave me an outlet where I could dress as I wanted without reprimand. *(Try to) Dress-up* is a game that basically acts like the dress-up games I loved growing up but simulates my real world experience with dressing up" (Kannan, 2015). This game pushes the bounds of what a dress-up game can look and act like by including a personal and

societal narrative and additional challenge besides just choosing a nice outfit. Although our lived experiences are different, Kannan's view of these games as spaces to explore and experiment with self expression on her own terms echo my own and show how the dress-up game can be transformed and restructured to represent diverse narratives and experiences.
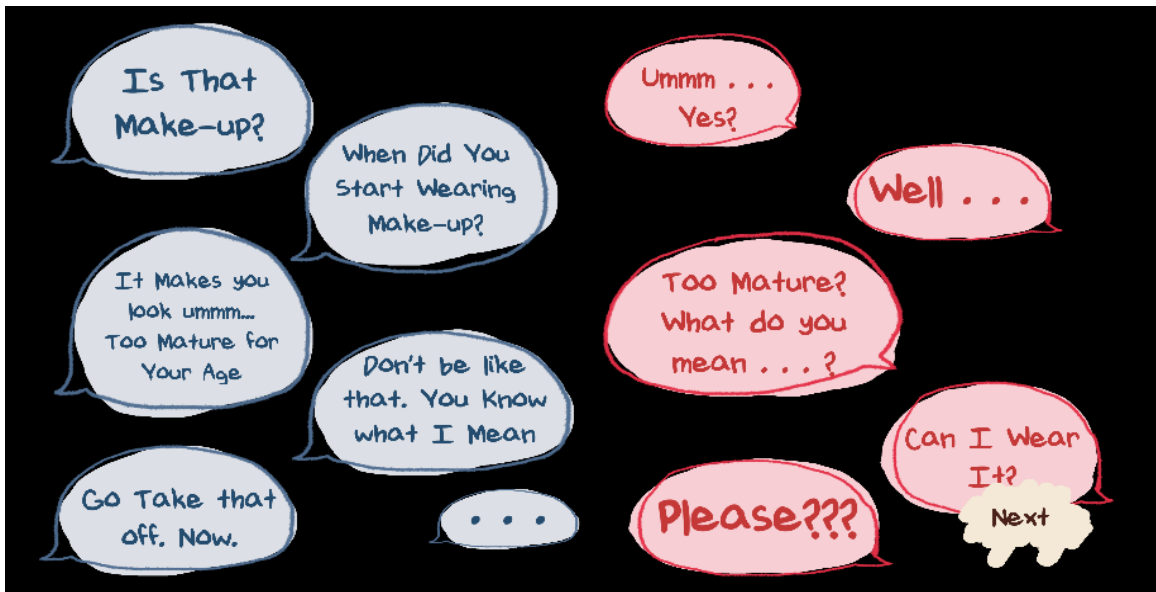

Fig. 4. *(Try to) Dress-up*.

OMINID is described as a "queer response to character creation screens in culturally relevant video games" (Oleandrin, n.d.). This game was created as a part of Xpace's Images Fest in Toronto, where the theme was "binary in the non-binary world" (Patterson, 2015). The creator describes the game as addressing the limitations of gender expression in the usually very limited and binary avatar creation screens in many video games. In this game, the gender of the character is intentionally ambiguous, and unlike many games there are no rules as to the types of clothing and accessories they can wear, including skirts, short shorts, button downs and dresses. This game is a great example of how the dress-up game can move past the need to lock certain customization like makeup or dresses behind a gender binary.

Fig. 5. *OMINID*.

These examples are important to examine because they offer ways in which the creators addressed and subverted certain aspects of dress-up games, such as the limited body and skin customization options. Games like *(Try to) Dress-up* show how dress-up games can be pushed further by including a narrative element and a goal to achieve to support that narrative. Each game also has a distinctive art style and user interface, with some ditching the usual drag and drop mechanic altogether. Despite all being the same genre of game, each creator offers a unique perspective of how dress-up games can be structured differently to tell a story or represent varying experiences and concepts.

2.4 Indigenous Presence in Cyberspace

Indigenous peoples have been occupying digital territory almost since its conception, including the first Indigenous territory in online cyberspace, the CyberPowwow project developed by Kanien'kehá:ka artist and writer Skawennati in 1996 (Lewis & Fragnito, 2005). The project was hosted on The Palace, one of the most popular Internet chat rooms in the late 1990's to early 2000's (Gaertner, 2015). which allowed users to customize 2D avatars and inhabit virtual rooms resembling social spaces. The flexibility of The Palace allowed for a variety of expressions to take place, including online art galleries, gathering sites, and live, interconnected graphic chat rooms. Skawennati describes CyberPowwow as, "... a virtual exhibition and chat space that would dispel the myth that Native artists didn't (or couldn't!?) use technology in their work. In addition to that, we wanted to claim for ourselves a little corner of cyberspace that we could nurture and grow in the way we wanted" (Gaertner, 2015). CyberPowwow provided a space where Indigenous peoples could gather despite physical distance, a space made by and for Indigenous people.

Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace is an Indigenous research-creation network that grew, in part, out of the CyberPowwow project, and aims to ensure Indigenous presence in virtual worlds

(AbTeC, n.d.). This research network was created to meet the need for self-determined cyberspaces for Indigenous peoples and has organized programs such as the Skins Workshops on Aboriginal Storytelling in Digital Media that engage youth in telling their stories using digital media (Initiative for Indigenous Futures, n.d.). Developed by Skawennati and Jason Edward Lewis, the Skins Workshops teach Indigenous youth the skills to adapt stories from their communities into a variety of experimental digital media, including video games, machinima, as well as 3D sculpting and printing. These workshops encourage youth to imagine their futures and empowers them to be the producers, not just consumers, of new and exciting media (Initiative for Indigenous Futures, n.d.). AbTeC also conducts the Initiative for Indigenous Futures (IIF), a partnership of universities and community organizations that uses workshops, residencies, symposia, and archives to encourage Indigenous peoples to conceptualize futures for themselves and their communities.
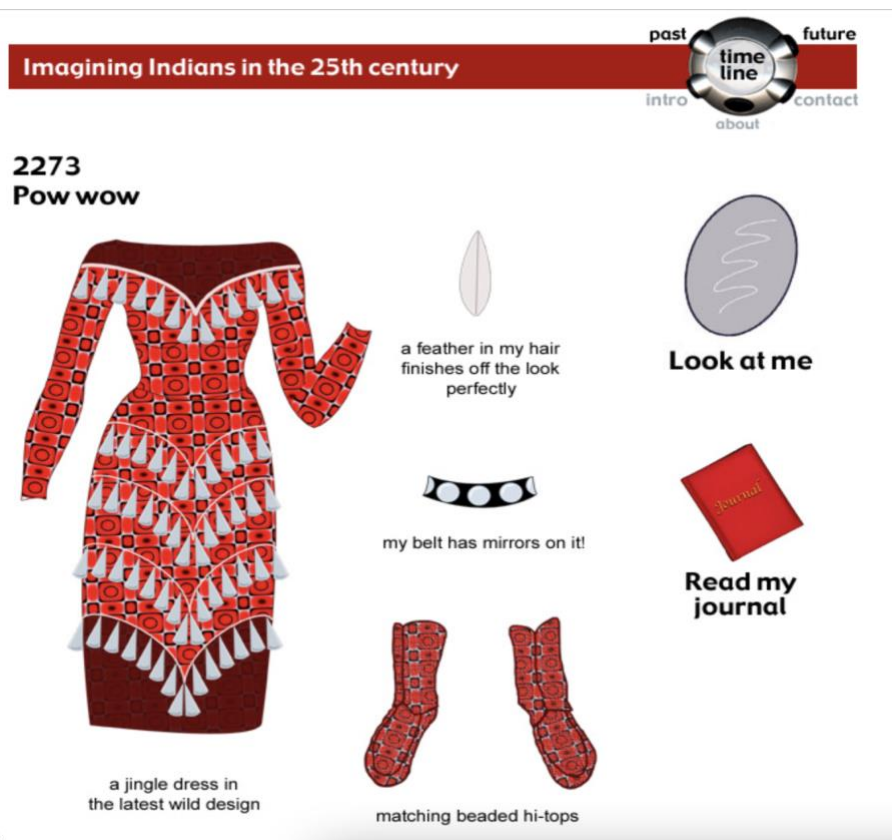

Fig. 6. Screenshot from *Imagining Indians*. (Fragnito, 2000).

Another key inspiration is Skawennati's piece *Imagining Indians in the 25th Century* (2000), a time-traveling virtual paper doll project that serves as a bridge between CyperPowWow and AbTec. The viewer follows a young Mohawk woman, Katsitsahawi Capozzo, as she travels through time, each time period having a set of clothing and accessories as well as a reflection from Katsitsahawi in her journal describing her experiences and key events and features of each point of time (Fragnito, 2000). Skawennati uses the clothing and accessories of Katsitsahawi to reflect the unique circumstances of the time period she is in, showing how Indigenous cultures

could change and adapt in distant futures. This work is a wonderful example of using digital media, specifically this virtual dress-up doll genre, to showcase a vision of Indigenous futures.

Elizabeth LaPensée is another pivotal figure in Indigenous new media. LaPensée is an Anishinaabe, Métis and Irish game designer, writer, and artist. LaPensée's works were one of the first games I saw that weaved together Indigenous methodologies, art, and storytelling, opening my eyes to the potential of video games as a medium. With games like *Techno Medicine Wheel* (2007)*, Honour Water* (2016), *Thunderbird Strike* (2017)*,* and *When Rivers Were Trails* (2019)*,* she combines game development with her art and research addressing relationships with land and water. *Techno Medicine Wheel*, for example, uses video games to encourage youth to create new and reciprocal relationships with the land and beings around them (LaPensée & Moulder, 2017).

When Rivers Were Trails is a 2D point-and-click game where *Where the Water Tastes Like Wine* (2017) meets *The Oregon Trail* (1971), telling the story of colonization's impact through an Indigenous perspective. The game depicts the player's passage as an Anishinaabeg from Minnesota to California due to Indigenous land displacement during the 1890s. Lapensée uses the game as a way to assert digital sovereignty by retelling this portion of history through an Indigenous perspective. The writing for the game was done by a team of Indigenous writers from across Turtle Island, often including encounters with characters from their respective Nations. She discusses 'survivance', Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor's term for recognizing Indigenous communities as thriving and not merely surviving in the aftermath of colonization, and how this can relate to game making (LaPensée, 2018). Using code, art, design, and audio, LaPensée relates games to survivance in that games can become a space to express self-determination so long as "they stand 'against colonial erasure… [and mark] the space of a returned and enduring presence'" (LaPensée, 2018). LaPensée's games, art, and writing have provided key guidance for not just this thesis project but my personal practice as well, helping me think through the motivations behind what I create and how my works can provide a space for my own self expression while practicing survivance.

Fig. 7. Screenshot from *When Rivers Were Trails,* 2019.

Another of the first Indigenous video games I encountered was Maize Longboat's *Terra Nova* (2019). A two-player cooperative platformer set on Earth in the distant future where, after environmental disaster, one group ('Earthborn') chooses to stay on Earth and another ('Starborn') leaves for the stars. Players can experience this world as either Terra, an Earthborn Elder, or Nova, a young Starborn inventor. The game tells the story of the two characters' first meeting, where they must work together to explore and interact with their environment as Terra investigates the crash landing of Nova's ship on Earth. Each character has individual skills that allow them to access certain areas or complete tasks suited to their respective strengths. The mechanics, art, dialogue and music make the world in this game feel rich and lived in, encouraging the player to explore and find out more about the beautiful and unfamiliar Earth that is Terra's home. First contact between humans and alien beings are a common theme in many sci-fi media, often reflecting Settler fears of invasion and colonization (Longboat, 2019). *Terra Nova* offers a unique and hopeful re-imagining of such first contact in a futuristic sci-fi setting, centering connections to the land and stars, as well as our relations to each other. Not only was the game itself a key inspiration, but Longboat's accompanying research creation thesis *Terra Nova: Enacting Videogame Development through Indigenous-Led Creation* (Longboat, 2019) provides a thoughtful examination of what makes a game Indigenous, as well as the methods and motivations that drive Indigenous game developers. Longboat's reflections on the process of video game development provided guidance on the production of my own game. He writes,

> Indigenous videogames, even the most simple ones, are sites of resistance and reclamation for their makers. Making videogames is just one of the ways that Indigenous peoples around the world are actively expressing their diverse cultures, identities, and love for themselves and their communities (Longboat, 2019).

This was a fundamental principle guiding my desire to make a Cree dress-up game, to express my love for the various material cultures of Indigenous communities across Turtle Island, and the ways that we intertwine and differ.

Fig. 8. Screenshot from *Terra Nova,* 2019.

The scholars, artists, and videogames discussed in this chapter provided essential guidance for how I approached creating this game. The work of Lewis and Fragnito with AbTeC as well as their individual projects and writings are what first opened my eyes to the existence of an enduring Indigenous presence in cyberspace, leading me to my first introduction to the ever growing and welcoming community of Indigenous game developers, who demonstrated to me the true potential of videogames as a medium. LaPensée's creative and scholarly works showcase how videogames can act as an avenue for self-representation and an act of survivance. Longboat's research creation thesis and videogame *Terra Nova* explores what makes a game Indigenous through the production of a sci-fi videogame with an Indigenous-led team.

2.5 Indigenous Fashion: Weaving Together the Traditional and Contemporary

Indigenous material culture, specifically clothing and accessories, are heavily intertwined with culture and belief systems. Beaders weave stories and meaning into their work with every bead. Patterns, materials and colours hold different meanings for every nation. Due to colonization and residential schools our ancestors were forced to hide their cultures, including traditional clothing and regalia. Many designs, traditions and histories were lost. Indigenous fashion designers today are reclaiming and celebrating their ancestral practices and knowledges by bringing the traditional into the contemporary world with their unique works.

In recent years, there has been a resurgence of Indigenous fashion in the mainstream. With events like Indigenous Fashion Week (*International Indigenous Fashion Week*, n.d.), Indigenous Fashion Arts Festival (*Indigenous Fashion Arts*, n.d.), as well as Indigenous designers collaborating with well-known brands like Ralph Lauren (*Ralph Lauren Presents First Artist in Residence Collaboration*, 2023), Indigenous fashion created by Indigenous designers has never been more in the public eye.

Each nation across Turtle Island has their own distinct material cultures with their own histories and teachings behind them. However, there are many cultural staples that are shared across nations. Indigenous communities have a long history of sharing with one another, whether it's stories, songs, food, and as discussed here, attire. When I think broadly of Indigenous fashion, I immediately picture colourful ribbons, beadwork, moccasins, and kokum scarves. Each of these have a long history of being shared and transformed from nation to nation, adapting to the times along with us.

Ribbon work is a traditional design craft in many Indigenous communities where ribbons are sewn onto garments like shirts, skirts, and dresses, with the placement and colour often holding significance and meaning. Ribbons were also used in traditional regalia like jingle dresses and fancy shawl, and worn by dancers at powwows. Beginning in the 18th century when French traders brought silk ribbons to the Great Lakes in North America, Indigenous communities adapted these new materials to represent traditional designs in new ways (Paulsen, 2022). The ribbon skirt is a result of hundreds of years of cross-cultural interactions and collaborations. Ribbon skirts are possibly the most widespread garment currently worn by many nations as a symbol of Indigenous identity and resilience.

Even if the ribbon skirt is common across many nations, each community may have different techniques for the creation of the garment, or different histories and protocols surrounding it. This is something I find so interesting and valuable about knowledge sharing between communities, that despite our similarities, we still have many differences, and despite our differences we are the same. Although we share many cultural aspects, we still find ways to make them our own.

Another iconic piece of clothing is the kokum scarf, which tells the history friendship and collaboration between Indigenous communities and Ukrainian settlers who immigrated to the North American Prairies. As with any good relationship, the two traded goods, including the Ukrainian hustka, a colourful floral scarf which the Cree now call the kokum scarf. The bright floral scarves complimented the floral patterns found in Cree, Dene, and Metis beadwork (Yawnghwe, 2021). We call them this as kokum means 'your grandmother', in reference to the Ukrainian and Indigenous grandmothers who wore and still wear the scarf proudly today (Benallie, 2022). Kokum scarves are a powerful symbol of solidarity and reciprocity, and are often seen worn casually in everyday wear, as well as incorporated into powwow regalia.

These are just a few of the most widespread cultural items worn by Indigenous communities today. It is important to discuss the rich history and context behind these items as they are often seen in the work of Indigenous fashion designers in unique ways as they bring the past into the present. Jamie Okuma, a Luiseño, Shoshone-Bannock, Wailaki, and Okinawan designer, uses the tradition of ribbon work combined with contemporary silhouettes to offer a fresh twist on the craft. Many ribbon skirts and dresses often have the ribbon solely on the skirt or lining the sleeves of dresses. Okuma designs entire dresses and ensembles entirely out of silk ribbon, playing with colour and ribbon placement to create beautiful and innovative pieces (Figure 9) (Allaire, 2021).

Fig. 9. Image of ribbon dresses by Jamie Okuma, from *Power of Style* (2021).

Another key inspiration is Nêhiyaw Isko artist Cheyenne LeGrande, who creates stunning works of art using installation, sound, video, and performance art. Her performance art video *Mullyanne Nîmito* (2022) features two pieces that stood out to me as something I had never seen done before. The video shows LeGrande wearing a beer/bepsi tab shawl and platform moccasins, as she dances on the shore of her homelands in Wabasca, while a Nēhiyawēwin (Cree) cover of Fleetwood Mac's Dreams sings softly in the background.

Fig. 10. *Mullyanne Nîmito* (2022).

The bepsi tab shawl, a playful nod at the popularity of Pepsi, nicknamed 'bepsi' in Indigenous communities, is a modern twist on the traditional fancy dance shawl worn by powwow dancers. The shawl is made up of 3300 beer and Pepsi tabs collected by Cheyenne and her community, weaved together with pastel ribbons (Beedham, 2022).

Fig. 11. Bepsi shawl (Beedham, 2022).

The second item featured is the 4-inch platform hide moccasins, with Cree syllabics written on the base of the platform. These hybrid shoes and bepsi shawl honour and reclaim her traditional practices while intertwining them with her personal style and modern Indigenous femme identity.

Fig. 12. Platform Moccasins (Beedham, 2022).

Additionally, Mobilize is an Edmonton-based Cree streetwear brand founded by Dusty LeGrande. Mobilize uses reworked vintage pieces alongside materials like fur, scarves and other fabrics to create innovative pieces that tell a story. The brand was created when founder LeGrande noticed the lack of Indigenous representation in streetwear brands, and how that was negatively impacting the youth. Combining traditional practices and patterns with modern streetwear, the brand tells a story of Indigenous peoples thriving here and now and in the future. LeGrande encompasses the principle of his brand, saying, "As Nêhiyaw [cree] people we have always represented ourselves uniquely in our dress; if you study the archives you can see how stunning indigenous fashion truly is. Clothing is always an extension of who you are, and the story you are telling" (LeGrande, n.d.). Mobilize creatively weaves together ancestral and traditional knowledge and contemporary streetwear style to showcase and celebrate Cree culture while encouraging Cree youth to do the same.

Fig. 13. Mobilize Streetwear

With the number of Indigenous fashion artists constantly growing larger every day, each leaving their own unique mark on the industry, there is no possible way I could cover every artist who has inspired me, but the designers and brands covered in this section are the ones who showed up the most often in my inspiration for this project. More artists and brands that I could not talk about in detail include; B.Yellowtail, OXD Clothing, Osamuskwasis, Choke Cherry Creek, Nativelovenotes, Section 35, and many more. There is something beautiful and hopeful about going from growing up only seeing your people represented in black and white historical photographs, to now seeing Indigenous fashion everywhere, filled with colour and movement, innovation and resilience.

Chapter 3: Methodologies

3.1 Research-Creation

For this research project I employ mixed methodologies, which include research-creation, survivance, and miyo-pimâtisiwin. These concepts work together to provide a framework to ground my research. Each concept plays a necessary part in both the research and the creation of my game *wawêsiwîn*.

My primary methodology is research-creation, where, "The creation process is situated within the research activity and produces critically informed work in a variety of media" (SSHRC, n.d.). Providing additional guidance is Natalie Loveless' writings on research creation in her book *How to Make Art at the End of the World:A Manifesto for Research-Creation*. She describes the driving forces behind research creation; the 'radical need to nurture joy', and a 'labour of love' (Loveless 2021). Together, these concepts provide a framework of how my research is guided and driven by joy and playfulness, a labour driven by my love of Cree culture and expression, video games, and dress-up, as well as the desire to share this with others and see that same joy reflected back.

To employ this methodology, I researched and synthesized the common characteristics of the typical dress-up game. Then, as mentioned above, I look at how developers of these games today have been pushing outside of those characteristics as guidance for how I can do the same. I also look at how both Indigenous fashion designers and Indigenous game developers are using fashion and games as an avenue for cultural expression, as well as inspiration for my game development and the garments I designed for the game.

3.2 Survivance

The secondary methodology used is survivance. As discussed in the literature review, I am heavily inspired by Indigenous scholars such as Maize Longboat's research-creation project *Terra Nova: Enacting Videogame Development through Indigenous-Led Creation,* as well as much of Elizabeth Lapensée's creative works and writings. In particular, Lapensée's discussion of the term survivance, defined by Vizenor as, "… an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy and victimry" (Vizenor 1999). Lapensée affirms how video games can be a tool to practice survivance and self-determination, so long as the work "marks the space of a returned and enduring presence" (Lapensée 2016). Through her various artistic and scholarly works, Lapensee challenges the idea of video games as another tool to exclude and misrepresent Indigenous peoples and instead offers ways in which it can be used for Indigenous cultural resurgence and expression.

Survivance has been a guiding concept for much of my work even outside of this research project. It encompasses everything that I hope to see and create in Indigenous art and games. So

much of Indigenous stories have been told by non-Indigenous creators, often for a non-Indigenous audience. Our history and our traumas are important stories to share, when they are told by the people involved. However, when the only stories that we see about ourselves are about our past and trauma, we internalize this and end up not being able to see ourselves in a hopeful future. This is especially detrimental to our youth, who are our future. If they only ever see stories of tragedy that place Indigenous people in the past, what kind of message does that send them? My goal with this research project and game is to share a beautiful part of Cree culture, without the need to justify or explain its existence. To claim a small corner of cyberspace where Cree can simply enjoy themselves and see this part of our culture represented in the dress-up genre that many of us enjoyed as children.

3.3 Miyo-pimâtisiwin

My third methodology is the Nêhiyaw concept of miyo-pimâtisiwin. Defined by Paulina Johnson in *E-kawôtiniket 1876: Reclaiming Nêhiyaw Governance in the Territory of Maskwacîs through Wâhkôtowin (Kinship)*,

> Miyo-pimâtisiwin, the good life, is the behavior in which we are to act and respect the very life that has been gifted to us through our state of mind and the laws and teachings we as Nêhiyawak are bound to. It is how we are to live our life in ceremony that we understand our roles and responsibilities to our people and through this role we are kept relationally accountable and on the path of living the good life. It is a self-reflection of how we are to conduct ourselves in everyday life and essentially live morally and ethically on the land gifted to us (Johnson, 2017).

This belief is central to me as a Nêhiyawak and holding myself accountable to community is an important part of conducting research grounded in miyo-pimâtisiwin. Additionally, it is essential to, "remember that we are gifts from Creator and have every right to live within the bounty of the land and be proud and strong Nêhiyawak" (Johnson, 2017). This reflects conversations I have had with Indigenous friends and peers concerning joy and play as resurgence, where part of living the good life is enjoying it. Not only is joy our right as Indigenous people, it is also, "the celebration of survival that focuses on the positives of Indigenous being and celebrates our resistance and affirms our cultural identity" (Johnson, 2017). Our joy is also resistance to a colonial narrative that seeks to eradicate us as Indigenous peoples. Part of this is incorporating concepts like Indigenous joy and humour into this game, an essential way that many of us communicate and heal.

To me, play, playfulness, joy, and humour are all concepts that go hand in hand. Although you may be able to have one without the other, often these are so intertwined that it is difficult to discuss or experience, for example, play without feeling some joy, or humour with no playfulness. I draw on Alison James' discussions of the value of play as research and playful research practices. In her paper *Play in research? Yes, it is "proper" practice*, she examines the

motivations behind both play and research, and how these often intertwine. For example, we research and play in order to 'speculate', 'expand our understanding', and 'indulge our love of a subject and/or process' (James 2021). James references Miguel Sicart, who gives a definition of play that reflects the nature of research enquiry: "To play is to be in the world. Playing is a form of understanding what surrounds us and who we are, and a way of engaging with others. Play is a mode of being human" (Miguel Sicart, 2017, p. 1). James points out how easily research can be written in place of play and still understood, and how these concepts mirror and often intertwine with one another. This also reflects my understanding of miyo-pimâtisiwin, and how an essential part of living the good Cree life is enjoying it. Experiencing joy and play is an essential part of humanness and being human. I put this into practice not only in the creation of the game with including touches of Cree humour and playfulness, but in my research as well. A large part of conducting the research for this project included playing the games discussed in the literature review, as well as keeping myself grounded in joy and what I love when writing, research, and academia became overwhelming.

Together these concepts provide a framework for my research and creation. Research-creation, guided by love and a desire to share parts of Cree culture while informed by a diverse body of works in the literature and games that I discuss. I draw on survivance to mark the space of an enduring Indigenous presence in a genre that has not been explored from a Cree perspective. Miyo-pimâtisiwin ensures I stay grounded in my responsibilities to others and to myself, holding myself accountable and staying on the right path to conduct this research in a good way. These concepts go hand in hand to ensure the creation of a Cree dress-up game that is grounded in Cree values and worldviews while sharing parts of our beautiful material culture.

Chapter 4: Research Creation Discussion

4.1 wawêsîwin: The Act of Dressing Up

Wawêsîwin is inspired by the nostalgia of early 2000's dress-up games, reimagined with clothing and accessories influenced by contemporary Indigenous fashion. The name, *wawêsîwin,* translates to 'the act of dressing up' (*Itwêwina*, n.d.) in nêhiyawêwin.

4.2 Walkthrough

The game begins with a screen displaying a ball of light floating in the stars, with text reading, "We all come from the stars…". (Fig. 14) A text box prompts the player with the question: "How will you decorate your vessel?" The ball of light then takes a more humanoid form (Fig. 15), though still made of light (which I use as a way of illustrating spirit.)

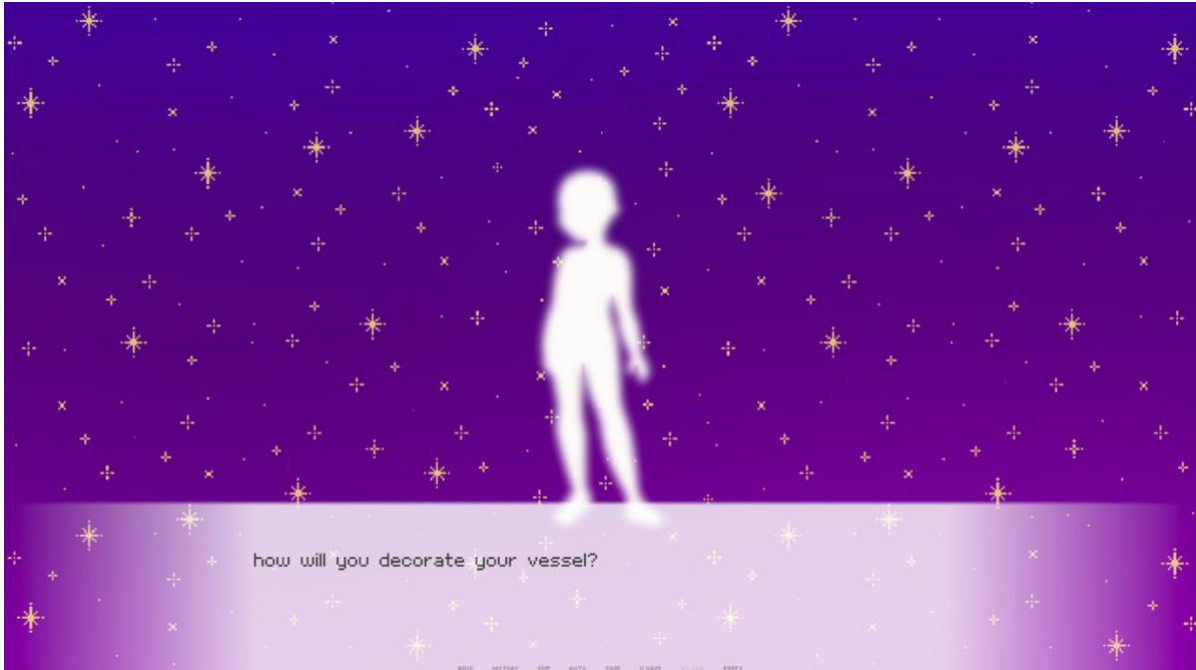Figure 14. Screenshot of start screen from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Fig. 15. Screenshot of second start screen from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Once the player clicks or presses the space bar to continue, the main customization screen then appears. The form, or avatar, continues glowing until the player chooses a skin tone, which then appears on the avatar (Fig. 16). The avatar slides to the left, revealing the other customization options. The screen now shows the avatar with the chosen skin tone, ready to be customized further. To the left is a box containing accessories related to the corresponding labelled tab. Each tab above the box represents an aspect of customization, with the categories being: Face, Hair, Jewelry, Tops, Bottoms, and Shoes. On one side of the box is a red 'X' to clear all choices, and on the other side is a green check to bring the player to the next and final screen.
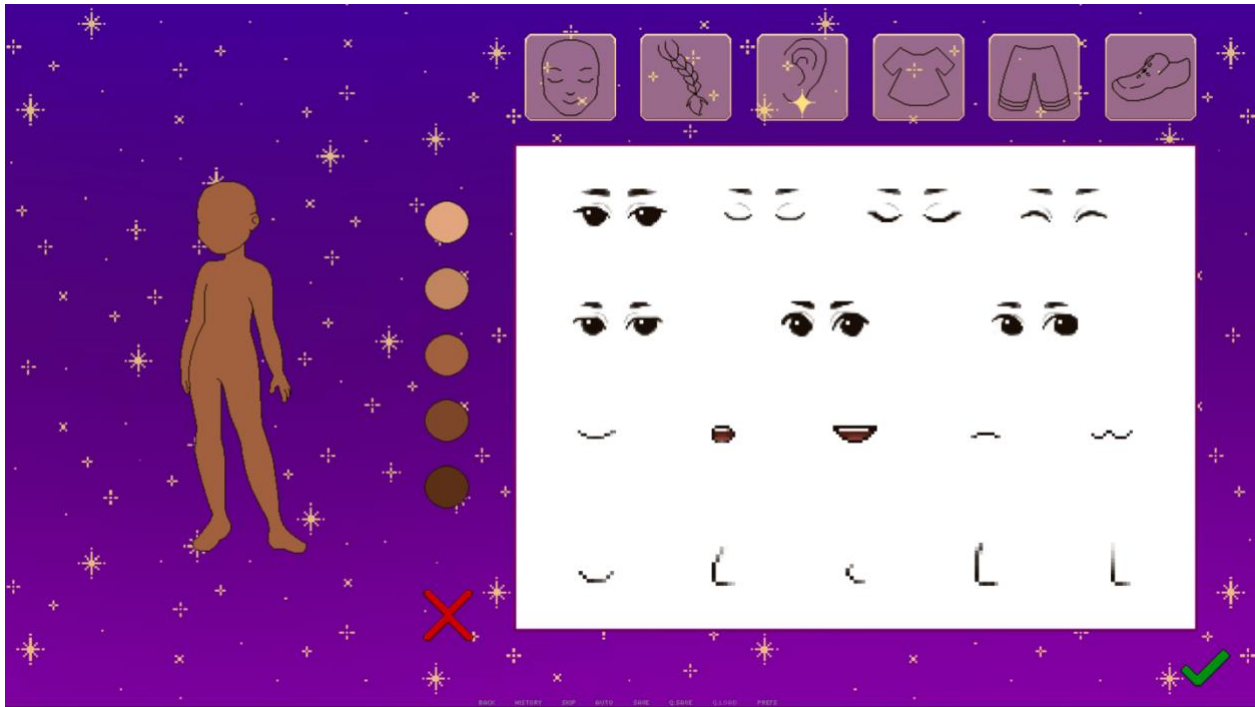
Fig. 16. Screenshot of facial customization screen with skin tones from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Once the player is satisfied with how they have customized their avatar and clicks the green check, they are taken to a screen showing their completed character with a text box reading, "So, this is how you'll decorate your vessel this time? (Fig. 17) Take care of it on earth before you return." (Fig. 18) This is the end of the game, and it is ready to be replayed if desired.

so this is how you will decorate your vessel this time?

Fig. 17. Screenshot of first ending screen from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

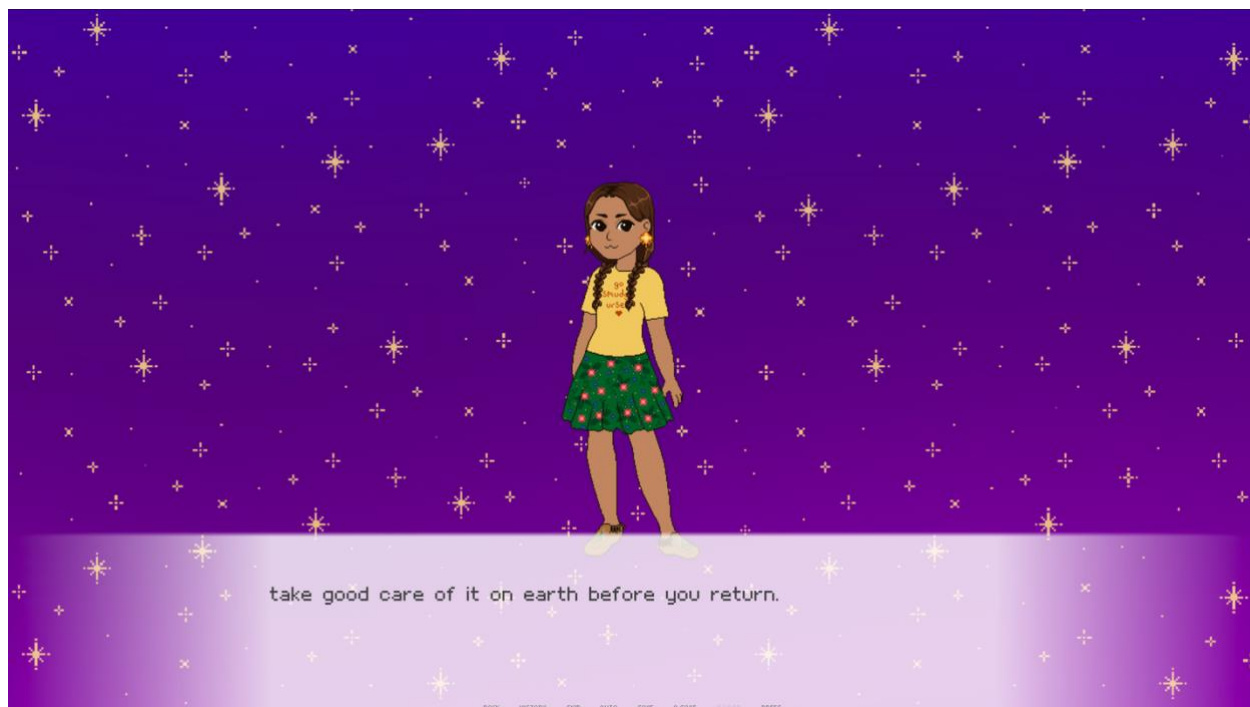take good care of it on earth before you return.

Fig. 18. Screenshot of final ending screen from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

4.3 Design Choices

One of the most challenging aspects of this process was narrowing down the aesthetic of the clothing to include. Originally, I had thought about going through archival and historical documents to see what my ancestors wore and how I could bring that into today's fashion. This led to questions of how to do this in a good and respectful way, and in the end, with my current disconnection from my community I did not believe I would be able to do that research in a good way at that point in time. It did not feel right for this project and I trusted my feelings on that.

Instead of attempting to be historically accurate or adapt traditional clothing I decided to draw from my own lived experience, and what I see the stylish Indigenous people in my life wearing. I wanted the clothing to look like items I would steal from my sister's closet—cool graphic tees, big beaded earrings, ribbon pants, skirts and shorts. As this game is not aimed at any gender in particular, another important aspect was that the clothing needed to be gender inclusive, with options for anyone to enjoy.

4.4 Beading

    I was also heavily inspired by the youth I see playing with aspects of their culture. An example is with beading (Fig. 19), as they adapt it to their interests with beaded medallions referencing pop culture.

Fig. 19. Images of four beadwork pieces from *@beadsinthetrap, @iah.q, @otsihstohskon, @LittleShellTK*

From the beginning I knew I needed to include beadwork in this game. The connection I see between beadwork and pixel art was one of the driving forces behind my desire to create an Indigenous dress-up game in this style. Beaders often use square grids similar to the ones used to create pixel art to sketch out beadwork designs. A dress-up game using a pixel art style seemed like the perfect medium to represent beadwork. I designed several earrings inspired by my own collection made by talented beaders, as well as a beaded choker necklace and silver turquoise studs. In the future I would like to add more pieces such as beaded medallions, bracelets and hair pieces.

Fig. 20. Screenshot of accessory customization screen from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

For the clothing, included are three tops, one with the Cree syllabics for 'awas' or 'go away', one with 'go smudge urself' and another with a *otêhimin*, or strawberry design. Other designs include two ribbon dresses based on a sunrise and sunset, and red overalls with geometric details. For the bottoms, I drew a few different colours and patterns of ribbon pants, such as flared green with polka dots, and looser fitting purple with a star pattern. Other bottoms include a pair of ribbon shorts, pink and green ribbon skirts, and finally a skirt with a floral 'kokum scarf' pattern. In the shoes section, I decided to use shoes that could go with each clothing item, a pair of combat boots, sneakers, flats, cowboy boots, and a pair of beaded moccasins.

Fig. 21. Screenshot of tops, dresses, and overalls from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Fig. 22. Screenshot of skirts, pants, and shorts from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

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Fig. 23. Screenshot of shoes from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

In terms of customizing the character itself, I wanted to include a few options to give the character personality. The face section has several different eyes, noses and mouths to mix and match and create a unique face. There are seven eye shapes to choose from, with three being closed. There are five mouths and five noses to make a variety of expressions. There are five skin tones to choose from. The hair section has several styles such as braids, curly hair in several styles, straight hair in several styles, as well as short and shaved hair styles. The hairstyles can be changed to five colours- blonde, brunettes, red, and black. I originally thought to have a colour wheel so the player could create their own skin tones and hair colours, however I was not able to properly implement this feature in time. I ended up using a limited palette of five colours to limit the amount of assets I had to make in a short amount of time. I hope to experiment more to be able to get the colour wheel working so players can create their own custom hair colours and skin tones.
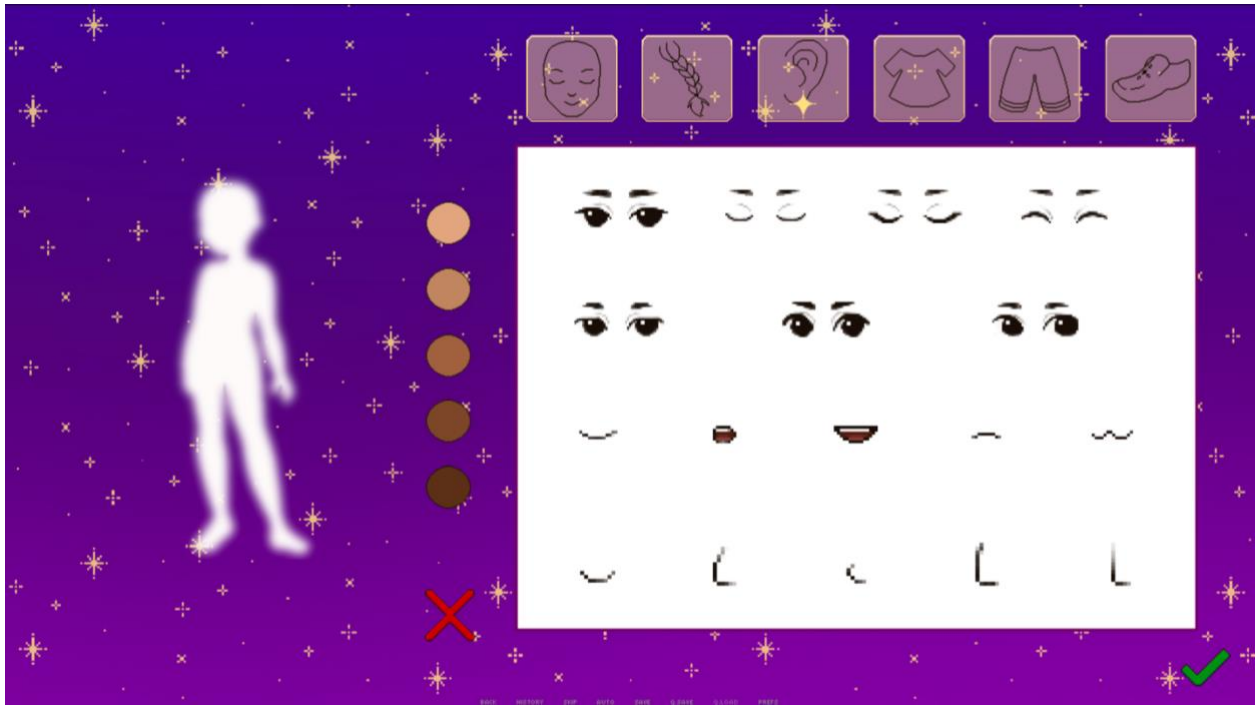
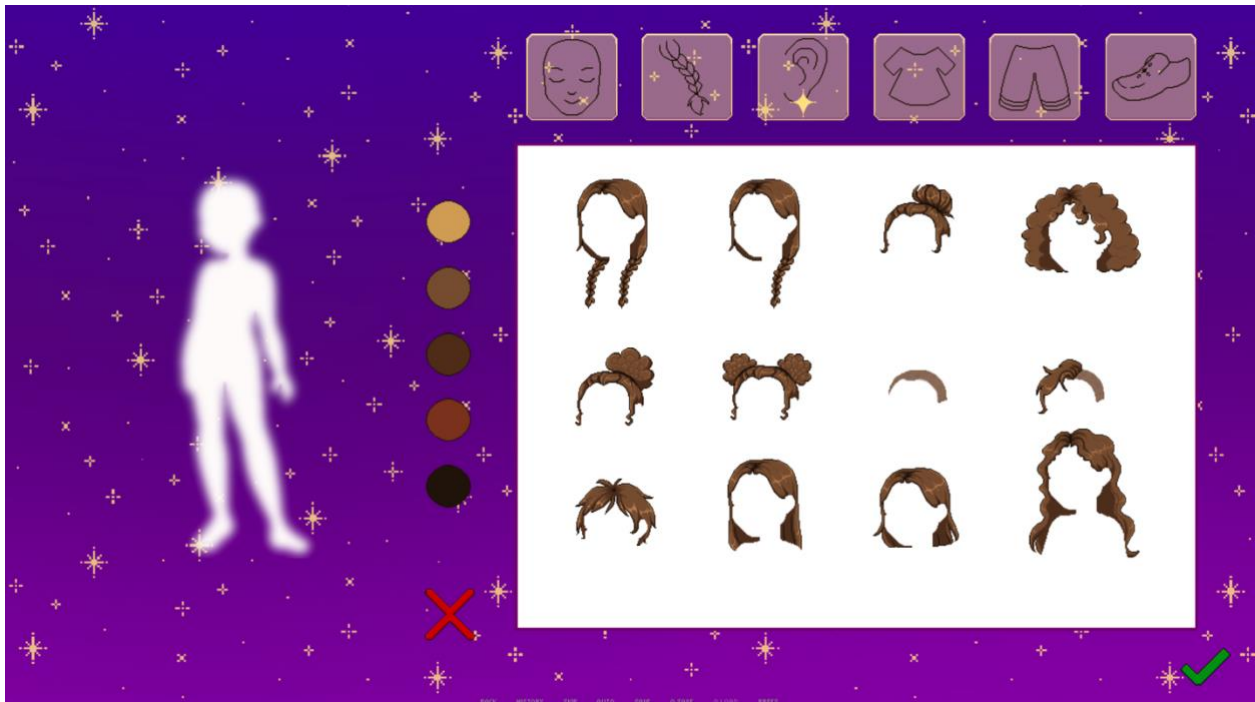Fig. 24. Screenshot of facial customization screen in *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Fig. 25. Screenshot of hair from *wawêsîwin* (2023).

Although the main focus of the game is the clothing and accessories, it was important to me to still incorporate some ways of customizing the character itself to the players preference. One of my favourite parts of playing dress-up games is trying to make myself, someone I know, or a new

character. This is difficult to do with limited customization options, so although I had to restrict the options for this iteration of the game due to time and inexperience, I wanted to include some basic options to allow the user some room to play. Additionally, since this game is not targeted towards a particular gender, it was important to include options for anyone to enjoy. Rather than aiming to be gender neutral, which is a difficult concept to define and execute, I aimed to have gender inclusive options, so players can mix and match features to get their desired look. There is not just one way to 'look Indigenous', so it was important to have different skin tones and hair textures/styles to represent that.

4.5 User Response

My 2023 Master of Design (MDes) cohort organized a year-end exhibition to display our works, present our research to our peers, and provide constructive critique of each other's projects. I had the opportunity to display *wawêsîwin* on a large touch screen for attendees to interact with. A highlight of this exhibition was being able to watch others have fun playing dress-up, as well as receiving pictures from my friends and peers of the different outfits they created. Despite the somewhat limited options in the game, no two looked the same and I loved seeing what people chose to dress their doll in. Some chose to make themselves (Fig. 26), and I also heard from others that they were thinking up backstories for the characters they created to match the outfits they chose. I unfortunately do not have a photo of it, but a friend shared that they had created a character they imagined to be attending an upcoming concert that they were not able to go to in real life. Their character was decked out in the sunset ribbon dress, beaded earrings and cowboy boots. This was a level of engagement that I was not expecting but was delighted to see.

It's me!

Fig. 26. Image of customized avatar (personal communication, 2023).

Although there are several factors of the presentation I would improve upon and change looking back, it was a valuable experience to share this with my peers and other attendees, to see their creations and receive helpful feedback. I was able to have some thought-provoking discussions that helped me think even deeper about the intent behind this project and my personal connections to my research. I received suggestions to expand upon the game, such as the inclusion of clothing items that could impact the 'stats' of the character to imply what they are capable of, such as strength or agility. Other suggestions were to include more experimental and futuristic pieces, and implanting an educational component. These thoughts and ideas will be discussed more later in this chapter.

4.6 First Concepts

In this section, I will discuss the concept work I created in order to think through elements of this game and narrow down the scope of the project. Then, I will present the first mock up concepts of what I pictured the game looking like, and the features I wanted to include. Finally, I will discuss issues that came up during the creation process, as well as ideas I thought through during and after the creation of the game.

During my second semester of my first year of the MDes program in 2022, I had the opportunity to create a speculative project exploring certain aspects I was interested in expanding upon further in my thesis work. I was interested in how people were already subverting the genre of dress-up games and how I could push the genre. These explorations ended up being valuable in narrowing my scope and choosing what to focus on for my larger research-creation project.

My goal was to explore what future bodies could look like if they became more than human while remaining intertwined with our relations. What would our bodies look like if we took on other skins that visually showed our connection to the world? I believed this would reveal more discussions about connectivity and sustainability, investigating if humans truly understood ourselves as a part of this world, rather than a separate, controlling force. This also led me to thinking about different views of the body from Western and Indigenous perspectives. For example, the idea of the body as not temporal, but as everything and nothing simultaneously, where we are just a speck of dust in the universe, and we are also integral parts of communities and intertwined in a web of connections. Similar to Cree understandings of time as intersecting and non-linear, the body is a temporary vessel we inhabit that is intertwined in a web of connections. Cree stories tell us how our people come from the stars, and how one day when we leave this vessel, that is where we will return. One might feel existential dread when we zoom out from our planet and see how small we truly are, however that 'smallness' does not negate the importance of our actions and our connections here on Earth and to the stars as well as other beings.

4.7 Connective Stones Theory

These guiding thoughts led me to Line Laplante's *The Plains Cree Connective Stone Theory: Earth-Sky Vertebral Spines And Umbilical Cords* (2020). The author discusses the connective stones theory which began in a dream and continued to develop as she made more connections between Cree teachings, the cosmos, and the human body. The theory recognizes the sacred energy shared by everything in the universe, that everything is made up of stardust, ensuring the relationality between all forms of being. Laplante describes how humans reflect nature, specifically how each region of the human spine mirrors activities on earth and is reflected in the cosmos. These reflections are also present in language, where,

> … the Cree word for human being is ayisi**yin**iw, while for rock is asi**niy** - notice how the root words **yin** and **niy** are reflections of each other. As everything in the universe is made of stardust, all spirit embodied forms whether stars, bones, or plants and animals are considered asiniyak (stones) (Laplante, 2020).

This article supports many of my thoughts on our interconnectedness with other beings, further discussing human beings as star people, made up of stardust. Cree relationship building takes

work and reciprocity. Ionah M. Elaine Scully (2021) discusses shapeshifting and trickster consciousness rooted in Cree stories, teaching us how to be in right relationship and how to make sense of our self-reflective practices.

Indigenous relationality requires responsibility and reciprocity. Wâhkôtowin and miyo wîcêhtowin teachings show us that relations require tending to those responsibilities (Scully, 2021). Although the author discusses these concepts in a different context, I found them to be applicable and extremely useful in thinking through relationality with the non-human. Trickster teachings and shape shifting can be used to imagine if humans could change form, and what those forms would look like if they visualized our relationships to our non-human kin.
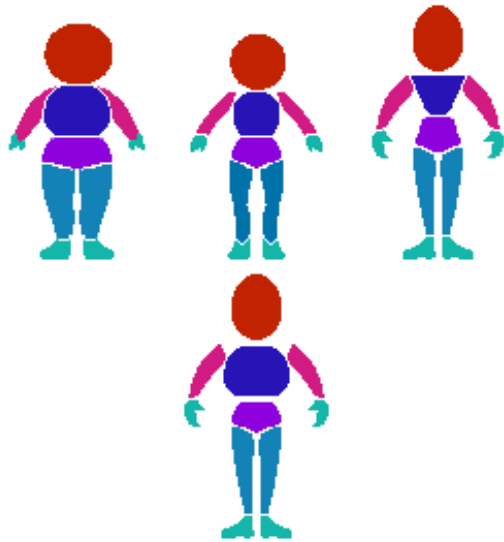

Fig. 27.   Fig. 28.

Fig. 27 and Fig. 28 are the first explorations of the concepts discussed. Figure 1 shows me thinking through different bodies, possibilities of mixing and matching body parts to create unique figures. Figure 2 is where I began to play with visually showing the unseen. Inspired by stories and discussions of people coming from the stars, being star-beings, I sketched what a galactic, space-themed body could look like, as well as galactic hair filled with stars. This progressed into thinking about cyborg bodies, and how we could visually show our new relationships forming with technology. Next, I began wondering about our relationships with trees and plants, which is what the person with skin made of tree bark and leaf hair represents in the top right corner of Fig. 28.

These sketches did raise more questions for me, particularly around the default state of the character. Many games of this genre fall into a binary default, where the player begins with a

male or female avatar and can, in some cases, change this to either gender. This is something I had to consider as well: what form the default would take at the start, as this reveals a lot about what is considered the default for a human. Is it male or female, or is it nothing at all?

Fig. 29.

Fig. 29 shows the next iteration of sketching more than human bodies. I was still exploring what beings to include, and I was undecided on the level of human that would be involved. The figure on the far right is a small exploration of what a human and tree hybrid could look like, particularly if branches could grow to replace lost limbs. However, as I continued to create more bodies I leaned more and more into the fantastical. The birch being (middle bottom) is where I began to specify the species I wanted to investigate.

Fig. 30.

Fig. 30 is where I began to explore more of how these bodies might look if they were embodying the essence of a being, for example the birch tree's tall slender frame, the oak tree's wider form, and water's flowing, shapeless and fluid form. Returning to my undergraduate degree in Indigenous environmental science, I researched specific characteristics of each species to see how they could be represented in this form. The prairie lily (upper right) was a suggestion from my sister, and after seeing the bright colours and shapes of the petals I thought it would make an interesting looking being. The soil person in the bottom middle grows moss, flowers and other grasses. I thought each soil being may have different mosses or grasses depending on their environments or the seasons.
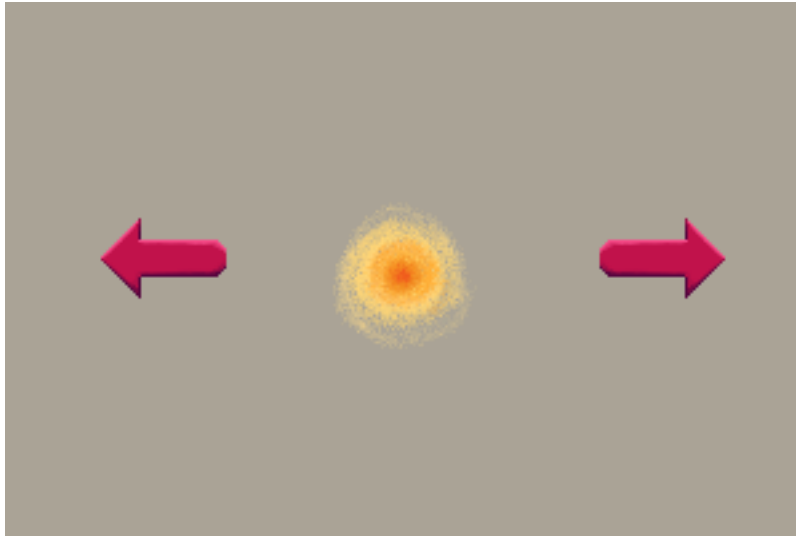
Fig. 31.

This is the final animation cycling through all of the more than human bodies. I call them more than human because of the combination of human and non-human, equaling something more than human. Beginning with a ball of light, I was inspired by the idea of humans being made of stardust, and since the human and more than human bodies I include all have spirit, I thought a ball of light/stardust would make sense as a default or starting body. I added colour changes for the leaves of the oak and birch tree since their leaves change with the seasons, and I imagine they would drop from their bodies in the winter. I decided to create an animation with arrows resembling a character selection scene in a video game for a more interactive presentation with no coding required.

This project was a great opportunity to explore key aspects involved in my thesis. I was able to experiment with the pixel art style while investigating and playing with parts of the dress-up genre. Incorporating Indigenous values made the experience all the more valuable, and through the research process I uncovered additional sources on Cree values and principles, providing grounding and guidance in my further research. The connective stone theory reinforces what I wanted to explore regarding our interconnections with all beings, and the idea of all beings containing spirit. Further, trickster teachings and consciousness discussed by Scully provided discussions of how shape shifting can help us understand our positions and relations with other beings, including our non-human kin. Form shifting, even in these small experimental drawings, can help in understanding non-human kin and our connections with them. These explorations were helpful in narrowing my scope and making decisions on including certain aspects in my dress-up game, such as gender selection and different body types.

4.8 The Goal

Following my explorations in the previous section, I had a stronger idea of what elements I wanted to delve into in my larger thesis project. I began to create an outline for what my ideal outcome would look and perform like. Some key elements that came from this exploration were choosing the shape of the vessel as opposed to choosing a gender, the default/starting shape being a ball of light, and the confirmation that I wanted to work with pixel art.

My next step was to organize the gameplay elements into a document. I created sections for each main screen of the game, such as the title screen, main customization screen, and the ending screen, each with notes on gameplay elements. Then, I made some mock-up sketches of how I imagined the game to look. This helped keep me organized in the creation of the game assets as well as arranging them in the game engine.

Fig. 32.

Figure 32 is a mock-up of the first scene of the game, what the player sees upon entry, after the title/load game screen. Rather than having one gender or shape be the 'default', the player begins the game as a floating ball of light. This is a reference to Cree stories and knowledge of humans originating from the sky or stars, and how we are made up of stardust.
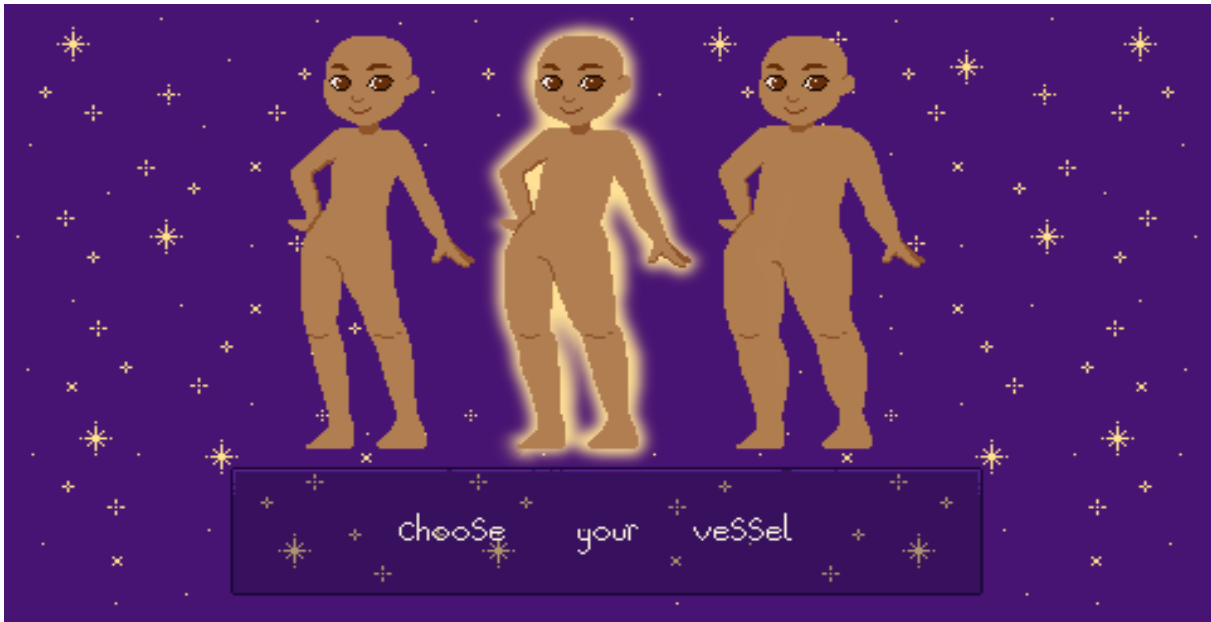
Fig. 33.

Figure 33 is a mock-up of the next screen, where the player chooses which body shape to dress-up. Sticking with the lack of default gender, the player simply chooses what shape to customize. I originally chose three body types to keep it simple in the time frame that I had. The main focus of the game is on customization and accessories, and I planned to add more features like additional body shapes later on. Having several different shapes meant I would need to edit each piece of clothing to fit each shape, as well as code the game to change the clothing displayed depending on which shape was chosen. This extra step ended up being outside of my time frame, and I hope to include it in the future.

Fig. 34.

Figure 34 is a mock-up of the main customization screen. The body shape and skin tone that the player chose is on the left, with customization and clothing options to the right, along with clickable buttons with icons depicting the type of customization. Customization is possible in the following categories: Face, Hair, Jewelry/Accessories, Tops, Bottoms, and Shoes.

The text bubble in the top left corner depicts an optional play mode with prompts to guide outfit creation. I imagined the player could choose whether to play with or without prompts on the loading screen. If the player chose to use the prompts, they would appear in the upper corner with a prompt like, 'What will you were to Kokum's house for supper?' or similar questions with different settings, such as a concert, a powwow, Indigenous fashion week, the city, and more.

The 'lookin' deadly' thought bubble relates to the idea of having randomized pop ups complimenting the outfit choices the player has made. When I thought of elements of the nostalgic dress-up games from my childhood, I remembered the ambient noise of a peppy female voice saying phrases like, 'great choice!' and 'looking good!' as I played. I pictured that as the player makes choices and decorates their character, thought bubbles containing other phrases like 'ever sick', 'real cute' and more would appear, randomized, as if the character was thinking them. I thought these randomized pop ups would be a fun way to incorporate this idea and include some Native humour and slang.

Fig. 35.

Finally, here Figure 35 depicts some first sketches of the clothing and accessories. As discussed in the Literature Review, I was inspired by many talented Indigenous designers. I was also

heavily inspired by the everyday wardrobe of my friends and family. Here I was still thinking through the key pieces to include. I knew I wanted to have graphic tees with some slang/sayings and syllabics, moccasins, different ribbon pieces, and of course beaded earrings.

Not pictured here is a mockup of the ending screen, however my goal for that was to have an option for the player to change the background behind their character, then export as a PNG image and send to an email to share online. By the time I had gotten to the creation of the mock-up screens, this idea was put aside to come back to later. I also thought of having an option either in the game or where I upload the game, where players could send feedback and suggestions on clothing or accessories they wanted to see.

There are several aspects that I did not get a chance to include but would like to add to the game later on. The optional prompt mode, speech bubbles, and music are all important parts that I look forward to including in the future, as they add more interactivity and character to the game. Although I am pleased with the final result I look forward to continuing to build on and add to *wawêsîwin.*

4.9 The Process/Roadblocks

In this section, I will discuss the many thoughts and conflicts that came up during the process of researching and creating wawêsîwin. One of these thoughts is the difficulty in finding accessible Nêhiyaw clothing and designs, leading to thinking about how so much of our knowledge was lost due to colonization, and so much of our stories and designs have been watered down and adapted by others. However, sharing knowledge, stories, and art has always been a part of how we live with one another. How can we tell the difference between what was shared and adapted versus what was appropriated?

Another conflicting thought was about Indigenous video games, and how they are often forced into a box to educate or be consumable for non-Indigenous audiences. This can smother the creativity and expression of Indigenous artists, as it seems no matter what we make it must be made palatable to others.

Lastly, I reflect on how the process of this research creation project ended up being a very personal journey that led to the rekindling of many of my childhood interests. I end with some thoughts on the importance of joy and play alongside resistance and reclamation.

4.10 The Melting Pot of Indigenous Fashion

One aspect of this research project that was difficult to navigate was the lack of accessible, specifically nêhiyaw clothing designs, both historical and contemporary. Additionally, finding information about those designs, such as who was wearing them or if they belonged to someone

was even more difficult, leading me to feel unsure about using them for this purpose. I did not want to play with something that I was not meant to.

Along with this is what I've taken to unofficially calling in my mind 'cross-nation appropriation', where due to colonization suppressing traditions, many communities' specific cultural aesthetics and clothing designs have been co-opted by other nations/communities. A close friend who is Anishinaabe shared with me that in the past, one could identify another's community and nation by their beadwork, whether that be with regalia or everyday clothing, with each piece containing distinct teachings and stories (N.B., personal communication, September 7, 2023). Nowadays, these patterns are still being used, still holding that knowledge and those stories, many just do not know how to read them.

We spoke about the jingle dress dance, which was originally an Anishinaabe tradition with the purpose of healing, but more recently has been adapted by many other nations as well, sometimes with no knowledge of the original purpose (N.B., personal communication, September 7, 2023). Another non-clothing example is the dreamcatcher, originally an Anishinaabe tradition with history and stories behind it, that was adopted by other nations, and used by outsiders as a pan-Indian symbol of all Indigenous nations across Turtle Island, similarly to the headdress from Plains nations (N.B., personal communication, September 7, 2023). There are also instances like Kokum scarves, which as I discussed in the Literature Review, come with a history of sharing between communities of Cree and Ukrainian people (Benallie, 2022).

There are many instances of nations having similar stories, aesthetics, and values that exist across nations. The movement of material culture and tradition between nations comes naturally with relationships, marriages across nations, and trade. Much of these practices were shared between communities, such as beading or weaving techniques, as well as patterns. However, due to the persecution of both our people and cultures resulting in the loss of knowledge, it can be difficult to discern what was shared or where things came from. It is also important to remember that traditions evolve as people need, to suit our changing needs.

These are thoughts that have come up through my research and creation of this project, through conversations with friends, and I do not presume to have all the answers to this particular subject as someone who is still on my path of learning and reconnection. I do think it shows the need for reconnection to our nations' traditions. We need to have these conversations with Elders and knowledge keepers in order to keep these traditions alive in our communities with the context, knowledge and stories behind them.

4.11 The Claustrophobic Box of Indigenous Games
During the creation process of the game, I questioned if this project could, or should have an educational component, such as providing explanations of the history behind each article of

clothing or accessory. This was a suggestion I received when requesting feedback from peers, and I consider it especially valuable as it made me think deeper about my motivations and purpose behind this project.

A common theme I have observed with Indigenous-centered media such as video games is that many times, intended or not, they are framed in a way to be educational and digestible for a non-Indigenous audience. Educational video games centering Indigenous peoples and cultures are extremely valuable, however it becomes a pattern when even fictional and sci-fi media are being labeled and perceived as educational.

Mîkiwâm, a visual novel game created by my sister Keara and I working together (as Studio Ekosi) received similar feedback regarding its educational value for younger audiences, despite the game's explicit advertisement as a fantasy, magical realism setting with magical plants. Having the label 'educational' imposed immediately implies the creator as being representative of their people and culture, even if that was not their intention or desire. It also suggests the player preparing to do some work and learn something, taking the game out of what could be considered just for fun. This can be stifling when Indigenous creatives want to experiment, create something speculative, tell a personal story informed by their lived experiences, or just create something purely for fun.

I see a difference between being held accountable to community and having someone else's perception imposed upon an artist and their work, thus being forced into a box for non-Indigenous consumption and comfort. Does creating something intended for an Indigenous audience automatically mean that those who are not Indigenous cannot interact or enjoy it, or must 'get something' from it or be educated by it? The many Indigenous nerds, or 'Indiginerds', I know who have been a large part of pop culture fanbases despite much of that media representing us very stereotypically or not acknowledging our existence show that it is possible to engage with and love media that is not necessarily made for or about you.

Even so, as per my own lived experience as a displaced nêhiyaw who grew up away from community, many Indigenous people do not necessarily know their histories or traditions. Many of us have been separated from our communities, cultures, and knowledges. An educational component to this dress-up game regarding histories behind the garments could be very valuable to other Cree people.

In the end, I must look back to the guiding principles behind this research creation, as well as why I desired to see this created in the first place. The goal was to create a dress-up game highlighting the beauty, humour, and joy in my culture. It was not to create a historically accurate and informational dress-up game. However, this game is not set in stone. If later I believe I have gained the knowledge to be able to include an educational component, I can return to it and add it. This is a project that I can continue to build on, and I look forward to doing so in the future.

I do not aim to present either side of this issue as 'correct', or devalue the importance of educational, Indigenous focused games, however it was important for me to think through these ideas in order to hold myself accountable to what the intentions behind this game are. There was a strict timeframe to complete this project and so the scope had to be narrowed in order to create something presentable and playable that I would be happy to share.

A large part of the process behind anything I create is asking who I am making this for and why. From the beginning my goal for this project was to create a game centered around Cree joy, and to me that does not entail excluding anyone else. Although others may and are encouraged to play and enjoy this game, it was made explicitly to center and spark Cree joy. My intent is to say 'I think that Cree people will especially enjoy this, and that's why I want to make it', not 'only Cree can play and understand this'.

4.12 Last Reflections

Overall, the entire process of this research-creation project was much more personal than I expected. In the beginning, I attempted to keep my distance and be 'academic' in my approach. During one of my first presentations where I presented my research topic, a peer commented that they wanted to know more about my personal ties to this topic, specifically why it appealed to me so much. This comment made me realize how much I was holding back in an attempt to be what I perceived as 'properly academic' and unbiased in order to be taken seriously. This ended up working against me when I stopped feeling excited about researching, writing, and creating for this project and would instead avoid working on it, creating this cycle of avoidance and stress. It was not until I began playing games again, connecting to these feelings of euphoria and playfulness that I could reconnect with this research and feel no dread. How ironic that this paper centering joy could be one that I dreaded and avoided thinking about for so long.

Research-creation, and really any research, is a vulnerable, personal process, no matter how much it is perceived as purely scholarly and unbiased. I chose this topic because it is one I love, and one I am interested in because of that love. Love is inherently biased and personal. When I discuss this, it puts me in a vulnerable position, to share parts of myself with whomever reads this text. But if I hadn't, this would be a dishonest, and frankly boring paper to read. Who would want to read something written by someone not interested in the subject they are researching?

This project opened a door for me to rekindle the love I had and the joy I felt as a child, instead of feeling shame and embarrassment for loving the same things now as an adult. Although this game was made for others to enjoy, the entire process ended up being a small love letter to my child self, who I got to know again, as well as our beautiful culture and communities. The process of creating the game was a form of play itself—I got to play dress-up while designing all the pieces. I also gained a new and deeper respect for the thriving community of creators making these

dress-up games. So much work and thought goes into each one, coordinating every piece to form a cohesive wardrobe with a theme to tie them together.

This game is not my magnum opus or the end all be all of Indigenous reclamation and resistance, but it is a little pocket of cyberspace that I have claimed as a place for myself and others to explore and express themselves however they see fit, whether that is with pixel moccasins or digital ribbon shorts. As discussed in my theoretical framework, an important aspect of miyo-pimâtisiwin, the good life, is enjoying it. Not just surviving but something more than that. Joy and play are essential for living that good life. However, I'm not interested in mindless joy. It is in addition to resistance. It is not something to replace our rightful anger and sense of injustice. It is something we need alongside that, to keep us grounded in what we are fighting for in the first place; our people, our communities, our culture, our lands, the things that bring us joy and love.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Through this thesis, I have explored video games as a medium for cultural expression, specifically in the dress-up genre. I wondered what a nêhiyaw dress-up game could look like, and wawêsîwin is the product of that wondering and the research that came with it.

In Chapter 1: Introduction, I positioned myself as well as my topics of research. I discussed Indigenous New Media, the possible issues as well as uses such as an avenue to express survivance. I then discuss Avatar Customization in video games, including the genre of dress-up games. In Chapter 2: Literature and Media Review, I discuss the history of the dress-up game, leading to my reasons for pursuing the creation of an Indigenous dress-up game, and finally showing how dress-up game creators today have been pushing the bounds of the genre. In Chapter 3: Methods, I lay out the mixed methodologies in use for this thesis: research-creation, survivance, and miyo-pimâtisiwin, and how these work together to provide a framework for my research and creation. In Chapter 4: Discussion, I present the game created through this process: wawêsîwin, meaning the act of dressing up in nêhiyawewin. I provide a walkthrough of the game, while describing the thought process behind the design choices. I then discuss the echibiton where I presented wawêsîwin to my peers to interact with, receiving thoughtful engagement and helpful feedback. I then explain the first concepts for the game, which began as an exploration of relationships with non-human beings, shapeshifter and trickster consciousness. I wanted to examine how human bodies could look if they represented our relationships with our non-human kin, creating more than human bodies, a mixture of human and non-human. These explorations were fundamental in thinking through many aspects of wawêsîwin, such as the default state of the body as well as the focus on Cree as star people. Next, I discuss my original goal for the game, the aspects I was not able include such as several body types and an optional prompted play mode. Lastly in this chapter, I explain my process, including conflicting thoughts I had throughout the process of researching and creating. These included the lack of accessible resources on nêhiyaw clothing and the sharing of knowledge and art between communities. I also describe the constricting box that Indigenous video games and their creators are often pushed into, where they must be made palatable and educational to others. Finally, I end with my thoughts on the personal journey this research took me on, and the importance of play, joy, and love in addition to resistance.

Wawêsîwin is in what I would call a demo stage right now. It is enough to be a functional game, but as I discussed in Chapter 4, there are several features that I was not able to implement for this version of the game. I hope to continue building on this iteration with features like an optional prompted play mode, more body types, and even more clothing and accessories. I would also like to incorporate Cree language and syllabics more, on the clothing as well as in the game itself. Language could be embedded in the prompts as well as the complimentary thought bubbles mentioned in Chapter 4. Language holds so much knowledge and power, and even though I am

not a fluid language speaker it is important to me to include it as much as I can. In the future, I would love to collaborate with Indigenous designers to include their works in the game. I can picture a version of wawêsîwin that exists on an Indigenous fashion brand's website, with new pieces added with each collection drop. I think this could be a unique way to show new collections in an interactive format. I can also envision a version with several different designers works, with text showing information about each designer and piece, as a way to showcase the variety in Indigenous fashion.

There are several ways in which an Indigenous dress-up game could be expanded on. Although I was resistant to this suggestion due to the scope and purpose of this project, I can see an Indigenous dress-up game with information on each garment, like the histories and meaning behind them to be valuable and informative for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous players. This would be a project I would imagine being done in collaboration with Elders and Knowledge Keepers within different Nations. I would be interested in seeing the differences and similarities if several Nations made a game like this with their histories behind particular garments. I can also see this genre working well with an Indigenous futurisms approach, where the clothing and accessories tell a narrative about an imagined future, similar to Skawennati's *Indians in the 25th Century* (2000). The player could dress their character in torn up, battered clothing one may find in an apocalypse, or futuristic cyber clothing with glowing beaded accessories depending on what story is being told, or what future is being imagined. Dress-up games, with their simple premise, can be a great medium for communicating a narrative, as was shown in the game *(Try to) Dress-up* (2015). Now having some experience with designing a dress-up game and creating the assets, I would be interested in pushing this genre more and communicating a story with the design of the game itself and the garments. This project was an opportunity to explore a medium with potential that I felt was being underutilized in this new age of Indigenous game development and I hope to continue exploring what this game genre has to offer.

Through the creation of wawêsîwin, I strived to center nêhiyaw joy and modern material culture. It is my hope that other Cree who loved these games as children and never saw themselves in them, or those who have never even heard of dress-up games will still enjoy this as a space to express themselves and experience the joy that I felt while creating it. I hope that non-Indigenous players can also enjoy and see the beauty and power in Indigenous fashion and game design. I hope that players will see the potential of dress-up games as a medium, how the simple structure provides an avenue for storytelling and pushing the bounds of what is considered a dress-up game. Most of all, I hope that Indigenous creatives continue to transform and expand their respective fields to tell their stories and practice survivance in their own way, whether that is through fashion or game design or even both.

The field of Indigenous game development is constantly expanding, and I am delighted to see the growing number of Indigenous games being created and shared as tools become more accessible. When we gain the tools to tell our own narratives in new ways, we inspire and guide others like

us to do the same, allowing the enduring presence of Indigenous communities in digital spaces to grow and transform.

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