

Running head: OHITIKA CHADE WIYA

Ohitika Chade Wiya – Brave Hearted Woman:

A Narrative of Recovery, Reclamation and Renewal of an Indigenous woman's body image

by

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### **Abstract**

Body image research with Indigenous women typically focuses on the concept of health and their understandings of health. However, it is necessary to acknowledge how Indigenous women's body image has been shaped through heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism. The purpose of this autoethnography was to understand Indigenous women's body image. This study has been guided through an Indigenous perspective that draws from my own Indigenous background as a Nakota and the theoretical framework of Indigenous feminism(s). The guiding research question was 'how can we create a safe space for Indigenous women to seek empowerment and find opportunity to share their own body image narratives of heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence?' Typically, in our society when individuals speak up about the violence they experience, they are victim-blamed and shunned. When Indigenous women experience colonial or sexual violence (e.g. missing and murdered Indigenous women), they are silenced. I used epiphanies to capture these experiences and to challenge the conceptualization of Indigenous bodies within the biomedical and mainstream media discourse. I drew from remembered moments that have significantly impacted my body image experiences. I created a three-part collection of poetry and prose to capture my thoughts, feelings, and emotions from racism, sexism, and discrimination growing up in Edmonton, Alberta. By conducting an autoethnography, the project was framed within a cultural landscape that acknowledges the history, the stories, and experiences dealing with settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy that also satisfied my ethics in Indigenous research.

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### **Dedications**

“In the end, granddaughter, our body is the only house we will every truly own. It is the one thing we truly own... What is more, in the end, command of it will only amount to the sacred right of choice” (Maracle, 1996, p. 27).

This thesis is dedicated to my late brother who held so much spiritual knowledge and connection even in world that no longer holds spirituality as important or healing. You may have left us physically, but I will always carry your spirit within my own body. I love you. This is also for every person who has been violently killed, hurt, and harmed by settler colonial and heteropatriarchal sexual violence. You are not damaged. You are not deficient. You are worthy even in the darkest and sadness moments in your life. Our bodies are strong. Strong with diabetes. Strong after weight gain. Strong with heaviness. Strong after childbirth. Strong with alcohol use. Strong after heartbreak. Strong with drug use. Strong after assault. We are not wasted. We are not sick. We are not victims. We are more powerful than they like to think. I believe you. I support you. I love you.

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## Introduction

This thesis was initially conceptualized when I took a one-day women's self-defense class on campus. Not only did this course involve physical activity, it created a safe space for women to talk about sexual violence they had/have experienced in their lives without judgment, without harm, or without consequence. At the end of the day, I felt I embodied a sense of love and respect and, through my body, I found an outlet to express empowerment and strength. These concepts and feelings are something that I often have difficulty experiencing in my everyday life because the way society – my peers, family, partners, and mass media- have constantly told me that there is only one way to express my Indigeneity or womanhood. I have also felt this strength and empowerment in ceremonies that are meant for us, Indigenous people, but outside the safe realm of this spiritual connection, it can be hard to be an Indigenous woman. In our white, hetero world, patriarchy teaches us that women's bodies are to be objectified, to only be seen as sexual objects and women must be cognizant of this in order to receive the acceptance or validation from their peers, romantic partners and in general, men (Wolf, 1990). Often in media or advertisements we see women being objectified as they model fashion and products. These women depict a “standard female body” but none of these images have allowed me to feel emotionally or physically okay with my body. Furthermore, I am reminded through the character of Pocahontas, a Disney icon and depiction of an Indigenous woman, that Indigenous women who wish to survive must be pacified, assimilated, and beautiful all at the same time to be able to live.

As someone who identifies as an Indigenous cis<sup>1</sup>-woman, specifically a Nakota wiya (woman), the standard female body has also shown me that there is one way to be a ‘good citizen’ on maka chî wîda (homeland) by internalizing self-hate of my own Indigenous and female body. I often feel like I need to assimilate within the colonial framework of Canada by being particularly conscious of how I behave, act, and present myself to Canadians. It is often the ‘white, middle-upper class body’ that I see being represented as the ‘good citizen’ and telling me that we, Indigenous people, must also obtain these “white” passing qualities.

We, as Indigenous women, do not realize how often we cast off these experiences as unimportant; these experiences are something that wears us down silently. We often just ignore or reproduce these stereotypical and colonial images, insults, and words “representing” the Indigenous woman (e.g. accepting the image of Pocahontas or enforcing ideals of a heteronormative Indigenous woman). In my Nakota (familial) epistemology, our stories, our narratives, are passed down by my ancestors, and subsequently through my mother. I have been taught that Indigenous women had respect, dignity, and importance amongst their family and community. The hardship and violence Indigenous women experience today can be analytically drawn from the impacts of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy in the daily lives of Indigenous women.

After participating in the self-defense course, the original intent of my thesis was to develop a culturally relevant, self-defense program for Indigenous girls and women. This was a major task to undertake within a master’s thesis project. I also quickly realized that to understand the complexities Indigenous women have regarding their body image and how that impacts their well-being, I had to take a closer look at the everyday practices of Indigenous women regarding

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<sup>1</sup> To be cisgender, or cis-woman, indicates that you identify with your assigned at birth gender. For example, I was born given the ‘F’ marker, so I was raised to be a socially constructed woman. To use this term, originating from cisgender, is an inclusive practice to acknowledge that we cannot assume our gender or other people’s gender.



their body image. So I decided on a qualitative study of interviews and collecting stories of Indigenous women's experiences with body image. I had met with a prominent community member, who volunteers regularly for community events and was raised in the community (versus me, who was raised in Edmonton), and she rejected the idea of doing such a project in the community. I respected the decision because I am not in a position to push my research interests in a community I did not grow up in and can be seen as outsider. At the same time, I have also realized that these stories are not mine to document. I was in constant struggle with being a researcher and being accountable to my Indigenous community. I found myself frequently asking, "How can I take these women's stories of violence, of resilience, and keep it in a colonial institution?" Or if I go to conferences, "Why would I share these stories with a predominant, white/colonial audience that may not have grounding in colonialism or feminism?" Is it worth it to debate, to argue, to enlighten individuals with such real impacts and actions Indigenous women experience on a daily basis through my words/descriptions? I was in a very similar experience most Indigenous researchers find themselves in when conducting their own research within their own communities (see Kovach, 2009). And why should I feel guilty for questioning this when historically, research on Indigenous peoples is grounded in exploiting and keeping Indigenous peoples only as objects of study.

I finally decided to write a personal narrative on my experiences with body image, which conscientiously and ethically satisfies my values and beliefs as an Indigenous researcher. In this view, I have practiced what Indigenous researcher Wilson (2001) stated on conducting research, "you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research" (emphasis in original, p. 177). By answering to all my relations, I have also connected with my cultural teachings and lessons to draw in their perspectives of body image. This intimate focus also moves away from

the construction of Indigenous women as “vulnerable victims” and seeing Indigenous women, such as myself, as survivors. I can also attest that the Indigenous women I know are the most resilient and strongest women, despite all the struggles, heartache, and violence perpetuated against them. Thus, my thesis is shaped by these experiences, and how these experiences relate to other self-identifying Indigenous women including friends, family, acquaintances and myself.

## Chapter 1: Literature Review

Telling stories is a historical and ancestral practice for teaching life lessons and values within my Nakota culture, along with many other Indigenous groups. The narrative about Indigenous women has been typically destructive and used in a way to dismantle and delegitimize Indigenous women's agency, subjectivity, and knowledge (Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Jiwani, 2009; Mithlo, 2008). However, many Indigenous scholars and writers (e.g. Lee Maracle; Marie Campbell; Tracey Lindberg; Val Napoleon) have written counter-narratives as a way to reclaim their own socio-cultural narratives about their respective subjectivities. There is also ample literature (e.g. Anderson, 2011; Green, 2007; Lawrence, 2004; Yee, 2004) that has explored how settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy affected and interfered with Indigenous women's roles and responsibilities in their respective communities and how this colonial and heteropatriarchy legacy impacts Indigenous women in Canadian society today. There is also literature (e.g., LaRoque, 2010; Lawrence, 2004; Young & Nadeau, 2005) critiquing how settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy impacts the way Indigenous people perceive themselves within the larger colonial Canadian context and how that relates to their overall well-being. There is an absence of scholarly research, however, that contributes to an understanding of how the body image of self-identifying Indigenous women impacts their overall well-being and construction of self. I have broken down this literature review into four parts that outline: body image research with Indigenous women or by Indigenous women; gaps in body image research focused on Indigenous women; research and reports on colonial gender-based violence; and my chosen theoretical guiding perspective(s).

## **Body Image**

Body image research is vast and diverse, and has been studied within a variety of contexts such as physical health, body weight issues, positive psychology, emotional health, and viewing bodies as socio-cultural constructions (e.g., McHugh, Coppola, & Sabiston, 2014; McHugh & Kowalski, 2011; Shea, Poudrier, Chad, & Atcheynum, 2011; Shea et al., 2013). Typically, body image can be generally defined as “[encompassing] one’s body-related self-perceptions and self-attitudes, including thoughts, beliefs, feelings, and behaviours” (Cash, 2004, pp.1-2). Cash (2004) further explains, “body image refers to the multifaceted psychological experience of embodiment, especially but not exclusively one’s physical appearance” (p.1). Furthermore, body image is not a static condition or feeling. It is a process, which Cash (2004) argues can be impacted by life altering experiences such as injuries, or diseases and naturally occurring through life stages. Body image research has evolved over time to include a wide range of topics such as body size, body weight, body shape, attractiveness, self-esteem, gender, diverse cultural perspectives, eating disorders, body dysmorphic disorders, mood disorders, exercise, physical activity, and diseases (Cash, 2004).

In body image research with Indigenous people, there is no Indigenous word or description to conceptualize body image from an Indigenous worldview. Despite the abundance of body image research, there is also little research that is focused on body image through an Indigenous woman’s perspective or research written by an Indigenous woman (McHugh & Kowalski, 2011). Body image scholars (e.g., Cash 2004, Tiggmann, 2011) have called for more research that focuses on the body image experiences of those from socio-ethnic diverse groups. With the research that does focus on Indigenous women, there are conflicting findings on body image (Shea et al., 2011). For instance, some research has focused on negative body image

experiences for Indigenous peoples within the context of obesity and obesity related chronic diseases (e.g. Marchessault, 1999; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Perry, & Casey, 1999). However, more recently, some researchers have found that Indigenous women have positive body image experiences (e.g. Fleming et al., 2006; McHugh et al., 2014; Shea et al., 2013; Shea et al., 2011). Positive body image and qualitative body image research with Indigenous women is relatively new, but showing insightful discussions.

In positive body image literature, McHugh et al.'s (2014) body pride study highlights young Indigenous women's acceptance of their body is influenced by their culture and subsequently, connected to their identity. Through the process of colonization, Indigenous peoples' culture and identity have gone through violent acts of elimination (e.g. residential schools), which still affects the health status of Indigenous peoples today (Loopie Reading & Wien, 2009). Thus, integration of Indigenous culture and reaffirming their Indigeneity is an important aspect in terms of health status and understanding Indigenous peoples' experiences of their bodies beyond western ideals of the body (Poudrier & Kennedy, 2008; Shea et al., 2011; Shea et al., 2013). In Shea et al.'s (2011) photovoice study, 20 young Indigenous women, between the ages 13-16 years, were interviewed and five themes (i.e., healthy/unhealthy foods, community, relationships, physical activity, additional healthy behaviours) emerged from the qualitative study that also emphasized the importance of culture (e.g. medicine wheel teachings) and how culture relates to increased mental and emotional health. In Fleming et al.'s (2006) work, the authors identify four Indigenous female participants, between the ages 14-18 years of age, as wanting a sense of belonging. The same research project identified that the participants did not view their bodies as negative as previous research has suggested. Young Indigenous women cannot, and should not, be combined with young non-Indigenous women as a whole

group to deal with body image experiences as there are gaps in dealing with settler colonialism when they do so (Fleming et al., 2006).

Body image research with Indigenous peoples is typically quantitative, which becomes problematic, as fully understanding the impacts of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy is typically not represented within the findings. For example, previous quantitative body image research indicates there is high body dissatisfaction, psychosocial concerns, and weight control behaviours amongst young Indigenous women (e.g. Gittelsohn et al., 1996; Neumark-Sztainer, Story, Resnick, & Blum, 1997). Although this research provides insight into the prevalence of such issues, it provides little insight into the underlying reasons of why such issues may arise. Many quantitative studies have also focused on children, including males and females. For example, in Willow, Ridley, Raine, and Maximova's (2013) study they used quantitative measures such as anthropometrics, pictorial and verbal measures of physical appearance satisfaction, and psychological self-concept with Cree children. Their results indicated the children were generally dissatisfied with their physical appearance; however, they did conclude that these results were influenced by mass media. In this study, Willow et al. used biomedical knowledge and model to represent how the children understood their bodies. This suggests that their analysis comes from a very western, colonial way of thinking about how these children feel about their bodies. In a similar study by Gittelsohn et al. (1996), this research focused on body shape perceptions and its health implications in an Oji-Cree community (ages ranged from 10 to 50+ years) in Northern Ontario. The study had implemented a questionnaire and used the Stunkard scale (1980) to illustrate their perceptions of their bodies. Such measures and the results do not account for the various socio-cultural factors that impact their experiences.

Qualitative research methods can shed light on the lived and everyday experiences of Indigenous women that help form their own understandings of their bodies within the settler colonial and heteropatriarchal framework. Examples of such qualitative research can be seen in McHugh et al. (2014), Shea et al. (2011), and Shea et al. (2013). A narrative approach may provide a unique opportunity to provide an intimate understanding of Indigenous women's body image experiences rather than the typical representation of body dissatisfaction and negative connotations of their bodies that are often the focus of quantitative studies. I have yet to find any narrative studies that explore and describe body image experiences from an Indigenous women's perspective that emphasizes how heteropatriarchal and settler colonialism impacts body image and women's resiliency to its effects. Such research can provide crucial insights into better understanding how Indigenous women's everyday lives impact and promote body image experiences.

Body image work has typically examined the Indigenous body through their negative health experiences rather than positive experiences. McHugh and Kowalski (2011) argued that when describing Indigenous bodies within the public health discourse, the focus is usually on health concerns related to issues with obesity, body weight, and diet. Such narrow perspectives provide a limited understanding of Indigenous women's body image. Both settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy play a role in how Indigenous women view their bodies, and subsequently, their whole entire being. In Shea et al.'s (2011) photovoice study the young Indigenous women provide a narrative that reflects how both settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy constructs competitiveness and judgment of what constitutes a "good, cleanly body" (p. 48). The young women emphasize the concepts of cleanliness (e.g. good hygiene – not looking sick or unhealthy), purity (e.g. being non-sexual versus "sleeping around"), and promote a sober life

without contextualizing the complexities of intergenerational impacts of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy (p. 48-50). The overemphasis of a clean and healthy lifestyle can still be detrimental to Indigenous women's emotional and mental health as it can be seen as being critical or judgmental without understanding individual circumstances (Anderson, 2011; Lupton, 1996). The discourse of health and health promotion from a western, colonial point of view also colonizes traditional Indigenous lifestyle (like eating wild game or harvesting plants and berries) or other factors impacting their health (intergenerational impacts of settler colonialism like sexual abuse or income or food availability) as it gets convoluted when research puts a strong emphasis on obesity and obesity-related diseases in Indigenous communities (Earle, 2011). In other body image studies (e.g., McHugh et al., 2014), young Indigenous women also emphasized that too much body pride can lead to being negatively judged by others, without analyzing how heteropatriarchy plays into creating competitiveness between girls.

When speaking about Indigenous culture within body image research, it is important to ask how body image experiences are influenced by Christianity and/or settler colonialism, as numerous body image studies have cited culture as being important to positive body image (e.g., Fleming et al., 2006; McHugh et al., 2014; Shea et al., 2011). However, it is also important to ask if culture can be critiqued in this sense without delegitimizing Indigenous women's body image experiences? McHugh and Kowalski (2011) argue that we, society and researchers, should be asking 'how can we work with young women to develop strategies to manage their body image concerns?' Organizations such as the Native Youth Sexual Health Network have addressed issues facing the body, like sexuality and reproductive justice, and how violence is connected to the land and their bodies. But they are limited in their capacity to reach a wider audience since their organization is small; community funded only, and can only enter



communities by invitation. Furthermore, the topic of the impacts of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy on the body has yet to be thoroughly researched within body image literature.

### **Embodied Violence**

In non-body image literature, many Indigenous women scholars and writers (e.g., Allen, 1991; Anderson, 2011; Green, 2007; LaRoque, 2010; Lindberg, 2004), have explored within their respective works how settler colonialism interferes with the roles and responsibilities of Indigenous women that were integral to community development. Settler colonialism has made it difficult for Indigenous women to maintain their roles, respect, and importance (Anderson, 2011). It also removes and disregards Indigenous women from positions of power, replaces roles and responsibilities with western, heteropatriarchal gender roles. With the loss of the land, Indigenous women's bodies are rendered invisible within settler colonialism (Arvin, Tuck, & Morrill, 2013; Green, 2007; Million, 2009). Settler colonialism has shaped and confined Indigenous women as sexualized and racialized objects that are produced and reproduced throughout Canadian culture and can often be seen in symbolic representations through the Pocahontas-squaw complex, or the bad mother, or the impoverished sex worker (Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2009). In either of these symbolic representations, Indigenous women's bodies are recognized as territory or property to be controlled, to be bought, or to be disregarded (Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2009). Within settler colonialism, Indigenous bodies also become a new way of existing and presenting itself, such as the definition of an "Indian" within the Indian Act and the 'othering' of Indigenous bodies (LaRoque, 2010). The concept of sovereignty or self-determination almost becomes non-existent within these colonial and heteropatriarchal structures. This is an important aspect to consider when understanding how settler colonial and heteropatriarchal violence becomes an embodied experience. This embodied experience reflects

the way Indigenous women see their own bodies while removing them and being removed by others, from their traditional roles and responsibilities in their communities.

These same scholars (e.g., Anderson; Green) also argue that there is a need to incorporate Indigenous cultural teachings as ways of healing and finding a sense of belonging and identity. This process of decolonization can counter balance these narratives and structures that create shame or consciousness of their different, *Indigenous*, bodies. Anderson (2000) describes this process of decolonization as being able to recognize that “how you live your life is ceremony,” and in this context, owning your body and viewing it as ceremony (p. 27). Much of Anderson’s (2011) work has drawn from an Indigenous perspective when looking at Indigenous women’s roles. She shares knowledge she has gained from Cree, Métis, and Anishinaabe Elders to represent how important it is to recognize women’s roles in Indigenous culture as they provide a multitude of knowledge and responsibilities, such as conducting puberty rites ceremonies, women’s health, and gender work roles. These roles and ceremonies can be shared through the process of storytelling. Being able to tell your own stories and hear these stories is important to consider because Indigenous women, through colonization, have lost much of their roles and responsibilities, which mean what was vital to their socio-cultural familial structures. Indigenous women carried along stories and teachings that taught values of loving oneself and their bodies (Anderson, 2011). To take care of their bodies was an important aspect because it meant they were able in turn to take care of their family and others for their survival. These values can be translated to contemporary life as Indigenous girls and women struggle with heteropatriarchal settler colonial values that are deeply embedded in our society. By creating their own narratives, Indigenous women can continue to construct their own stories of love, which will help attain autonomy over their bodies, than have settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy decide body and

beauty standards. Indigenous women can help with dismantling and disrupting settler colonial and heteropatriarchal narratives.

There are many stories to tell and artistic works can be another form of expression of dismantling or disrupting heteropatriarchal and settler colonial oppression. Artworks by Indigenous women (e.g., Christi Belcourt; Rebecca Belmore; Erin Konsmo; Angela Sterritt) have focused on settler colonialism and heteropatriarchal oppression and violence that is reflected against Indigenous bodies, Indigeneity, gender, and the land. Such artwork diverges and differentiates in style and expression from each other, but is similar in that it describes social and political injustices of Indigenous women/peoples. Their artwork can be seen as a method of being politically vocal and creating awareness on colonial, gender based violence, and its legacies, but also their resiliency represented through their art (Spears, 2005).

Indigenous women can also be seen organizing several national rallies/marches each year such as Stolen Sisters through Amnesty International and Sister in Spirit through Native Women's Association of Canada, and community-based projects. These focuses exemplify how concepts of Indigenous self-determination and sovereignty tie into recognizing gendered concerns and rights, but can also be understood as decolonizing practices and acts of resurgence (Shea et al., 2013; Shea et al., 2011; Spears, 2005; Young & Nadeau, 2005). These artistic projects and Indigenous organizations that focus on colonial and gender-based violence also assert how Indigenous female bodies continue to be racialized and sexualized through settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy (Spears, 2005; Young & Nadeau, 2005). It also represents the need to dismantle and disrupt criminalization, shame and stigma of Indigenous bodies, but also highlights the different concepts of beauty and bodies. Indigenous women's bodies are represented as embodying colonial and heteropatriarchal violence.

There have also been numerous reports (e.g. RCAP, 1996; Highway of Tears symposium recommendation report, 2006; Oppal report, 2012; various Native Women's Association of Canada reports) that collect recommendations on ways to dismantle colonial, gender-based violence that the Indigenous population face in Canada. Despite these reports indicating the need to integrate educational strategies, increase support services in Indigenous communities, and increase engagement with youth, Indigenous girls and women still face violence at rates higher than non-Indigenous women and to the point their lives are at stake (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010). In Canada, there are over 1200 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls and often these girls and women are cast in the victim-blaming discourse as their Indigenous bodies have been sexualized and criminalized for centuries (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; Oppal Report, 2012; RCMP, 2014<sup>2</sup>). Rape culture, heteropatriarchy, and settler colonialism within Canada also makes it harder for women to come forward when they experience sexual violence (Jiwani, 2006; Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010). Furthermore, dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories provoke the violence being perpetuated against their bodies and land (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; Yee, 2011). This is an important aspect to consider as embodied violence has become integrated in Indigenous women's lives, to the point that their lives are taken as seen with missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada. There is research looking into these issues (e.g. Native Women's Association of Canada, 2010; Oppal Report; RCMP, 2014), but the colonial, sexual, gender-based violence still exists and high proportions of Indigenous girls and women experience violence.

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<sup>2</sup> Although the RCMP report (2014) was able to provide statistics for the amount of MMIWG cases the RCMP is investigating, the report is still contentious since it makes problematic conclusions as why Indigenous women experience violence, such as, victim blaming. Despite their efforts, the report and the people behind the report suggest Indigenous women are at fault for the violence they experience.

Discourses in body image literature and the works of Indigenous women academics, scholars, and artists' provide insight into the unique experiences Indigenous women face in Canada. However, there is a need to explore how these experiences have become embodied and shape the way Indigenous women view their bodies and affect their overall well-being. Such exploration is possible by blending storytelling with a critique of heteropatriarchal settler colonialism violence. Body image literature with Indigenous women emphasizes body dissatisfaction (the negative), without understanding or acknowledging how Indigenous women reclaim their bodies through decolonization (reclamation of culture). In order to understand their unique experiences, it is important to emphasize the use of qualitative methodologies to gain insight on the complex issues (the effects of heteropatriarchal settler colonialism) and positive body image experiences (Fleming et al., 2006).

### **Guiding Perspective**

This study has been guided through an Indigenous perspective that draws from my own Indigenous background as a Nakota and the theoretical framework of Indigenous feminism(s). I pluralize feminism(s) in such way to signify an individual person or community will have different and varying definitions and practices of feminism. Furthermore, feminism can take on the characteristics of other critical theoretical frameworks such as radical feminism, ecofeminism, and socialist feminism.

Many Indigenous women and academics have cited that there have been problems with the settler colonial feminist critiques and analysis, as they often leave out the experiences of women of colour and other genders (Arvin et al., 2013; Green, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Williams & Koonsmo, 2011). The settler colonial feminist critiques and analyzes how heteropatriarchy influences the socio-cultural, political, and economical experiences of women,

which is the source of oppression that women experience within the heteropatriarchal framework (Arvin et al., 2013; Green, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). It is this settler colonial feminism(s) that have often universalized the experiences Indigenous women face in Canadian society (Lindberg, 2004; Yee, 2011). This is also another reason many Indigenous women do not align themselves with feminism(s) as it carries so much stigma and discrimination (Green, 2007; Ross, 2009). The critique and analysis often ignores the impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous women and how it offers a certain amount of privilege to their *whiteness* (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Here, *whiteness* is about privilege and about how certain privileges, particularly white settler women's privilege, dominates over others, such as Indigenous women (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Furthermore, violence against Indigenous women is fundamentally a consequence of colonization, as colonization is an act of dispossessing and displacing people from their traditional territories. If we do not critically analyze violence against Indigenous women and look at the historical context of colonization and how that has been worked within our institutions (e.g. media, education, health care system, & justice system), then Indigenous women remain in a space that is structurally and deeply rooted in a history of violence (Jiwani, 2006, p.5-6). This same violence is embodied and is carried out in different ways for Indigenous women like through their body image.

Various critical theoretical frameworks can dismiss or overlook the experiences of Indigenous women, especially when written from a white, settler scholar (Million, 2009). These theories miss the critical analysis of settler colonialism and the privileges that come with colonizing certain knowledge with white supremacy based within western epistemologies (Million, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Furthermore, Arvin et al. (2013) argues Indigenous feminism(s) is a field that produces important insights and analyses for gender and women's

studies. This research was grounded in Indigenous feminism(s) and has documented the settler colonial and heteropatriarchal experiences that Indigenous women have encountered historically, as well as how these experiences have been perpetuated within Indigenous women's everyday lives, communities, and within Canadian society. Such experiences are then carried through Indigenous women's bodies and how they learn how to love, care and respect their bodies.

The term Indigenous feminism(s) is seen as a relatively new concept and contentious within academia, research, and with Indigenous communities. Several articles explain how Indigenous feminism(s) draws from the socio-cultural background of each Indigenous woman or community rather than being subject to one specific definition (see Anderson, 2011; Green, 2007). This produces different meanings within the theoretical framework and becomes tailored to the specific needs of that woman or community. Indigenous feminism(s) should not be understood as homogenous or static and should not be understood as something Indigenous women had recently taken up within a post-colonial context. I argue as something that has conceptually pre-existed within Indigenous communities to ensure respect and uphold importance for Indigenous femininities (Altamirano- Jiménez, 2014). Thus, framing Indigenous feminism(s) within this research project was essential to understand the unique experiences of Indigenous women regarding not only their bodies, but also how settler colonialism offers different social, cultural, familial, linguistic, and institutional experiences amongst Indigenous women. In doing so, I have centered myself within the research from my Indigenous, Nakota background and take on those qualities to help guide my analysis.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to understand Indigenous women's body image. The project was focused on regaining cultural and ancestral memory of Indigenous women's roles and

responsibilities, specifically from my own Nakota background and experiences, while making room for Indigenous girls and women to express themselves in safer spaces that does not promote hetero-patriarchal and colonial values of Indigenous women's bodies. The guiding research question was 'how can we create a safe space for Indigenous women to seek empowerment and find opportunity to share their own body image narratives of hetero-patriarchal and colonial violence?' By conducting an autoethnography, the project was framed within a cultural landscape that acknowledges the history, the stories, and experiences dealing with settler colonialism and patriarchy. This research represents a need for Indigenous girls and women who want to reconnect with their cultural teachings, and provides insight into understanding how to break down those hetero-patriarchal values that oppresses Indigenous female bodies.



## **Chapter 2: Method**

This research represents an opportunity for me, a Nakota woman within the academy, to share the meanings of my own understandings of decolonization and resurgence in relation to Indigenous women's body image. I acknowledge and recognize the power and the importance in creating a decolonial, Indigenous feminist praxis through my own narrative. I also acknowledge that my knowledge and analysis comes from my own understanding from my familial background teachings and beliefs. I utilized autoethnography, specifically an autobiographical study interwoven with poetry and photographs. I provided an overview of Indigenous/decolonizing methodologies and described how they have shaped my research paradigm. Research with Indigenous peoples has been problematic, whereby the voices and knowledge of Indigenous peoples' have been exploited within academia. As such, Indigenous/decolonizing methodologies and accompanying ethics are central to my research. I am committed to engaging in research that does not further colonize Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous women's experiences.

### **Ethical Considerations - Indigenous/Decolonizing Methodologies**

Research conducted from within western institutions, like universities, have always been and remain to be a contentious issue within Indigenous communities. Academic researchers rely on the presumption that the results or data can speak for others or have a way of giving back. Even qualitative research by non-Indigenous researchers can “[serve] as a metaphor for colonial knowledge for power and for truth” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.4). Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), potentially the most recognized researcher who has written on decolonizing research methodologies, has stated “the word itself, ‘research,’ is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary” (xi). Research has shown to be exploitative and, broadly

speaking, continues to undermine the production of Indigenous knowledge. As such, many Indigenous peoples remain cautious and are reluctant to share their knowledge and stories. Drawing from decolonizing methodologies and Indigenous methodologies are crucial steps that can make research relevant to Indigenous participants and people.

Research within a decolonizing framework is about resisting, recovery, and renewal (Smith, 2012). Smith (2012) states that decolonizing methodologies offers a critical reframing of the way researchers usually think and talk about research, whereby research is contextualized from a historical lens to guide researchers. It is important to remove the power structures embedded within research as well. Smith (2012) further explains that to allow space for Indigenous knowledge, Indigenous peoples can begin to recover stories of the past. The language and cultural values that tie these past stories together can help inform Indigenous peoples in the present. Like decolonizing methodologies, Kovach (2009) offers a similar framework for Indigenous methodologies that focuses on Indigenous epistemologies. Such epistemologies are relational and focus on the reflexivity and responsibility of the researcher. Reflexivity and responsibility are also qualities of ethics, but as an Indigenous researcher it is important to constantly reflexively ask: “Is the research goal manipulative or helpful for my community? Is the methodology respectful to culture and community? Do the methods meet cultural protocols? What are collectivist ethical considerations? Who is driving the research and what is the purpose?” (Kovach, 2005, p. 26). Such questions are considered while the researcher works to understand and prepare for the cultural protocols of the community or the participant (Kovach, 2009). Furthermore, Kovach (2005) also reinforces the need to question whether one’s epistemology is beneficial, if it works for the common good, how much knowledge is shared, and what knowledge needs to be kept for just the Indigenous community.

The above-mentioned questions are important ethical considerations to reflexively ask by researchers who are doing work with or around Indigenous peoples. Brown and Strega (2005) also emphasized the importance of looking at research from the margins and not *on* the marginalized, and acknowledging how previous research about Indigenous peoples stifles and ignores their knowledge and truth-making. King (2003) further argued that if we want a different ethic, then we must tell a different story. From this understanding and within the context of this research proposal, research from the margins is research by, for and with them/us/me, which allows for “making room” or “taking back spaces” that can help dismantle and disrupt hegemonic and dominating narratives about Indigenous women and their bodies. Critical, personal narratives are already political, healing, and transformative as they become sites of resistance for the narrators or autoethnographers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008, p.4). Furthermore, Smith (2012) considers healing and transformation to be a key principle or element in conducting Indigenous research (p. 117).

### **Autoethnography**

Autoethnography is a combination of autobiography and ethnography that emerged in response to many scholars seeking an alternative method to resist colonial and sterile research that often exploits the culture and its people (Ellis, Adams, and Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography emerged as a way to produce meaningful and evocative research grounded in personal experiences when, most often, these experiences are shrouded in silence (Ellis et al., 2011). As stated by Ellis et al. (2011), this form of research can allow us to better understand and empathize with others who are different from us.

The nature of ethnography is studying the culture of certain groups to better understand the practice of the culture’s common/shared and learned patterns of behaviours, values, beliefs,

and language (Ellis et al., 2011). Autoethnography allows for both personal and cultural critique (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014), and seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, 2004). Ellis and Bochner (2000) described how an autoethnography researcher must be able to look outward on social and cultural aspects of their personal experience, and then look inward acknowledging and exposing the self that may refract, resist, or move through cultural interpretations. Thus, autoethnography turns the gaze on the self and how the autoethnographer researches their relations to others and/or society (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). There are different autoethnography methods, such as narrative ethnographies, reflexive ethnographies, and personal narratives; however, I specifically decided to draw upon the method of Indigenous autoethnographies.

Indigenous autoethnographies specifically analyse colonialism and from this position, "...are used to address and disrupt power in research" (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 278). In Indigenous autoethnographies, the narrative is committed to dialogue, community, self-determination, and cultural autonomy that can be healing and transformative for the Indigenous autoethnographer (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Intersectionality also plays an important role in Indigenous autoethnographies, given that race, ethnicity, gender, sexuality and class shapes the personal experiences of individuals within a broader sociocultural context (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014). Indigenous autoethnographers are committed to constructing their own personal and cultural stories without forced subjugation of being the 'other' (Ellis et al., 2011).

Autoethnography has been criticized as not being proper qualitative research within the social sciences. There are criticisms of narcissism in autoethnography because they are considered too self-indulgent and self-absorbed (Sparkes, 2000). However, Ellis and Bochner (1996) argue that culture circulates through all of us and impacts us in different ways; thus,

autoethnography is not a reductive practice that bypasses important sociological understanding of personal experiences. Sparkes (2000) concludes that using universal criteria within this type of research method cannot be implemented and suggests that experience is complex and diverse that it will almost be impossible or inappropriate to judge a different sociological understanding of culture. However, often, and in this case as an Indigenous woman challenging settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy, there are stories and experiences left silent and even one story being told is better than none. Especially in writing about body image experiences from an Indigenous worldview. Thus, the use of autoethnography provide insight into body image research by challenging the way in which Indigenous women's bodies have been studied. This approach can help turn the focus away from the typical biomedical and colonial narratives of body image research.

I specifically chose autoethnography as it can be represented as a decolonizing and Indigenous methodology. Furthermore, Clandinin and Connelly (1998) argue that education lives at the core of personal narratives and such narratives are “not merely the telling of stories” (p. 246). In this way, Indigenous teachings come from storytelling and these stories are not merely telling a story but also sharing a lesson. With this understanding, the use of an Indigenous autoethnography within my research is not only to explore an Indigenous woman's body image, but also as a way of caring, respecting and being responsible in research inquiry. Instead of just *studying* Indigenous women, this research is about producing knowledge and sharing information as a form of education to influence and perhaps change people's understandings of an Indigenous woman's body image. This autoethnography presents a powerful tool to make invisible stories visible and disrupt the grand narratives of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy.

## **The Process**

Autoethnography is a method of ‘studying’ yourself. It provides self-reflexivity grounded in your ontology, epistemology, method and praxis (Holman Jones, 2005). Autoethnographers generally write reflexively or retroactively about past experiences, with most autoethnographers relying on the use of ‘epiphanies’ as a writing device to collect their data/stories (Ellis et al., 2011, p.275). ‘Epiphanies’ are generally defined as “remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person’s life” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 275). Ellis et al. (2011) further explain that epiphanies are “self-claimed phenomena” that may be transformative to some while not for others. I implemented the use of ‘epiphanies’ as my main writing method for my data collection to search for a deeper understanding of heteropatriarchal colonial violence and body image. Ellis and Bochner (2000) state that autoethnographic studies often incorporate personal reflexive dimensions to search for deeper understanding of the connectivity between self and other. Often these narratives provide “thick descriptions” of a culture (Geertz, 1973, p.10), which can provide “insight into the messy, complex nature of diverse sets of lived experiences” (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014, p.19). Within this context, ‘epiphanies’ have guided my data collection to provide the ‘thick descriptions’ of my diverse and complex body image experiences.

While I engaged in this autoethnographic study, my data collection was informed by my Nakota epistemology/worldview that guided me through the teachings, values, and ethics. These teachings, values, and ethics also congruently work with autoethnography since an autoethnography “displays multiple layers of consciousness, connecting the personal to the cultural” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739). An autoethnographer will gaze, back and forth, “first through an ethnographic wide-angle lens, focusing outward on the social and cultural aspects of

the personal experience; then they look inward, exposing a vulnerable self that is moved by and may move through, refract and resist cultural interpretations” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000, p. 739).

An autoethnographer may also use hindsight in their analyses, and may use other texts like photographs, journals or recordings to help recall memories or experiences (Ellis et al., 2011).

Through these processes, my autoethnographic study incorporates my own writing and work through creative writing, my personal reflection pieces, photographs, and intellectual journals.

**Accessing Indigenous knowledge.** I would like to first and foremost start with identifying and locating my Indigenous foundational knowledge. For this research, one of the sites of information I accessed was my own Nakota traditional knowledge and teachings. I grew up learning about my Nakota ceremonies and teachings by attending ceremonies despite the impacts of colonialism through my parents. They are my first traditional knowledge teachers and they taught my siblings and I their own foundational lessons by establishing healthy relationships through their own decolonial, healing work. My second site of accessing Indigenous knowledge is through various spiritual knowledge keepers my parents, Charlie and Martha Letendre, who had built relationships with throughout their journey, specifically Warfield Moose Jr (Oglala Nation). who we continue to have strong kinship ties with. I would like to emphasize that what I share is based on my experiences I had growing up and what I continue to learn as *my* Nakota way of life, which has been taught through oral teachings and participating in ceremonies. I fully disclose that the knowledge I share is part of my life and is practiced on a daily basis, which does not exist within confined spaces or locations. This way of thinking, and way of life, informs the daily interactions with myself, with others, and subsequently my own body image experiences that are sometimes shaped by heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence.

**Narratives.** In order to analyze epiphanies, one must examine other similar experiences,

which can be comparing and contrasting personal experience against existing research (Ellis et al., 2011), and/or examining other relevant cultural works. My narrative has drawn mainly from my recalled ‘epiphanies’ (primary documents) that have impacted the way I conceptualize, perceive, and represent my body-image as an Indigenous woman and has been supplemented by secondary documents (e.g. literature) within my research area (e.g., Indigenous feminisms, colonialism, critical race theory, sexism). Furthermore, since using secondary sources add texture to research work and autoethnography is simply not just telling a story (Boylorn & Orbe, 2014; Ellis et al., 2011), I analyzed looked at culture through secondary documents to represent how culture has shaped Indigenous women’s body image experiences. I have woven my epiphanies (stories/poems) into three sections that became my main arrangement of analysis for my autoethnography.

*Excerpts from journal entries.* Words are social practices, which can represent social realities. They describe our understandings of incidences, interactions, aspirations, and intentions. Most often, we can find that we censor ourselves in our physical interactions with others, but within a private setting or a personal journal, we find ourselves sharing information that we would not otherwise share. I accessed my own personal journals to provide ‘epiphanies’, which describes my overall impression of the impacts of heteropatriarchal settler colonialism has had over my body image experiences. There are two types of journals I have accessed from: my personal journal and an intellectual journal. A personal journal can be understood as a collection of emotions, feelings, thoughts and reflection in the form of a poem, a small passage, single descriptive words or sketches, either on paper or written on the computer, while an intellectual journal is a recording of ideas and concepts that are linked to your field which can be analyzed or consolidated at a later time (O’Reilly, 2009, p. 75). However, both are considered as taking field



notes and from this stance, these journals can also be understood as my complete participation and participant observation within my site of research. In the end, I linked these concepts and ideas to my personal journals.

**Poetry/short stories.** This autoethnography has incorporated my own poetry and prose. Mainstream narratives and history around Indigenous peoples and colonization often distorts and dehumanizes Indigenous peoples (LaRoque, 2010). Engaging in creative works lends a different lens to Indigenous peoples' experiences and creates an Indigenous expression of their colonial experiences. Furthermore, Indigenous poetry can be seen as an act of resistance and can be considered as decolonial work (LaRoque, 2010). I included my own pieces of creative writing to represent my 'epiphanies' in a different form. My own creative writing also subverted and dismantled heteropatriarchal colonial narratives of Indigenous women (e.g. media representations through the reporting of Missing and Murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada). These narratives represent how it affects who I am as an Indigenous woman by their reinforcement of violence against Indigenous women in these heteropatriarchal and colonial narratives. These writings can also be seen as acts of Indigenous resurgence and embodying Indigenous feminisms.

**Photographs.** Visual methods are another form of narrative or storytelling that can help bridge teaching, learning, and research (Schell, Ferguson, Hamoline, Shea, & Thomas-Maclean, 2009). Autoethnography is also a method meant for empowerment, which also coincides with photovoice methods as it can help empower those who are silenced (Schell et al., 2009). Furthermore, photographs are used as an opportunity to create more in-depth or rich data and to help enhance memory (Schell et al., 2009). I specifically included my personal photographs that explored reflections, thoughts and feelings to conceptualize specific meanings with body image

experiences.

### **Interpretation and Representation**

The interpretation of the data involved drawing themes from my ‘epiphanies’ (experiences) and categorizing the data to reflect meaning. Each epiphany distinguishes four types of moments and/or experiences: “the major event that touches the fabric of the individual’s life; the cumulative or representative events, experiences that continue for some time; the minor epiphanies, which represent a moment in an individual’s life; and episodes or relived epiphanies, which involve reliving the experience” (Creswell, 2013, p. 224). From these four types of epiphanies, common threads or elements were examined and categorized into the themes, which guided the development of the autoethnography. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) refer to this approach as “reduction downward” since it separates major themes from lesser or minor themes. I broke down my epiphanies into three categories to reflect my body image experiences with settler colonialism, heteropatriarchal/sexual violence, and spirituality/Indigenous feminisms. These categories: *blood memory trauma*, *subverting the stereotype*, and *body talk* are my major themes that outline the type of trauma I experienced and how that eventually made it’s way into my body image.

### **Verification**

Reflexivity is an indicator of validity in qualitative research (Creswell, 2013). It is even practiced more so in Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies, as this type of research is grounded in Indigenous epistemology, which means being ethical (truthful) to your Indigenous knowledge and relations (Kovach, 2009, p.35-36). Autoethnographers also seek validity through verisimilitude, which “evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et al.,

2011, p. 282). In autoethnography, it is hard to discern truth or facts since this method is not heavy in scientific procedures and standards; however, the goal of writing an autoethnography is to produce texts that are analytical and accessible (Ellis et al., 2011). Through my creative non-fiction writing, I provide data that evoke feeling, while my analysis provides reflection of the cultural context within which my body image experiences took place. Thus, my autoethnography is reflexive and acknowledges my position of being an Indigenous woman.

### Chapter 3:

#### Making the Private Public: A proverbial memoir of an angry Nakota fem

##### Part 1: Blood Memory Trauma

###### *A Good Little Indian Girl*

She became a poster child of what a good Indian looks like. Delicate. Pleasant. Intelligent for an Indian. But she was thought of as a victim. Just born into an unfortunate circumstance. So of course, they thought she needed a leg up. She is neither delicate or a victim. Sure she has some troubles. Yeah she fucks up from time to time. And why can't all people be thought of as intelligent? We all have something to offer whether we have degrees or not. We are always measuring. Quantifying. Making qualitative gestures. She is a charity case. An Indigenous woman who needs her path cleared to get her through the bullshit. Don't get me wrong, white supremacy exists. Rape culture exists. Misogynists are everywhere. Violence erupts destroying countless lives. There are 1,182 missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls. Even more *uncalculated*. Forgotten. *Simply* lost. Broken treaty promises with murder after murder. NWMP and their predecessors RCMP did not serve or protect Indigenous women. They raped them too. So do you see how she easily became the poster child? Eyes light up at the thought of a *successful* Indian girl. We can *save* her. She's not a prostitute. Not on drugs. Not a drunk. Not a single mother. Not married. She is smart. She has the whole world ahead of her. We can lift her up to our status. She would not need her Indian status anymore. She will have a different kind of status that is full of opportunities. Make her dream. Make her alive. Make her into a good little Indian girl.

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The journey through university has been long and hard and filled with mistakes. It can easily change you for better or for worse. It definitely changed me. For better? For worse? I am barely making it right now, which is why I only intend to write for myself for my thesis. Although, it has been a difficult choice and took a long time getting to this point, but this voice has been asleep till now. I do not believe I remained silent and powerless prior to this, but I definitely held a lot in to make other people feel comfortable about themselves and most importantly, to protect myself. Protection from a long history of colonialism that my ancestors suffered greatly before my siblings and I. I often ask myself “what would I look like without heteropatriarchy and colonialism?” I often wonder what it would be like? What would I be doing? What kind of life would I have? A family? Children? Would I be travelling? Exploring? Learning? This is something I already enjoy doing and these qualities has brought me here to university, but university is not the only place for learning and I am ready to expand. I am ready to share what I have learned and what has brought me to this point.

I present my thesis in this format because my stories are like a string of tobacco prayers to offer up to my ancestors and relations and so they are sacred. Consistent with the literature on Indigenous methodologies (e.g. Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2001), Indigenous storytelling within the academy is an important aspect to Indigenous research. Maracle (1996) describes how the storyteller needs to have great trust and love to enable them to tell their stories, which will help preserve the teachings within the stories. I am in a place where I have built trust and love with many people in my life. I know I have somewhere to go once I uncover parts of my past, experiences, and what my body looks like after heartache and violence. This is the structure: my creative writing pieces on my epiphanies followed by an analysis.

### **Mapping out my epiphanies**

They are moments of realization. I have many trajectory points of trauma and violence that impact the way I see and feel about my body and my worth. But right now, the one that keeps leading me back here is the death of my brother. I need to start with my brother. He's always on my mind. I am constantly being reminded of him. I can't shake his presence in my heart. This loss is making me fragile. Every bump, swerve, and disruption reverberates through my whole body, making every mistake, hurt, and disappointment cut me deep.

The feelings coming from success last a moment and I am back to contemplating existence. Do I deserve to be here? Do I have the right to be happy? My brother is gone. My nephews are without a father and my parents are heartbroken. Will they survive this? Will it be another vicious cycle of trauma, violence and grief? What will happen to my nephews? Recycled pain and trauma runs through our family. What can I do? Will I lose this fight too? I recite the words of Ellis et al. (2011) out loud; epiphanies are "remembered moments perceived to have significantly impacted the trajectory of a person's life." These are my memories through failure, loss, and happiness.

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*July 17, 2013*

It was a warm summer day with the wind blowing softly and yet there was nothing inside of me. I spent almost a week in the hospital praying and hoping my brother will wake up. His brain swelled up. He didn't have oxygen for 45 minutes. He was dead on arrival, except we didn't want to let him go. The ICU doctor wanted us to take him off life support that night he was brought in.

My parents were not in Canada. They were in South Dakota on the Pine Ridge reservation attending a Sundance. We didn't want to let him go until they came back, but my parents were afraid. We all were. My brother has already been in the hospital three times over the course of the year. This time, we all knew it was bad. He didn't wake up. He always wakes up.

My parents didn't arrive in Canada till the 17<sup>th</sup>. They had stayed to pray. They wanted to try anything. When they drove up in the parking lot, relief came over me. I knew that this was going to be much harder for them to see my brother unresponsive, but during that week, I could not eat or sleep. I needed to be near them. That's all I needed.

I was already outside when they showed up. I was watching the sunrise and I was praying. I felt like I was safe now. I did not think my brother will miraculously wake up upon their arrival, but my family was together now and we can do this together.

My parents went inside. I stayed outside. I hated that hospital. I hated the staff. They were assholes. I guess they saw a dead body and wanted a clean bed. I saw my brother who loved his family so much. He had a lot of love despite everything. A lot of people showed up at the hospital to come see him. That probably ticked off the hospital too.

I remember one night the nurse came into the waiting room and berated me for the room being "dirty." The cleaning staff did not come into empty the garbage can, and so it was full of garbage. Most of the garbage was coffee cups and some half drunken coffee cups were around the room. We had blankets in there as well. Maybe it did look like we moved in, but it was a small room. Probably 4-6 people can fit in that room, but we brought in a few extra chairs to fit more people.

I started to tidy up to make it look "clean." I felt empty from not eating or drinking, from not sleeping, from losing an important person in my life and this nurse made me feel like shit for allowing the room to get messy. It was the automatic response to these colonial clowns. They make you feel like shit when you are so vulnerable, so you just shut up and do what they want from you. You can stand up for yourself but they will make your behaviour seem like it's unnatural, uncontrollable and criminal. That day, I had no fight in me anymore.

Not long after my parents went inside, I decided to go inside. It did not feel right. I know this may sound cliché, but it was like a dream walking down that hall to ICU. I saw one of my nephews crying in the hallway by himself, so I ran up to him and hugged him. I started crying too. My dad came out of the waiting room and yelled, "what's going on." He ran to down the hall to my brother's room. It startled me. I stopped crying and I followed my dad.

After this, I don't know much of what happened or how the time passed. I just remember going outside to see my mom to tell her a message from my dad and witnessing colonial hands trying to revive him. One by one, the hospital staff all worked on him. After they were done, his chest was blue from the force of their hands pressing down so hard. He left this world with his body bruised and a broken heart.

It flows through my body reminding me how the staff wanted us to just throw him away. We couldn't. We held on to some hope in glorious fucking Canada, in the land of the fucking free. When there was no hope to hold on to. We still did anyway and all they saw was a dead *Indian*.

Guess what? He did deserve life cause now I am lost and I don't know what to do anymore. There seems to be nothing left inside of me. Just fleeting moments of warmth and extreme joy. There is nothing in between to stabilize my life. I am always on the opposite ends of this spectrum of life. Birth and death. Joy and emptiness.

Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. **NOTHING.**

Losing my brother took a lot from me. Something I thought that could not be possible. There has been a lot that has been taken from me and I have worked so hard to reclaim some of that back. I do not look at myself the same way anymore. I am raw. I am swimming in guilt. Ugliness bleeds out of my pores. I carry his memory. My skin is bruised and my heart is broken.

Do you believe me?

\*\*\*\*\*

*June 2, 2015*

Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother

I say it over and over again tonight  
Reminding me that it was not him who took his life  
The Canadian government had it out to get us  
They almost did win  
With "only" over hundreds of thousands and thousands of casualties  
Ongoing still

Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother  
Residentialschoolsbrokemybrother

I say it over and over again  
My family is not unique  
We all lose someone

We all experience heartache  
But you don't get back that love again  
Once they are gone, they are gone  
Only space is filled with concentrated forgotten memories

You don't think about the loss



You don't think about your love  
 You don't think about the emptiness  
 And you especially don't think about the happy times

You will never again experience that happiness again.  
 Residential schools took that  
 They took my brother and buried him alive  
 He had so much more to give  
 More than me

Residential.schools.broke.my.brother  
 Residential.schools.broke.my.mother  
 Residential.schools.broke.my.dad  
 Colonialism.broke.my.family

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*Homecoming – July 18, 2013*

Bringing his body back to the rez house was like a mixed lethal cocktail  
 I wanted him home now and not in a cold freezer  
 I also wanted him alive  
 Dizzy with these drunken emotions  
 I fought my ex  
 I had to keep fighting my ex to keep him by my side  
 What I really wanted was my brother to keep fighting for his life  
 He gave up  
 I should have too

We all gathered at the gate and met my parents with my brother  
 We put up tobacco filled flags all along the driveway as offerings of prayers  
 He was coming home for his final visit  
 We sang a prayer song as they approached the gate  
 My brother loved to sing  
 He would practice everyday with his drum  
 These songs are more than just words but connections to the other side, to our ancestors

I guess you can say we sang him home  
 We honoured my brother one last time  
 Why do we only honour our loved ones after they passed on?  
 Maybe it's only in my community?  
 Nobody wanted to help my brother once he started using drugs  
 Just people like him who mask their pain

The day we buried him, I was buried alongside him  
 At least both our hearts were left on sacred ground  
 He will forever be remembered there

On ina maka, on our Sundance grounds  
In ceremony, in our prayers  
His homecoming

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*Root of doubt – 1999*

She wakes up in a panic. Her heart is racing so hard that she feels it in her throat. Her body is rigid but she forces herself to move. The babies are both crying.

Stop. Stop. Stop. Don't. Stop.

She tries not to let her anxiety take over.

How did I not wake up earlier? She asks herself.

She had made herself a little bed out of blankets on the floor of the babies' room. She fell asleep with the babies. Now one is crying by the door and the other is sitting not too far from where she was laying. She picks one up and goes pick up the other. She kisses them. She tries to soothe them.

Don't. Stop. Stop. STOP.

She puts them down on her made up bed. She forgot about the other child. He's older but still so young. She runs to his room. He's awake. Quiet. She hugs him. They are silent.

She is screaming. She's crying. I go check on her. I knock on the bathroom door. I call her name. They go quiet.

I go back to my sister's room. I pick up both the twins and balance them on each hip. I bring them to my other nephew's room. I sit down on the floor. I hold them all. I tell them I love them. I kiss them.

I can hear things being thrown around.

STOP.

I stand up. My body feels like ice but I feel anger rising up inside. I feel fire burning in the pit of my stomach making its way to my arms. I clench my hands. I tell my niece and nephews that I will be back. I kiss them. I close the door behind me.

I start pacing the hallway. What can I do? I need a weapon. But what can I use? I run to the kitchen. I notice my cousin passed out on the couch. I try waking her up. She doesn't respond to me.

I go into the kitchen. I start rummaging through the drawers. I grab a big knife. I stare at it. Can I really stab him? I can hear my sister screaming. I feel tears roll down my cheek. I am afraid. What about the children? If I hurt him, will he go after them? I put the knife down.

I start pacing the hallway again. I need a bat. I can knock him out with one swing. I go to the storage room in their tiny apartment. There's nothing I can use but a broom. I grab that. I feel it in my hands. It is so light.

I am only 15 years old. I blame myself that I couldn't save my sister from his physical violence. I carry that shame.

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**Part 2: Subverting the Stereotype****Missing and Murdered – summer of 2014**

Thousands of wiyami voice their pain

I try to swallow the ache in my body

She did not deserve this

I don't deserve this

Her bones reach up and grab my leg

She screams at me to not leave her behind

I pick her up and wrap her in a blanket

My girl, I will keep you safe now

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**Gender based violence is an act of genocide**

As I am writing this, a relation is missing from my community. I say her name. *Misty Potts*. I have known her since I was a teen. I know her sister and her brothers. We even partied together. When I heard the news, my body grew icy. Rumours swirled around and a few weeks later, gossip reached my ears that they found her body – she was dead. I cried by a creek in St. Albert with my sister. This is the same town where we said our last goodbye to my brother in the hospital. Too many memories swell up. We held each other tightly. We put down tobacco. We prayed for her and her family. The talk was false. She is still missing.

This is a reality for many Indigenous families and communities across Canada. Many are facing uncertainty. Many have nowhere to go. I say her name. *Tina Fontaine*. While residential schools were going on, Indigenous mothers, aunts, grandmothers, sisters, and all relatives were

going missing or found murdered. This is the legacy of colonialism. When settlers put up a reward for the scalps of Indigenous people that is an act of genocide. I say her name. *Helen Betty Osborne*. When the government of Canada enforced that children to be removed from their families and they are grossly neglected in government care that is an act of genocide. I say her name. *Cindy Gladue*. When the government of Canada and the justice system ignores the cries, the grief, and worry of families that is an act of genocide. I say her name. *Pamela George*.

My community has many missing members, but I share this one young woman who was beaten to death in my community. No one wants to talk or say what happened. I say her name. *Chelsea Bruno*. This is just another example of how colonialism and heteropatriarchy is engrained into our communities. It is not so simple. Violence is more than physical or sexual violence as well. We silence survivors and victims of violence because we are also afraid of the repercussions. We are tired of being criminalized and institutionalized. Colonialism and heteropatriarchy is so complex and it weaves through our actions, thoughts, and relations. Colonial violence is the way we talk about the missing and murdered in the media, and in our homes. I have a friend whose sister's death is suspicious. I say her name. *Bella Laboucan-Mclean*. I am sure you can 'Google' the names of the women. Try it. You will learn of their stories. You may read someone's comment that these Indigenous women were in the "wrong place at the wrong time." Or you may find that they are slut-shamed for being a sex worker. But it is more than slut shaming, it is hundreds of years of colonialism where they wanted to erase us. They wanted to own the land so they wanted us dead and if they couldn't kill us, they wanted to own our bodies. They made sure we barely survived by starving us. They killed off our relatives, *tatanka oyate* (Bison nation). We had to sign treaties and we were forced to live on reserves where they figured they wouldn't hear from us. My own aunt's death is suspicious. I say her

name. *Betty Rain*. Except you won't find her in any literature or newspaper. Just in the stories my mother tells me. If they couldn't kill us, they made sure they scarred our bodies. I am not next.

\*\*\*\*\*

### 2003

Car slows down  
 She walks faster  
 A white man tries calling her  
 She ignores him  
 He keeps trying  
 He honks  
 She keeps walking  
 It is daylight  
 Many people are around  
 Car takes off  
 She questions herself  
*Am I dressed appropriately?*  
*No, it is not me?*  
*Is it?*

### 2004

Shame can eat you alive  
 She wanted to look nothing like her  
 feminine body  
 She cut her hair  
 She wore baggy shirts and long pants  
 Plain faced  
 Just a little plains NDN grrrrl  
 Mohawk  
 Piercings  
 Chucks  
 In her heart  
 She is dying  
 She cannot breathe  
 There is no relief

\*\*\*\*\*

### Oil Spill violence

On wabamun lake amidst the oil spill,  
 She will remain nameless  
 Only clothed in an white HAZMAT suit  
 In a mask and gloves  
 All steps taken for precaution  
 For the train transporting the oil  
 For the clean up after the spill  
 For being a woman – modest and reserved  
 At the end of the day,

It is just men being men, right?  
They stake her out  
They send one man alone  
Circling in on her  
Predator and prey hierarchy  
He goes in for the kill  
Destroying her body  
Leaving her to bleed out  
While the rest come in to feast

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Keeping up with Pocahontas**

Why do we keep imitating this image? Am I jealous?  
Maybe this is why it bothers me.  
Because I do not look like. Poca-hon-tas. Or. Urban. Native. Girl.  
They are *just* cartoon fantasies. <Well U.N.G. is a real person>  
Both have long black hair.  
Both are slim with curves.  
Both showing excess skin in their fantasy replications  
Is this what I desire? Do I want these qualities? Sensual. Paleo diet enthusiast.  
Capitalistic Opportunist. I care to be healthy. I care about how my body feels.  
But like a lot of women, I wish I could change things about me.  
Less breasts. More ass. Thicker thighs. Smaller shoulders.  
More like cartoon Urban. Native. Girl. Sometimes.

Just when I get angry about the violence done... When I Choke For Air.

Like there's a noose around my neck getting *tighter* and *tighter*

I want to fall in line.

I want to be like Pocahontas

Be an entrepreneur like Urban Native Girl

Fresh faced. Pretty smile. Seductive. **LONG BLACK HAIR.**

I pretend that I am happy for all the ones who have the standard western beauty look

No, there is something more to this uneasy feeling

Generations and generations of violence

No, I am not like the Disney Pocahontas.

In real life, we are kidnapped and raped.

The violence keeps scarring my body

I am exactly what they want me to look like.

\*\*\*\*\*

## **Intimate Partner Violence X2**

### **Part 1**

She didn't have a chance to say no cause she had too much to drink. He apologizes the next day.

### **Part 2**

1. He thrusts.
2. She tries to push him off.
3. He keeps thrusting.
4. She says stop.



5. He pants.
6. She looks away.
7. Silence.
8. Tears roll down her face.
9. He loves her.
10. She should just be grateful

\*\*\*\*\*

**What happens when I am silent?**

Sometimes all your rage,  
And all your anger was so quiet  
It was so still.  
That is what ached most inside of me  
And all I could do was cry silently  
So you would not be offended  
Then when I was brave enough to break that silence  
You would say,  
“That’s not what I said,”  
And deny everything  
I could not explain enough for you  
To understand that everything  
BEFORE,  
IN BETWEEN,  
And AFTER,  
Made me feel so inadequate  
Because you said  
I am a complicated woman  
And once again, silence permeated our home  
Readying itself for another outbreak

\*\*\*\*\*



*The body remembers*

The body remembers when

The body remembers when you

The body remembers when you don't

The body remembers when you don't want

**The body remembers when you don't want to**

The body remembers when you don't want

The body remembers when you don't

The body remembers when you

The body remembers when

The body remembers

The body

*is unforgiving*

\*\*\*\*\*

**SUBVERT.**

My mother and I  
holding each after  
my undergrad convocation.  
I enrolled in this institution  
to be better paid.  
to have employment  
like my mother  
before me.  
We both made it  
out alive  
with intergenerational trauma  
and heartache.  
We survived.



Figure 1. After my convocation at University of Alberta, Edmonton, Ab.

**Part 3: Body Talk****When love dies**

Nobody talks about what happens to your body after love dies

The nightly tremors when you are completely alone

Unable to close your eyes because there is a chance of seeing your lost loved one

No, nobody tells you about the excruciating pain

When the memories are dragged across your mind in stop motion

In your favourite spots, with your favourite foods, hearing your favourite songs

No, nobody tells you that it feels like being chased down by a predator

The fear sets in and your heart cannot stop beating so loudly or fast

You panic, but you cannot escape the feeling

No, nobody tells you that it feels like being gutted by a hunter

The knife slides across your stomach that bends you over and you cry out to no one

No, nobody talks about what happens to your body after love dies

There is no one left to tell you how the ache inside crawls out and eats away your flesh

\*\*\*\*\*

Indigenous women's bodies are casualties of settler colonialism. In one sense, body image is beyond physical appearance and it is not for Indigenous women. With settler colonialism, Indigenous bodies are constantly in the process of being eliminated, but it also produces compounded results for body image. The trauma produced from settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy does reaffirm poor or negative body image for Indigenous bodies. It can make you second-guess yourself because the legacy of settler colonialism and sexual violence is meant

to strip Indigenous peoples from their identity and culture (their source of power) and prevent you from believing in yourself and way of life. However, body image is not a static condition or feeling. It is a process. How you feel about your body fluctuates between loving yourself, to self-loathing, to self-determining, to picking apart body parts you don't like, to liking, to enduring, to resiliency. This process can be considered 'objectification' of your own body, much like how female bodies are objectified within our heteropatriarchal society and even bodies to a lesser extent, which work as microaggressions of where you intentionally or unintentionally assault your own body in thoughts, or actions. When you are violated or experience trauma, we are unaware of how this translates to self-harming practices such as self-doubt, low self-esteem, eating disorders, or substance use. This can also be understood as a coping mechanism or working from a harm reduction framework.

\*\*\*\*\*

***Stage one: Maman (baby)***

Hush...

Mmmm...

I love you.

***Stage two: Win (child)***

She tells you to be girly.

She tells you to be clean.

She tells you to be worthy.

You can't be dirty.

You can't be foolin' around.  
You can't be slutty  
She can't help it  
She is only teaching you what she has been taught  
We all gotta protect ourselves somehow  
So you gotta be a girl!  
And you gotta do it right!  
Or they will come to take you away.  
You don't want that.

***Stage three: Wiya (woman)***

Sit taller  
Sit pretty  
Sit with integrity  
Don't cross your legs  
Don't spread your legs  
Don't slouch  
You must prove your worth  
You must control yourself  
You must not let them get to you

***Stage four: Society***

Spread your legs



That's all you're good for  
You look pretty for a native girl  
You are smart for an Indian  
Fucken chug  
Your parents probably drink Lysol  
I will kill your family  
What do you know?  
You are an urban Indian  
Let your mind wander  
Let your mind forget  
Let your mind disconnect  
You body can take the hits

\*\*\*\*\*

*Processing recovery...*

She dyed her hair purple.

She wanted anything else to look back at her that isn't her.

She wanted something that did not remind her of childhood or last year.

Brown meant a lot of things.

Violation. Surveillance. Death. Grief. Unwanted change.

People are nicer now it seems.

“Is this for real?” she asks herself every time a white person walks by and smiles.

“Was I experiencing anything at all before?”

She would shake her head and keep on walking.

After she dyed her hair, she had more confidence it seemed.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **STRANG(ER) IMPOSITION**

He says, “you are *PRETTY* for a native girl.” Out of nowhere. Pretty cuts you. Pretty ok.

Pretty decent. Pretty ugly. Pretty fuck. Loaded with meaning and accusations. I don’t want your *pretty* observations or *petty* comments. Petty move. Petty privilege. Petty fuckhead. Petty basic, white man. I don’t feel pretty. You make me feel unsafe.

\*\*\*\*\*

### **Hahebi (night)**

And love is still what I crave

In those moments where I was able to truly let go,

I remember love

At night when you were sleeping,

I held you tight

Enjoying your warmth against my skin

Like drinking hot tea out by the fire with ina and inanan

The searing hot liquid heated me on those cold, lonely nights

When I was so unsure about where tomorrow will take me

The silence of night would soothe me

Allowing waheba (moon) to be acquainted with me again

But it only lasted till the sun started to rise

Morning made everything so bright  
Making all things more noticeable  
The imperfections, the lies, the doubt  
And everything would hurt all over again  
Destroying what was given to me  
Then night would fall  
And the excitement made me restless  
I just wanted to lay down with you  
To hold you close again  
To lay still in silence with no thoughts of pain, of hurt, of death  
Just your skin against mine  
Slowly falling asleep with your familiar breaths  
Slowing rising and falling, over and over again  
Love remembered me then  
And one day, I will allow love to come in again  
This time it will not only be at night when I am asleep  
Love will exist in day  
Exposing all the good things I have  
No I won't let love die inside of me again

\*\*\*\*\*

**I am still Nakota wi**

I am neither a princess nor a traditional woman

I lay bare with uneven skin

with dark scars

with eczema

I am not your average Plains Indian girl

I like wearing pants to keep me warm

And to feel comfortable

I am neither abrasive nor disrespectful

I do like wearing dresses when it's hot

And in ceremony

I have dry skin from the prairie air

I have acne

I dye my short hair

But what do you know?

I cut my hair when my brother died

I let it go when his spirit left us

Colonialism cut our ties and cut our hair

They did that.

I'm educated

I question what you say

And stand for what I believe in

But who is to say that I am not Nakota?

My hands taken care of many children,  
Combing my fingers threw their maman hair  
Cooing, smiling up at me  
With their trusting eyes  
My 10 years old hands held my first maman  
It did not stop there  
I feed them,  
burp them,  
bathe them,  
dress them,  
change them,  
sing to them,  
talk to them  
My hand ensured I was ok too  
Taking me places I needed to go like allowing me to write  
When I was too afraid to say the words out loud  
I would hold people's hands when they need it too  
I held medicines in my hands and my hands are medicine  
My legs are part of loving as well  
When I have to leave, I can go  
They have also taken me to many new places in my life  
Even back to where it all began for the Lakota oyate, my kin  
My voice lent me spoken prayers

Crying, singing, talking to my ancestors

My body's presence can be comfort for someone who I care about

My warmth can be love

All the while making mistakes when I stumble,

when I hurt,

when I am sad

But I am resilient

I am still loving

I am still Nakota wi

\*\*\*\*\*



Figure 2. Sweetgrass picking in Paul First Nation (maternal community)

**Make Peace with your body**

Be in love on the land

Maka chî wîda

Be in love with your relatives

Be with your relatives,

On the land,

Be in love with the land

They are your relatives too

Mitakuye oyasin

\*\*\*\*\*

**Indigenous Resistance is Love**

Our Indigenous bodies are considered deficit – unhealthy, diabetic, overweight, flawed, sexually dirty, brown, etc. Our bodies were part of a colonial project of stripping who we are away and trying to replace it with the ideal body – like the white, settler colonial. Except, it failed in that we are still here and a lot of us still identify as Indigenous. Despite all the violence and death, we are still here. We are aware of the intergenerational trauma and how that impacts us. We are aware of gender-based violence. But, do we understand how this impacts our body image? Body image is an important aspect to an individual's well being. It represents more than physical aspects of an individual and explores deeper emotional and psychological aspects of our body. It shows us how we can love and know love. Trauma impacts this understanding of love. How can we love ourselves when society does not respect or care about who we are and if we believe in that message?

Indigenous feminisms explore the process of locating the source of your own power and decolonizing what love means within a heteropatriarchal society, which is known as decolonial love. To have decolonial love means that we critically look at the broader society, but it also allows for us to critically look within ourselves to understand how heteropatriarchy works within us. It allows us to examine the ways in which we build relationships that are not healthy with ourselves and with others. This form of decolonial love is an act of resistance to heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism. It is the process of loving yourself and others and in that sense love is part of Indigenous resistance. There are many methods of Indigenous resistance and resurgence amongst circles of Indigenous women, such as Indigenous feminisms in academia, communities or collectives bringing back women's teachings and ceremonies, art initiatives such as ReMatriate and R.I.S.E. (Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment) and missing and



murdered Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit awareness campaigns. Indigenous feminism(s) is reclaiming that lost sense of self and breaking down the trauma within our bodies. Indigenous feminism(s) is allowing me to do so, as before, I was not capable to locate my trauma and put the words to describe my trauma.

### **Chapter 4: Discussion**

The purpose of this research was to understand Indigenous women's body image, which occurred through regaining cultural and ancestral memory from my own Nakota teachings and experiences. The stories shared in this autoethnography highlight the relationship between body image and trauma created by heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence. This autoethnography went into depth on my individual experiences with settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy such as, expectations of a woman, intergenerational impacts of residential schools, racialization, and criminalization. As such, this research makes a significant contribution to body image literature by describing the intricate relationship between body image and trauma from an Indigenous woman's perspective. As well, as suggested by Indigenous women scholars (e.g., Anderson, 2011), this autoethnography was an important journey for me in that to experience healing and a sense of belonging it is necessary to incorporate cultural teachings that have traditionally been shared and passed down through storytelling.

Although there is body image research that focuses on sexual assault and harassment, limited body image research has taken into account Indigenous women's body image experiences of the legacies of colonial and sexual violence, nor has there been body image research written from a first person's perspective. In published studies, Indigenous women's body image research has explored the connection between health and well-being to a positive body image, which includes highlighting Indigenous cultural values and beliefs as important to young Indigenous women (McHugh et al. 2014; Pourier & Kennedy, 2008; Shea, et al., 2013). Arguably, the concept of health (including mental health) has been the underlying justification of previous body image research, which pathologizes Indigenous women's experiences rather than exploring the systemic issues of settler colonialism as contributing factors to their health. This

autoethnography contributes to understanding how settler colonial and sexual violence impacts Indigenous women and their livelihood. Within this research, I found myself asking ‘how can we create safe spaces for Indigenous women to empower and find opportunity to share their own body image narratives of heteropatriarchy, sexual, and colonial violence?’ I proposed this question since, in Canada, there is still the notion that being an Indigenous woman means being uncivilized, lazy, *easy* “stupid squaw”. Such notions correlate to the assumption that Indigenous women consent to violence and are deserving of being mistreated, as demonstrated by the missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls in Canada (Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Jiwani, 2009). Thus, my autoethnography becomes written documentation for many others who have had similar experiences and provides insight into the uncomfortable discussion of gender-based violence and the intergenerational impacts of colonialism on an individual. This autoethnography shares the narrative of my experiences as evidence of the violence I experience as a Nakota woman living in the Canadian state.

### **Wicoza – the Body**

In my Nakota worldview, my parents use the word wicoza (we-cho-tha) for body. When you break down the word, ‘wi’ is also used to describe the sun or stars. In our culture, we believe we came from the stars (or the sun as it is considered a star) so we have become like an outline of the sun. We think of our flesh as being made up from the sun, since it nourishes all life, which is why when we describe our bodies like the term woman, wi-ya, ‘wi’ is part of the description. It is a significant term since it describes who we are because it relates us back to where we began our new journey on makeoce (earth). In this understanding, we are more than just physical bodies but spiritually connected to our ancestors and how we were created, which is why it is important to take care of ourselves. We honour our relations by honouring ourselves, which is something I

will elaborate more on later in this chapter. So in learning the word, ‘wi,’ and having it broken down for me, I understand the significance of who I am through my connection to the creator and my body. In the western/colonial epistemology and in body image research, the term body image is broken down in a health aspect of the body. Body image is described as a socio-cultural construct that is complex, and multidimensional that comprises of affective, cognitive, behavioral, and perceptual components of body experiences (Cash & Smolak, 2011). In an anthropological sense, body image also denotes physical appearance, which includes body size, shape, skin colour, class, ethnicity, body modifications, body ornaments, and specific geographical locations (Anderson-Fye, 2012). It also comprises of an individual’s self-perceptions and self-attitudes, including their thoughts, beliefs, feelings and behaviours (Cash, 2004). In this context, body image looks and is conceptualized differently amongst people of different classes, genders, cultures and sub-cultures (e.g., between Indigenous or non-Indigenous or between Cree and Nakota). In trying to conceptualize body image, these descriptions did not impact my understanding until I received the teaching of the word ‘wi’ last summer by my spiritual knowledge keeper, Warfield Moose Jr. (2015). It was then I knew how my Nakota body is connected to a broader understanding of body image from an Indigenous woman’s perspective.

With settler colonialism, Indigenous bodies are in a constant state of attack. They can become physically removed from their connection to their original teachings (e.g. Residential schools, foster care system) and from the land in which they originated (e.g. forced removal of their lands and relocated – reserves). This produced trauma within the body and a distorted self-image that is intergenerational. There has been plenty of literature published on how trauma affects the body and how intergenerational stress is related to the legacy of residential schools (Castellano, 2006; Wesley-Esquimaux & Smolewski, 2004). Some individuals describe this

experience as *blood memory* (as defined in Castellano, 2006, p. 13). In Part 1: Blood Memory Trauma, *July 17, 2013*, I wrote about the experience I had when my brother was hospitalized for the last time. I had a range of emotions during that time, but I clearly understood the way the doctors talked to my family the way we were treated. It was like layering a cake with icing, but with racism, colonialism, violence, substance abuse, residential schools, hate, prejudice, and discrimination, which is why I wrote *June 2, 2015* (the day TRC report was released). This writing represents what blood memory trauma actually is and how it plays out in family. They saw us only in one way and I performed an act for them to keep my mind distracted and to not act out in anger, because my family and I were in prayer for my brother. After my brother passed away, the grief took over in my body and the impact on my body image was significant. I could not look at myself in the mirror for the longest time. Trauma can make you second-guess yourself because it strips you from your identity and culture (source of power). What had happened with the death of my brother prevented me from believing in who I am and my way of life. I wrote in *Homecoming – July 18, 2013*, of being buried along with my brother, which was a real feeling. I lost myself along the way even with a connection to my culture because it was such a violating experience. Ceremonies became the hardest thing to get through because the absence of my brother's voice in ceremony reminded me of great loss. Our bodies remember trauma, which manifests in different ways within our bodies and psyche.

*Historic trauma* becomes a common experience due to experiencing violence repeatedly over prolonged periods of time, which can also be passed down through generations (Castellano, 2006; Wesley-Esquimaux, & Smolewski, 2004). In *Root of Doubt – 1999*, I had become a witness to domestic violence. The shame and fear I had experienced became ingrained in my body and I refused to have meaningful romantic relationships as I grew up, but it did not protect

me. I knew the background of the person who physical abused a loved one and this person had come from parents who were residential school survivors. The legacy of residential schools has grown roots and devastated many generations. Trauma goes beyond the physical and takes over other parts of your body. Trauma can impair the memory as it can produce high levels of cortisol, which can also cause cell damage or even shutdown the hippocampal system (our memory function; Heller & LaPierre, 2012). There are real impacts and interference when we forget to recall important information. After years of experiencing loss and grief, I found the biggest impact on my memory was after the death of my brother. It interfered with school resulting in prolonging my Master's program another year, which meant not qualifying for band funding. I had to withdraw from courses because I was failing them even though I had tried all that could to stay afloat. I was also retriggered by other violence I had experienced (e.g. witnessing domestic violence), which created panic and anxiety within my spirit. My parents come from the residential school era and my dad is a residential school survivor, but I know this also means that they carried the hurt from the violence in which they grew up. I also know that means that I often carry the same hurt without either of us realizing it. The intense desire to push their children, me, to be educated and stay sober came from a place that made them fear what would happen to us and to them. That fear came to life when my brother passed away, but living with that fear became too intense. It is a work in progress and I know it is not up to my parents to do the healing work alone. Trauma is more than individual experiences, and has been explained as rooted in dislocation that affects an entire group and the community's collective sense of order and meaning (Duran & Duran, 1995).

For the Nakota/Lakota, it was Pte skan wi (white buffalo calf woman) who brought the pipe and seven teachings to the people. Her role is essential to our ceremonies and teachings, so

we uphold what she taught and all the women who come after her. Since colonization, we have lost this connection to *pte skan wi* as white settler logic has erased this knowledge and the respect for all living people, animals and non-humans. In part 3: Body talk, the first set of writings (*Stage one: Maman, Stage two: Girl...*) exemplifies the life of Indigenous people. Their lives were changed with settler colonialism, sexual harassment, sexual assault and racist slurs. In each passage, these are actual words that have been spoken to me. Furthermore, it is to show the transition Indigenous girls now go through in life, compared to when we traditionally had ceremonial celebrations for each life stage, which *pte skan wi* had taught us as well. *Wi* also teaches us our bodies hold ancestral power. I am not advocating for taking on traditional labels or romanticized notions of womanhood, which have become imbedded with heteropatriarchal colonial values and beliefs enforced on us. I am advocating for the inclusion of Indigenous women, queer, and two-spirit people to be integrated back into our stories and ceremonies that have been violently killed and written out of our knowledge and teachings. As much as I love my way of life and all the ceremonies, I do not believe my body only represents bringing in new life to this world. For my body not to do so *especially* does not mean it is then rendered wasted, untraditional, or unfeminine. My body belongs to me and I decide what I want to do with my body, which is that I do not wish to marry or have children. I am an aunt and I believe that is important enough as I have an aunt who has showed me how to love without barriers or labels. My aunt, another single parent, has been integral to my family's kinship structure and she allowed me to grow freely in my life by supporting and loving me. In *I am still Nakota wi*, demonstrates that my body is still livable, important and capable of loving despite all the perceived/culturally imbued imperfections of a brown, Indigenous woman. Today, it is quite different for many young Indigenous women. Our bodies and the land we lived on has now

become static noise for strangers to try to silence or put out.

According to ConsentEd (2016), sexual violence is comprised of sexual harassment (unwanted/non-consensual sexual attention, sexual coercion) and sexual assault (unwanted/non-consensual touching, grabbing, kissing, oral, anal, or vaginal intercourse). Going back to the Nakota word of body, *wicoza*, this description goes beyond the physical body and describes how the spirit grows within, which then feeds the physical body. The historical trauma produced from settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy validates poor/negative body image for Indigenous people since it does not allow the spirit to grow. In terms of the sexual violence I have experienced, my common reaction is revulsion for my body. Every time I experienced white settler male violence and hate, I became frozen and stuck within a funnel of fear. In Part 2: Subverting the Stereotype, both writings, *the body remembers* and *what happens when I am silent?* are examples of what happens when the spirit is not being fed. Sexual violence produces psychological distress, which can impact Indigenous women's body image experiences. Indigenous women often experience depression and sadness from the same violence in their everyday lives (Flowers, 2015). In the writings, *2003 & 2004*, both are examples of being sexually harassed and the type of questions you have about yourself and how you present yourself to the world. Thus, our bodies become a common ground for control and dominance through our own hand and through others at the same time. For all genders, sexual harassment produces distressing psychological symptoms, including low self-esteem, shame, guilt, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, physical health problems, and work or academic disengagement (Avina & O'Donohue, 2002; Buchanan, Bergman, Bruce, Woods, & Lichty, 2009; Buchanan & Fitzgerald, 2008; Larkin & Rice, 2005; Larkin, Rice, & Russell, 1996). Furthermore, sexual harassment is often based on appearance focusing on the body, which will



likely increase the development of weight/shape concerns and eating disturbances (Petersen & Hyde, 2013). In *processing recovery*, I purposefully changed my appearance to mask pain and grief. A cycle that happens when faced with grief and traumatic experiences that is varied in different circumstances from weight gain, to weight loss, to depression, to anxiety, and back again.

Heteropatriarchy make up Indigenous bodies as unequal to the heteronormative and white bodies. Identities, sexualities, and body image are all fluid and constructed, but heteropatriarchy has claimed and objectified anyone who falls out of heteronormativity or the male/female binary. Finley (2011) writes, “Colonialism is supported through the structure of heteropatriarchy which naturalizes hierarchies. Heteropatriarchy disciplines and individualizes communally held beliefs by internalizing hierarchical gendered relationships and heteronormative attitudes toward sexuality” (pp.33-34). Again, destroying their Indigeneity and bodies through their sexuality that has now been structured through heteropatriarchy. Indigenous bodies that fall outside of the white, hetero settler body become erased. In Part 2: Subverting the Stereotype, *Missing and Murdered - Summer of 2014*, after learning of yet another young Indigenous girl found murdered, I wrote this as a prayer for Tina Fontaine. After the lives of Indigenous women are taken, often their bodies are mistreated in the same manner as when they were alive. This prayer is for the ones who have been disposed in a disrespectful and violent way like Tina. Rape culture is normalized sexual violence through law, language, legal processes, images, movies, and music (Women Against Violence Against Women, 2016) and Indigenous women must fight their way through the already existing heteropatriarchal colonial violence in order to survive. They are victim-blamed and slut-shamed for what happens to them. I also dedicated one page of the words *they will deny it*, and purposefully repeat this to further make the point of how much society will

deny the violence Indigenous women and girls will experience in their lifetime regardless of where she is during the time she experienced this violation (e.g., the writings *intimate partner violence x2 & oil spill violence*). This is also a further societal commentary on what happens to our missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit and the realistic outcomes of heteropatriarchal white settler violence. Indigenous women disappear or are found murdered, and only the families are left to search for answers. What does that say about my brown, Indigenous body?

In our white, hetero/colonial and capitalist culture, it can be argued that the only acceptable bodies come in binaries of male/female, feminine/masculine, beautiful/ugly, good/bad, white/black, rich/poor, skinny/fat, clean/damaged, sexualized/whore, or citizenship/immigrant (Arvin et al., 2013; Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2006; Spears, 2005). Due to these pervasive binaries, Indigenous bodies have become casualties of settler colonialism and gender-based violence. I instantly became a casualty for being born with brown skin, being a woman, and being Nakota. I became absorbed by white settler logic and white settler male violence. *A Good Little Indian Girl* represents how much I have tried to fit in by feminizing my look and “kept” clean to keep white settler male violence at a distance, and from them trying to destroy me. I grew up in Edmonton so I was in constant proximity of white people who subjected me to their ideals. I became fixated at constantly changing who I am. Wolfe (2006) explains, “settler colonialism destroys to replace” (p. 388). In the case of body image, what is destroyed is the Indigenous body through settler colonial policies and practices (e.g., rape as a tool for genocide and erasing/silencing their sexuality). These policies and practices become a form of colonial and sexual violence that is connected to the livelihood and importance of Indigenous women and their choices around their own bodies. In *STRANG(ER) IMPOSITION*, I wrote this to

capture what it means to actually live with the threat of strangers imposing on you with their unwanted and uninvited white settler logic and violence, but also to represent what I go through and the negative consequences of trying to seek protection from settler colonialism. *Hanhebi (night)* represents the sadness I carry from these kinds of daily interactions and the love I seek for myself, which I can only reflect alone at night when I feel like there is some kind of comfort and protection from the world.

Reframing our understanding of violence, it can take on different formats and structures. Settler colonialism has a long history of stealing and dismembering Indigenous bodies to make them relics of the past (e.g. the missing and murdered via colonial and sexual violence), or to put them on display such as in museums, or entertainment shows (Fear-Segal, 2013). Within this context, Indigenous women's bodies have become part of the heteropatriarchal settler colonial gaze where they are hyper-sexualized and used as a commodity for mainstream western/colonial culture (e.g. Disney Pocahontas, Halloween costumes, music festival headdress outfits) to racist name-calling (e.g. stupid squaw, rez ho), rape and murders of Indigenous women and girls (Finley, 2011; Jiwani, 2009). For example, Gwen Stefani's music video of her song "Looking Hot" has her dressed as a "sexy Indian (white) girl" and being chased by (white) cowboys, which decontextualizes and disembodies Indigenous women's experiences with settler colonial and sexual violence. This is not to say that Indigenous women cannot express their bodies or sexuality, nor am I saying that they are simply victims. However, this commodification of their bodies and one dimension caricatures represents how heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence erases/imposes on Indigenous women's bodies. In *Keeping up with Pocahontas*, I outline the racism and aversion of the sexualized portrayal of Pocahontas and how it is being replicated by not just white settler culture but by other Indigenous people (Finley, 2009; Jiwani,

2009). This objectification of Indigenous women's bodies to romanticized versions of Indigeneity has affected my own sexuality, and likely other Indigenous women's sexuality or the concept of the "ideal" Indigenous woman. I have also experienced guilt for not being or feeling sexual after experiencing heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence, as it became a part of my life. In *when love dies*, I wrote this about grief, which can mean a lot of things like the ending of yourself after experiencing something traumatic like death, rape, or racism. Nothing has been more terrifying than being retriggered by the sense of loss like losing control over your own body through violent acts or to see such representations of Indigenous women in mainstream culture. McHugh et al.'s (2014) body pride study provides further insight of what young Indigenous women think of unrealistic body shapes in the media (e.g. skinny girls on TV) and how Indigenous women's bodies are talked about (e.g. bannock butt). Indigenous women's bodies are diverse and different from each other; they are not one size fits all and have different expressions of their Indigeneity. Furthermore, our identities are constructed through our own lens and can be layered with different components rather than just gendered binaries or heteropatriarchal colonial values.

In writing my thesis, there has been a shift towards a mainstream body positivity movement on social media that is still not meant for Indigenous bodies despite their image being widely known around the world. Huhndorf (2009) states "Natives are among the most commonly represented people in the world, their images circulated in museums, photographs, films, ethnographic displays and national monuments" (p.20). However, in terms of the body positivity movement that is meant to celebrate all bodies through images, this movement still produces a 'one fits all' approach as seen in mainstream body positivity messages (e.g. white cis-women, heteronormative). Specifically, Indigenous women have diverse and unique experiences within

this colonial and western society, while mainstream/white women feminism(s) tends to erase Indigenous women's existence by excluding complex body image experiences of Indigenous women and women of colour (e.g., forced sterilization of Indigenous women during "first wave" feminism in Alberta lead by Nelly McClung). Again, white settler feminism(s), heteronormative ideals represent what bodies should look like when in fact, there are multiple ways to express body image regardless of gender or Indigeneity.

In an attempt to frame body positivity from an Indigenous<sup>3</sup>, Black, and person of colour (IBPOC) perspective(s), there have been numerous Instagram accounts created that reflect IBPOC body image experiences such as @nalgona positivitypride, @Reclaimyourpower and @ReMatriate, which celebrate IBPOC bodies and reaffirm their Indigeneity and ethnicity. @nalgona positivitypride shares info on decolonizing eating disorders and body image issues and pictures, while @ReMatriate and @Reclaimyourpower posts pictures of Indigenous women to debunk stereotypes and share inspirations. These Instagram accounts represent how Indigenous women have already long been in the process of decolonization despite how colonization has worked against them. In *SUBVERT*, I wrote this to honour my relationship with my mother, who has shared many stories with me about heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence in her lifetime, but what is important is that she did not give up despite all that she went through. I carry on with her words. We have a teaching of perseverance like tatanka oyate (buffalo nation) who stands strong in their hardship in all the seasons, so we embody the tatanka's spirit of strength and courage. Thus, my body image is more than just vanity or facing oppression, but I have embodied my ancestral and cultural teachings. It lives through my blood as well. In *Make peace with your body* I wrote, and included a picture, to represent the decolonizing and healing work of body image I am doing for myself and to represent the tenderness of the land that has

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<sup>3</sup> Indigenous is used to include all Indigenous people from North American and South America in this instance.

also provided me with love and respect. There is no greater sense of safety and acceptance than being on my ancestral land and with all my relatives. However, this does not equate to the “imaginary Indian” who are relics of the past and who does not exist in the present. It means I can be in places and spaces at the same time and still be an Indigenous woman without violence controlling or masking my body.

### **Conclusion**

Theorizing pain and trauma has been one way to work through my own understanding of the physical manifestation of that trauma. I have long suffered from anxiety, panic attacks, body aches and depression. I have seen medical doctors and traditional healers. I have sought therapy and chose to be physically active. With all the help I received, I still struggle. I could not understand why the ache and pain did not go away. Why I was not “healed” yet. In Canada, the narrative around Indigenous people and settler violence did not occur and it has become their own fault. We somehow have created the environment in which we feel hurt and are hurt. Victim blaming is a technique to marginalize and make those who experience violence even further marginalized. Furthermore, society wants to delegitimize our Indigenous experiences by talking over, ignoring, or dismissing us. Society tells Indigenous people to get over our trauma and ignore the deaths and disappearances of family members.

When we look at structural oppression like settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy, we need to reframe our understanding of violence and who are the ones reinforcing the type of violence Indigenous people experience. Heteropatriarchal colonial and gender-based violence directly impacts Indigenous women and two-spirit people through structures like incarceration, foster care system, Indian act legislations, media, education, access to health care, reproductive and sexual health, and access to housing (Jiwani, 2009). How we respond should not be against individuals but through the structures that continues to perpetuate oppression and violence. Furthermore, Indigenous people are not trying to be saved, nor are they needing to be saved. As I displayed in my autoethnography through the lens of Indigenous feminism(s), it is deeply rooted settler colonial and sexual violence that continues to colonize our bodies. It is also my own

Nakota knowledge that I have access to, which has allowed me to understand the body in a more spiritual and ancestral way.

Nason (2013) describes how it is the centrality of Indigenous love that is essential to the anticolonial project. She states that “the world has witnessed the boundless love that Indigenous women have for their families, their lands, their nations, and themselves as Indigenous peoples” and now it is the time to turn it inwards. As Indigenous women, we must learn to turn the love we have been taught to give to others to give to ourselves. Furthermore, we have our own worldviews that will help us work through issues like body image and heteropatriarchal colonial and sexual violence. Dr. Michael Yellowbird (2014) describes his experience within social work (and even in research) that people tell him when working with Indigenous people, they need a model to be evidence-based, but he counters that Indigenous cultures have been working for thousands of years. Indigenous cultures are already evidence-based and to think that Indigenous cultures are not evidence is exactly what settler colonialism has been trained to do – to erase Indigenous knowledge and way of life. In the time of TRC and the concept of reconciliation, I ask ‘is it for settler researchers to document our lives and write about what we know already?’ or must they step back and dismantle settler colonialism through their own relations and institutions for which they work? Time and time again Indigenous people are overtly saying they need to control their own lives and bodies as they have the tools and knowledge to do so. It is also time to stop appropriating Indigenous women and the violence they face as settlers way of “reconciliation.” Furthermore, we need to protect the land for the sake of our bodies and spiritual connection through wakan. Looking at an Indigenous body positivity framework means understanding empowerment from an Indigenous perspective; however, I use empowerment as what Brown and Strega (2005) defines as “tied to an analysis of power relations and a



recognition of systemic oppressions” (p.10). This further aligns with the process of decolonization and the analytical work of Indigenous feminism(s).

### **Limitations of the study**

Despite the strengths of this autoethnography in supporting an understanding of Indigenous women’s body image experiences, there are limitations to this research. First, since this is an autoethnography, it only focuses on my body image experiences as a Nakota woman. There are diverse experiences of Indigenous women due to age, motherhood/parenthood, which Indigenous nation one belongs to, on-reserve/off-reserve experiences, poverty, and homelessness. Therefore, this autoethnography does not represent the experiences of all Indigenous women. There are also queer Indigenous and two-spirit people whose identity has been erased by settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy, and who also experience this violence that exists in Canada. Queer Indigenous and two-spirit people are also diverse and have unique experiences of their own, which were not necessarily accounted for in this research. There are queer Indigenous (LGBTIQQ2S) people who have been fighting and resisting settler colonialism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and sexism for a long time, which has impacted their body image as well. There needs to be more in-depth research to explore such body image experiences with all genders and sexualities. Native Youth Sexual Health Network is an example of such community-based work.

### **Moving forward – creating safer spaces**

This autoethnography can provide information to create new understandings of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy in health projects and programming. This autoethnography provides a basis for rethinking about health risk factors of Indigenous women and girls. I am not a registered health specialist, psychologist, or counsellor, but what my own experiences and my

close relationships have taught me is that trauma impacts us in ways we may not entirely know or want to acknowledge. That is ok. The one thing I have learned through my teachings is that it is not about being perfect and not making mistakes, but being ok with yourself and your experiences. No one is perfect, The underlying message of my teachings is to take care of yourself, respect yourself, and to love yourself, which will flow to doing all three with others and all living things. It does not differentiate between genders or living creatures or non-humans.

With the relationship of Indigenous feminisms, this autoethnography challenged the impacts of settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy in Indigenous women's body image experiences. Indigenous feminisms explore the process of locating the source of one's own power and privilege and decolonizing what love means for our bodies within a heteropatriarchal society, which is also known as decolonial love (Díaz, 2012). To have decolonial love means that we critically look at the broader society, but it also allows for us to critically look within ourselves to understand how heteropatriarchy works within us and undo the power and privilege we hold over others. It allows us to examine the ways in which we build relationships that are not healthy with ourselves and with others. This form of decolonial love is an act of resistance to heteropatriarchy and settler colonialism. It is the process of loving yourself and others and in that sense love is part of Indigenous resistance. There are many methods of Indigenous resistance and resurgence amongst circles of Indigenous women, such as Indigenous feminisms in academia, communities or collectives bringing back women's role in teaching and performing ceremonies, art initiatives such as ReMatriate (social media campaign), Radical Indigenous Survivance & Empowerment, Native Youth Sexual Health Network, and missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit initiatives like Walking with Our Sisters and Sisters in Spirit. There are many other Indigenous women authors who published their own stories of violence and

abuse such as Lee Maracle, Marie Campbell, Tracey Lindberg, Jeanette Armstrong, Eden Robinson, and many others who are paving the way for other young Indigenous women researchers and writers. Indigenous feminism(s) is about reclaiming that lost sense of self and breaking down the trauma within our bodies. Indigenous feminism(s) is allowing me to do so, as before, I was unable to critically locate my trauma and to put the words to my trauma. Indigenous feminism(s) is vital to decolonize our bodies.

Reframing narratives is an ethical responsibility especially when it comes to breaking down colonial writing on Indigenous peoples, and resisting these colonial narratives moves beyond notions of obligation. Stories can build a new life and expand beyond boundaries that typically ensnare us. Allen (1991) describes stories as medicine and as a conduit for connecting us to the sacred power of the universe. I understand this as connecting with my relatives who have passed on like my brother and maternal grandmother (whom I yearn for a connection). Their life force is not undone or gone. They are part of me. Simpson (2011) explores how her people, Nishnaabeg, survived and resisted by hanging onto their stories that were tucked away so when the next generation were ready, the stories, like seeds, are planted in order to spring Nishnaabeg back to life. In this way, we all walk alongside each other. We all survive together. Thus, my stories told in this autoethnography are not my own, but interwoven with all my relatives. They are my responsibility, which reflect the ethics of an Indigenous researcher who considers the cultural protocols of their community (Kovach, 2009). I will plant them and nourish them to continue to flourish in the next generation.

In the past four years I have journeyed with this women's bundle that my parents had created for the work I do with the missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and two-spirit people in the city. The bundle was originally gifted to another person, but it was not taken care of

in the way it should have so it was brought back to the Sundance lodge. From there, it was gifted to another individual who then became adopted into my family. We have now become sisters and she is the bundle keeper. Even in the process of providing the bundle a new caretaker, shows how important it is to maintain good relationships and be accountable to the ceremonial and nonhuman items within the bundle. The bundle even carries a pipe that was originally owned by a man who abused his wife, so the family took responsibility and retrieved the pipe back. The pipe was then gifted to one of my family members who then gifted the pipe to the bundle. The significance of a bundle is to show the relationship between wakan and the people to honour that relationship. That is why we have laws and protocols around such sacred items. Throughout the past three years, I have helped her with taking care of the bundle and bringing it to Indigenous youth to teach them about the bundle and its purpose. It is through this bundle that my sister and I are providing traditional teachings and practices that promote self-care and self-love after traumatic experiences amongst Indigenous youth, and making the connection of how settler colonialism and heteropatriarchy have been erasing and hurting Indigenous people from this land. Many Indigenous youth have shared their own experiences during these times and provided beautiful insight to their own healing and practices.

Now, in my journey I have been given a new spiritual name, *Hanwi Yuha Wi*, which means Moon Warrior Woman. I love and protect the people therefore I was given the honour of a warrior name. I may not create life, but I will protect the lives that are given to us. With that, I will finish with a reminder that I wrote for myself:

*Wicozani* (to have good spiritual health)

I don't have to remind you of my humanity. I am born of thunder and lightning. My presence is fire. I come from a long line of Brave Hearted women. You don't belong here

if you can't respect me. I will keep smiling cause I am not afraid to spit fire. I believe in my teachings: to love myself, to respect myself, to take care of myself. I am my own prayer. And in return, I slay.

Pinamiyad. Hetchedo.

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