wakká:raien – i have a story:

Mixed-Blood Indigenous Women, Identity, and Urban Spaces

by

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Abstract

This study explores the stories of three mixed-blood Indigenous women in relation to how they navigate their identity and connection to land in urban spaces. The women are between the ages of 19 and 30 and live on the traditional and ancestral territories of the Coast Salish people, also known as Vancouver, Canada. The women engage with Photovoice, a grassroots methodology that employs photography and storytelling, to share aspects of their life and their experiences as mixed-blood Indigenous women. Through this research study, I aim to create an opportunity for the women to share and to be heard. Through their personal narratives, I will help shed light on the realities of female Indigenous identities with the intention of disrupting whitestream discourses and perceptions of indigeneity within urban settings. I employ an epistemology entitled “Three Directions”, as well as draw on Indigenous Feminism with the aim of honouring the women’s voices. The sharing that transpired within this research speaks to the ongoing struggle for mixed-blood Indigenous women to fully embrace their roots due to the impacts of colonization and assimilationist policies, but it also speaks to their own resiliency in finding supports within the urban community and in drawing strength from the land.
Lay Summary

This study is an exploration of the identity and connection to land that urban Indigenous women of mixed heritage experience. The purpose was to create an opportunity for the women to come together and share their stories and their words, and through that to demonstrate how Indigenous identity is deeply intricate and varied. This is to highlight that mainstream understanding of indigeneity is often incorrect and laced with stereotypes. This research used photography and storytelling to gather perspectives, and the women in the study chose what it is that they wanted to present, as well as how what they shared was interpreted. The purpose of this approach was to ensure the women’s voices never became separated from their stories, the way data is often separated from research participants. Based on my review of the literature, this area of research has not been explored within the context of mixed-blood Indigenous women in cities.
Preface

All work done within this thesis is the original and unpublished work of the author, Nahannee-fé Rita Schuitemaker. The research was carried out by approval of the University of British Columbia’s Behavioural Research Ethics Board under the Ethics Certificate #: H17-00201.
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Niá:wen to the women, Cedar, Ocean and Mountain, who so graciously shared their stories and allowed me to capture a part of their journey. You each inspire me in different ways and I admire your strength, determination and resilience. You are beautiful, loved, and appreciated. Your stories are valid. Your journeys are important.

Niá:wen to Haudenosaunee artists, Monique Bedard and Mitch Holmes, for creating the sweetgrass art for me at the last moment to bring it all together.
Dedication

For Linda, whose words and smile I carry with me wherever I go. Niawenkó:wa for loving me like a daughter and supporting me unconditionally.

I also dedicate these words to Ronathahí:non O’nikón:ra who reminded me time and time again to let love carry me through this work. Konia’tí:saks tahnón é:so tsi kononorónhkhwá.
In order to locate myself in this writing and also within the academic world in which this work has come to life, it is important to share the reasons why I chose to carry out this study. Although the words here reflect the stories of three urban mixed-blood Indigenous women, in various ways they very much also speak to my own journey and this is why part of my discussion breaks away from the traditional thesis format by including sections of my poetry and vignettes written by me associated with the group session. These are important personal reflections on the women’s stories which contribute to the greater narrative of what it means to be Indigenous. This collective voice approach also challenges readers to embrace a form of knowledge sharing that resonates more closely to how I understand the world and how I utilize different forms of knowing. We are often taught in western education to eliminate the “I” in our work, to eliminate the personal, and I purposely and wholeheartedly reject this separation of head and heart because this journey is incredibly personal. To not honour and acknowledge the strength it has taken to complete this work would be to not acknowledge how difficult it is for many Indigenous students to dive into the depths of such important topics that shape who we are. Therefore, I begin by offering a piece of my story.

Shé:kon sewakwé:kon, Nahannee ionkiats. Greetings, my name is Nahannee. My ceremonial name is three rainbow woman which was gifted to me on the traditional territories of the Xaxli’p First Nation by my Sundance community. The name Nahannee has traveled great distances across Turtle Island and its origins come from the islands of Hawai’i to which I am still building an understanding of what it means in the native Hawaiian language.

In Shawn Wilson’s book (2008) “Research is Ceremony”, he shares the story of a woman who describes herself as originating from “the three i’s - Indigenous, invader, and immigrant” (p.
68). Borrowing from this, I similarly describe myself: I am Kanien’kehá:ka (Indigenous since time immemorial), French Canadian (invader – 15+ generations) and Dutch (immigrant, first generation). I have other Indigenous heritages that I know far too little about to speak to at this point in my life. I have lived in three provinces as well as internationally and have had more addresses than I can count. I have spent most of my life feeling unrooted, neither connected to the family around me or the communities I have lived in. I have spent chapters of my life exploring the cultures of others which eventually brought me full circle to my own heritage. I cannot remember at what point being Indigenous became something we spoke about in my family, but I do remember feeling the closest sense of home in beginning to explore what that meant. It was not until I entered post-secondary that I began to take a critical look at this identity I was becoming more connected to. There are many reasons for being disconnected from the culture including adoption, residential schools, assimilation and genocidal policies that sought to outright kill Indigenous people. I am still uncovering my own family’s story, but I do know that Indigenous heritage was not something that was celebrated among previous generations. Coming from very poor origins that already suffered under the pressures of the British, my family was and is still not eager to call attention to or identify with Indigenous roots. The Indigenous women who married into my French lines would have become property of their husbands and cast out of their communities for marrying out. In addition to that, any government recognition as an Indigenous woman would have been rescinded for marrying a non-Indigenous man. I can estimate that it was my grandmother’s generation which stopped speaking the language, and my mother’s generation were the last to visit our relations on reserve; although it is not clear if that was Caughnawaga/Kahnawake and/or Kanehsatà:ke.
It is important to emphasize that even though I name these locations, I make no claims to either community because of this lack of clarity. I am the only person in my generation to actively reclaim our Haudenosaunee roots, the first to begin relearning the language, and my dream is to revitalize a part of my family that has given me meaning to live. I do not share these facts to emphasize the things I am doing but rather to give the reader a sense of the context from which I speak. Canada’s history of genocide which sought to absorb Indigenous people into whitestream culture, and the ongoing oppression and violence against Indigenous people have almost rendered my lineage forgotten.

Due to the disconnect in my family, I had no idea what being Indigenous meant and so sought clues and direction from what I saw represented in places such as the media, literature, and common discourse. One can imagine how problematic this is as the representation of Indigenous people is grossly inaccurate and stereotypical at best in most incidences. I took in what was around me with little understanding as to how to filter out cultural appropriation and damaging representations. I have heard many accounts of Indigenous people being rejected by other Indigenous individuals or communities, and I too have experienced my own share of encounters which have been hurtful and rather confusing in the earlier parts of my identity searching. There is no single explanation as to why such incidents occur, but is partly due to a compounding of hurt and anger over generations, the internalizing of colonial definitions of who we should be, combined with abuses, dehumanizing practices and centuries of oppression. Some of this is explored in more detail later in this thesis.

Along with my Indigenous roots, my father’s history is also riddled with violence and trauma. He was born during the holocaust when the Netherlands were occupied by the Nazis in World War II. My grandmother had lived through World War I and now when think of her as a
young mother trying to survive with her children during the Nazi occupation, I can barely fathom the desperation she must have felt. My grandfather was rounded up in the fall of 1944 as a young Dutchman who was involved with protecting those being persecuted by the Nazis. He was known for his open resentment towards the Germans, and his refusal to cooperate, and this resulted in his arrest. He was taken to a concentration camp called Neuengamme in northern Germany, just outside the city of Hamburg where he was imprisoned until he died on February 14, 1945. My birthday. My father was just shy of two years old when his father died. My uncle, an infant, died of starvation without his father ever laying eyes on him. My grandfather survived until the end of the war but never saw freedom because of the length of time it took for the camp to be liberated. Little is commonly known about Neuengamme in comparison to other camps such as Auschwitz in Oświęcim, Poland but its history is just as horrific and being one of the last camps to be liberated left ample time for evidence to be destroyed, including killing off as many of the prisoners who managed to remain alive. Because of this, documentation was sparse and much of it only survived due to the courage prisoners had to hide the records they were instructed to destroy.

In 2011, I attended the Truth and Reconciliation’s first conference in Vancouver, BC. During my undergraduate in Psychology and Spanish, I focused heavily on Human Rights and Genocide studies and therefore, this first conference was something I needed to witness. The conference called on various countries and peoples from across the globe to speak on their histories of enduring violence and possible pathways for reconciliation. This was in the midst of me trying to grasp my own identity issues and histories and in a moment of courage I introduced myself to the woman from Germany who was invited to speak. Susanne Urban was the Head of Historical Research and Education at the International Tracing Service (https://www.its-
arolsen.org/en/) in Bad Arolsen, Germany, which houses existing documentation from the Holocaust such as Nazi records, recovered documents from families, photographs, personal accounts, and other relevant databases. I explained that I knew so little of my grandfather’s journey, and she instructed me to submit a request to her personally to research what their service may have on my grandfather. Two weeks later I received a package in the mail with colour photocopies of every scrap of documentation they had on him, from his train records after his arrest, to a work card with Arbeitsverweigerung (refusal to work) written on it, to the page where his name is recorded in the death book. His name among many names, listed like pieces of inventory instead of human beings fighting for life.

![Figure 1 Prisoner's personal card of "Polizeiliches Durchgangslager" Amersfoort](image)

I cannot even begin to put words to what it felt like to receive that package. It took me a year to even respond to Susanne and thank her. But when I finally found it within me to reach out, it was also with the intention to travel to Germany because I needed to bear witness to this
part of my history that I knew so little of if I was to have any idea of what it means to be a mixed-blood woman.

So, in 2012 I boarded a plane to Amsterdam with limited knowledge of my family and who would be waiting for me when I arrived. During my time there, I boarded a train to Hamburg and through a series of events I found myself at the gate of Neuengamme, covering a massive area sprawling out in front of me, with neatly organized piles of broken brick where the prisoner’s living areas used to stand. I was 24 years old when I visited. My grandfather was 24 when he died where I stood. It was one of those moments you feel the world shift around you, and certain things change in a way they can never be the same again. And although I am two generations removed from what happened there, I cried like I had walked every step there myself.

I could write for days on that visit to Neuengamme. But the purpose of sharing this part of my story within my thesis is what resulted from this journey of exploring my histories and how they shape my identity. I started writing a blog on this trip to help process what I was experiencing, and to this day I have continued to write that blog to process many things including identity. And it was through this platform that other Indigenous people, mainly women, reached out to me about my posts to share their opinions and their stories. Some continue to reject me for reasons I cannot assume to know but for the vast majority the stories shared with me reflect a desire for a space where they can speak and be heard on issues Indigenous women face. Over the years this has motivated me to have a better understanding of how other mixed-blood Indigenous women navigate their identity and how their stories are similar and different from my own. My work has become about our stories, how they shape us, and how they guide our journeys. I want to help create space for these stories to be shared and
heard because they are all valid and important. After all, King (2003) said it best when he wrote:

“the truth about stories is that that’s all we are” (p. 2).
Within the greater Indigenous community, spanning rural and urban centres, the topic of identity is highly contested and multi-faceted (Anderson, 2013; Krieg, 2007; Lawrence, 2004; Proulx, 2006; Warry, 2009; Wilson & Peters, 2005). Identity is attached to many aspects of our lives and when considering an Indigenous context, where identity can mean many things (i.e. nation, tribe, status or non-status, male, female, two spirited etc.), discussion around the topic can produce a spectrum of responses both within and outside Indigenous communities. What it means to be Indigenous cannot be boiled down to one thing, nor should we expect it to be considering the diversity of nations, cultures, geographical factors, histories, and ways of knowing. However, whitestream culture has imposed upon Indigenous people a definition that we are more or less one thing – a construct that usually consists of a single identity - a noble savage that is doomed to vanish, visibly unchanging in features including physical characteristics and Indian garb such as feathers and buckskin. This is what Thomas King (2012) refers to as a “Dead Indian” and which sets the basis for what authenticity should look like, constructed entirely from the imaginings of white North America. King (2012) further elaborates how “Live Indians”, those Indigenous people living in modern times, are rendered invisible because they are “unruly, disappointing. And breathing” (p. 66). Dead Indians are “a romantic reminder of a heroic but fictional past” (p. 66) but are often used as a means of comparison, an ideal of what Indianness is against Indigenous people who are alive today. King lastly introduces the “Legal Indian” which is category of authenticity in of itself. Legal Indians are those recognized by the government and labeled as Status Indians under the Indian Act in Canada. King (2012) writes:
… only about 40 percent of Live Indians in North America are Legal Indians. A few more than one in three. This is important because the only Indians that the governments of Canada and the United States have any interest in are the Legal ones. “Interest,” though, is probably too positive a term, for while North America loves the Dead Indian and ignores the Live Indian, North America hates (sic) the Legal Indian. Savagely. The Legal Indian was one of those errors in judgement that North America made and has been trying to correct for the last 150 years. (p. 69)

And while the focus of how identity is understood within the context of my research does not necessarily directly intend to center around the Indian Act, it is imperative that I stress that this piece of legislation is the source of much discrimination and gender bias against Indigenous women. In fact, since contact, Indigenous women in particular have had their identity negotiated, restricted, withdrawn, stripped, re-instituted and flat-out denied within legal contexts, society at large, within and outside communities and beyond (Lawrence, 2004; McIvor, 2004; Palmater, 2011; Monchalin, 2016). In her book, Beyond Blood: Rethinking Indigenous Identity, Pam Palmater who is a Mi’kmaq lawyer, writes extensively about how Indigenous women have been and continue to be targets of gender discrimination within the Indian Act and how this has impacted herself and her family.

Within my own life, I have experienced the denial of my identity as a mixed-blood Indigenous woman and witnessed that of others similar to myself. This denial has been based on a number of things such as not being a Status Indian as per Sections 6 (1) or 6 (2) of the Indian Act (McIvor, 2004; Monchalin, 2016), not looking Indian, not being connected to a community, and other failed measures of authentic Indianness. Although I choose to express my discontent through King’s notable sarcasm and wit, and relay a similar tone here, there remains a gravity to
which the conversation of Indianness of mixed-blood individuals and their realities needs to be supported. Palmater’s work, alongside that of Lawrence’s research on mixed-blood identity are important but they are already over a decade in age and reflect a different demographic and generation from that associated with my work. Therefore, through a plethora of encounters in my experience, both positive and negative, I assert that the importance for the topic of mixed-Indigenous women’s identity to be openly and critically explored remains paramount.

Inquiry Topic & Purpose

Acknowledging the need for opportunities to be created to explore the aforementioned topic, the focus of my research is mixed-blood identity among urban Indigenous women and additionally, their relation to land in urban spaces. Building on research such as Friedel (2009), Lawrence (2004), Palmater (2011), and Krieg (2007), and using Photovoice (PV), a grassroots research methodology, I have engaged with young urban mixed-blood Indigenous women to hear their stories in relation to how they negotiate their identity within today’s reality, and how they relate to the land in urban places when they may have little to no connection with their own ancestral territories for various reasons.

The previous research I mentioned has not specifically focused on young women who navigate more than one heritage within an urban setting. Therefore, there is a gap in the literature that I am addressing. Additionally, I sought to better understand how these women relate to land in urban places because Indigenous connection to land is incredibly important within the context of identity. An example of this is written by Laguna Pueblo writer Leslie Silko (1998) who shares that “[t]he landscape sits at the centre of Pueblo belief and identity. Any narratives about the Pueblo people give a great deal of attention and detail to all aspects of a landscape” (p. 21). In addition, Silko explains that within the Pueblo worldview, humans are not separate from the
landscape, yet are an important part of it. It has been my experience that my lack of connection to my ancestral territories has been an indicator of my lack of authenticity and others I have encountered expressed similar dilemmas.

My study takes place in Vancouver, Canada which is a city situated on the shared traditional territories of the Sḵwx̱wú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish), Tsleil-Waututh, and xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) and like many urban centres it has a growing Indigenous population. More unique to Vancouver is an Indigenous population which includes a very diverse collection of people and families from nations across North America and beyond (Environics Institute, 2011). Similarly, to Wilson and Peters (2005), whose study explored urban participants’ connection to community and land, I sought to understand how the women in my study connected to land in Vancouver when it was not their own territory and when they have limited or no access to their own ancestral territories.

Research questions

In consideration of the abovementioned topics of inquiry, this research is guided by the following set of questions and sub questions. The participants were provided with a guide sheet of questions, statements, and word prompts relating to these research questions to help motivate their exploration of the study’s topic (see Appendix F) and to prepare them for discussion during the group session. The questions are as follows:

1. How do urban mixed-blood Indigenous women identify themselves?
   a. How do mainstream or colonial perceptions of race and gender influence Indigenous women’s connection to indigeneity?
   b. What measures or language are used to define their sense of identity?
2. Do the women form a sense of belonging to the urban community and/or with the local Indigenous nations?

3. How do the women, who have little to no connection to their own ancestral lands, connect to the land in urban centres?
   a. Do the women form connection to physical locations?

**Goals of the study**

Most importantly, the goal of this study was to create an opportunity where mixed-blood Indigenous women would feel comfortable to share their stories so that they could be heard by one another and by the larger audience this work will reach.

In the context of the Canadian political landscape, where terminology such as reconciliation, identity, and decolonization are hot topics, the purpose of this study was to move past click-bait sound bites and bring forward stories of Indigenous women who are often not readily represented. The study seeks to not only educate within an academic setting but to also reach a more varied audience through easy-access dissemination methods. This includes reaching audiences within Indigenous communities, of which are not immune to perpetuating harmful colonial perceptions of what being Indigenous means (Lawrence, 2004; Palmater, 2011).

Furthermore, Photovoice as a methodology, allows the women as participants to drive the coding aspect of the research by asking them to identify themes or topics that emerged and were of importance to them. These themes and topics not only stem from the discussion but already began emerging in their process of selecting their final images ahead of time to share in the group session, therefore demonstrating a longer period of thoughtfulness and reflection.
contributing to the overall study. In terms of future direction, the women have the power of continuing the conversation beyond the study, and this can take whatever form they feel speaks best to their stories.

*Ensuring an opportunity to share*

Because the most important goal of this research was to create an opportunity for sharing for the women involved, I needed to approach this work in a delicate and thorough manner. It started with considering who would possibly want to be involved and planting the seed long before I even began shaping my research proposal. One of the most important factors in any research and especially research with Indigenous people is the relationship we build with those involved. I knew that it would take time to speak about what my intentions were and although many of my conversations were not even directly with those who ultimately participated, others in my community in Vancouver became aware of the nature of the work I do and speak about. I have blogged about my personal experiences of being attacked over my Indigenous heritage, my search for my culture, yearning to know my roots, and many of the fears that come with it. Therefore, when it came time to search for participants, multiple young women immediately responded because they wanted to be included. In addition to being considerate of the relationships with those involved, I wanted to ensure that the physical location itself was as safe as possible for those who participated. Therefore, the location and those who were present, aside from the participants, were carefully considered and even the videographer was an Indigenous woman to ensure the most considerate environment. Understanding that it is impossible to mitigate all risk, I choose to refer to the sharing as an *opportunity* to speak and be heard, rather than labeling them as “safe spaces” as I have previously, both within this research and among my other work outside of this thesis.
Operation definitions

As previously mentioned, I use the term *opportunity* to refer to the sharing that occurs among the women in this research. I mainly use the word *Indigenous* throughout this text, but at times I use the term *native* interchangeably. The use of the word Indian is in reference to how others refer to Indigenous people, whether through government policies or stereotypical renditions of indigeneity (i.e. Indianness). It is not a term I use in relation to the women who participated, for myself or for any other Indigenous person. *Mixed-blood* refers to Indigenous people of mixed ancestries, and I chose this term because of its familiarity within the academic literature, including Lawrence’s (2004) work. *Urban* refers to Indigenous people residing outside of their traditional territories, in an urban centre for a significant period of time. *Walk in two worlds* refers to a personal journey of coming to know the responsibilities of being mixed-race and navigating the world through two, sometimes conflicting, worldviews. The use of this term refers to my personal journey and employing it to inform my epistemology and ontology. Later in this thesis, I speak to the forming of this epistemology to direct my work with and it is based on my lived experience. For the purpose of this thesis, I use the term *walk in two words* to refer to the complexities of being mixed-blood. *Whitestream* is a term I use to refer to the dominant perspective in which white, Anglo-European is considered the default experience and the measure by which to compare, following the examples highlighted by the work of Political Studies professor Claude Denis (1995) and Quechua scholar Sandy Grande (2003). I choose to use this term instead of “mainstream” or “dominant” to highlight that indigeneity is still very much being defined by those outside of the Indigenous community.
tékëni – Literature Review

The need for stories

With an ever-growing population of Indigenous people within urban centres across Canada (Environics Institute, 2011; Peters, Newhouse, & Policy Research Initiative, 2003; Peters & Anderson, 2013a) there is also an ever-growing need to more accurately understand Indigenous people, as they are no longer “others” at a distance in rural reserves but still remain “others” within a societal context. As it stands today, it is often easier to reject their histories and perpetuate stereotypical renditions and narratives of Indianness to justify attitudes towards Indigenous people and the implementation of legislation to further the colonial agenda against rural and urban communities alike. In this way, the hegemonic discourse surrounding Indigenous peoples is maintained, therefore upholding the power and privilege of settler-society. Furthermore, these false representations of current-day Indigenous people continue to support the Eurocentric version of history as in the past and as it unfolds today (Friedel, 2011; Lawrence, 2004; Monchalin, 2016).

The term Indianness is used by Lawrence (2004) to refer to legal or socially acknowledged forms of being Indian such as being recognized as a Status Indian under the Indian Act, having the stereotypical appearance of an Indian, or coming from the reserve. Indianness outside of a legal context (and arguably so even within) is often based off of incorrect, romanticized notions of noble savagery and that of a vanishing relic (King, 2003; 2012). Dyar (2003) goes into great depth speaking to the fantasy and outright fetishization of
Indianness within an American context, which certainly pertains to the neighbouring settler society north of the border here in Canada. For example, Dyar (2003) writes:

This divorce of Indianness from the reality of Indians themselves allowed white society to define Indianness according to white cultural preferences and resulted in both a skewed understanding of Indian identity and a loss of voice for Indians in creating that identity.

(p. 817)

Indianness takes on different forms and interpretations dependent on location, context, and era (Lawrence, 2004) and in some sense, this can allow space for different understandings of it but all too often it simply perpetuates incorrect notions of who is a real Indian and who is not. Dyar (2003) discusses how Indianness, separate from actually being Indian, manifested over time since contact, has led up to current day misperceptions. She asserts that in the earlier days of contact the way of life of Indigenous people was seen as a source of freedom that was not tied to the obligations of white society and this provided an escape for those discontented with their own lives. Furthermore, the belief that Indigenous people led a carefree existence was also appealing and in some way reminiscent to Europeans of their ancestral ways of being that were more tied to the land, thus fostering in some part feelings of familiarity (pp. 818-819). Dyar writes:

At the same time that Indianness was attractive to whites because it touched a chord with their own distant past, it was also alluring because of its extreme dissimilarity to present civilized society. (p. 820)

And with this birthed a fascination of Indianness through literature that spoke about those Europeans who “went native” living amongst Indigenous nations, engaging with the primitive
other and all the possible mysteries of Indianness that would engage the European mind (Dyar, 2003, p. 822). Stemming from the occasional incidences of settlers being captured and sharing their experiences (fabricated or otherwise), the genre of the “captivity narrative” became an instant hit and far exceeded the reality of actual occurrences. Nevertheless, this type of writing appealed to the whites because they could “simultaneously participate in Indianness while rejecting physical Indians” (Dyar, 2003, pp. 827-828) because the focus of the writing itself was on the white characters and thus allowed the consumption of desirable Indian traits while distancing any connection to Indigenous people as humans themselves.

And the sifting through of Indigenous cultures for all its prized parts did not end at literature. No different from other colonized lands, Europeans have ransacked Indigenous knowledge, creations, tools, clothing and all other aspects of indigeneity to lay claim to anything they felt would be useful or simply bring them pleasure. From moccasins to medicines, foods, mnemonic devices such as wampum, ceremonies and buckskin clothing were taken, appropriated and used in whatever manner seen fit. Regardless of the traditional and appropriate use of these items, they became commodities to Europeans (Muller, 2007). Indianness for benefit, all the while Indigenous people themselves were facing relocation, diseases, starvation, mass extermination, and government sanctioned Indian-hunts and Indian-head bounties which threatened their very existence in the lands their nations had lived on since time immemorial (Madley, 2009; Young, 1957).

This reality has continued to present day, where throughout social media, a common slogan one can find regarding the existence of cultural appropriation is “they want our culture but don’t want our struggle” which speaks to the lack of awareness that Indigenous (and other minority groups being appropriated) continue to face including higher than average rates of
suicide, violence, and abuse and that the continued consumption of Indianness feeds into the cycle of dehumanization underpinning these realities.

Figure 2. Confederate Flag Dreamcatcher, Original Source Unknown

There has been a growing pushback on the commodification of Indigenous culture such as calling out non-Indigenous people who make a living off of being “medicine (wo)men”, the rampant disrespect of whites (and others) wearing sacred war bonnets as dress up, dreamcatchers – dreamcatchers everywhere! (as seen above in this image currently circulating social media) – and the disturbing continued use of Indigenous peoples as mascots. An example of a movement that has gained momentum started with the work of Adrienne Keene, a mixed-blood Indigenous woman, who focused her doctoral studies on cultural appropriation and created the website
http://www.nativeappropriations.com/ as a way to start educating the masses. Keene writes on topics from Halloween costumes, mascots, fashion, and other forms of appropriation such as in the series called *Magic in North America* released by literary giant and creator of the Harry Potter series J. K. Rowling. Rowling’s new series perpetuates the same harms by classifying Indigenous people as mythical creatures and placing Indigenous traditions on par with that of witches and wizards. Her work reaches millions of readers across the globe, and her words continue to imprison Indigenous people within the confines of the settler’s perception of Indianness since contact. Keene (2016) writes:

> We fight so hard every single day as Native peoples to be seen as contemporary, real, full, and complete human beings and to push away from the stereotypes that restrict us in stock categories of mystical-connected-to-nature-shamans or violent-savage-warriors. Colonization erases our humanity, tells us that we are less than, that our beliefs and religions are “uncivilized”, that our existence is incongruent with modernity. This is not ancient history, this is not “the past.” The ongoing oppression of Native peoples is reinscribed everyday through texts and images like this [series]. How in the world could a young person [see] this and not make a logical leap that Native peoples belong in the same fictional world as Harry Potter? (para. 11)

Work such as that of Keene’s sheds light in a public forum as to why such things are damaging. And although some are optimistic and feel that change is happening, the war rages on against the continual wave of appropriation that plagues whitestream media, fashion, sports, and politics. Moving away from generic and rather incorrect descriptions of Indianness, and a part of drilling deeper into distinct nations and particular histories, to focus on specific stories of experience and reality is what needs to be heard. These are the stories that are needed – within our schools,
within academia, and within society in general. While the kinds of stories that could be shared is vast, my interest lies with identity and connection to land in urban places.

“I’m not the Indian you had in mind”

Anishinaabe scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (2014) writes:

Indigenous presence is attacked in all geographies. In reality, the majority of Indigenous peoples move regularly through reserves, cities, towns and rural areas. We have found ways to connect to the land and our stories and to live our intelligences no matter how urban or how destroyed our homelands have become. (p. 23)

Simpson touches the tip of an oceanic sized iceberg of Indigenous identity and stereotypes associated with what indigeneity entails. A persistent dichotomy exists which declares that Indians are tied to the wild, to remote and rural areas and to the reserve – *real Indians* do not exist within urban places because these are settler spaces and those that do reside within the city are assimilated and therefore not real or authentic (Lawrence, 2004; Wilson & Peters, 2005; Proulx, 2006; Krieg, 2007; Warry, 2009; Friedel, 2011; Anderson, 2013; Norris, Clatworthy & Peters, 2013). There is no single story of who Indigenous people are and how they exist within the current colonial society. The simple reality is – all land is Indigenous territory, including urban spaces (Simpson, 2014) and the idea of urban Indigenous people being assimilated or inauthentic is nothing more than a colonial construct (Friedel, 2011). Identity within urban places is extremely varied but literature such as Krieg (2007), Wilson and Peters (2005), and the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (2011) consistently demonstrate that Indigenous people carry forward their culture in meaningful, varied ways wherever they reside.

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1 Refers to Thomas King’s spoken word piece that challenges common perceptions of Indigenous people in popular media.
Wilson and Peters (2005) speak to how Indigenous people who maintain connection between their traditional territories and the urban spaces they live “disrupt boundaries” and is a “stretching out of identities” (pp. 395-396). Breaking this down, this means that Indigenous people can continue to be rooted to the communities to which they originate, as well as simultaneously form significant connection to the place they reside in urban settings. Therefore, living in an urban space does not mean a disconnect from non-urban communities. This disruption of boundaries to me is dual layered. Not only is it a push against the colonial borders used to cut up the land into sections that function within a Western worldview, but it is a rupturing of assimilationist conditioning which asserts that Indigenous people cannot and should not maintain connection beyond such boundaries. Knowing the personal stories of Indigenous people who disrupt such boundaries and stretch out their identities is what helps “problematize dominant interpretative frameworks” (Wilson and Peters, 2005, p. 397).

Interestingly, Wilson and Peters (2005) write about Clifford’s (1994) work on diasporas in their article. While they agree that “the overlapping strategies and identities of translational and displaced Indigenous peoples resonates with some of the experiences of contemporary First Nations people”, they do point out where his assumptions do not reflect the reality of Indigenous peoples and that he overlooks the fact that the reserves which Indigenous people migrate from are in actuality “colonial constructs that were created to empty lands for settlers” (p. 398).

Further to this, I would like to point out how the movement of Indigenous people is considered internal migration because it falls within colonial borders and therefore does not qualify as “transnational movement”. This ignores Indigenous groups as distinct sovereign nations and therefore does not consider the two major diasporic movements many nations have encountered. First the relocation of Indigenous people into small parcels of largely unusable land
to make way for settlers, and secondly, the movement of Indigenous people from these reserves to urban settings due to lack of resources, food insecurity, unemployment, limited or no access to health care and education, and so on. When we start to use vocabulary such as diaspora to describe these movements, it is with the intent to demonstrate the significance and impact they have on Indigenous nations themselves and to speak raw truth to our shared histories.

Indigenous scholar Renya Ramirez, as quoted in Ross (2009), specifically uses the term *transnational* to assert that Indigenous tribal communities are in fact nations, and to highlight that maintaining culture while in urban centres, in addition to labeling Indigenous movements over history as diasporas. Further to this, Peters and Anderson (2013) state that “the characteristics of urban Indigenous identities and communities continue to be shaped by connections to traditional territories and communities through circular migration or other linkages” (p. 7). Additionally, it is important to acknowledge the sheer resiliency and strength of Indigenous people to maintain rootedness through language, tradition, world views, and knowledge in the face of wave after wave of attempted erasure. It is not to say that much has not been lost, because it has, and often being away from the original lands from which we come, it can be difficult to revive knowledge without the stories we carried from generation to generation through recitation and narration.

However, it is research such as Wilson and Peters’ (2005) study that demonstrates how knowledge can be carried from location to location. Indigenous people who relocate to urban centres for various reasons are still finding ways to maintain their culture and specifically their connection with the land. In their research with 18 men and women who are First Nations migrants from reserve communities to urban centres in Ontario, Canada, the “respondents identified three scaled strategies they used to overcome … challenges and to maintain [an] aspect
of Anishinabek cultural identity” (p. 403). The researchers describe these three strategies as the following:

First, they create small-scale places of cultural safety in urban areas to express their physical and spiritual relationship to the land. Second, urban-to-reserve mobility is a strategy that allows Anishinabek to maintain their relationships to the land across urban and reserve boundaries. Third, participation in ‘pan-Indian’ ceremonies and beliefs in the sanctity of Mother Earth are ways of sustaining spiritual and symbolic links to the land. (p. 403)

Wilson and Peters (2005) point out that this group of respondents does not speak for all Indigenous people, nor are their findings something that can be generalizable to other Anishinabek people. But this is precisely the point. Indigenous people and their experiences are not meant to be summed up in a blanket statement. And while some of the findings in Wilson and Peters’ research align with the experience of others, it is not to say that all of it will. Their research demonstrates one collection of descriptions of cultural continuity among many and provides evidence against the whitestream concept of Indianness and the rural/urban dichotomy.

Similar to the work done by Wilson and Peters (2005), in her study Bonita Lawrence (2004) interviewed thirty individuals of Indigenous descent living within the Toronto area. She interviewed both men and women of varying ages, some of whom have lived in the city all their lives. Her work sheds light on the complexities of being mixed-blood identity, such as those who are visibly native (dark hair, dark eyes, dark skin, etc.) versus those who are white-passing, loss of tradition, language, and culture due to assimilation policies and residential schools, and generations of overt racism that led Indigenous people to minimize or hide their nativeness for their own protection. White-passing refers to individuals who are of mixed race but do not have
features that readily link them to being Indigenous such as light hair, light eyes or light skin colour. White-passing also comes with the privilege of being able to hide one’s ethnicity and avoid forms of discrimination that visibly Indigenous peoples are subject to such as being singled out or targeted for violence, being met with overt racism, being discredited or silenced, being asked to leave a public space for “unclear reasons”, and so forth. Individuals who appear more white also encounter their own host of issues such as friends and family feeling more comfortable expressing racist opinions around them because of their lack of native appearance, or their native and white families denying their nativeness. Lawrence (2004) ends one of her chapters stating:

   As the participants struggle to maintain their Native identities, it is clear that each individual has had to negotiate a series of internal assumptions around what Native identity is – as well as external standards in the urban community about who is Native. (p 151)

One can see the struggles with the concept of Indianness evidenced in this quote, which is a prevalent theme throughout her research findings. Relating this back to Thomas King’s descriptions of whitestream culture’s Indians (Dead Indian, Live Indian, and Legal Indian), one can see that these definitions have become internalized within the Indigenous community itself, providing yet another layer of complication when considering the experience of indigeneity.

   Although Lawrence (2004) speaks to a mixed-blood reality within urban space, I explore this area further by focusing on mixed-blood young women within specific urban places, and in the context of the consistently higher rates of identity scrutiny and historical identity stripping that women have endured (Monchalin, 2016). Indigenous urbanization is more often women (Peters & Lafond, 2013) and despite greater vulnerability, women tend to have leadership and
decision-making roles within the community (Peters & Lafond, 2013). Focusing on this female reclamation of voice is also personally significant.

Lastly, Métis scholar Brigette Krieg’s article (2007) titled “Understand the Role of Cultural Continuity in Reclaiming the Identity of Young Indigenous Women” also explores the importance of culture within urban settings and in this case, specifically among young Indigenous women. Krieg’s study overwhelmingly highlights how these young Indigenous women are desperately in need of older female role models and their stories as guidance and a foundation for their identities. Krieg uses Photovoice to engage with the young women to better understand how they respond to challenges within their urban environments and also how they envision solutions for moving forward. The study, which takes place in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan, emphasized strength and resilience instead of harping on the crushing negative statistics plaguing Indigenous youth such as teen pregnancy and addictions. The study found that the young women struggled with identity because of a disconnection from culture and community but emphasized that the way forward was through reconnecting with their roots, and the presence of older female role models and mentors (Krieg, 2007). This study helped form a base for approaching my research in terms of possible themes and issues that participants may identify with their photographs and in discussion. It also provided a comparison when looking at sense of identity and belonging. Krieg (2007) works with young women between the ages of 16 and 18 and the participants identify as First Nations or Métis. My research seeks to work with women of a different age group (19-30) and who identify as mixed-blood specifically, which may speak to a different lived experience and reality. Building on the findings of this study which, as mentioned above, highlights the need for stories of resiliency, empowerment, and
strength, and positive female role models, I wish to create the space for such stories and role models to come forward.

*I am the land*

Considering deeper the issue of identity, is that of connection to land. As aforementioned, due to the perception that Indigenous people are only viewed as authentic if they are existing within rural parameters, those that assert a connection to land while residing within non-rural locations are dismissed or overlooked (Anderson, 2013; Lawrence, 2004; Lobo, 2000; Patrick & Tomiak, 2008; Wilson & Peters, 2005). Indigenous people maintain connection to land while living in urban centres by engaging in personal ceremonies and traveling back to their homelands, if possible (Wilson & Peters, 2005), but the conversations in the literature barely touch upon this reality on a more significant level.

Connection to land is deeper than having physically been acquainted with the territories of your ancestors. Although there is a profound sense of power in knowing the land from which your roots come, those who have not had this experience due to a plethora of reasons stemming from colonization are not any less Indigenous; to suggest otherwise only reinforces a false and damaging perception of indigeneity formed by whitestream discourse and compounded over generations. As Robin Wall Kimmerer (2013) writes, “the land knows you, even when you are lost” (p. 36) which speaks to a deeper spiritual connection that helps shape an Indigenous person’s identity. Caution is needed to emphasize that the word “lost” does not hold the same meaning as “without identity” or “assimilated” or “hopeless” as other literature and colonial mindsets would have one believe. But rather, her meaning is one of temporary absence, something that can be restored once regained or reconnected, because the essence of land and our relationship to it as Indigenous peoples cannot be separated. Both this significantly deeper
connection, and Styres, Haig-Brown and Blimkie’s (2013) statement that “cityscapes within urban contexts are also natural landscapes in that we are all part of “the natural” (p. 6) are points of exploration that are relatively untouched and that I wish to engage with through this study.

Women, Land

Significant to this research is the relationship that women in particular have with the land and the importance of that within communities, culture, and tradition. Therefore, including the work of Indigenous feminists such as Goeman (2017), TallBear (2017) and Ross (2009) is imperative. For example, Ross (2009), an Indigenous scholar whose work help shaped the path of Indigenous feminism, speaks to how for her, “Indigenous/feminism privileges storytelling as a way to decolonize and empower our communities” (p. 50). Her work helped to open up dialogue about painful, traumatic, and at the time, unspoken topics that were the result of generations of colonialism impacting families and community. This work was rooted in highlighting issues relating to gender and it took years of hard work and perseverance for tribal communities to open up to the idea of feminism and issues pertaining to it. Ross (2009) writes, “[o]ur larger sovereignty movements cannot omit issues of gender” (p. 50) and this point is incredibly important when considering a holistic approach to healing our communities. Women’s voices need to be heard and validated as much as men and other genders.

Goeman (2017) further hits this point home by emphasizing that “[g]endered analysis needs to move beyond early framings of “loss” of culture leading to “loss” of status and present a much more complex, intersectional assessment of pivotal issues in Indigenous communities” (p. 185). The way women and their roles are woven into the tribal community, nations, and global communities, is much more multifaceted than a colonial patriarchal framing of such matters accounts for. Goeman (2009) continues by stating:
…it is not just a matter of erasure from the historical record or the need to add Native women’s voices, rather [Indigenous feminism] frames the conversations around politics, economics, and the issues that need to be addressed external and internal to communities, such as domestic violence, sexual assault, poverty, the prison system, and other commonplace issues (p. 185).

It is important to note how Indigenous Feminism is unique from whitestream feminism and how it specifically acknowledges the “long-standing struggles and work of Indigenous women both historically and in the contemporary moment” (Goeman, 2009, p. 185). Whitestream feminism is centred around white women, which excludes all that women of colour, or Indigenous women, have done and continue to do, both within their own respective communities and contributing to the work of feminism overall. Women of colour, including Indigenous women, have begun to disrupt the common narrative that highlights only white women by asserting their own work in various fields. Goeman (2009) describes it best when she states: “Dominant genealogies and etymologies of feminism are a colonial entrapment that helps to sustain mainstream feminist ideologies, feminist colonial practices, white supremacy, and colonial patriarchy” (p. 186). The underpinning of white feminism was not about equality for all women. In fact, white feminists in the United States used the Indian Citizen Act in the 1920’s as a stepping stone for their platform, in which they promoted “the fear of supposedly savage Indian men having authority over white women who would then in turn treat them as beasts of burden” (Goeman, 2009, p. 186). Indigenous women were nowhere on the radar of full citizenship rights as white women leveraged themselves at the expense of another group whom they did not even consider to be human beings.
I highlight Indigenous Feminism in this research because it ties into how women’s voices within our communities have been largely negated, especially in relation to land. Women and land cannot be separated, and although the women in my research have little to no connection with the lands of their ancestors, it is not to say that they do not have connection to land at all. This disconnection stems from colonization, in its many forms and manifestations and is gender specific violence that is part of a greater conversation beyond the scope of this thesis (for further reading see Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016; Palmater, 2011; Women's Earth Alliance & Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). However, for the purpose of this study, I will draw attention to a quote in the toolkit by the Women's Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network (2016) titled “Violence on the Land, Violence on our Bodies: Building an Indigenous Response to Environmental Violence” by a Seneca woman named Iako’tsira:reh Amanda Lickers. She says:

The reason women [are] attacked in because women carry our clans and …by carrying our clans, are the ones that hold that land for the next generation. That’s where we get our identity as nations. So if you destroy the women, you destroy the nations, and then you get access to the land. (p. 4)

Her quote points out the historical origin of the violence against Indigenous women and how that contributes to the stories of the women in my study. It all goes hand in hand and it is something our nations have been fighting against since contact. The resiliency shown here in this study is an example of the resiliency that Indigenous women have maintained over generations.
áhsen – Methods

Introduction

Given the nature of the research and the literature that I reviewed in tékeni, I felt that it was important to employ a methodology that would allow my participants to actively direct the course of the research so that their voices were present throughout the study. After considering many possibilities, I chose Photovoice due to being a grassroots approach and the incorporation of the visual image and creative process. In this chapter, I describe more of the history and specifics of Photovoice as well as how it functions as both a Participatory Active Research and Arts Based Education Research tool.

Research questions

As indicated before in énska, my research was guided by the following research questions and sub questions which aimed to best capture the stories of the participants in relation to mixed-blood identity and connection to land. They are as follows:

1. How do urban mixed-blood Indigenous women identify themselves?
   a. How do mainstream or colonial perceptions of race and gender influence Indigenous women’s connection to indigeneity?
   b. What measures or language are used to define their sense of identity?

2. Do the women form a sense of belonging to the urban community and/or with the local Indigenous nations?
3. How do the women, who have little to no connection to their own ancestral lands, connect to the land in urban centres?

   a. Do the women form connection to physical locations?

**Research design**

The main methodology I worked with in my research is Photovoice (PV) which falls under the greater umbrellas of Arts-Based Educational Research (ABER) and also Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Barone & Eisner, 1997; Haque, 2011; McIntyre, 2008; Sum, 2008). I chose PV because it allows me to weave together two forms of qualitative research. PAR dates back to the 1940’s when Kurt Lewin coined the term in his work and since then a spectrum of PAR varieties has emerged each with their own respective “underlying epistemological, methodological, and ideological differences. Similarly, they have different visions of social research, of the scientific method, and of … political and ethical commitments” (McIntyre, 2008, p. 5). While some research using PAR fixates on the individual, I choose to engage a community-based focus which will consider the stories of the women in my research both as unique experiences but also important parts within the larger community context. Keeping in mind the intent of my research when considering PAR, I turn to McIntyre’s (2008) stance in regards to how she roots herself in the methodology by stating:

I base my approach on the combined beliefs of Paulo Freire and feminist practitioners of PAR—an approach characterized by the active participation of researchers and participants in the co-construction of knowledge; the promotion of self- and critical awareness that leads to individual, collective, and/or social change; and an emphasis on a
co-learning process where researchers and participants plan, implement, and establish a process for disseminating information gathered in the research project. (p. 6)

I borrow from McIntyre’s approach to help situate my own work but am cautious to highlight the differences and unique circumstances surrounding feminism within the Indigenous context, and thus approach my work with this differing lens in mind.

Lastly, as a PAR methodology PV allows the women in my research to drive the direction of the work, such as in the analysis and dissemination aspects, and also leaves room for the possibility of social change, either through themselves or their community, manifesting from critical dialogue and collective reflection.

As an ABER methodology, the use of images in PV brings forth a richer experience because “images evoke deeper elements of human consciousness than do words” (Harper, 2002, p. 13). Further to this, photography allows the women to be creative in expressing their thoughts around the research topics and it also harnesses a medium frequently used in today’s society where social media platforms such as Snapchat and Instagram are common aspects of everyday life. Also, by asking the women to use their cellphone cameras, it employs a current socially relevant tool and lens in which to view their perspectives through. Not only do these perspectives speak to the personal story of each woman but also the immediate social climate and reality that these women navigate on a daily basis.

In his article “Talking about pictures: a case for photo elicitation”, Harper (2002) speaks to the use of photography in a similar sub category of ABER called Photo Elicitation (PE). Although there exist differences between PV and PE, there is also a considerable amount of overlap. Harper points out two insights from his work with PE that PV likely has the ability to do
as well. He calls them *breaking frames* (p. 20) and *crossing cultural boundaries* (p. 21). Breaking frames refers to photographing an aspect of one’s world in a fashion different from the everyday norm, thus “jolt[ing] subjects into a new awareness of their social existence” (p. 21). I see this paralleling PV in my research in the sense that the participants may photograph and share aspects of their life that overlap with others thus creating new perspectives of shared realities. Harper (2002) refers to crossing cultural boundaries as “us[ing] images as bridges between worlds that are more culturally distinct” (p. 21). Again, relating this to PV in my research, is the fact that although the participants will share similarities coming from the shared categorization as “Indigenous”, the possibility exists that the women will speak to the unique experience of being from their particular culture, distinct from the others. Thus shedding light on a spectrum of realities and dispelling the incorrect perception of homogeneity of Indigeneity existence.

*Epistemology – three directions*

As a way to embed my personal understanding of knowledge into this research, I consider an epistemology that I have been growing throughout my academic work and with which I demonstrate using a piece of beadwork. Approaching the completion of my undergraduate degree, I attended the ceremony held for Indigenous students on campus the year before my graduation date. I was particularly moved by the regalia that most wore and the pride in being able to show where their roots come from. For many reasons, I do not have regalia, but I wanted to create something that spoke to my journey. I brought the idea to my mother, along with a sketch of what I envisioned, and she agreed to bring the piece to life as a gift to me for completing this milestone in my life. Her work involved creating modern renditions of wampum belts and my idea stems from the design of the Two Row Wampum which is a historic belt
created by the Kanien’kehá:ka to represent an agreement between themselves and the Dutch. This agreement was that each side would live in harmony with one other and not interfere with the business of the other. Thus, the two purple lines never intersect. However, my journey in this world is a merging of those two lines, as my lineages are Kanien’kehá:ka, Dutch and French. This piece was named the piece “Three Directions” and for me, this piece is a reflection of my journey to understand this walk in two worlds (living with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritages) and the complexities that come with it. I use this piece as a way to ground me and to emphasize that we each have our ways of understanding knowledge. Shawn Wilson (2009) explains that epistemology is how I know what I know. And for me, there is no better way to illustrate this understanding, than through this beadwork. Therefore, I carry it with me into this work and use it as a lens when approaching the women’s stories.

Figure 3 Me wearing my piece "Three Directions" at the World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education 2014, in Honolulu Hawai’i
Photovoice: History and Methodology

Originally developed by Wang and Burris (1997) as a needs assessment tool with peasant women in Yunnan, China, PV methodology can be adapted to meet the needs of varying research goals, participants, and community situations. The basis of PV borrows from Friere’s methods in which Wang and Burris (1997) highlight from his work that “one means of enabling people to think critically about their community, and to begin discussing the everyday social and political forces that influence their lives, [is] the visual image” (p. 2). PV also goes as far as having the participants capture the images to speak to what is important to themselves and their community. By the women determining what images to capture and present, it shifts away from the shadow of male bias that taints participatory research, and thus moving towards eliminating aspects of research that render women silent or invisible (Liamputtong, 2010; Wang & Burris, 1997). PV was specifically developed in part from feminist theory for this exact purpose and as previously stated, bringing forth an Indigenous lens will further serve the voices of the participants whose histories do not necessarily align with the hegemonic discourse of white feminism (Goeman, 2017).

Wang & Burris (1997) outline a number of advantages to using PV, a few of which I describe here:

1. PV combines photography with storytelling in a way that empowers the participants to speak for themselves, instead of the researcher attempting to do so on their behalf. It “values the knowledge put forward by people as a vital source of expertise” and this is especially important when working with historically marginalized and silenced participants (p. 372).
2. The participants lead the research by reflecting on their images and those of other participants through storytelling and identifying emerging issues, themes and/or theories (Wang & Burris, 1997) instead of being asked to fit within an existing framework that may or may not resonate or speak to their worldview. This allows room for refocusing or redefining the goals of my research by listening to how participants understand or interpret their own participation in the project.

3. PV enables participants to highlight both challenges and assets such as strengths, resiliency, and positive experiences. This is important in my research when considering my research question(s).

4. Wang and Burris (1997) write: “the images produced and the issues discussed and framed by people may stimulate social action… Photovoice… [invites] people to become advocates for their own and their community’s well-being” (p. 373) which ties in perfectly with the fourth aspect of the methodology which I include in my research, “sharing,” to help me stand with those of the community (to which I am a part of as well).

**Participants and Recruitment**

For this research study, I employed purposeful and snowball sampling methods (Flick, 2014) to recruit four final participants. By purposeful sampling, I sought out specific individuals who fit the criteria through existing personal relationships within the urban Indigenous community of which I am part. Through them others were referred to me through their own existing networks and relationships, thus reflecting how snowball sampling occurred.
Participants were accepted in the order they expressed interest (through contacting myself) and each confirmed eligibility by meeting the following requirements:

1. Identifies as a mixed-blood Indigenous woman. *Mixed-blood Indigenous* refers to descending from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous roots and identifying as Indigenous. *Indigenous* refers to Indigenous to Turtle Island and for the purpose of this research, from nations within Canada. *Woman* refers to any Indigenous person who lives and identifies as a woman, inclusive of trans and two-spirit individuals.

2. Living in an urban centre (preferably the greater Vancouver area). By *urban*, I refer to those who have spent a significant portion of their lives living within an urban centre, or at least a significant portion of their time since learning of, or identifying with, their Indigenous heritage.

3. Participants have little to no direct contact or access to the territories of their Indigenous ancestors.

4. Between the ages of 19 and 30 so that all participants are legal adults and can also be considered to be youth.

5. Must own or be able to use a functioning cell phone with a camera that produces clear photos for the duration of the project.

I limited the scope of the project to four participants in consideration of how much time each woman would have to speak to her photos. One participant withdrew the evening before the group session and no photos were received by her. The research was conducted with the remaining three women.
Table 1. Participants

Data Collection and Analysis

The following is the order in which the research was conducted, data collected, and how analysis of the data was undertook.

One – First Meeting with Participants

Upon initial contact, I met each participant for a short interview to determine eligibility/suitability to participate, including availability for the group session. For those suitable, an overview of the project was explained including their right to end their participation at any point without any consequence. The women were asked to complete a short survey on demographic information and sign a consent form for participation as well as a photo and film release form. All four women completed the demographic survey but the data for the fourth participant who withdrew is not reflected in the research or analysis. The women were instructed to use the cameras on their cell phones and to capture photos relating to the research topic. They were also provided with a guide sheet including questions and statements based on my research questions as prompts to help guide their photography and reflection. Basic information such as...
when photo release forms are necessary for the photos they take, as well as contact information for myself and my supervisor was covered in this initial meeting. The women were given a package that included:

1. A blank copy of the consent form they sign  
2. Photo release forms for their photos  
3. Guide sheet  
4. Blank journal (to be collected for analysis)

Two – Photo journey and Journaling

The women were asked to begin taking pictures from the time the interview ended until the group meeting time (approximately 7-10 days) and to record their thoughts, feelings, or notes in the provided journal as they take the photos, while considering the content on the guide sheet. They selected four final images to share with the group which were forwarded to myself beforehand in preparation for the group sharing. Photos could be edited in any way they wished.

Three – Sharing Circle and Participatory Analysis

In the group setting, the women had the opportunity to introduce themselves in any way they wished which for some included simply their name and nation and for another was a more lengthy introduction in both her Indigenous language and in English. In the PV methodology, Wang and Burris (1997) outline three stages for analysis. I have included a fourth to honour the responsibility to give back to the community and as such have set out these stages as the following:
1. Selecting: this stage begins before the participants arrived to the sharing circle, as outlined in the above section “Two – Photo Journey and Journaling”. The participants determined which four photographs were most important to present.

2. Storying: each woman had the opportunity to present her final images to the group and share in whatever form of storying she wished (narrative, spoken word, song, etc). One participant prepared notes which she read from directly as it was the most comfortable way for her to express her thoughts in a succinct manner. Another participant prepared poetry to accompany her photos as a way to express her story. The third participant arrived unprepared due to being sick leading up to the session and spoke freely from her heart, often building off what was shared in the group and adding her perspective. Following the sharing of photos, the group had the opportunity to reflect on each other’s photos, ask questions, offer comments, and/or give feedback. This was to be facilitated using the suggested acronym VOICE, Voicing Our Individual & Collective Experience (Wang & Burris, 1997, p. 380-381), but it was not necessary for me to explain this because the women naturally related to what one another shared and therefore, I allowed them to lead the discussion this way.

3. Synthesizing: after all images were revealed and stories shared, the women were invited to caption their photos (with or without the help of others). One participant left before this section of the session but had already included the titles of her photos in her notes which she left with me. The women were then asked to consider the information discussed and highlight what issues, themes and/or theories arose, thus helping create the parameters for analysis. The two remaining women compiled a list of themes. I discussed this list with the participant who had to leave early and invited
her to add anything she felt may be missing. She agreed with the selection of topics that was created by the other two, and therefore this is what is used in the data analysis and is discussed in the section to come.

4. **Sharing:** the women were asked if they would like to present their work in the project to the community and in what format (photo exhibition, blog format, via a social media platform etc.). It was explained that this aspect would take place outside this research and at the time of writing this thesis, no final decisions have been made as to what that may entail.

As the researcher, I also took notes during the process of my observations. The notes reflected language used (such as reoccurring terms or words and use of other languages), themes, feelings, and general observations during the sharing circle. I also noted the captions the participants assigned to each photo as a way of tracking themes and verifying external validity. PV uses two types of replication: internal (the same source repeating content in different ways); and external (reflected in the stories or photos of more than one participant or in other data sources) (Wang & Burris, 1997). To honour the unique experience that each woman lives, internal replication were mainly used, although noting others confirming similar points was helpful in understanding the research questions in a broader context.

The sharing circle was video and voice recorded to track who speaks in relation to which image and to capture body language, gesturing, and group interactions. Overall, the data sources collected are: demographic surveys; photos and captions; participant journals; video/audio and transcription; and researcher notes.
Data Analysis

Once the group session was complete and I had a chance to follow up with the one participant who had to leave early, I transcribed the entire recorded session and input this data into a qualitative data analysis program called Nvivo 11. The women listed 12 areas that they considered to be important to the session which they identified sometimes by a single word (i.e. belonging) or by a description (i.e. that sense of where you connect to, what you call connection, where you call home and what that means to you). Some of these areas had overlap and could be condensed into one theme and therefore some rewording took place to more clearly capture their thoughts. Additionally, after reviewing my notes and completing the transcription, there were areas that I felt were of great importance due to the frequency in which they appeared in the discussion and also to capture relevant data for the research questions. In some themes, I identified more specific examples such as in the theme “Connection to nature or land”, one sub theme is “Sense of home”. This often reflects a reoccurring specific example within a theme or an area that I am attempting to capture in regards to the research questions. Overall, the final themes are as follows:
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Theme</th>
<th>Child theme</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Belonging</td>
<td>a. Fear of appropriation&lt;br&gt;b. Fitting in&lt;br&gt;c. Not good enough</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Connection to nature or land</td>
<td>a. Coming back to nature&lt;br&gt;b. Connection to land on Pacific North West&lt;br&gt;c. Home territories&lt;br&gt;d. Sense of home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Empathy/Support</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Family</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Gender</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Gratitude</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Healing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Identity labels (language)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Identity reflection</td>
<td>a. Connection&lt;br&gt;b. Identity as nation or family or clan&lt;br&gt;c. Reclamation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Love</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Racism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Resilience/Pride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Safe space in community</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Shame/trauma</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Silencing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. Traditional or Cultural Activities</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Vulnerability</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2. Research themes
Using these final themes which reflect both the women’s list and my own observations, I then coded the transcriptions from the audio and video recordings. After coding it once, I then returned to my research questions, my notes and my research proposal to reflect on the data. I then went through the transcription data a second time to ensure that I was satisfied with how I coded it and to make sure I did not miss anything important.

Once I finished my first draft, a copy was sent to each of the women, highlighting the sections where they would find their content, and asking them to review it. Although I indicated the sections where their content was to make the reviewing process as simple as possible, they were welcome to read the entire thesis draft. One of the three women returned a few minor edits to me to help clarify some of the meaning of her comments but otherwise the women were satisfied with how their voices are presented within this work.

Ethical considerations

My research project underwent the necessary steps and approval as laid out by the Behavioural Research Ethics Board at the University of British Columbia. As I was working with Indigenous women, I ensured that all steps were taken to protect my participants above and beyond that required by BREB. All data and participant information are now stored on a device requiring two locks and/or passwords to access. Hard copies of data have been stored in locked storage on campus. Consent forms were collected from all participants, and the study was explained in layman language. Participants could choose to end their participation in the project at any point. Because the topic explores issues pertaining to identity, historical traumas, colonization, and genocide, and (lack of) connection to land, there could be minimal harm to participants in speaking to their own experience. The study focused on empowerment and positive aspects of participants’ experience and caution was taken to minimize triggers.
Further to this, I prepared the space that the women gathered in a culturally relevant way. The location itself was in a social space for Indigenous students, faculty, and other community members on campus in the Longhouse. At all times, traditional medicines were available and as the researcher facilitating the space, I had a graduate student in the space to help maintain the privacy of the space while not distracting from the group session (i.e. ensuring no one entered the space or disrupted the session) and I was sure to pay special attention to the emotional needs of the women throughout the session.
Results and Discussion Intro

The following chapter is a discussion of the data as shared by the women in the study. At first, I wanted to separate the content into two areas to reflect how my research questions are structured relating to identity and connection to land. However, this has proved to be impossible in order to (w)holistically represent the stories shared by the women. Therefore, I employ a form of presenting the data that is based on my epistemology, or my wampum Three Directions which speaks to walking in both worlds: honouring both western and Indigenous ways of knowing. Therefore, I have decided to use a metaphor of sweetgrass as the basis of presenting the findings in kaié:ri.

Circle of Sweetgrass

Sweetgrass, as the hair of Mother Earth, is traditionally braided to show loving care of her well-being. Braids, plaited of three strands, are given away as signs of kindness and gratitude. (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 203)
I use a Circle of Sweetgrass with points of discussion located within it to speak to the stories shared by the women. As indicated in the quote above, sweetgrass is traditionally braided. The three strands within my research represent: land, community, and self. Self refers to each woman and her story. I use sweetgrass as a reminder of the importance of relationships and the weaving of ourselves into these relationships. The topics within the Circle of Sweetgrass represent points on a circle. One point next to another does not necessarily imply that one leads to the other nor does the distance between points suggest a lack of correlation or connection. They are simply part of a continuum of experience and existence. The circle is meant to represent how identity is not linear and too often western understanding still applies the notion of linearity to cycles. These points are a collection of stories within stories.
**Approaching the data**

I do not wish to simply look at the frequency of which topics were spoken about and by whom because the nature of the session and the uniqueness of each participant renders this sort of data analysis untrue and misleading. For example, when reflecting on the themes individually, *family* is the most frequently occurring theme throughout the group session. However, when the themes are aggregated (meaning to include child/sub-themes), *family* places fifth after the parent themes of *measures of identity or validity*, *belonging*, *connection to nature or land*, and *identity reflection*. And when focusing specifically on the themes covered when sharing photos, *belonging* is the most frequently occurring theme, with *identity reflection*, *family*, *shame/trauma*, and *fitting in* closely following. However, the emphasis placed on certain themes by the women was different from the overall coding of the transcription. Furthermore, when looking at such measures as the percentage coverage of certain themes and who spoke to what, I realized that the data was also not reflective of the perspectives of the women. Each woman participated and presented her photos differently:

1. Cedar brought notes from which she read to help speak to her photos and to ensure that she covered what she intended to share. She is soft spoken and an introvert and this form of preparation and sharing spoke to her strength in being able to gather her thoughts in a coherent and succinct fashion. Additionally, she had to leave the session early. Therefore, the volume of content from her is significantly lower but still rich in terms of touching on the topics the women identified as significant for the coding process.

2. Mountain also brought notes from which she read in addition to speaking freely. Her written pages contained the spoken word pieces which she used to share her stories in relation to her photos and the rest of her participation as based off these sharings or in
free form. Her presence and participation quickly highlighted her expressiveness and she often took the role of responding in a caring way to both the other women, in addition to sharing her own reflections during the group session which resulted in a greater volume of content from her. Her words are heartfelt and often capture layers of themes making the analysis of her content the most intensive.

3. Ocean arrived feeling under the weather from a lingering illness and a long commute to attend the session. Therefore, I observed she was less prepared and her energy and thoughts seemed often scattered. However, she spoke from the heart the entire session and at times it felt like the revealing of an internal conflict with many statements followed by crutch phrases that indicated being unsure (i.e. I don’t know) but nonetheless with important points and themes unique to her. When looking at the transcription of her sharing, there is a great volume but with less layering of themes like that of Mountain which reflects the more “stream of consciousness” format that Ocean employed in her sharing.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the preface, I include sections of poetry and vignettes in this chapter. The sections of poetry are my own personal reflections on the women’s stories and as a way to include my voice in the research as the questions of inquiry relate to my own experiences as well. The vignettes are included to provide context and a touch of humanity to the writing as often research separates the data from the participants.

Ultimately, kaié:ri is a response to the impossible standards that Indigenous people are measured by in terms of authenticity and identity that I draw attention to in énska and tékeni. I seek to highlight why it is necessary to push out these damaging and stereotypical inaccuracies both in whitestream culture and to dispel them from our communities which
have internalized these colonial misconceptions that are romantic at best, and more importantly dehumanizing. This is done through the sharing of stories to demonstrate that the actual reality of Indigenous people is not what is contained within these impossible measures.

This chapter reflects the areas that the women in the study most strongly related to in terms the themes they selected in the group session. I have also included themes resulting from my own notes in order to further address the research questions. These areas demonstrate the pervasiveness of both seeking and resisting forms of ‘authenticity’ and how the women navigate defining themselves within the community and through their lives. Lastly, kái:ri also speaks to the connection these women have with the land, especially but limited to their own ancestral territories and I demonstrate how they believe this connection is imperative to their wellbeing and survival.
kaié:ri– Points on a Circle of Sweetgrass: A Discussion

we gather in the space where stories are to be shared.

my hands busy with preparations,

i reveal abalone shell and medicines wrapped in fabric.

the gift of food filling our noses,

laughter amidst the high ceilings,

and damp coastal air through the open door.

one woman stands at my side,

her eyes and heart smiling as she motions towards me.

my eyes fall in her hands to find

a braid of sweetgrass being gifted.

This is how I call myself

Of particular interest to me is how the women in the study refer to themselves.

Considering how terminology is consistently changing to reflect how political and nation
dynamics shift, I wondered what language they would use to identify themselves. The First
Nations and Indigenous Studies Program (formally the First Nations Studies Program) at the
University of British Columbia has created a website titled *Indigenous Foundations* as a tool for learning about Indigenous people. In their section on terminology it states:

[T]erminology can represent something more than just a word. It can represent certain colonial histories and power dynamics. Terminology can be critical for Indigenous populations, as the term for a group may not have been selected by the population themselves but instead imposed on them by colonizers. With this in mind, one might understand how a term can be a loaded word, used as a powerful method to divide peoples, misrepresent them, and control their identity… (para. 3)

Understanding how the women refer to themselves comes from a personal desire to explore how changing attitudes and resistance toward state-imposed terms and names may or may not be of importance to others. I reflect on how I personally see a movement towards reclamation of traditional words to refer to ourselves. For example, my nation has been referred to as the Mohawk, which is an exonym imposed upon us by the Dutch based on an adapted Mohican word. This term persists today but there is a growing resistance against the continued use of this incorrect colonial term. Some, notably those of younger generations, insist on being referred to as *kanien’kehá:ka*, which translates *People of the Flint* and comes from our language *kanien’kéha* or as *onkwehonwe* meaning original people (Brant, personal communication, 2013). As I have begun to learn the language, I too find myself propelled to reclaim our traditional names. The sound [m], (or the English “m”) does not even exist in the kanien’kéha language!

*Identity Terminology*

In this study, by *language* I refer to both the terminology and words used and whether any of the women would use their native language. I sought to capture this in a number of ways
which included: the short demographic survey that the women had the option of completing in our first meeting, initiating introductions in our sharing circle, and by coding for the language used to refer to oneself throughout the session. All three women completed the survey, in which they indicated which terms from a list they use or have used to refer to themselves. The results from this survey are as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity Terminology</th>
<th>0</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Native American/Canadian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional word</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inuit</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metis</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Nations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 3: Identity Terminology*

The women indicated between 2 to 6 different terms that they have used or continue to use to define themselves. It is not surprising that all three women indicated the term *Indigenous* as a means for defining themselves, as the word Indigenous was the most consistently used term throughout the group session. It appeared 119 times throughout the transcription and was used to refer to themselves, their communities, families, friends, and in general descriptions. However, all three also indicated *aboriginal* as a term they use(d) to define themselves but it was only appeared a total of five times in the group session and one incidence of usage was to define an
organization’s acronym and not actually applied to oneself. One woman never used the term at all throughout her sharing. This result leads me to think that perhaps the use of the term *aboriginal* is limited given that it tends to be associated with state-instituted definitions when identifying ourselves to others outside the Indigenous community or perhaps for purposes related to identifying ourselves in a way that aligns with government mandated policies. The term *aboriginal* was introduced into the Canadian political landscape in 1982 after Section 35 was created in the Constitution Act. Section 35 is the recognition and affirmation but not the definition of Aboriginal Rights, which were essentially excluded from previous versions and drafts of the Constitution Act in Canada (First Nations Studies Program, 2009). All women were born after 1982 making it more likely that *aboriginal* would be used than *Indian*, although one of the women indicated she has or does use this to describe herself. However, this use of the term *Indian* may stem from herself being identified as a *Status Indian* under the Indian Act which means being legally recognized as an Indigenous person by the Canadian government or what King (2012) referred to as a Legal Indian (as previously described in énska).

As Monchalin (2016) indicates “[n]o matter which term … is used, one is still left with a “pan-Indian” approach to defining Indigenous peoples, one that groups everyone into one big category” (p. 3) and therefore I wanted know how the women may define themselves at a more specific level. In the introductions, all women introduced themselves by means of their nations and communities: Nuu-Chah-Nulth from Ucluelet First Nation, Haida from Haida Gwaii, and Cree from Saskatchewan. All women also acknowledged their lineages that were not Indigenous, although to different extents within their introduction and later during the sharing of their photos but never do their non-Indigenous heritages become a focal point of their stories. Two of the women specifically indicated their blood quantum by sharing that they are a quarter or half, and
the topic of blood quantum arose a number of times throughout the session but it was never specifically discussed in great detail or listed as a theme by the women during the synthesizing process. I, however, chose to include *blood quantum* as a theme in order to code for both use of language and to more thoroughly understand the different aspects of how identity and/or perceptions of validity of an Indigenous person are measured.

*Use of Traditional Language*

In addition to a specific nation, one woman began by speaking only in her native language, Nēhiyawēwin, to introduce herself and to give thanks to the territory we are located on. She then offered her traditional name and lastly introduced herself in her English name. Interestingly, out of the three women, she specifically shared her experience as a young child being told by her Indigenous grandfather that “[she] should be ashamed… [she] should be glad [she’s] white” and yet she most strongly asserts herself as an Indigenous person in the space she occupies through such manners such as calling upon the language of her ancestors.

After reflection of this, I find her to be the most similar to myself when I enter a space – offering the little bit of language I can speak - as well as locating myself wherever I am, the territory, and those I am with. I have often felt it is my responsibility to acknowledge the land I am on and to introduce myself to the territories and the people. I remember being accused of doing this to validate that I am, in fact, Indigenous because I do not automatically register as Indigenous in the eyes of others for a variety of reasons such as my visual appearance, to which we will speak to later in this chapter. But I call forward this point specifically because it aligns with the words of another mixed Indigenous person who highlights how white-passing Indigenous people tend to put forward these indicators of authenticity – introducing ourselves in
our languages, wearing clothing or jewelry to call attention to our heritage - and the list goes on (Mays, n.d.). It is important to highlight this now, to which I will return later to discuss in detail.

**Uncertainty of self-identity**

A significant piece of information which was part of Ocean’s story in relation to how she identifies herself, was that of striving to feel comfortable and confident calling herself “a good example of an Indigenous person”. All four of her photographs contained an element of her seeking to have a sense of her background, culture, language, and family. Although she only identifies as Indigenous, she struggles with what that translates to in her life. One of her photographs during the session (shown below) began with describing how Vancouver is her home while attending university. Having been born in Vancouver she mulled over whether it felt like a sense of “coming home” or if it was just another city to her, after having been moved around so much as a child.

*Figure 5 Photovoice piece, Ocean, entitled “Temporary Home”*
Being geographically separated from her culture combined with a lack of a strong Haida presence in her life beyond the aunt who raised her, Ocean’s uncertainty about her identity is evident in the language she uses to express herself such as:

   I think that is one thing that I have really been trying to do is get more of a feel for what Indigenous people do ... you know. I’ve been kinda trying to find my way into becoming ... like a modern Haida in a city but at the same time it’s hard ... so yeah ... I don’t know ... I’m sorry.

Ocean is involved with organizations such as accepting a nomination for club president of the Indigenous Students Association (InSA) on campus and at times participating in more “pan-Indian” events or activities. Yet her statements are filled with “I don’t know” and apologies which suggests that such things may not give clarity to her identity or are part of a larger lack of certainty.

   Similarly, Cedar described how she did not feel she had the right to her Indigenous identity due to being mixed and even though she has begun a journey of reclaiming herself as 100% black and 100% Indigenous, she still struggles in a similar way when engaging with cultural activities that are not from her own nation. She shares that she “feels like an imposter sometimes”. She struggled with learning the language and traditions of other nations but that she was not putting that effort into learning the language or traditions of her own Nuu-Chah-Nulth heritage. This language around being an imposter, fake, or appropriating surfaced consistently throughout the session and will be discussed in more detail in relation to the theme is most consistently appeared in correlation with.


This is how I see myself

“Some days,

all I want to look is Indigenous in everyone’s eyes,

not just in my own reflection” (Mountain)

her words –

echoing my own perception

a lament of self-deception

but we’ve all heard these words before

us mixed women, an ache to the very core

in hushed tones, in private conversation

a dissection of self, instead of celebration

invisible yet visible to whitestream eyes

this is exactly where the problem lies..

Physical Appearance

Throughout the group session, a reoccurring theme that surfaced centred on looking visually Indigenous which was coded as Looking Native (physical characteristics) and was nested under the parent theme of Measures of identity or validity. To clarify, this perception of what looking Indigenous entails is very much rooted in what King (2012) described as the Dead
Indian in terms of visual characteristics. This includes long, dark hair, bronze skin tone, dark eyes, and so forth. All of us in that group session know that this is a harmful stereotype and all of us know the vast possibilities of what Indigenous people actually look like. We know that this concept of Indianness, is just that, a concept. However, it is so deeply entrenched and pervasive both within and outside the greater Indigenous community that it continues to exist as a signifier for one to be perceived as authentic (Lawrence, 2004; Monchalin, 2016; Proulx, 2003).

Monchalin (2016) writes:

> Indigenous people can have hair that is straight or curly and red, blonde, or light brown as well as black. Some have green, hazel, or blue eyes. Of course, many Indigenous peoples do have the physical characteristics that people would typically assign to them. The caution here is, though, is that definitions of identity based on stereotypical physical characteristics spring from racist colonial conceptions and history. (p. 13)

All the women in the group spoke to this struggle of not fitting the stereotypical image of an Indigenous person. Cedar, who is mixed black and Indigenous, shared with great emotion how as a child visiting her home community was difficult due to being alienated or made fun of by other community members for her thick, curly hair, city clothes, and dark skin. She felt shame for her mixed heritage and did not feel she had a right to her Indigenous identity and culture. She therefore spent a significant period of her life struggling greatly with coming to terms with her identity. She shares that she has started a journey of acceptance but she says “sometimes I think black is all people see when they look at me” and this is echoed by Mays (n.d.) who writes: “I’m often read as only [sic] Black, unless someone knows [sic] me as Black, simply because of my skin color … Society reads me as Black” (para. 7). She later clarified with me that by this, she meant that, as a mixed-blood person, others categorize her either as ambiguous which she
explains “sometimes results in being labelled as exotic like that’s some sort of compliment” or “as black because that’s the more obvious, dominant ethnicity”. She relates this to her reality of navigating racism and how the one drop rule, a colonial concept that allowed white slave masters to expand the slave market, still has power over how black people are viewed. Thus, this obscures the possibility of having a mixed heritage, such as her Indigenous roots, because such a concept is not even a consideration. Monchalin (2016) cautions that “[i]t is well to remember that definitions of identity based on appearance or blood heritage are more about gaining power and maintaining control than about actual genetics” (p. 13) thus shedding light on how such measures are about inclusion or exclusion for political reasons.

Ocean, who also expressed that she did not feel like she fit in when visiting her home territories, spoke to how her Indigenous family is naturally lighter skin toned because of their geographic location in an area that tends to be rainy for a significant portion of the year. She also spoke to how her family members, who relocated to urban areas, made an effort to “pass” and blend into mainstream society instead openly identifying as Indigenous. Hearing this caused me to link her statement to Lawrence’s (2004) study in which older generations of Indigenous people tried to blend in for various reasons such as due to shame or trying to minimize violence and/or racism. Although Ocean mentions that her family, which relocated to a city tend to keep to their own instead of engaging with other community members either in the city or back home, it cannot be certain that their reasons for doing so are the same as Lawrence’s (2004) interviewees.

Mountain similarly spoke extensively about her battle with both seeking and resisting stereotypical forms of Indianness when it came to how she looks. As her quote in the opening
poem shows, the desire to appear Indigenous to others is something deeply rooted. She shares with us:

[A]t night, when I am smudging, I just wonder the perception is, you know, when I go to powwows, when I go to community events. And then changing my appearance the best I can to best make it look more.. so in the summer, like taking time out to strictly go tanning, in the sun, dying my hair brown instead it being blond, doing things the best I can, to make it seem I look more Indigenous than just what my spirit says.. is something that I have really been struggling with. But something I am learning from.

When Mountain says it is something she is learning from, she is referring to coming to terms with living as both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous woman. And although she tells us that one of the greatest compliments she has ever received was being told by another Indigenous woman that her body type and features were clearly that of an Indigenous person, she acknowledges a deeper level of this struggle. Mountain shares:

An elder told me once that being a lighter skin toned first nations person, it’s your duty, your responsibility to heal the people, especially those who went to residential school because you’re the trigger but you’re also the medicine that’s bringing back to the community and to recognize. So I always keep that in mind, sometimes it is hard to keep in mind. But I think it’s also great too.

She calls her skin tone a trigger because we exist in a society that values whiteness and that she must also carry this knowledge as medicine in the sense of understanding how being lighter skinned has advantages in a colonial settler-state due to the power that white-normativity holds (Dyer, 2002). This brings me back to the blog written by Mays (n.d.) in which he calls out light
skin Indigenous people for not acknowledging their privileges of lighter skin. This is because, although light skinned and/or white-passing Indigenous people are likely to be rendered invisible and not seen as authentic for failing to fit the stereotypical description, lighter skinned people are more visible within society in general regardless of their heritage or race (Mays, n.d.). And while Mountain and Ocean both speak to how their light skin is a personal struggle, Mountain has taken her experience of this to a more critical level and sees how she can expose the favouring of white voices over those of people of colour. For example, she shares:

I’m privileged to have lighter skin in some aspects because I know in places where there’s not a lot of First Nations people welcomed, I have the privilege of being put into the situation and then booming up and being like “PS there’s no First Nations people, why are they not represented in this space?” and really calling it out because sometimes people will listen to you because of your lighter skin tone because there is such racism happening.

One of her photographs that she chose to share, captures how she believes this is part of her destiny. She titled it “Chasing Shadows” and it honours her journey and belief that her destiny is to bring her culture back to her family, and her family back to culture.
Ocean shares similar accounts, expressing that she wished she was “more tan” and that she suspects that community members in her home territories of Haida Gwaii likely mistake her for “some other white girl just wandering around” and that “there are a lot of backpackers who go up there, they probably think [she’s] going up there to find [her]self or do some yoga on the beach”. Ocean repeatedly mentioned not feeling like she fit in or belonged in either world, neither Indigenous or with white people. Lawrence (2004) writes that “[t]he problem for these [mixed-blood] individuals is less a matter of not belonging anywhere, than living in a polarized society where whiteness and Nativeness are not admitted as existing in the same person” (p. 149). I
would argue that this applies beyond just those who are mixed white and Indigenous such as in the case of Cedar who, as previously mentioned, due to being mixed black, her nativeness is not even given space to exist because her skin colour is all most see when they encounter her.

Summing this up, I draw on Lawrence (2004) who states that “ideological racism – a war of images – is a constant issue to be reckoned with for urban mixed-blood Native people” (p. 136).

*Figure 7 Photovoice piece, Mountain, entitled “Me vs Myself”*

Unique to Mountain was a very pronounced battle between her two lineages and wrestling with how to strike a balance. One of her Photovoice pieces, which she named “Me vs Myself” accompanied a strongly worded poem that captured her ongoing journey with walking in two worlds. She begins with writing:

I know I may be a trigger for both of us./ When I look in the mirror I see two parts of me./ I don’t know which one I feed the most but I know we don’t really like each other’s
company. I try to get them to play together like they are small children fighting over the same toy, but like always someone gets hurt no matter what you do or say.

She refers back and forth to herself between her traditional and her English name like two shores connected by the plank over the water. She also relates this image to a physical bridge in her life which connects the two cities she has lived in. Within these cities her identity has developed in different ways and both contain stories of experiences that shape who she is today. In her explanation she shares:

It’s understanding that I have to be okay with many different sides of me. Trying to walk in both worlds of an Indigenous person but most of my life spent as non-Indigenous. And how that really affected me or even being in spaces that are safe places and having other Indigenous .. like elders, or Indigenous women or just people who you thought were family in that space, tell you you’re not meant to be here because the way you look or your blood quantum.

Mountain later references this photograph and portion of her story when she talks about how she hopes that others see her engagement with the community when she enters a certain space, such as a cultural event at the local Friendship Centre, as an indication of her indigeneity. She mentions her patterns of behaviour such as purchasing food from the vendors and hugging and greeting elders. Proulx (2003) speaks to Lobo’s (2000) work in which it is mentioned that community engagement is one major area that can often establish authenticity. Showing commitment and dedication to the community, as well as being accepted by others of status (ie. elders, knowledge keepers) is something all three of the women make references to at one point in the session.
Fear of appropriation

Not only do the women express their struggles with failing to fit the stereotypes around physical characteristics, this issue unfolds into several layers with one of the most prevalent being the fear of appearing to be or actually enacting cultural appropriation. Cultural appropriation, as discussed earlier in tékeni, is when “elements from oppressed people are taken by members of the dominant society for their own self-interest” (Monchalin, 2016, p. 37). It may not make sense at first thought that the women would have this fear of cultural appropriation when they, themselves, are part of the oppressed community. However, Monchalin (2016) continues by elaborating that “[w]hen cultural appropriation takes place the sacred meanings, stories, or cultural significance tied to the design, symbol, or outfit are completely disregarded” (p. 37).

There is no shortage of examples of cultural appropriation in our society: from dreamcatchers (yes, dreamcatchers, again!), to sacred patterns being used by haute couture designers, Indigenous cultures are still being pillaged by culture vultures, most of which are so blinded by the nuances of white supremacy that they are completely oblivious to the implications of their actions. (Others are entirely aware of their actions and relish in continuing to oppress others which is a topic beyond the scope of this study). However, Monchalin’s quote comes back to an important point contained within this thesis – that Indigenous people are not all the same - there are many cultures within the community, and each nation contains a collection of designs, patterns, stories, songs, traditions, and many other elements unique to itself. Indeed, there is overlap of certain aspects as people were not opposed to sharing but nations created ways to relate to their environment, their worldview and spirituality which is expressed through the way their clothing was designed, the colours used, the items they created to represent such
relationships, and so forth. With such a violent history since contact, much was stolen, stripped, outlawed and deemed savage or uncivilized. Much has been lost and therefore, it is no surprise that traditions, patterns, colours, artwork, and other cultural elements that have survived attempted erasure have been adapted by Indigenous people across the continent in an effort to revitalize identity and form connection. This is where we see “pan-Indian” celebrations such as powwow or potlatches, beadwork, and ceremonies being inclusive to many Indigenous people (Warry, 2009; Wilson & Peters, 2005). However, within pan-Indianism, and a growing conversation around how cultural appropriation affects our people, it is no surprise that the women share their concern about perpetuating disrespectful and harmful practices.

What the women fear is to be perceived as a non-Indigenous person wearing Indigenous designs (clothing, jewellery, traditional dress, etc.) or to be inappropriately wearing or using the designs of another nation which are not intended to be shared. Mountain speaks about an experience in which she witnessed a Métis man being called out for facilitating a bentwood box workshop. Bentwood boxes are not traditional to Métis people and the Kwakwaka’wakw woman who expressed her anger against him (because bentwood boxes are of her culture) indicated that his light skin was the reason he did not understand why he was being accused of cultural appropriation. Mountain felt that her light complexion also automatically made her guilty of appropriation and caused her to reconsider whether she should be learning bentwood box making when it is also not from her own culture.

In Cedar’s story she related how others cannot seem to see past her skin colour. She explained in more detail how that in her work environment within an Indigenous art gallery, customers who are Indigenous make comments about how the gallery does not have an Indigenous person working, and she overhears their comments and wishes her indigeneity was
apparent to them. Being a quiet individual, she faces the challenge of speaking up to share that she is in fact Indigenous. She tells us:

I feel like I wear my blackness and I can’t take it off.. so then I wear Indigenous jewelry and things that will help people see that I’m half but even then… maybe they’ll just think that again I am just a non-Indigenous person appropriating the jewelry and stuff.

Her comment about appropriation created a domino effect in the group session and an outpouring of discussion around it ensued. Not only did Cedar feel that wearing jewelry (with designs that are not necessarily from her own culture) was possibly crossing the line into appropriation, but she also has questioned her role in other activities such as learning fancy shawl dancing for powwow. Two of Cedar’s photographs contained elements of which she reflected back on in relation to appropriation.
Cedar described “Creation Station” as her connection to self. This is where she does “everything from painting, drawing, beading, weaving and sewing”. She shares with us:

I am currently working on my regalia for fancy shawl dancing. I chose to include this image because two years ago, I did not have the confidence to try any traditional or modern Indigenous art practices. This stemmed from my discomfort with being mixed-
race, and the belief that having mixed ancestry actually denied me the right to claim my Indigenous identity.

Cedar began reconnecting with culture through different avenues, including art forms such as those she mentions. Her next photograph demonstrated her greatest sense of connection to community.

![Figure 9 Photovoice piece, Cedar, entitled “Powwow Culture”](image)

Even though Cedar read from her notes mostly, one could easily tell while sharing about powwow dancing that this is a place of comfort for her merely by how she expressed herself. It is not surprising considering how much powwow culture, as a pan-Indigenous activity, has been a powerful force in identity formation (Proulx, 2003; Wilson & Peters, 2005). Many of the dances
have significant origin stories and are used as a form of healing and medicine. Johnson (2013) writes:

Despite the powwow’s modern and evolving form, many perceive it as providing an avenue that enables one to connect to an ancestral past. In this way, it not only creates a temporary Native place but also succeeds in transcending the linear time of the modern, settler-state city. (pp. 225-226).

For Cedar, this space helped form a foundation for her sense of community and belonging within Vancouver. However, even though this is a place she feels grounded in, there are doubts about whether she is rightfully allowed to participate. Her concerns are clear when she shares:

I was introduced to this community when I started attending Shyama Priya’s\(^2\) powwow workout classes in the fall of last year. At first there were feelings of not belonging, especially because the Nuu-Chah-Nulth don’t traditionally powwow dance. But despite this, I quickly felt at home in this space ... I would eventually like to compete … but am still nervous to do so. I worry that I will end up looking like I am a non-Indigenous person appropriating the culture. Or that I am a West Coast Indigenous person appropriating the culture of the Plains Indigenous people. Pretty consistently this issue of feeling like an imposter also comes up as a person of mixed blood and doesn’t really look native.

The word imposter strikes hard for me. And although the other women do not use the word imposter specifically, they too share their insecurities around being seen as someone appropriating the culture or being inauthentic. As Proulx (2003) states, “Aboriginal peoples are

\(^2\) A well-known powwow instructor in both Vancouver and nationally
rightly concerned about cultural appropriation, and ethnic switching and ethnic fraud that can come about through processes of self-identification (p. 419). Mountain also wants to participate in powwow culture and expresses how she is worried about the perception of her wearing regalia:

So I’m starting to make my regalia for Kamloopa\(^3\) and stuff, wanting to learn how to dance and all this stuff and I’m in my head will people be like “is she culturally appropriating right now?” I don’t want people to have those feelings because that’s a horrible feeling. So you know when you just want to look the part? And that’s like the worst thing to say about yourself! It’s like a hidden secret I have.

There is an element of vulnerability with engaging in large community events. Cedar’s photograph is taken at the Gathering of Nations which is the largest powwow in North America (and possibly in the world) and many make the journey annually to participate in the occasion. With bigger events, one needs to step outside the protective boundaries of the community they’ve built to surround themselves with and enter into an unfamiliar environment.

As discussed in tékeni, there are many concepts of what indigeneity entails and many problematic measures are internalized within the greater community (King, 2003; King, 2012; Lawrence, 2004; Palmater, 2011; Proulx, 2003). Participating in such large events exposes one to incredible experiences but may also expose one to harsh opinions, entrenched views, and lateral discrimination. Both Cedar and Mountain express concern over their appearance invalidating their ‘authenticity’ to participate. Further to this, it is my experience that urban centres tend to be open in accepting and creating space for mixed-blood individuals, especially those who do not fit the stereotypical characteristics of an Indigenous person. These women have found and

\(^3\) Kamloopa is a large annual powwow hosted by the Secwepemc peoples in Kamloops, BC
contributed to community within the Vancouver area and for the most part, they feel included and accepted within this urban community. However, venturing into new environments does not guarantee the same comfort or safety of their Vancouver connections. This is due in part to the fact that much of these connections are formed through relationships, active contribution to the community, and one’s reputation, all of which the women expressed in their stories. Entering a new environment, whether that is a powwow event, new city, or reserve, where one is not known and also does not “look Indian”, can be a difficult and uneasy experience to navigate. I too have felt the most comfortable with community in Vancouver and have experienced uncertainty entering new environments. For this reason, the thoughts expressed by the women deeply resonate with me and I can understand why they feel this concern.

While Ocean does not speak to powwow culture, she does share about her internal struggle with whether the roles she takes on are genuinely a representation of herself or if she is faking it.
In relation to her photograph, titled “Balance”, she shares:

I chose this picture just because I find myself not being able to balance.. like who I am and I try really hard. Like, I’m president of InSA\(^4\) but like, what does that really mean? Am I a really a good example of someone who is Indigenous? Or is that barging in and pretending to be this person cuz I don’t know anything about my culture and I know the history of Indigenous people but that’s it, I don’t experience my own culture.

Feeling confident in the roles we take on as mixed-blood Indigenous women in urban spaces is a long journey and it is often the support of others who help us build understanding of what we are struggling with. Interestingly enough, Ocean explained that the rock in this photo is a tourist

\(^4\) Indigenous Students Association on campus
attraction in Haida Gwaii and that it is, in fact, not her favourite place in her territories. She goes on to name and describe her favourite location but then continues on with the balancing rock. Given that she expressed feeling as though she may be seen as a tourist visiting “to do yoga on the beach”, I was struck by her choice to include this image in her final four as opposed to an image of the place she named as her favourite. At the risk of imposing my thoughts as the researcher on her story, I instead reflect as a fellow mixed-Indigenous woman on how I have felt like a visitor (and tourist) in my own territories the few times I have had the opportunity to travel there. I reflect on how I have similarly held onto photos taken of myself next to landmarks that non-locals would be more likely to pose with. Being unfamiliar with our own histories can shake the foundations we are trying to build and we often look for things to help anchor us. Throughout the session the women leaned on one another for support and offered it when they saw one another needing it. It is characteristics such as this, taking care of one another, that are truly Indigenous in nature and demonstrate an often unspoken network of reciprocity and care.
This is how I connect myself

ionkwanoronhkwa ohneka

ionkwanoronhkwa ohneka

kahnekaronnion mmmmm

kahnekanoron mmmm

kainawiiia heiah...  

i am learning to sing to honour you.

remembering our words

hands fumbling to drum in unison

finding places where i can hear you

louder

closer.

A Return to Nature

Being an urban Indigenous woman myself and knowing how I feel when out on the land,

I was curious to know how other urban women feel. Each of the women shared stories of how

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5 Water Song by Kontiwennenhawi - Akwesasne Women Singers (Written by Teresa Bear Fox)
they seek natural spaces for very similar reasons and at the basis of all these reasons, connecting with the land has helped them build an understanding of themselves.

![Photovoice piece, Mountain, entitled “Nipi”](image)

Figure 11 Photovoice piece, Mountain, entitled “Nipi”

Mountain selected this photograph as one of her final images and named it “Nipi” which means water in the Cree language. As part of her sharing, she wrote a spoken word piece in which she says:

I am wandering through the forest trying to find who I am again. So I come back to you. I always seem to come back to you … I stand here breathing slowly, listening to your voice ripple through the rocks and cover my shoes. I want to be as resilient as you, but sometimes I still find it hard to say your name out loud. So I repeat it in my head over and
over again until I feel like it rolls off my tongue just right, just enough to finally see that
I’ve belonged here my whole life.

She explains that this photograph was taken while she was on the land harvesting cedar and
reflecting on times when she was a child. Although she is far from her own territories, she has
memories of her family engaging with ceremonies related to the land (although they were never
explicitly named to her as such) and she realizes that she has had a strong connection to the land
on the coast for a long time. She has retraced her memories to find that places she visited and
things she saw as a child were significant to her Indigenous roots, but because they were never
named as being Indigenous, she did not make that connection until later in life. In conclusion to
sharing about this photograph she says:

There were a lot of things that were hidden in that mountain that brought me back. And
so sometimes I go there, to just .. sometimes to drive up, hope I don’t get a flat tire.. other
times I hope I get a flat tire because I want to stay there longer without being obligated to
leave.

Similar to the participants in the study done by Wilson and Peters (2005), Mountain travels
between the city and the mountains to disconnect, rejuvenate herself, and engage with cultural
activities. Although she does not return to a reserve like the participants in the study done by
Wilson and Peters (2005), she actively travels to and from Vancouver to a rural area to maintain
her connection because it is incredibly important to her. Mountain does not speak of her ancestral
territories aside from a general comment about coming from the prairies and also does not name
a specific area beyond the province of Saskatchewan. Her reasons for this could be anything and
although she does not speak to any sort of connection with her homelands, she does talk
extensively about how the land around the greater Vancouver regional area is something she has
deep connection, both through her family and through her own journey of understanding her identity. She describes the land as her counsellor which she confesses to and talks with because she believes it has its own spirit. To this she adds that “no matter where I come from or where my blood runs from, I have this connection down here to this land. Because Turtle Island is one big turtle, one big piece of Mother Earth’s heart”. Mountain has formed a close relationship with the land around her even though it is not the land of her ancestors.

Very similar to Mountain, Cedar provided a photograph that specifically spoke to returning to nature. Her first image, which she named “Connection to Land” outlined the reasons why she felt it necessary to include it.
In relation to this image, Cedar shares:

This location represents home and is my go-to whenever I need to escape the city and connect with nature. When I am here I have access to trees and forest, mountains and ocean, three things that I am learning I cannot do without.

Cedar names this location a healing space where many tears have been shed and where she returns to time and time again for reflection. She says a friend of hers describes nature as their...
church and that is how she feels about it as well. The use of this comparison really highlights the depth of her connection, similar to that of Mountain’s comparison of confession to the land, which aligns with a quote from Rebecca Adamson (2008) who states that “…equally important is our spiritual link to the land, our connection that is deeply embedded with who we are in understanding and in relating to the land” (pp. 28-29). These spaces that Indigenous people seek are not merely for a break from the city but speak to a more significant link between ourselves and Mother Earth.

Likewise, Ocean, who does not necessarily pinpoint a particular location within or outside her territories, but emphasizes how being near the water is key for her. She says that “when I go to the ocean, I feel complete” and also indicates that her family also insists that they could not survive without the ocean. Given that Ocean’s nation has a relationship with the ocean that has existed since time immemorial, it is not surprising this statement. Ocean also draws attention to how all the women in the group are urban based yet seek natural landscapes which are imperative to their wellbeing. This is also echoed in the responses of the participants of Wilson and Peters (2005) who also specifically indicate that the land is necessary for survival. However, also similar to Wilson and Peters’ (2005) participants, each woman in my study has also found ways to exist within the concrete and noise of the city.
Urban Community Connection
	here is something about this city.

maybe it’s the land

buried beneath concrete

calling to those who may still hear its voice.

trusting that someone hasn’t forgotten

its stories.

the bones of my relations’ ancestors have rested here

quiet, content.

longer than any of these concrete shafts

erected by waves of whiteness.

the cedar and salt water still

offer themselves as medicines.

the salmon still try to return each year

even when streams are rerouted or left dead.

the mountains still keep watch

for travelers making their way

home.
When speaking about the land, “the land” does not mean simply the ground. Instead it is an all-encompassing term meant to include the waters, the plants, animals, insects, stars, moon, and beyond. Everything is included in “the land” (Styres, et al, 2013). But Todd (2001) points out that “the land might stretch beyond the stars to infinity but it does not seem to include the cities” (p. 51). And indeed, this way of thinking perhaps contributes to the idea that indigeneity cannot be maintained within an urban setting and that Indigenous people living in urban settings are assimilated. However, it is important not to see things so starkly as black and white; that one cannot exist with the other. There is some truth to Todd’s (2001) statement that cities do not seem to be included in the concept of the land. This is because cities are manmade spaces that are the epitome of settler society. Forests are clear cut, wetlands drained and filled in, and habitats destroyed. And the trees and plants that do exist are mainly for aesthetics or to serve the purpose of humans (parks, green spaces, community gardens, etc). They do not exist as any form of reciprocal relationships, they are not acknowledged as their own beings, and here there is no honouring the land as teacher or healer as Kimmerer (2013) calls it. Rather it is land as property or land as capital, all in ownership and/or to make money. And it is important to also remember that Indigenous people were not welcome in cities, and the generations that first made their way into the urban sprawl often did so at the cost of shedding their culture to become “workers” and to avoid, or at least minimize, the racism they experienced (Jackson, 2000; Lawrence, 2004). Although urban Indigenous people may not be able to name it as such, these histories still have an impact on today’s generations.

The women stated there were aspects about the city they do not necessarily appreciate, but they also found spaces to claim as their own. In relation to the city, Ocean shares:
I try to fall in love with the city too but sometimes when you’re walking around the city it just feels kinda dirty. And you go down those alley ways downtown and and ... ugh this is great … what a connection. You don’t really feel connected to that land but at the same time it’s like all kinda the same land.

Ocean points out sarcastically that the conditions within the city make her shy away from feeling connected, but at the same time she recognizes that it is still part of Mother Earth despite the invasion of manmade messes and maltreatment of space. Again, the participants in Wilson and Peters’ (2005) study also indicated a struggle to connect due to the lack of natural spaces in the “concrete nations” they live in (p. 406).

Mountain also indicates her attempts at loving the city. She states that:

Sometimes I will force myself to try to like the city because when I don’t have the opportunity to go back to nature, I try to force myself into the city nature. So there is this one alley way that on one side is all Indigenous art and on the other side it’s non Indigenous art and it’s like my identity, on one side and the other in an urban setting but with art and there’s still like.. you can hear the ocean because it’s right by Waterfront but you can hear ambulances and everything. Sometimes I force myself to like it, which is interesting because you know your body craves nature.

Mountain finds spaces that she thinks she can resonate with and pull connection from, such as the artwork in the alleyway. But it remains a challenge as she indicates by saying that the body knows what is craves. Again we see a connection that runs deeper than just surface level.

Although the artwork may provide a sense of comfort, to both parts of herself as she describes, it

6 A street in Vancouver along the water through a historic part of the city
does not satisfy something rooted deeper within her. Kimmerer (2013) writes: “We spill over into the world and the world spills over into us” (p. 103) which to me highlights how we are intricately tied in a cycle of existence with land; therefore, it is no wonder that Mountain describes the need for the natural landscape as something her body craves. Kimmerer also writes:

I wonder if much that ails our society stems from the fact that we have allowed ourselves to be cut off from that love of, and from, the land. It is medicine for the broken land and empty hearts. (p. 126)

This quote sits heavy with me, especially when considering how the women in my study, much like myself, so profoundly need interaction with the land for healing and survival. In tékeni I quoted Simpson (2014), and I quote her here again to emphasize: “We have found ways to connect to the land and our stories and to live our intelligences no matter how urban or how destroyed our homelands have become” (p. 23).

Urban Resources and “Safe Spaces”

Although Mountain and Ocean speak to their attempts to find connection with the land within the city, or the city itself, Cedar explains that it is the resources within the urban Indigenous community that ground her, give her a sense of belonging, and help shape her identity. In her image below, which she names “Urban Resources”, is a shot of an important location for many urban ndns\(^7\) within the greater Vancouver area.

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\(^7\) Ndn is a reclamation of the word Indian and often used within an urban context
Figure 13 Photovoice piece, Cedar, entitled “Urban Resources”

Taken just slightly west of the intersection of East Hastings Street and Commercial Drive, the Vancouver Aboriginal Friendship Centre and the Urban Native Youth Association (UNYA) are located across the street from one other. Cedar shares that:

Both of these locations are really important to me because they are such amazing resources for Indigenous people living in urban centres like Vancouver. I started going to UNYA in the spring of last year, they offered a variety of different programing and it’s a fabulous place to connect with youth who maybe share similar stories or perhaps have completely different backgrounds and unique perspectives. I feel so lucky to have resources available to me.
Cedar’s story about connecting with resources available to urban Indigenous people is not new by any means. Indigenous-specific services have been an imperative part of urban living for decades and research such as Lawrence (2004), the Urban Aboriginal Peoples Study (UAPS) by the Environics Institute (2011), and Wilson and Peters (2005) have reported this. The UAPS for Vancouver in particular reports that 7 in 10 respondents in their survey indicated they use or rely on such services at least occasionally (Environics Institute, 2011, p. 45). What is inspiring about this part of Cedar’s story is that she found community through these services and this newfound sense of identity has empowered her to give back by volunteering as a mentor for youth with a program called The Circle of Sisters. Cedar shares that:

It’s a mentorship program that gives Indigenous youth the chance to connect with community, culture, tradition, and positive role models. In my role as a mentor, I offer my support, guidance, encouragement, experience, and knowledge. Although I am just as much a learner as I am a teacher.

Krieg’s (2007) research also highlighted a similar theme in which the young women indicated that positive female role models was something they felt was critical. Not only has Cedar found mentorship for herself through role models such as Shyama Priya, she has embodied the responsibility to give back and stand with the young women and girls in the community. The Circle of Sisters is something that she describes as a “safe space” and “the type of community I love and feel so honoured to be part of” which is a main reason why she does not relocate back to the United States where she feels she stands out less due to the colour of her skin. Both her urban community and the land in and around Vancouver are things she has expressed immense gratitude for in her stories.
Although Mountain does not mention any specific urban resources, she does describe an occasion when she had the opportunity to learn how to make Bentwood Boxes (as previously mentioned in the section on cultural appropriation). The incident left her feeling wary about perpetuating armful practices but she also shared the following: “I love doing west coast art because I’ve always grown up with it and the other part is that my family, my community that has adopted me in, and all this stuff are west coast”. This is something she wrestles with quite deeply, knowing that she is not from the coast and therefore none of the practices she has learned while on the coast are of her culture. This is most strongly portrayed in her image below, titled “Lost”.

Figure 14 Photovoice piece, Mountain, entitled “Lost”
In this photograph she speaks to how she visited Québec and was excited to stumble across these west coast art pieces. She identified with them as “home” and then that they should be back in the community because they did not belong there in the museum. What struck her as well though, was that she did not feel like she belonged either – to the coast that is – because her roots are from the prairies. Recalling the incident with the Bentwood Boxes, she explained how her supervisor whose culture does in fact practice making these boxes, also expresses frustration around a lack of opportunities to discuss issues pertaining to mixed-blood Indigenous identity and that for Mountain, having that outlet with her is something she does not find often. In conversation together, they call it a “silent struggle” and have built enough of a rapport to confide in one another. Sensing the collective need for more opportunities such as this, Mountain suggests to the other women to create a community together through social media. This invitation on her behalf could spark the beginning of a project around sharing the work done in this study, as indicated in áhsen.

Different from Mountain and Cedar, Ocean described a reluctance in engaging with traditional activities that were not of her own culture despite identifying as falling into a pan-Indigenous category and having engaged with different cultural practices. In her photograph, titled “Blurry Connections”, Ocean highlights her challenges with connecting with her own culture and how that has impacted her.
This photograph was taken at a recent pole raising at the University of British Columbia. The university’s website provides the following description:

> The Reconciliation Pole is one of two UBC initiatives that aim to capture the long trajectory of Indigenous and Canadian relations and to ensure that one part of that, the history of Canada’s Indian residential schools, will never be forgotten. (para. 2)
The significance of the pole is that it was carved by a close relation of Ocean’s, but due to being away from her community her whole life, she felt awkward at the pole raising because she is not familiar with her own culture. She shares:

I took better pictures but this one is a bit blurry and I thought that really kind of represented the way I’m not fully clear of my own culture…. I find that I kinda just fall into a “pan-Indigenous” kind of thing where I recognize that I’m Indigenous and I don’t really take part in my own personal culture because it’s so far away. But I’ll find home in other cultures and I think because I lived out east and I used to do powwows and they do potlaches and it’s just kinda like everything got mixed into one Indigenous culture and that’s what I connected with.

Ocean indicates on one hand that she falls into a pan-Indigenous category because of her upbringing and having no access to her own community but then later strongly points out that she does not feel right participating in cultures that are not her own. The greatest consistency in her life, which has kept her Haida heritage alive, has been her aunt, whom she calls “Mum” because she was raised by her. However, aside from the knowledge of her heritage, this did not extend to knowing her culture more intimately. In her attempt to explain her frustration and the challenge of expressing herself out loud to others, when she only reflects on the topic silently to herself, caused a very emotional response which further unsettled her. It could be said that her blurry connections extend beyond one matter and are instead indicative of a greater source of uncertainty pertaining to her identity. Despite the emotional toll it took to describe this, she concluded by stating that:

I feel like “oh ya, I’ll include myself in some cultures” but I’m still waiting for my culture….I think it’s very important, this conversation that you’ve started. So I’m very
happy I get to be a part of it. As soon as you said it, I was like, I kinda wanna be part of this! … you need me!

The need for an opportunity to share, vent, connect, and let down the guards that we carry in relation to the topic of mixed-identity is consistent through the research. This study opened a small pocket to allow the women to engage with one another but it is just the beginning. There is a call for more and the desire for it is understandable.

Chapter Summary

This chapter highlighted some of the strongest topics evident in the research. The women explored the intricacies of not fitting the image of an Indian, both rejecting the stereotype but also navigating the desire to be more readily seen as Indigenous by fitting some of the characteristics associated with the stereotype. All the women expressed discontent with their physical image. And all women also expressed fear of crossing the line into perpetuating the harms of cultural appropriation. Being displaced from their own home territories for various reasons has severed their connection to their own culture. This in turn, has led them to seek belonging within an urban setting by engaging with pan-Indigenous activities. All three women spoke to how they thought other Indigenous people perceive them, which feeds into their uncertainty of self-identity.

The women each identified themselves in a way specific to themselves but the term “Indigenous” was by far the most consistently used. The terms “First Nations”, “Aboriginal” and the names of their nations were also used multiple times. This speaks to the spectrum of realities when looking at Indigenous identity, especially within an urban context.
Although there persists a dichotomy of rural versus urban, assimilated and authentic, the women shared stories of developing and maintaining a cultural connection in various ways. Cedar names specific activities within the community that she engaged with to help build her sense of belonging and which in turn have shaped her identity over time. She also points out a specific location within the greater Vancouver area that has been a place of refuge for her in terms of healing and connection with land. Mountain similarly connects with urban activities within the Indigenous community but her connection to the land is something she deeply seeks out on a regular basis, returning time and time again to engage in ceremony, traditions, and healing work. And even though she struggles with whether she belongs to the land, she has expressed that she is profoundly interwoven with the land and teachings she has received. Ocean questions whether engaging with other cultures is right to her and wrestles with her desire to return to her home community to know more about her Haida heritage but faces the challenge of distance and lack of a sense of belonging. Despite this, Ocean, like Mountain and Cedar, return to the land, ocean, and forest to disconnect from the city and recharge. All three acknowledge the importance of this relationship is in their wellbeing. Lastly, an important finding in this study is that the coming together to share and listen to each other’s stories has highlighted the need for more opportunities to be created for such dialogue.
wisk – Coming Full Circle (Conclusion)

In the preface I shared about visiting Neuengamme and through writing this thesis, one of the most powerful messages that arose for me was Mountain sharing a teaching about the reason we find ourselves crying when we are not aware why we feel the need to cry. She says:

Something I always think about is that I believe we have ancestors inside of us. That’s the whole idea of genetics and trauma, we carry the trauma of years behind us. So when we are healing right now, we are healing our ancestors. But my understanding of even crying, like sometimes I’ll be doing something really fun but I’ll start crying and just like cedar, when cedar burns, and it crackles, it asks the ancestors to listen to our prayers. But when we cry and we let it drop, it’s asking the ancestors to hear what our heart is saying. Sometimes we cry because our body needs the healing, not so much our brain. So sometimes when we have those conversations with ourselves, it can be different but when we have it out loud where other spirits and other beings can hear it, so it is different, because we are taking other energies from everyone else in the room. And just being like “woah, someone needs to cry right now” and it’s something to be super honoured to be able to have tears come out, even when you don’t feel you need them because it’s like a vessel for someone else to cry. (Mountain)

What hits deeply for me is that even though she was comforting one of the other women in the room, her words provide comfort for me in this time where I write my experience of crying for another. I see that experience as releasing the hurt and healing the trauma that is carried in my
family; trauma that was carried and transmitted by my father across the Atlantic to his children. I do not believe he possessed the strength or he perhaps lacked the humility to face the source of his pain that remained tucked away inside him all those years. Looking back now, I recognize parts of his behaviour as harmful coping techniques, projection, and bouts of anger and cruelty to perhaps mask a depression that haunted him. I have never vocalized this thought but often wonder how my siblings or I had any idea how to love. My father is a stranger to me in many ways, but I am becoming familiar with the demons he fought. I am confronting them because he was unable to, and in turn, I am healing what he could not. I am breaking the cycle that he maintained, and I do it for my children to come. To my knowledge, I am the first to visit Neuengamme in my family and the journey of 8000 km was necessary. My family who lives there has their own experience of what our shared history has handed us, and they find their own ways to navigate.

And just as I cried while visiting Neuengamme, I have also found myself in tears throughout the collection of stories and the writing of this thesis. It has taken me far longer to complete it than I anticipated, and it has impacted me far more profoundly than I could put to words. It is incredibly difficult to dive into the depths of something so heavy and then to dwell there to try to make sense of it. I do not come out of this thesis feeling any less of an imposter but that does not surprise me. At one point I felt that I should be walking away from this research as an expert of something, but rather I feel there is so much work left to do in relation to this issue in the community, and all I have done is merely spot the iceberg on the horizon. I pursued this topic for many personal reasons, and the women chose to participate for theirs. Much of what the women spoke about was so close to my life experience that I felt as if they were speaking to aspects of me.
We all find spaces that help ground us, help us feel like we belong, and dull the sharp pain of disconnection. But that security is not always a given, and we are still left open to attacks, even in the spaces we feel safest, even surrounded by those with whom we lay our trust. We reluctantly dance back and forth between feeling okay with who we are or at least, who we think we are, and with feeling like we have no right to exist as who our spirit tells us we are. We are challenged daily by others, by our communities, by outsiders, by our loved ones, by strangers too. But we persist. Pushing back against the tide that seeks to wash us away and constantly reminds us that we might not be enough by whatever measure is the flavour of the week with respect to Indigenous identity issues. We resist. And we find new ways to strengthen our ties to what makes us Indigenous.

*Points on a Circle of Sweetgrass Revisited*

*Question 1. How do urban mixed-blood Indigenous women identify themselves?*

- *How do mainstream or colonial perceptions of race and gender influence Indigenous women’s connection to indigeneity?*

- *What measures or language are used to define their sense of identity?*

I chose to include this set of questions in my research because I am genuinely interested in understanding the ways in which we, Indigenous women, understand and navigate our identity within an urban context and to see if there were common themes amongst us. Undoubtedly so, question (a) in particular was the most thoroughly discussed theme throughout the session, and several of the themes that the women identified in the synthesizing potion of the session were easily applicable in answering this question. As discussed in kaié:ri, physical appearance and cultural appropriation were the most frequently occurring themes and all women not only
mentioned these themes but provided specific examples that have impacted their connection to indigeneity.

Firstly, all women wrestled with not fitting the stereotypical appearance of an Indigenous person whether that was hair colour or texture, being too light or being too dark in skin tone, or looking too urban for their home community. They talked about how they wondered how others perceive them and whether they are recognized as Indigenous. They expressed the different ways they wished they looked and how they do things such as tan their skin, dye their hair darker, or wear Indigenous jewellery with the intention and desire of being recognized as Indigenous by others.

Secondly, stemming from the adornment of Indigenous jewellery was the fear of being seen as appropriating the culture. The women expressed two layers to cultural appropriation, the first being seen by others and accused of appropriation because they do not register as Indigenous to others such as wearing regalia and appearing to be non-native. The women also expressed the fear of enacting cultural appropriation because of engaging with pan-Indigenous activities or learning traditions from other Indigenous nations. The women partake in these sorts of cultural activities because of the disconnect with their own culture and the sense of belonging an identity which participating brings. But at the same time they worry about whether activities such as this cross the line into perpetuating harmful and disrespectful practices.

Through the course of the discussion, the women leaned on one another in terms of supporting each other’s decision to engage in learning different cultural activities. The reassurance of another woman who understands the fear and implications of disrespectful sharing helped them navigate whether the experiences they had were crossing a line or not. The women also responded to each other’s uncertainties of visual appearance which is something I have
encountered outside of the study but not something I anticipated to happen during the session among women who, for the most part, did not know each other.

In relation to part (b) of the research question, as mentioned in kaié:ri, the women most consistently chose to use the word “Indigenous” to describe themselves, others, and the community at large. Occasionally the term “First Nations” was used, and also “aboriginal” but to a far lesser extent. In my personal experience, I find that the term “Indigenous” is being used far more commonly amongst younger academic circles, the urban community, and across social media platforms. It is not unanimous and certain terms continue to persist such as “Indian” (sometimes reclaimed and written as “ndn” as previously mentioned) but in my experience they are more prevalent in rural communities, among older generations, and in the United States where the term is still widely used. In terms of introductions, all women named their specific nation and Mountain also spoke in her traditional language. All women referred back to their nation several times, but Ocean in particular related her identity over and over to her nation specifically, not just solely as being Indigenous. Her uncertainty appears to lie heavily with whether she is a good example of a Haida person and much of her reflection centered on her culture.

Question 2. Do the women form a sense of belonging to the urban community and/or with the local Indigenous nations?

Interestingly, the women did not speak in detail about their possible connections with the local Indigenous communities specifically. There were times when the women mentioned in passing something in relation to one of the communities, such as learning one of the local languages, or participating in events from the local nations, but these occasions were details in a story focusing on something else. It is not to say that the women do not have any sense of
connection with any of the local nations but for the sake of this research study, there were no examples provided in the group session, photos, or reflection pieces of such relationships or connections. However, all three women did speak to their connection with the urban community. In fact, for all three, the basis of their identity has been formed through the various avenues they have explored and found belonging within. For example, Cedar specifically indicates that it is the community she has found herself surrounded with that keeps her in Vancouver because it is something she is afraid to lose. The resources, the cultural activities, and the role models around her have given her courage to begin embracing her mixed-identity and to feel comfortable claiming space as an Indigenous woman, whereas she did not feel she had a right to her roots previous to finding this cultural foundation. Mountain also points to learning about west coast culture in Surrey and Vancouver which has helped form her identity as a Cree woman. To a lesser extent, Ocean has also had her identity shaped within the urban landscape. She struggles with what this means for her as a Haida woman but still acknowledges that it is within these urban spaces that she is defining what being Indigenous means to her. None of the women’s responses surprise me, if anything they provide more examples as to how urban Indigenous women choose to engage and utilize services, spaces, and supports that are provided within the community, both formal and informal.

Question 3. How do the women, who have little to no connection to their own ancestral lands, connect to the land in urban centres?

a. Do the women form connection to physical locations?

Despite being away from their home territories, all three women have a special connection with the land that is unique to them. They define the way they interact with land and in which locations. While this question sought to understand how the women connect with land
specifically within urban centres, they took the question and expanded it. They spoke of their love and reliance on natural spaces that they have found in and around the city. For Cedar, Lighthouse Park in West Vancouver is a place she specifically is drawn to and returns to time and time again. Although it is a park, it is still situated in the city of West Vancouver, therefore making it land in an urban centre. She mentions this is her go-to location but also specifies that nature is like her church, and she could not survive without the trees, ocean, and mountains.

Similarly, Ocean mentions the need for the ocean itself for her survival, but she does not highlight any particular place of significance that she seeks out. She does, however, mention that it is the same for her family members, who believe that their survival is dependent on being close to the ocean. Perhaps with more time to focus on her story, she may have chosen to dig deeper into the reasons why the ocean has such profound significance for herself and her family. Ocean, however, speaks to her attempt to love the city and indicates her struggle to find connection. For Mountain, she also speaks about trying to find beauty within the urban landscape and she is able to point out certain aspects like street art that is close to the water and the resiliency of grass. But for her too, she finds the greatest fulfilment in areas just outside the urban sprawl, where she has long standing roots from her childhood. These locations that she has returned to for years and the love and importance they carry for her in her life is evident in the poems she chose to share and her photographs that she selected as her final four Photovoice pieces. Without a doubt the connections the women have with the land shape their identity and well-being, as well as form a deeper spiritual rootedness that is unique to each woman’s story. Mountain writes in one of her poems:
I’m tired of being lost in the city. I don’t want no map to tell me where to go but instead allow the current to move parts of me that I know are still vulnerable. I know this is home, I just haven’t made a bed here for years but I’m willing to learn again.

Here she is speaking to the disconnection in her family and why she has not made her bed there for years. But she is willing to learn and is taking the time to do so. Her words resonate with a quote from Simpson (2014) who writes, “if you want to learn something, you need to take your body onto the land and do it” (pp. 17-18). And this is what these women are doing; the time they spend on the land, is time they spend relearning what has been taken from them and their families. The generations of theft of culture and knowledge is being pushed back upon and reclaimed by these young women and the word they use to describe it is healing.

Directions for Future Research

Upon reflection of the journey this research has taken me on, I recommend the directions for consideration in future research, not only for other researchers, but for myself as well.

1) Incorporating more creative methodologies such as Photovoice into research to allow participants to more fully express themselves, especially when working with historically oppressed or silenced peoples. Flexibility in the way information is shared is also important as not everyone does well within one manner of communication.

2) Taking into consideration the space in which the participants gather is incredibly important – honouring the emotional impact that participating has and being prepared to help accommodate needs that arise.

3) The perspectives of women specifically need to be more widely represented and not discredited, or devalued within western frameworks.
4) Approaches to research that reinforce dichotomies such as rural/urban, assimilated/traditional, and native/non-native need to be reworked to be more inclusive and reflective of reality.

5) More research is needed that continues to highlight the voices of otherwise silenced or marginalized individuals such as Indigenous women. Research that allows the women to take control of the direction of the work will allow more authentic representation.

6) An area that I am continuing to look at for further research in my doctoral work is that of the connection women such as Cedar, Mountain and Ocean have to land. I am interested in the reclaiming of ties to land and “returning home” to ancestral lands as a form of decolonization.

Conclusion

To conclude, this study has shed light on women from an important demographic who has not had their voices heard before in a space that is open and welcoming. There exists research that intersects with this study such as that of Lawrence (2004) and Krieg (2007), but none specifically focus on mixed-blood Indigenous women’s experiences. Anderson (2013) states that “research has exclusively focused on how urban Indigenous people are excluded from the cityscape” (p. 53), but this research resists the damaging repetition of research by focusing on how these women express their indigeneity within the city and with the land beneath and around urban spaces. It is through story sharing such as this which draws attention to the spectrum of Indigenous identities and ultimately the perception of Indianness is disrupted. Indigenous people
are modern, fluid individuals who are not hopelessly trapped in antiquated renditions of their identity or forged narratives. It is as Proulx (2003) states:

Individuals born into or entering cities consciously react to, accommodate and are shaped by the historic, local, regional and, in some cases, the transnational differences of the constitutive outside. However, they do not just mimic or submissively accept the identities they find in the cities; they also consciously identify themselves in opposition to others such as non-Aboriginal city dwellers, legislated identities, other Aboriginal cultures within cities, the cultural politics that imbue relations between them and Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal discourses on authenticity. (p. 410)

When considering this work through an education perspective, I can see the power of how these personal stories can possibly expand the perception of Indigenous women. Indigenous women are the most vulnerable demographic in Canada (McIvor, 2004; Monchalin, 2016) and in many ways Indigenous women are continuously undervalued and unheard. This research is not just a response to whitestream perceptions, it is also an attempt to speak to our own communities and be heard. Education does not start in the system; it starts in our homes and in our families. The creation of this research study allowed for a pocket of time to exist, in which these women felt comfortable sharing some of the most vulnerable struggles they face. And consistently through and through is the need and demand for more of these sharing opportunities to be created. This was already part of the conversation put forward during the group session, and the women looked to one another for the support to do so, and communities can also help facilitate these opportunities to hear our women speak. Not only do I fully intend to be part of the creation of more opportunities, but I also intend to carry forward this research into my doctoral program which I have already begun. I am specifically interested in this spiritual, healing connection that
these women find in the land, and I want to let that conversation grow. Although I leave this research still uncertain about my own identity and my right to claim space as a mixed-blood Indigenous woman, these women gave me a sense of strength to at least continue to journey, to realizing once again that for every high, there is an equal low and that dance we do in relation to identity should not be something we choose to sit out on. After all, would that be something our great grandmothers would be proud of?
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Appendices

Appendix A: Consent Form

wakká:raien – i have a story: mixed-blood Indigenous women, identity and urban spaces

1. Who is conducting the study?

Principal Investigator:

Dr. Tracy Friedel, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

Co-Investigator(s):

Nahannee Schuitemaker, Master of Arts student in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Dr. Dory Nason, Department of First Nations and Indigenous Studies

Why this study is being conducted:

This research is being carried out as part of the requirements for the fulfillment of the Masters of Arts degree. This research will be used to write a final thesis which is a public document and accessible through the University of British Columbia.

2. Why should you take part in this study?

Indigenous people have had their identity defined and negotiated for them since contact and women have been particularly targeted through things such as the Indian Act and the forced introduction of a male-centred system. This study is being conducted to create a safe space for the topics of identity and connection to land can be explored by mixed-blood Indigenous women.

We wish to engage with the personal stories of mixed-blood Indigenous women in regards to
their sense of identity and their connection to land while living in an urban space. Your participation will help form a better understanding of the unique experiences urban mixed-blood Indigenous women encounter. You are being invited to participate because you fit the inclusion criteria for this study which includes:

- Identifies as a woman (transgender and two-spirit inclusive);
- Between the ages of 19-30 years;
- Mixed-blood Indigenous (Indigenous to Canada);
- Has little to no direct contact or access to the territories of your Indigenous ancestors;
- Living in an urban centre and has spent a significant portion of your life since knowing of and identifying with your Indigenous heritage; and
- Owns or has access to a functioning cell phone with a camera that produces clear photos for the duration of the study.

3. What happens if you agree to participate?

Once you agree to participate, this form will be signed and you will complete a short demographic survey that will help us have better understanding of you as one of our participants. You will also receive a package for the study which includes:

- A blank copy of this consent form for your records
- Photo release forms for your images (if any individuals appear in them)
- Guide sheet to help with taking photos and journaling
- Blank journal (to be collected and returned after the research is complete).

This initial meeting will take no more than about 30 minutes.
Following the first meeting, you will have 7-10 days to take photos and record any thoughts, feelings, or notes in your journal in relation to the prompts on the Guide Sheet. It is recommended that you spend about 2 hours over the 7-10 days, or 10-15 minutes per day on average to take photos and write in your journal. Prior to the pre-determined group meeting (final date and time to be arranged with all participants), you will select four final images that you wish to share in with the group and send them to us before the meeting. Photos can be edited, in colour or black and white. Photos must be a minimum of 2.4M (16:9) or 2048x1152 pixels in size. This is a standard size on most Android and IOS phones.

On the day of the group meeting, you will be asked to share your photos in a sharing circle format. You may present in any format you wish – speaking, song, poetry etc. Participants can also comment on, respond to, or ask questions about the photos being shared by others. Once all sharing is completed, you will be asked to give your photo a title or caption. You can do this on your own or have the others help you.

Once all photos are captioned, we will ask you and the other participants to identify what themes or topics that emerged or were spoken about that you feel were most important or relevant in the sharing. Once the group feels that this is complete, a wrap up of the session will take place in which you and the other participants will be asked about your thoughts and feelings around sharing what you learned in this study with the community as a way forward. The group meeting will be an afternoon session of about 4 hours and will be video and audio recorded for us to be able to analyze the data. Those who do not participate will not be video or audio recorded.

Lastly, once a final draft of the thesis has been written, you will be provided with a copy to review your content and give approval before moving forward. You will also have the
opportunity to meet with us for a 30 minute session to discuss the content and ask any questions (in person, by phone or video-call).

Your four final photos will be included as pieces of data in the thesis but you maintain ownership over them. Your journal will be collected for data analysis, and some parts may be used in the thesis. You give the final approval for all content relating to you and your journal will be returned to you once the thesis is successfully completed.

In summary, your participation is broken down as follows:

- Interview: about 30 mins.
- Photo-taking and journaling over 7-10 days: 2 hours over the 7-10 days or 10-15 minutes per day on average.
- Group meeting: One afternoon of about 4 hours.
- Follow up meeting for content approval: 30 minutes.

Total asked time: 7 hours

4. How will the results be shared?

The results of this study will be reported in a graduate thesis and may also be published in journal articles and books. This study is being carried out with individuals from the urban Indigenous community in the greater Vancouver area. One of the barriers to information is accessibility, therefore to help overcome this, the final thesis will be available on the researcher’s website for easy public access once it has been successfully defended. You will be provided a copy of the thesis by email and a link to the website URL.
5. Are there risks?

We do not think there is anything in this study that could be negative or hurt you. However, some of the topics or stories might upset you. As per cultural protocol, we will have traditional medicines such as cedar and sage available for smudging. You may also inform us if you are uncomfortable at any time.

6. Are there benefits?

Engaging in storytelling and sharing are educational tools within the Indigenous community and are known to help strengthen relationships and form connections. While we cannot guarantee any specific benefits, there is the possibility of the participants creating a stronger sense of community and friendships amongst each other.

7. Your identity

In Indigenous research, it is not uncommon for the participants to be identified. We will let you decide if you would like your first name used, or if you prefer to use an alternate name or pseudonym. Also, we encourage you and the other participants not to disclose identifying information regarding the discussion without the permission of the participant(s) concerned. However, we cannot control what is said outside the group setting and the research study itself.

Beyond the research team, no one else will have access to the video and audio recording that takes place during the group session. Your journals will also not be shared outside the research team. The audio and video files will be stored on a UBC hosted website that encrypts uploads/downloads and is password protected and secure. Files kept on a computer will be encrypted and password protected, following the standards required by the University of British Columbia. Your journals will be stored in a locked cabinet within a locked office until they are
returned to you. Files are required to be kept for 5 years following the research and after that
time they will be properly destroyed.

8. Will I get paid for participating?

At the conclusion of the group session, each participant will be offered a gift certificate. In
addition to this, the group session will have a meal provided.

9. Who can you contact if you have questions about the study?

If you have any questions or concerns about what we are asking of you, please contact the study
leader or one of the study staff. The names and telephone numbers are listed at the top of the
first page of this form.

10. Who can you contact if you have complaints or concerns about the study?

If you have any concerns or complaints about your rights as a research participant and/or your
experiences while participating in this study, contact the Research Participant Complaint Line in
the UBC Office of Research Ethics at 604-822-8598 or if long distance e-mail RSIL@ors.ubc.ca
or call toll free 1-877-822-8598.

11. Your consent and signature to participate

Taking part in this study is entirely up to you. You have the right to refuse to participate in this
study. If you decide to take part, you may choose to pull out of the study at any time without
giving a reason and without any negative impact to you.

> Your signature below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for
your own records.

> Your signature indicates that you consent to participate in this study.
Your signature indicates that you consent to be video and audio recorded, and photographed for the purpose of this research study.

Participant Signature  Date

Printed Name of the Participant signing above

Participant email
Shé:kon ~ Hello! You have received this information sheet because a mutual friend or community connection has identified you as potential participant for a research study being conducted by Nahannee Schuitemaker, an Indigenous graduate student at the University of British Columbia. The study is for a Master of Arts program and is required for successful completion of the degree.

The following is a brief description of the study and contact information if you wish to be a participant or want more information. Your name and contact information has not been shared with Nahannee or her research supervisors and participation is entirely optional.

About the Study

The word “wakká:raiien” comes from the Kanien’kéha (Mohawk) language meaning “I have a story” or “I have stories”. Using photography and storytelling, the study aims to create a safe space for mixed-blood Indigenous women in the greater Vancouver area to discuss their perspectives in relation to identity and connection to land. Understanding that there is a spectrum of experiences and stories and the study could become very large, we have created the following set of criteria for potential participants:

> Identifies as a woman (transgender and two-spirit inclusive);
> Between the ages of 19-30 years;
Mixed-blood Indigenous (Indigenous to Canada);
Has little to no direct contact or access to the territories of your Indigenous ancestors;
Living in an urban centre and has spent a significant portion of your life since knowing of and identifying with your Indigenous heritage; and
Owns or has access to a functioning cell phone with a camera that produces clear photos for the duration of the study.

Participants will be required to meet in person twice and complete part of the study between meetings on their own time. The study will involve the following steps:

1. Participants meet one-on-one with Nahannee to go over study details and sign consent form. A brief, optional survey is asked to be completed and the participant is given instructions to follow before the next meeting, as well as a package of materials which includes:
   - A blank copy of this consent form for your records
   - Photo release forms for your images (if any individuals appear in them)
   - Guide sheet to help with taking photos and journaling
   - Blank journal (to be collected and returned after the research is complete).
   This initial meeting will take no more than about 30 minutes.

2. Following the first meeting, you will have 7-10 days to take photos and record any thoughts, feelings, or notes in your journal in relation to the prompts on the Guide Sheet. It is recommended that you spend about 2 hours over the 7-10 days, or 10-15 minutes per day on average to take photos and write in your journal. Prior to the pre-determined group meeting (final date and time to be arranged with all participants), you will select
four final images that you wish to share in with the group and send them to us before the meeting.

3. On the day of the group meeting, you will be asked to share your photos in a sharing circle format. You may present in any format you wish – speaking, song, poetry etc. Participants can also comment on, respond to, or ask questions about the photos being shared by others. Once all sharing is completed, you will be asked to give your photo a title or caption. You can do this on your own or have the others help you.

Once all photos are captioned, we will ask you and the other participants to identify what themes or topics that emerged or were spoken about that you feel were most important or relevant in the sharing. Once the group feels that this is complete, a wrap up of the session will take place in which you and the other participants will be asked about your thoughts and feelings around sharing what you learned in this study with the community as a way forward. The group meeting will be an afternoon session of about 4 hours and will be video and audio recorded for us to be able to analyze the data. Those who do not participate will not be video or audio recorded.

4. Lastly, once a final draft of the thesis has been written, you will be provided with a copy to review your content and give approval before moving forward. You will also have the opportunity to meet with us for an optional 30-minute session to discuss the content and ask any questions (in person, by phone or video-call).

In summary, your participation is broken down as follows:
> Interview: about 30 mins.
> Photo-taking and journaling over 7-10 days: 2 hours over the 7-10 days or 10-15 minutes per day on average.
> Group meeting: One afternoon of about 4 hours.
> Follow up meeting for content approval: 30 minutes (optional).

Total asked time: 6.5 – 7 hours

If you feel you may be interested in participating or have more questions, please feel free to contact Nahannee Schuitemaker. You may also contact her research supervisor.

Contact Information

Nahannee Schuitemaker, Master of Arts student in Curriculum and Pedagogy

Dr. Tracy Friedel, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy
Appendix C: Consent To Use Of Image

wakká:raien – i have a story: mixed-blood Indigenous women, identity and urban spaces

The word “wakká:raien” comes from the Kanien’kéha (Mohawk) language meaning “I have a story” or “I have stories”. Using photography and storytelling, this study aims to create a safe space for mixed-blood Indigenous women in the greater Vancouver area to discuss their perspectives in relation to identity and connection to land. This study is being done by Nahannee Schuitemaker, an Indigenous graduate student at the University of British Columbia (UBC), and her supervisor, Dr. Tracy Friedel, an Indigenous faculty member at UBC.

You are being asked to sign this form because one of the participants would like to include your image as part of their story. If you are under the age of 19, you must have your parent or guardian sign on your behalf.

By signing this consent form, you give the research team of this study permission to use images that you appear in for the purposes of the research. The images will be used in the following ways:

> Shown during the group session among participants in a Sharing Circle format;
> Included within the researcher’s thesis, which will be available online; and
> Included within presentations related to the research (i.e. thesis defense)

If you have questions about this study or the use of your image within it, please contact Nahannee Schuitemaker. You may also contact her research supervisor.

Contact Information
Nahannee Schuitemaker, Master of Arts student in Curriculum and Pedagogy
Dr. Tracy Friedel, Department of Curriculum and Pedagogy

I am 19 years of age or older and am of clear mind to sign on my own behalf. I have read this form and understand the ways in which the images will be used. By signing, I give permission for my image to be used for the purposes of this study.

___________________________   _________________________________
Name (please print)                        Signature

_______________________________   _________________________________
Email address or phone number             Date

_______________________________   _________________________________
Name of parent/guardian (please print)    Signature of parent/guardian
Appendix D: Demographic Survey

wakká:raien – i have a story: mixed-blood Indigenous women, identity and urban spaces

Thank you for participating in our study. The purpose of this short survey is to collect general information for all the women participating in the research. We ask questions relating to how you identify with your Indigenous roots (ie. “First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Indigenous, etc”) to help compare to the existing literature on identity and the variables used to determine identity in different situations. Similarly, we ask questions about your connection to your ancestral territory for the same reason of comparing against existing literature. This information is in no way used to judge you or your story.

In the rest of the study you have the choice to use your name, however, this portion of the research will remain anonymous. All questions are optional but we encourage you to consider responding to all, as with such a small research study, the additional data will be helpful when comparing against larger studies.

1. What is your year of birth? _ _ _ _

2. How many years have you lived in an urban centre (i.e. a large city like Vancouver, Edmonton, Toronto etc)? Select one.
3. How long have you lived in the greater Vancouver area?

☐ ≤5 years  
☐ 6-10 years  
☐ More than 10 years

4. What term(s) do you use most frequently to define yourself? Select all that apply.

☐ Aboriginal  
☐ First Nations  
☐ Métis  
☐ Inuit  
☐ Indigenous  
☐ Traditional word (please specify word and which language):

_________________  

☐ Indian  
☐ Native American/Canadian  
☐ Other (please specify):_____________________________
5. How long have you actively identified as Indigenous? Select one.

☐ ≤5 years
☐ 6-10 years
☐ More than 10 years
☐ All my life

6. What is your Indigenous nation/community/lineage?

_____________________________________________________________________

7. Which additional lineage(s) do you wish to list? (ie. French, Dutch, Jamaican, etc.)

_____________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________

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Appendix E: Sharing Circle Protocol

wakká:raien – i have a story: mixed-blood Indigenous women, identity and urban spaces

For the group session in this study, a Sharing Circle format will be used to maintain a culturally appropriate approach. Sharing Circles can be facilitated in variety of ways thus impacting the protocols associated with them. For this study, the following points will be observed as protocol for the Sharing Circle in the group session:

> The participants and researcher(s) will be seated in a circle and all individuals will have the opportunity to introduce themselves to the group.

> An item such as a feather or rock will be passed around to indicate who is sharing at the time without interruption.

> The person holding this item can share in whatever way they feel comfortable (i.e. song, storytelling, poetry, etc.). They will be encouraged to speak from their heart.

> Whatever is shared is received with equal respect. All voices and stories are valid.

> The other participants in the circle have the responsibility to be attentive, respectful and considerate of the person sharing. No phones are allowed in the circle and must be on silent during the session.

> The Sharing Circle will move in a clockwise direction. A participant can choose to pass on their turn and have the talking item (rock or feather) come around to them later.
> Participants can ask for medicines to be brought into the circle if they feel the need for them.

> After the photos are shared, the Sharing Circle will be opened up for anyone to comment or ask others questions regarding what was shared.

> That which is shared during the circle will remain within the circle to maintain respect and trust among the group. All content will be approved by participants for the final thesis.
Appendix F: Guide Sheet

wakká:raien – i have a story: mixed-blood Indigenous women, identity and urban spaces

These questions, sentences, and words are to be used as guides when considering what photos to capture, what to reflect on in your journal, and ultimately which final four images you will share with the group. You do not need to use the entire list and are not restricted to use only these prompts.

I feel most connected when ...

The place I have a sense of belonging is ...

Land

What does it mean to me to be Indigenous?

What does it mean to be to be a mixed-blood Indigenous woman?

History

Home is ...

My favourite place here is ...

Identity

Being Indigenous in an urban place means ...

The next seven generations