

4-18-2023

Is My Colonialism Showing? A Reflexive Case Study.

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Is My Colonialism Showing? A Reflexive Case Study.

Nicole A. Karsies

Graduate Program in Social Innovation, Grand Valley State University

SI 693 – 03: Master’s Project in Social Innovation (W23)

Dr. Azfar Hussain

April 13, 2023

Author Note:

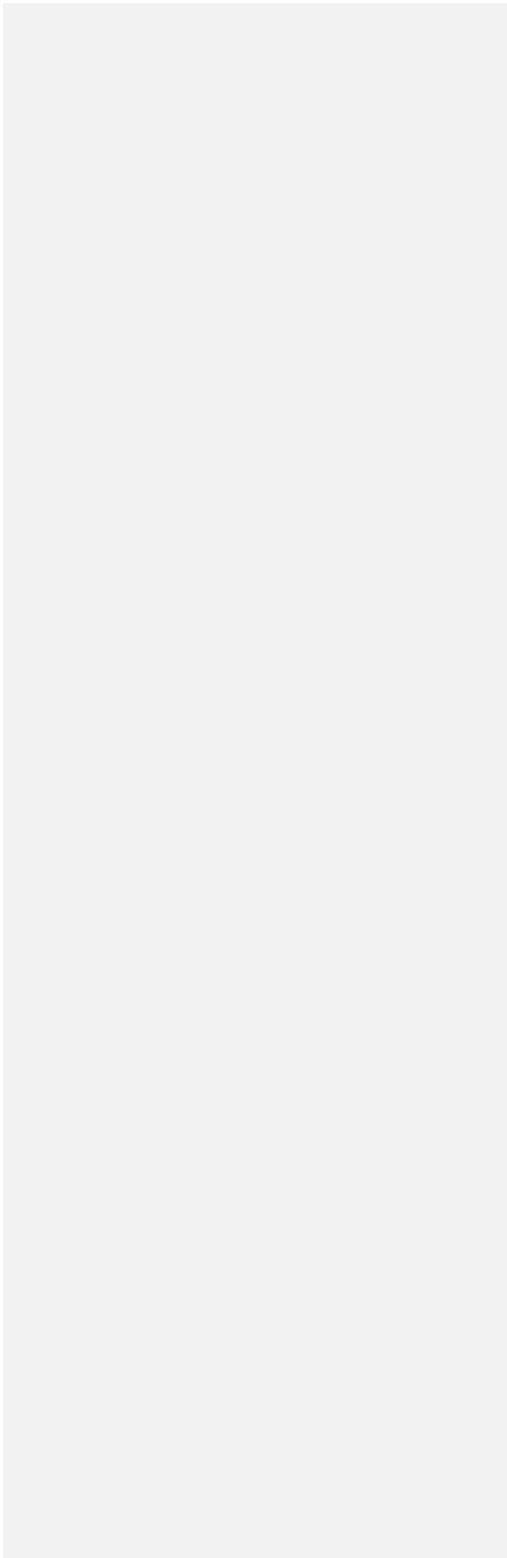
I am grateful for the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy awarding me the Orosz Fellowship in Philanthropy, which has made this project possible. Their address is as follows:

201 Front Ave SW, Grand Rapids, MI 49504.

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Introductory Gratitude:

Before I begin, I would like to thank Creator for healing me of my fifth documented concussion in 22 years. I want to thank the Anishinaabeg People of West Michigan for warmly welcoming me into community. This work is dedicated to you all – past, present, and future. I see you.

I would also like to thank the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy. They awarded me the Orosz Fellowship in Philanthropy in support of this project! Lin Bardwell MPA, is both the Native American Student Association - GVSU chapter director, and the Assistant Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs. She has been my biggest cheerleader, my advocate, and my community connection. She graciously has been my Indigenous Mentor, patiently welcoming me deeper into protocol and community. I am seen because of Lin. Chi Miigwech, Lin. I see you!

Dr. Krista Benson has guided my processes from a “post-it-note” mentality into a cohesive, personalized, reflexive case study. They have patiently (and perhaps laboriously) walked alongside me on this journey. Their knowledge of protocol, pitfalls, and procedures have opened more doors than I ever imagined were possible. Krista, I am honored to call you friend. Chi Miigwech. Dr. Rutecki has mentored me this semester, and I am so grateful for her time, listening, wisdom, mentorship, and friendship. Chi Miigwech, Dawn.

The GVSU chapter of Native American Student Association has become my community and extended family; Chi Miigwech for your acceptance without hesitation. I will “mother bear” on each of your behalf – always. Just let me know what you need. For GRPS – NAEP, Aanii! Chi Miigwech for welcoming me into community, and for your patience (with occasional long suffering) as I learn how to properly speak and think in Anishinaabemowin. I am honored to learn from you.

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The Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of the American Indian Central Archives allowed me into their sacred space so that I might better understand my ancestry, and our kin. That day holds place in my heart as one of the best days I have ever had. Chi Miigwech for allowing me to be seen, and for allowing me to see our ancestors in their own words.

GVSU CECI and Social Innovation Program, I am grateful that you decolonize our program by consistently seeking how to innovate both our program and its processes. Thank you sincerely for not only stirring the embers of my dormant dreams, but also for coaching me as I walk them out. Dr. Raymond Higbea, Dr. Michael Layton, Dr. Joel Wendland-Liu, Dr. Kevin Holohan, Dr. Brandy Lovelady, Dr. Michael Moody, Dr. Neal Buckwalter, Professor Jennifer Meeks, and Dr. Daniela Marini; your classwork, lectures, discussions, and input shaped this reflexive case study more than each of you realize. Every interaction with you stretched me out of my comfort zone while also revealing my own biases. Chi Miigwech (many thanks).

To my interviewees, you have walked alongside me in this good work, patiently and bravely sharing your heart with me. Chi Miigwech to you each: Jason S. Wesaw, enrolled member of the Pokagon Tribe, and of the Turtle Clan. Beth Fisher-Polasky, originally from Mackinac near Lake Michigan and Huron, now lives in Petoskey near Lake Michigan. Beth is of Deer Clan and is enrolled with Sault Ste. Marie Band of Chippewa. Jacob, Descendant of the Crow and Cherokee Nations, Southern Cherokee Nation of Kentucky – Bird Clan. I see you each, Jason, Beth and Jacob, and am grateful for you!

Jason Borowicz, thank you, friend, for walking out my thoughts with me ahead of this reflexive, decolonizing project. It's been a joy calling you friend for so many years! I am grateful for you and yours! To my Social Innovation classmates, I was nowhere near who I am today without you in my life! Chi Miigwech for being the flint stone necessary for the embers of my

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dreams to ignite. I hold you each so dear to my heart. Ty, Jowei, Tonya, and Jodi, thank you for making space for me beside you on Recenter and Reimagine! Minnie, Tonya & Shelby, we all know I would not be here without our chats! Beth, you are indeed my kindred spirit, let's never lapse in our talks, ok? Chi Miigwech to you all! Dr. Azfar Hussain, my gratitude seems shallow in comparison to your encouragement, chats, brainstorming, troubleshooting, and friendship. Your intellect daily reminds me that intelligence in its purest form awakens beauty. My dear friend, thank you for giving me such a beautiful two years in this program. Chi Miigwech.

I am grateful for an incredible group of twenty-seven 6th graders who challenged me, encouraged me, learned alongside me, and taught me more perseverance than I knew I had inside of me. Although we didn't get to continue this journey together like we wanted, I hope that you see how much I have been working to make a better place for you as you grow up. The song, "For Good" says it best, "But I know I'm who I am today because I knew you...Because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

My love, Tim, your kindness, devotion, and strength brings out the gifts that I did not know were within me. I see the thousands of sacrifices that you have made these last two years, and I am overwhelmed by your love for me. Thank you for being my Boaz, my love, my best friend, and my biggest promoter! I am courageous, brave, and settled because you love me lots. I can't wait to see where this next adventure takes us! I am humbled to be your Mrs. and I love you lots! Austin, Trey, Isabelle, Emerald, Ollie, Aden, Madelaine and Paige, thank you for encouraging me to keep going, for listening while I rattle off what I'm learning, and for discussing different perspectives with me until I saw my own biases (whether or not you realized it); but most of all, for sacrificing time and attention while I studied! I love you all! Thank you for calling me Ma/Mom/Madre/Knicki. My heart is full.

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Acknowledgements:

“Tears are strong” I remind myself as they start to flow down my cheeks. “Crying is cathartic and cleansing.” I was challenged by my dear advisor, Professor Krista Benson, to include an acknowledgement section and answer these two questions: “Who shaped your journey on the way here? Who contributes to this journey?” It’s time for the truth. My journey was pivotally shaped for better or for worse, when I discovered on the honeymoon of my first marriage that I had married an abusive addict. We were 2,000 miles from home, in a gated community, and I was covered with shame and disgrace. As my first husband’s addictions grew over the next five years, I initially sought advice from leaders in our community. Three different white male leaders told me it was my fault. Family members chided me to “Keep the house cleaner, then he won’t need to use so much.” Not even one urged me to get out...until the fourth faith leader – once he discovered that my then-husband had been threatening my life, the lives of our children, and my family members; that he had even started asking among his friends if they would kill me and make it look accidental, that is the moment we began to formulate a way that I could escape with the kids. My first plan to escape was thwarted by a well-meaning friend who didn’t want to see us divorce.

So, I played my role the way that my college theatre director had coached me when he said, “A good actor never breaks character, Nik.” I could have won an Emmy award for the way that I graciously de-escalated, and devotedly played my part. Eventually, my ex-husband threw a cordless phone at me while I held our five-month-old baby, knocking my feet out from under me as I held and protected our baby, hitting my head on the wall behind me. I knew that I finally had “enough reason” to leave. Earlier that morning, I awoke to discover him and his friend doing drugs off our coffee table, as our baby lay on the couch, barely a foot away from the drugs. The

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next few hours were the longest hours of my life as I fake-slept, acting roused when he started screaming and throwing things at the wall above my head, all the while holding a knife under my pillow in case he couldn't be talked down.

Somehow, I escaped that morning with our three kids in tow, ages 4, 2 ½ and 5 months. Because my first husband's family was enmeshed with politics and law at the highest levels in our county and state, we had to flee to a different county. The last 17 years have been filled with a seemingly constant barrage of harassment, ridicule, and intimidation by the very systems that I looked to for help and refuge. I have been traumatized repeatedly simply for my self-advocacy. Things as personal as my undergarments have been brought up publicly in loud conversation in proximity to me as a heinous method of intimidation, and a futile attempt to try and "keep me in my place." Matters that I have discussed in closed-door counseling sessions have been cited verbatim loudly in public, sometimes within hours. It took moving out of state before I finally began to process that my first husband had trafficked me and others after drugging us. I have one memory that is clear and painful, I am still processing the other ones. All of this to say that my advocacy for trafficking survivors and survivors of domestic violence dates to 2005, as does my political activism. I say activism because having three children with life-threatening allergies on WIC in the late-2000s meant that I was threatened with arrest if I did not take peanut butter jars home with me. If I did take them home, however, I would have been arrested for child endangerment.

My dear friend Lori and I met in a local support group for survivors of domestic violence. Despite her every attempt to find protection from her abuser, she was murdered by him. I seek to honor her life, friendship, and memory every day. She pushes me forward in this work. My 6th Grade Class that I had anticipated teaching these last two years as they completed Middle

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School; they drive me to keep going.. Seeing firsthand how a broken colonial system is holding them back shocked me into action. I realized that I can be a bigger influence for good outside of their school system than I can from within it. I began this journey for my MA in Social Innovation for Lori, for my 6th Graders, for my now-husband and our 6 children, and for me. I have been waking up to make the world a better place for free over the last 17 years, now I have learned my worth and value; and I will not be undersold ever again.

How do I find the courage to ignore my intimidators and fix my gaze? It's in my DNA. It was only a decade ago that my true ancestry was discovered, but suffice it to say that learning how my Grandfather's Grandfather fled persecution and found refuge in Grand Rapids, and connecting his story to how I fled persecution from Grand Rapids and found refuge along the beaches on the lakeshore in MI, only to be welcomed back into community by West Michigan Anishinaabeg, the very people who protected my ancestor; that has only strengthened my resolve. I have been advocating for Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women since 2019, when my husband and I were first invited to join a contingency of peaceful activists within Washington D.C.

Knowing the privilege that has been afforded me due to my white upper-middle class upbringing and understanding that because I look to be a white woman (despite my DNA), I have been offered resources that my kin has not. This realization has stoked the fire within me that burns for merciful justice on behalf of my kin. My Indigenous Grandfather was a Golden Gloves champion at age 18, anyone who knows me can attest that I am a fighter. I believe in peacemaking, but I will not shrink back from advocacy and "cage rattling" until my kin are acknowledged and seen. This project is part of that work.

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I acknowledge that my studies at Grand Valley State University have taken place on the unceded territory of the Anishinaabeg--Three Fires Confederacy: the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi (inspired by Dawn Rutecki's acknowledgement). I acknowledge that without the Anishinaabeg, Grandfather's Grandfather would have had no place to find solace, and without that solace, I would not be able to study and be welcomed back into this community today. I see you, Anishinaabeg, past, present, and future. Chi Miigwech for seeing my ancestors, our children, and me.

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Abstract:

About a decade ago, I was told by a family member that our ancestor, who we all believed to have been a French-Canadian fur trader, was of the Wolastoqiyik / Maliseet Indigenous People. This was shocking considering my white upper middle class, Dutch/Irish, conservative background. Through my time at Grand Valley State University (GVSU), I was able to meet Lin Bardwell, Native American Student Initiative Coordinator and Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs. Through her, I have been given the opportunity to be mentored in the ways of the Anishinaabe People of West Michigan. My experiences have stirred an even deeper desire to see more equitable systems in place for my kin and other marginalized groups. That is why this reflexive case study will ask the following question: How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the interrelationships between Indigenous culture, community, business, and philanthropy? My project is Participatory Action Research (PAR)-informed, utilizing a Strengths Enhancing Evaluation Research (SEER) approach through the process of story-gathering, while also examining anthropological resources through a Decolonizing / postcolonial methodology within a reflexive case study. Lastly, I will integrate the Seven Grandfather Teachings of the Anishinaabe people into the framework of my project. “The Seven Grandfather Teachings are the principles of character that each Anishinaabe should live by. Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility & Wisdom” (American Indian Health Service of Chicago, 2021). Embracing the SEER approach within a Reflexive Case Study will allow me to continually assess and adjust my own personal biases, while also learning and growing from the wisdom of Indigenous Culture and Knowledge Systems, including the Seven Grandfather teachings.

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Keywords:

Anishinaabe

Anishinaabeg People of West Michigan

Business

Case Study

Colonial Research Methodologies

Community

Decolonizing Methodology

Grand Valley State University

Indigenous Culture

Interrelationships

North American Indigenous Peoples

[Native American Student Association GVSU \(NASA-GVSU\)](#)

Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS)

Mno'Chigewin Student Success Program

Participatory Action Research (PAR)

Philanthropy

Reflexive Case Study

The Seven Grandfather Teachings

The Seven Generations Principle

Story Gathering

Storytelling

Strengths-Enhancing Evaluation Research (SEER)

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Project Question:

How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the interrelationships between Indigenous culture, community, business, and philanthropy?

Creative Tension Guide:

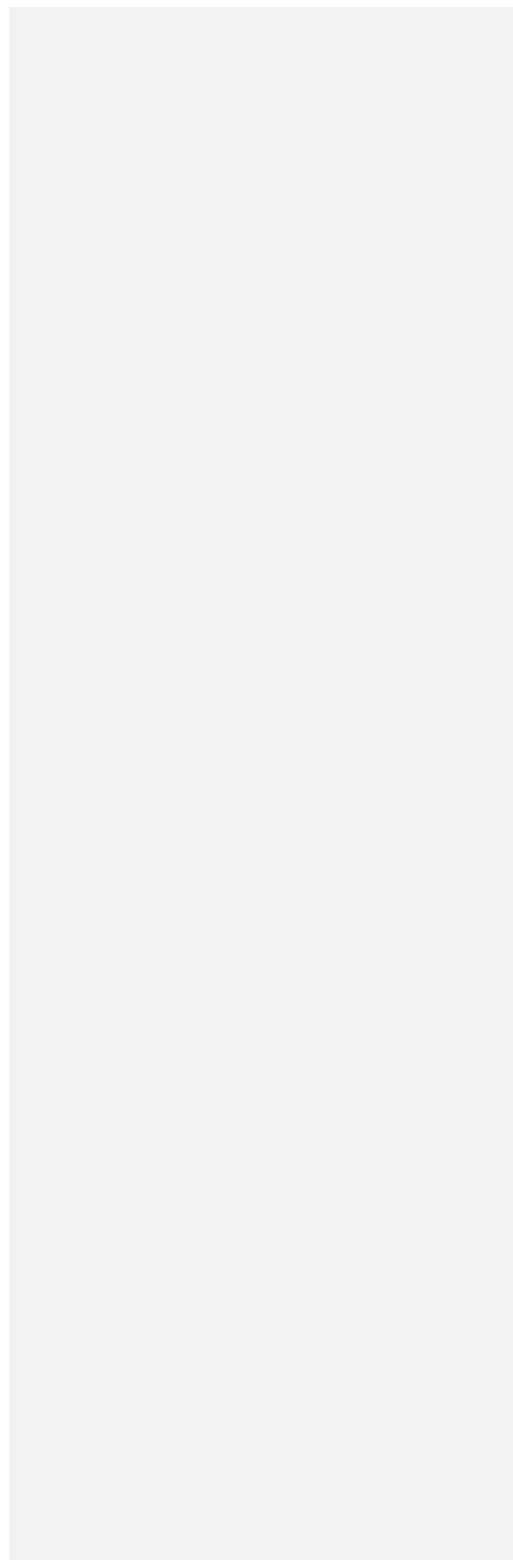
Everything about my project is intentional. Capitalization is just a tool. I purposely did not capitalize “colonial research methodologies.” My friend Jason Borowicz studied among the Maori People in New Zealand. As we talked over my project, he imparted the following quote of wisdom: “This [my lack of capitalization] is included to present the challenge of thinking about things we do implicitly or explicitly.” There is not even one of us who would hesitate to capitalize “Scandinavian People,” “Mexican People,” “Swiss People,” or “Russian People”.

Why, then, do so many of us neglect to capitalize “Indigenous People?” (Interestingly enough, Google fails to have images for the latter with capitalization, although the first four search terms provide images alongside capital letters.)¹ My friend Jason Borowicz also stated the following reasons for the Creative Tension Guide: “If you are uncomfortable, the discomfort is a beacon calling you to a breakthrough” and “Creative tension is necessary for growth. We do, we act, and then we see what it does.” I propose that creative tension is not only necessary for growth, but also likewise a vital tool for social innovation. This reasoning has also led me to call this my “project,” and completely omit the use of the word “research,” which is one strategy. Many Indigenous People have done the opposite and claimed many ways of thinking and engaging as research - both are legitimate interactions with these words.

¹ This originally occurred on November 26, 2022. Since including it in my paper, it has been adjusted in my Google search algorithm, and now “Indigenous People” likewise pulls up photos. However, “Indigenous Peoples” is the only search term to pull up an option for “cartoon” as of November 30, 2022.

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My Origin Story/Introduction:

I was immediately immersed into the story of Raven and The Box of Daylight² as my husband and I journeyed through the exhibit at the National Museum of the American Indian. The sights and sounds were breathtaking, and the narrative was artfully woven throughout the spaces. Preston Singletary's artwork included a myriad of carved glass pieces, displayed throughout numerous rooms. Singletary's Tlingit culture shone through each carving. The light play was mesmerizing, the sounds were emotive, and the projections of nature were awe-inspiring as we meandered through Raven's journey as the one who unleashes the sun, moon, and stars. The installation reflected so much of my own personal journey over the last 18 months in Graduate School. One of the themes that continued to resurface was that in my own life, as I reconnect to my ancestry, and wrestle with my upbringing, it's messy. The good and the bad parts are juxtaposed in a messy tangle together, inseparable from each other. Singletary's light play, dissonant sounds, and juxtaposition of dark intermingling with light and shadows resonated because it seemed as if my personal emotional journey was being displayed through the tale. This case study had been quietly expanding into every space of both my consciousness and subconscious as we had meandered through the rest of our trip.

Part of our visit also included a notable gathering of different Indigenous Leaders over the course of multiple days, as well as meetings with an organization that I was inducted into. At one of the Indigenous Leaders of Native American/Alaskan Native/Native Hawaiian meetings, a conversation was started between me and a leader. I shared emotionally about my origin story, and my Grandfather's Grandfather. About a decade ago, I was told by a family member that our ancestor, who we all believed to have been a French-Canadian fur trader, was of the

² <https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/raven-and-box-daylight>

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Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet Indigenous People. This was shocking considering my white upper middle class, Dutch/Irish, conservative background—all my life in private school until attending Grand Valley State University. Grandfather's grandfather apparently traveled from his homeland out East³ to Grand Rapids, Michigan by canoe. Considering that many Boarding Schools in Canada were founded in the mid 1800s, and that my ancestor went on to fight in the Civil War for the North, in addition to a tintype photo that I possess of him, it seems likely that he may have been in a Boarding School where he learned French before escaping to settle in Grand Rapids, under guise of being a French-Canadian fur-trader.

I also shared about other notable ancestors in my lineage. My dad's ancestry also reportedly includes Mary Todd Lincoln, and his mother was a Kennedy - traced back to the same county in Ireland as THE Kennedys. My mother's parents are both first generation Dutch American citizens born here. I emotionally explained my journey of learning about all the parts of my heritage, only to be devastatingly surprised at learning of my ancestor's heinous decision. A piece of history that was not taught in my educational experiences is that former President Abraham Lincoln made the final decision to hang 38 Dakota men at Mankato, MN on December 26, 1862. My horror deepened at hearing that one of the victim's descendants was the leader I was speaking with. Aghast, I offered an apology, seeking forgiveness for the crimes of my ancestor. My plea was waved off in an act of grace. I shared further how my Grandfather's grandfather was drowned in the Mississippi River after he dove in to save others who were drowning, of how I suspected that he was there to help those Native Americans who sought to cross the river into safety from pursuing soldiers. I mentioned how weighty it is to know that I

³ Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet People are part of the Wabanaki Confederation - whose original land stretched from the Pacific Ocean coastline to the St. Lawrence River. [The Canadian Encyclopedia](#)

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carry **both** the blood of oppressors **and** the blood of the oppressed. The Native American Leader looked at me unflinchingly and stated, “We all carry that duality.”

That single statement has become my Polaris. Something vital in understanding this project is that I tend to process things from the end backwards. As a child, I heard once that starting a maze from the end and working backwards was the most efficient way to navigate. This morsel of wisdom has led my decisions and my research ever since. I am fascinated by first studying where I am in a situation, then analyzing where things could continue to go if left uninterrupted, and then focusing my attention upstream, to deeply analyze how I arrived at this moment in my journey. As the scenes and sounds washed over me at “Raven and the Box of Daylight,” I was struck by the realization that Raven was faced with three items. The Box that held the stars, The Box that held the moon, and The Box that held the daylight (the sun). Every thought within me came to a screeching halt as I realized that colonialism has imposed the lens of duality onto Indigenous Peoples of North America, Descendants of Native American/Alaskan Natives/Native Hawaiians, and Native American/Alaskan Native/Native Hawaiian Community Members.

Historically, European dualism’s philosophical roots can be traced back to Plato, Aristotle, and Descartes (Robinson, 2023). Alexis de Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America, Volume I* in 1835. He highlights the dualism prominent in France at the time as a warning to America if we were to avoid the same mistakes:

Where are we then? The religionists are the enemies of liberty, and the friends of liberty attack religion; the high-minded and the noble advocate subjection, and the meanest and most servile minds preach independence; honest and enlightened citizens are opposed to all progress, whilst men without patriotism and without principles are the apostles of civilization and of intelligence. Has such been the fate of the centuries which have preceded our own? and has man always inhabited a world like the present, where nothing is linked together, where virtue is without genius, and genius without honor; where the love of order is confounded with a

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taste for oppression, and the holy rites of freedom with a contempt of law; where the light thrown by conscience on human actions is dim, and where nothing seems to be any longer forbidden or allowed, honorable or shameful, false or true? (1835, Location 869-870).

Instead of three options, colonialism has imposed only two. Instead of a *both - and* mentality, we are all often faced with either/or thinking. This colonial duality has impacted much of modern American culture. Our K-12 educational system often consists of “College Prep” classes or “General Education.” Our voting system currently offers two parties in power: either “Republican” or “Democrat.” The constructs of moral issues are seen as “black” and “white.” For years, even race was viewed as a “Black and White” issue, instead of a multiculturally nuanced one. Faith organizations and churches are quickly becoming polarized into two sides of the LGBTQ+ rights - in opposition of, or in favor of.

Further, consider the duality implications of colonial insistence that a child must be either a male or a female, erasing nonbinary people or people of other genders. For decades, people have been consigned to choose between either heterosexual or homosexual, completely negating the options of pansexual, asexual, and bisexual. Additionally, the indications of pro-immigrant or anti-immigrant/anti-immigration cannot be discounted. In the same ways that colonialism sought to erase the original existence of varied Indigenous People populations on this land, now it seeks to bar immigrants from said land, without allowing original Native American/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian caretakers a voice in the discussion.

Implications are profound when one turns their attention to other modern systems within the United States government. Consider the decline of the middle class in the last 60 years, something recently attributed to the blatant policy implementation of standards designed to switch the American Financial System from upper, middle, and lower class into an increasing duality system of the mega-rich and not rich, or even “upper middle class” and lower-class. This

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has been attributed to what Richard Reeves calls, “opportunity hoarding,” and continues, “Examples include zoning laws and schooling, occupational licensing, college application procedures, and the allocation of internships. Upper middle class opportunity hoarding, Reeves argues, results in a less competitive economy as well as a less open society” (Reeves, 2017, n.p.). Yet another polarization is demonstrated in the United States Housing and Urban Development (HUD) youth homelessness crisis. According to Desiree Viramontes Le,

Currently families/individual students transition through different states of homelessness; once they find a couch to surf for a week or a motel for the night, they are no longer considered homeless in HUD’s eyes and ineligible for housing options from the federal government (2020, 130).

Either you meet the criteria for homelessness resources, or you don’t. If you don’t (which many Americans don’t), there’s no safety net or mid-range transitional program in place. This is reiterated in the Hechinger Report by Neil Morton where he includes the following key points, as featured in his 2023 USA Today article:

- About 85% of K-12 students identified as homeless nationwide don't qualify for public housing assistance.
- Advocates say dueling federal definitions of homelessness push kids and families into their cars or onto the street before they can be helped.
- Washington state legislators passed a bill in 2016 that freed up money so schools can identify more students as homeless and get them into stable housing (n.p.).

In addition, consider the Testimony of Barbara Duffield, Executive Director, SchoolHouse Connection, before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Rules regarding “How Schools Can End Childhood Hunger and Improve Nutrition” on September 15, 2021, as follows:

The definition of homelessness used by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) for the most part only includes those on the streets or in shelters. As a result, the vast majority of the children and youth experiencing homelessness who are identified by public schools are not eligible for most HUD homeless assistance programs — even now, when staying with others in temporary, crowded situations places them at high risk for COVID-19 transmission and infection. So, most children and youth experiencing

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homelessness don't show up in HUD counts, and thus stay invisible, underserved, and underfed (7).

This all led me to study the impacts of colonial research methodologies, by asking the following questions:

1. How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the interrelationships for you and your kin between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy?
2. Do you have a story containing wisdom about how to embrace the Seven Grandfather Teachings in everyday post-colonial life, and/or a true story about personal experiences with any part of the project question?
 - a. Where did you/they come from?
 - b. Where are you/they now?
 - c. How did you/they get here?
 - d. Where are you/they going?
 - e. I will also ask follow-up questions to follow the natural progression of the conversation.

This topic is important to investigate for numerous reasons, many of which were previously examined in the previous paragraphs. One could ask what we knew about this topic before I began my study. There are some books on decolonizing methods in research, and a growing number of journal articles, as well as a few case studies. However, most case studies feature author reflexivity, but it's rare to either find a reflexive case study written by the descendant of a Native American author, or a Native American/Alaskan Native author. Further, while a case study entitled, *"Decolonizing the Business School: Reconstructing the Entrepreneurship*

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Classroom through Indigenizing Pedagogy and Learning” was published in 2022, and it brings forth helpful, applicable lessons; the study focuses on “the Māori, the Indigenous Peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand” (Woods et. al, 2022, pg. 82), and it utilizes entrepreneurship as the lens through which culture and community are examined. In contrast, my reflexive case study is written from my perspective as a descendant of a Native American/Indigenous Canadian man who found solace among the Anishinaabe People in West Michigan. I interviewed 3 other people who have been accepted into the community among and/or hold Tribal Citizenship within the Michigan-based Anishinaabeg Community. Additionally, I study the impacts of colonialism on the interrelationships between business, community, culture, and philanthropy.

One might ask how this study will advance new knowledge or new ways of understanding. T. McMahon, et al. address this with the following:

...previous research has indicated that focusing on strengths can be used as a mechanism to avoid community development policies often imposed upon impoverished and politically disempowered communities based on the assumption that poor communities have little to offer outside of cheap land, cheap labor, and a host of social problems (Perkins et al., [2004](#)). (McMahon et al., 2013, 694).

Notice the importance of utilizing a decolonizing approach for this project, as mentioned above. Focusing on the strengths of my kin while following my personal journey and simultaneously reflexively examining my own colonial biases allows a deeper understanding of the lasting impacts of colonialism and duality.

Literature Review (Macro)

Five hundred years ago, the beginning of colonial methodologies in research **was enacted on** Indigenous Peoples of North America. Some may question if there is any relevance today to a historical period, or “Treaty Era” in time. Linda Tuwaha Smith writes at length about “Why Indigenous Peoples have an abhorrence and distrust of research” ... in her book,

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Decolonizing Methodologies (1999, 123). It is a fact that in the year 2023, most Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians are the only People of a Sovereign Nation required by the United States Federal Government to undergo a blood test to “prove” their citizenship, otherwise referred to as “blood quantum”.

Consider the list of negative effects suffered by Indigenous People, as written by J.

Sanchez, et al:

Transgenerational trauma from the historical effects of colonization, cultural oppression, and marginalization of Indigenous peoples have significantly detrimental effects on Indigenous mental health and wellbeing. The loss of connection to land, kinship networks, power, autonomy, memory, traditions and community, and language have facilitated a loss of belonging, a core part of the Indigenous identity. Continued exposure to systematic racism due to colonial assimilation policies and practices fostered mistrust of mainstream health services. The previous deficits-based approaches to Indigenous youth mental health resilience unintentionally led to an erroneous perspective of blaming the individual. The current international approach to ameliorate the adverse outcomes of mental health calls for strategies that focus on integrating Indigenous worldviews and a whole of system approach (2023, pg. 2).

I sought out other relevant works, so that I might better gain an understanding of my reflexive case study within their context. In Shawn Wilson’s *Research is Ceremony*, he writes, “Being a participant observer allowed me to take a more action-oriented approach to the research (Heller, Price, Reinharz, Riger and Wandersman, 1984) and put emphasis on the face-to-face relationships and sharing of daily living experiences (Gans, 1982)” (Wilson, 2008, 59). An advantage to utilizing this approach is that Wilson wrote as an Indigenous Person, seeking to find a decolonizing methodology for his project. He further explains regarding Intersectionality Theories, “If Indigenous ways of knowing have to be narrowed through one particular lens (which it certainly does not), then surely that lens would be relationality” (Wilson, 2008, 86).

Bagele Chilisa expands on this idea of the necessity to utilize a decolonizing approach with the following:

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A postcolonial indigenous research paradigm articulates the shared aspects of ontology, epistemology, axiology, and research methodologies of the colonized Other discussed by scholars who conduct research in former colonized societies in Africa, Asia, and Latin America; among indigenous peoples in Australia, Canada, the United States, and other parts of the world; and among the disempowered, historically marginalized social groups that encounter the colonizing effect of Eurocentric research paradigms (Chilisa, 2020, 23).

In my design, I sought to walk carefully among community, ever mindful of protocol⁴, and the Seven Grandfather Teachings. “The Seven Grandfather Teachings are the principles of character that each Anishinaabe should live by. Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility & Wisdom” (American Indian Health Service of Chicago, 2021, n.p.). One of the first things that Lin Bardwell, my Indigenous Mentor, taught me, is, “There’s a reason that Native American babies spend the first year of their life on a cradleboard. They’re learning about the world by observing and watching. This next year is when you get to do the same thing, learn about community by watching and observing!” I have applied this principle not just to community gatherings, but also as a guiding parameter of my project. Dr. Joseph Gladstone uses storytelling and the study of anthropological resources such as Hudson’s Bay Company Journal Entries for discovering how ancient tribal practices relating to business were conducted in his work, “All My Relations” (Gladstone, 2018). Mirroring his decision to also include anthropological resources will strengthen my Case Study.

One of the first mistakes that I made in approaching a community leader was to assume that a gift given on Friday “covered” the weekend. I later learned of my horrible misstep. Each People Group has different preferences for gifts. Natural items are pretty universally accepted -

⁴ Let the reader note that Indigenous protocol varies, but a universally accepted protocol is to walk carefully with the posture of being teachable, and always bringing your best gift to express your gratitude before asking anything. “Gift economy” is not quid pro quo, it’s reciprocity. A gift given is not a guarantee. Please remember that you are approaching “Heads of State”, and approach with the same honor you would approach other Heads of State. Watch and observe more than you speak, please remember that reading books makes no one an expert on community life. Walk alongside community, listen, and learn. This is explained further in the following paragraphs.

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things like tea, wood bowls, food, etc. In her book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Kimmerer explains the concept of “gift economy” which follows:

From the viewpoint of a private property economy, the “gift” is deemed to be “free” because we obtain it free of charge, at no cost. But in the gift economy, gifts are not free. The essence of the gift is that it creates a set of relationships. The currency of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity (Kimmerer, 2013, 28).

This connected me to an Indigenous example of reciprocity, Three Sisters – an original way of growing corn, squash/pumpkins, and beans. T.M. Ngapo, et al. explain the background in the following long, but necessary excerpt:

Some Indigenous Peoples of the Americas planted corn, beans and squash or pumpkins together in mounds, in an intercropping complex known to some as the Three Sisters. Corn provided support for beans, beans provided nitrogen through nitrogen-fixing rhizobia bacteria that live on the roots, and squash and pumpkins provided ground cover to suppress weeds and inhibit evaporation from the soil. While the origins of the Three Sisters complex are unknown, veneration of the Three Sisters appears in the earliest accounts of European explorers and missionaries in North America. As described by Lewandowski, from its earliest appearance in written records, the Three Sisters complex was not simply an agricultural strategy or technology, but a cultural complex, complete with stories, ceremonies, technology, customs and etiquette.

Archaeological evidence dates the adoption of the Three Sisters complex in North America to 1070 AD. The complex was adapted to local conditions over the 500 years before contact with Europeans, so much so that it was the dominant food plant association of every nation practising agriculture in the northeast USA as well as in several other parts of North America, including southern regions of Quebec and Ontario, Canada. The Indigenous Peoples practising Three Sisters agriculture in the northeastern USA and southeastern Canada included those from at least fifteen nations (Ngapo, 2021, n.p.).

Three Sisters was part of my ancestors’ culture and agriculture, as was reciprocity. The intercropping method is an ancient part of Indigenous People of North America’s culture and serves as a visual representation of the interconnectedness of ancient modern philosophy. Everything is connected, everything impacts everything, and it is impossible to do anything devoid of relationships, of interrelationships. This case study is unique because it embraces the

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cultural wisdom of Indigenous Knowledge which not only acknowledges interrelationships, but it centers them as a pivotal way of being, understanding and relating. Like the way that the Three Sisters before harvest has stems, vines, and roots completely intertwined with reciprocity, the ancient modern way of life pre-colonization is that of interconnectedness.

As I sought to also answer questions about the impacted interrelationships of Indigenous Culture, Business, Philanthropy, and Community, I was drawn to the following: “It is important to remember that I was looking for the meaning of why and how Indigenous people relate to things (research), rather than looking for a causal relationship between things.” (Wilson, 2013, 61). By applying a similar approach to Wilson’s, my reflexive case study reveals the impacts of colonial research not only on Indigenous Peoples, but also on the interrelationships within and without Native communities, non-Native communities, and between the two. The lens of duality as it is revealed within this case study serves as a new focus for evaluating prior research. Instead of applying a colonial either/or approach to previous research, the application of a *both - and* decolonized interpretation allows for new and diverse perspectives to be applied. It allows for lessons to be gleaned from history, while also acknowledging both the good and the bad that has resulted. In exploring potential conflicts among previous studies, I discovered the following:

The contentious aspects of this approach are fourfold; firstly, the unequal relations of power in which Indigenous knowledge is positioned; secondly, the inherent tendency for traditional disciplines to exploit and appropriate; thirdly, the risk that Western disciplines simply cause mayhem to Indigenous knowledge; and finally, the long-held pattern of disrespect for Indigenous people and communities. Many people in power don’t like their Indigenous neighbours; in fact, they have a history of hating them. Co-production in this context is simply another word for ‘consultation’ which is another of those ‘dirty’ words for Indigenous communities (Smith, 1999, 208-209).

In other words, past works often still employ colonial methodologies, defeating the ability to compare it with my case study, as it seems the damage of these approaches was far-reaching.

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The other day, I mentioned to my husband that I was noticing the difference between Tribal Citizen original design (for example, round tipis) and colonial original design (for example, square log cabins). He replied with an observation that even western-designed skyscrapers tend to be rectangles, whereas eastern designed skyscrapers tend to be curvier, oval, etc. As he said this, I realized that **both** colonial design **and** Tribal Citizen original design use lines in their design. **Both** a curvy line **and** an angular line are still lines. Their shape does not negate that they are still composed of a line. When evaluating past work, it is necessary for my case study to point out the ways in which both colonial and Indigenous ways involve people. The **both - and** here, though, is not fully applicable, as the research was almost always weighted in favor of a colonial hierarchy, meaning that Indigenous People were treated as **less - than** a person instead of **both** an original inhabitant of this land with a different culture and way of understanding, **and** a valuable voice of wisdom within a reciprocal relationship.

The negative impacts of colonialism cannot be discounted, and more research is needed, lest we continue repeating the same mistakes of history. As Heid, et al. state,

Past colonial policies driving family, community, language, and cultural disruption are evident through population containment actions (e.g., introduction of novel viruses, forced attendance in residential “schools,” and over-representation in child welfare systems; Government of Canada, 2015; United Nations, 2015), and their related impacts (2022, 114).

In my undergraduate studies of research methodology at Taylor University, I was challenged to constantly ask, “Who gains?” In application to this reflexive case study, who ultimately gains from a colonial approach? Who has gained from this methodology? Who could potentially stand to gain if nothing changes? Smith lends the following insight to these questions: “Knowledge and the power to define what counts as real knowledge lie at the epistemic core of colonialism” (199, 13). Over the last 500 years, have Indigenous People gained as much “power to define

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what counts” as much as the perpetrators of colonialism currently hold? Contrast that with Indigenous methodology, defined as one that “must be anchored in Indigenous epistemology, theory, ethics, story, and community. This is not always the case in Indigenous research” (Kovach, 2021, 42). This reflexive case study will help fill in gaps within existing literature.

There are resources available within existing literature that provide a wonderful guideline for this reflexive case study. Kovach expounds on them in the following:

Qualitative methodologies applied in Indigenous research may include, but are not limited to, grounded theory, ethnography, and action research. Community-based research, a Western research tradition, is a methodology found in many Indigenous research projects (Leeuw et al., 2012; Victor et al., 2016). Projects integrating Indigenous methodologies (Debassige, 2010; Fidler, 2014; Kovach, 2009) are Indigenous research... Consistent with the above definition, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) defines Indigenous research as research that may encompass different research methodologies (SSHRC, 2020): “Whatever the methodologies or perspectives that apply in a given context, researchers who conduct Indigenous research, whether they are Indigenous or non-Indigenous themselves, commit to respectful relationships with all Indigenous peoples and communities” (para. 29) (2021, 41-42).

This segment gave me assurance that I was on the right path with my project. One of the most vital insights I gained came from Smith as follows:

The exercise of decolonizing methodologies has to do more than critique colonialism. It has to open up possibilities for understanding and knowing the world differently and offering different solutions to problems caused by colonialism and the failure of power structures to address these historic conditions. (1999, “Introduction to Third Edition”)

Applying my Social Innovation coursework principles to my research allows me to expound on the potential ways to address the current situation stemming from colonialism. Concisely, Chilisa states, “A postcolonial indigenous research paradigm is thus informed by relational ontologies, relational epistemologies, and relational axiology” (2020, 23). In other words, everything is

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based on reciprocity in relationships. Nothing about my reflexive case study is one-sided as even my reflexivity is based on interactions and conversations with others.

One of the most difficult aspects of this project was knowing that I needed to write my Indigenous community experiences in an academia-facing paper. It took all of my will power, and many tears, to do it. In so many ways, this abiding by colonialism felt irreverent to the relationships that have been grown over the last couple of years. I didn't want to dishonor my friends and community by disclosing my relationships as if they were devoid of the stories that formed my growth. In my undergraduate studies, I was friends with numerous students whose parents were missionaries. Many of these friends felt like they were "Third culture citizens", not quite fully American, not quite fully belonging to the nation their parents served in. I understood a small amount of their angst - after working for 8 years within inter-urban settings and returning home to West Michigan, I often felt out of place. Gathering these stories and writing this reflexive case study, which includes my story, has left me feeling in a visceral way like I have grown into **both** an American citizen **and** an Indigenous Community Member. There's not a "third culture", per say; it's more like I have found what makes my heart truly and freely come alive – it's embracing **both** the fullness of my faith **and** the fullness of the ways that my ancestors walked - as **both** a Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet descendant, **and** as a member mentored by the local Anishinaabeg community. Native blood flows through my veins, and as my relationships have grown these last years, my soul has grown deeply into becoming my true self. Often, I envision myself as an emerging butterfly from a chrysalis, but sometimes I am still required to crawl like a caterpillar. I will do it only if it means that other butterflies will eventually never have to crawl again, but will be free to forever fly.

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Methodology (Macro to Micro)

Colonialism in North America arguably began with the first contact of Europeans and continues into present day. Regarding the present-day effects of colonialism, The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) states:

Vulnerability of ecosystems and people to climate change differs substantially among and within regions (*very high confidence*), driven by patterns of intersecting socio-economic development, unsustainable ocean and land use, inequity, marginalization, historical and ongoing patterns of inequity such as colonialism, and governance (*high confidence*) (2022, n.p.)

Many have postulated about the beginning of colonialism as it relates to racial oppression. The following thoughts on that timetable are from an essay I wrote in 2021: as a perpetually curious rhetoric-researcher, I propose that systemic racism began further “upriver” if you will, with the events leading up to the Fall of Jerusalem on July 15, 1099. During the Fall, it’s notable that both Jews and Muslims were grotesquely left in the streets with rotting corpses, after being literally pillaged for gold coins they had swallowed.

Greek Orthodox priests in Jerusalem were tortured until they revealed the location of some of their finest relics, including a fragment of wood from the True Cross on which Christ had died, embedded in a beautiful gold, crucifix-shaped reliquary (Jones, 2017, 17).

Again, I say leading up to *these* events. Apparently this original Crusade was

...backed by the enthusiastic preaching of Pope Urban the II...Urban promised, alluringly, that going on crusade could be substituted for all penances the church had imposed on individuals for their sins-an entire lifetime’s wrongdoing could theoretically be wiped out in a single journey. (Jones, 2017, 16)

I propose, then, that the inception of the first Crusade is what began spreading the rhetoric of not only racism, but eventually anthropocentrism as well. This remained through the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, which on another sidenote, is when portraits and statues of religious merit

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began depicting Jesus and his disciples with increasingly lighter skin tones until they were “Anglicised”, if you will, to more closely reflect the European leaders who spurred on the Crusades. This setting was ripe for the rhetoric of “fully human” vs. “not fully human.”

It does explain the shift, then, to full blown anthropocentrism with the arrival of Christopher Columbus (whom one Indigenous activist refers to as “the first undocumented arrival” from the East). Add into the mix The Spanish Inquisition and mass atrocities against the Dutch and the Indigenous. Then the oppressed, like a bad season of Survivor, looked for someone else to oppress instead of applying the proverb of Sun Zhu, “my enemy’s enemy is my friend” (let’s defeat the oppressor together to deflect the oppression). In the end, though, all it has done is made the oppressors stronger. Again, I ask, who ultimately gains in power from the oppressed not working together? The oppressors, of course. They know that there is power in unity (Karsies, 2021).

Within this context, I began exploring the best way to frame the impacts of colonialism.

The following excerpt gave me the general parameters:

The framing of an issue is about making decisions about its parameters, about what is in the foreground, what is in the background, and what shadings or complexities exist within the frame. The project of reframing is related to defining the problem or issue and determining how best to solve that problem (Smith, 1999, 175).

I sought to examine the complexities in a simple manner and decided that a case study would serve as the most logical approach. The following parameters greatly influenced my next decisions in project design: “In a methodological context, the four principles of respect, responsibility, reverence, and reciprocity act as an ethical guide for the researcher to work with Indigenous people, their Indigenous knowledges, and stories” (Xiiem et al., 2019, 2). As a descendant of the Wolastoqiyik People (Maliseet People), and a woman who considers herself to

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be a Dutch-Irish-Native American, it is vital for me to be candid in my reflexivity. The case study speaks a language that I easily understand and provides me with the methodology I needed to journey with honor through the oftentimes muddy space between modern colonial academia and the ways of my ancestors. Regarding methodologies, I utilized protocols established via the SEER approach. One of the co-developers of this methodology, Peter Mataira, describes SEER as follows: “It is called *strengths-enhancing evaluation research* (SEER), an Indigenous research model developed by Paula Morelli and myself (Mataira and Morelli 2010) at the University of Hawai’i” (Mataira, 2019, 146). SEER Methodology focuses on specific approaches through five major steps, “engagement, data collection, data analysis, customized evaluation tool design, and sustainability” (SEER video).

Additionally, Ann Dadich and her co-authors reviewed Indigenous PAR studies, and created a lexicon of their work. The most persistent problem listed is found in either the lack of participation reported throughout the entire study process, and/or the lack of Indigenous involvement in all of the steps within the studied research articles (Dadich, et. al, 2019). Lin Bardwell, MPA, and Assistant Director of the Office of Multicultural Affairs, and our coordinator for the Grand Valley State University Native American Student Association, graciously agreed to be my Indigenous Mentor. She has mentored me in the ways of the Anishinaabeg over the last 18 months and has guided me in protocol as I have increasingly been more accepted into community. Embracing the SEER approach within a Reflexive Case Study has allowed me to continually assess and adjust my own personal biases, while also learning and growing from the wisdom of Indigenous culture and knowledge systems, including the Seven Grandfather Teachings. “The Seven Grandfather Teachings are the principles of character that each Anishinaabe should live by. Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility & Wisdom”

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(American Indian Health Service of Chicago, 2021). Intertwining these methods and interweaving the Seven Grandfather Teachings throughout this reflexive case study has helped me stay on a good path with my project, as has accountability with Lin Bardwell. Further, Margaret Kovach writes,

Graham Hingangaroa Smith (2006) raises a concern about those who are “claiming to be working in the area of Indigenous theorizing” but do not appreciate that Indigenous cultural knowing lives in the language. (2021, 72).

About the time that I read Kovach’s writing, I was given the opportunity to take Anishinaabemowin classes via Zoom. I was humbled by both the complexity and the beauty of the way that the language describes not only the function, but the processes. The memory of being welcomed in as part of community still brings tears to my eyes and a slight quiver to my lip.

This approach of inclusion and reciprocity at every step of the research process resonates as a remedy for the lack of inclusion that colonialism has imposed on Native American/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians. Additionally, story gathering recognizes the emergence of orality as a vital gathering tool for historical accounts. “Oral history transcripts are considered co created documents” (Columbia University Center for Oral History Research, 2022, Pg. 3). Dr. Joseph Gladstone focuses on Indigenous business practices in North America through the lenses of “‘survivance’ and community” in his article. His explanation of “survivance” is as follows: “Vizenor describes ‘survivance’ as “more than survival, more than endurance or mere response. [S]urvivance [is] an active presence, an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry’ [24]” (Gladstone, 2018, Pg. 195). It is a close parallel to the SEER approach mentioned above.

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Kovach reiterates intersectionality in writing, “Epistemology and research methodology are a tight, complex partnership. And as Manu Aluli Meyer (2004) states, the epistemological presence in research and life permeates our understanding in/of both” (2021, 64). This connects me again to the delicate balance of honoring **both** my ancestors **and** kin through academic discourse. Smith further emphasizes this through the following:

A large part of the research stories that need to be told are small stories from local communities across time and space, in other words the stories that map devastation across generations and across landscapes, or the stories of transformation and hope that can also be tracked in this way (1999, 281).

This determined my approach in interviewing local Indigenous People who I had met and interacted with among community. Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “As Gary Nabhan has written, we can’t meaningfully proceed with healing, with restoration, without “re-story-ation.” In other words, our relationship with land cannot heal until we hear its stories. But who will tell them?” (9). I decided to begin gathering the stories, and then telling them.

My story was told in the beginning of this paper. My ancestor’s story of bravery, travel, and “walking on⁵” was also shared. The story of my kin, the Wolastoqiyik/Maliseet is told in part in a book, “*Land of The Four Directions*” written by Frederick John Pratson in 1970. The following tells their stories in a gut-kicking imagery of duality:

The nearby non-Indian town can be a hostile place of suspicion, intolerance, ridicule, and injustice directed at the People. If the town could be avoided or ignored, its prejudices would not matter; but, the children have to go to school there, and the People need many of the goods and services sold by the town’s stores.

Confrontations between non-Indians and the People are inevitable. They are last to be served or totally ignored at a store or restaurant; refused a haircut; given insults or angry looks. Policemen watch for the slightest cause for arrest or humiliation.

⁵ “Walking on” is how many Indigenous People refer to a person’s dying.

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The non-Indian town is a place of a different race with a different religion and different ways. Both worlds coexist but not without a sense of deep tension and bitterness (Pg. 31).

I was born six years after this book was published. It is no wonder that my Indigenous Grandfather (my dad's dad) only entrusted our ancestry to my Grandpapa (my mom's dad) before walking on. All of my childhood, my Grandpapa left me breadcrumbs about my ancestry. Only recently did I realize that this First Generation Dutch-American man humbly learned everything he could about Indigenous ways of knowing. He walked out a mile plus from our house, and introduced us to his friends along the way, giving us landing places with friendly faces who knew his phone number, address, and who to call if we were ever in trouble while out in the neighborhood. He transformed the barren hill around a spring-fed creek in his backyard into a veritable paradise. Every Arbor Day, my cousins and I would solemnly bring our saplings home to dig a hole and plant our trees on the hill. The transformation became my science classroom, my safe space to run to, and the consistency that I needed for these 30 plus years. His cryptic clues told me the stories of my kin in an era when it was too dangerous to publicly acknowledge my ancestors. One of my earliest memories is him teaching me how to smell sweetgrass from a distance - and he made sure I knew that smelling it meant "home" - no matter how many miles away from our house we were. This side of learning and understanding my ancestry, when I was given my first braid of sweetgrass in Grand Rapids, by the People who sheltered my Indigenous Grandfather, I cried, because I knew it meant home. My Dutch-American Grandpapa's nurturing and protection, his love of nature and balanced ecosystems, and his unconditional love of me prepared me for walking into this sacred space today and gathering these stories with my kin. I was **never** invisible to him, my ancestors and kin will never be invisible to me.

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Discussion (Micro) & Implications

In the winter semester of 2022, I took a class called PNH 520 - Foundations of Public Service, taught by Professor [Neal Buckwalter](#). As we examined different case studies that semester, my driving question was “Can public servants ever truly claim to know the thoughts and feelings of their constituents?” This question is further connected to the potentials of *both - and* when viewed considering the following analysis of Alexis de Tocqueville written by Cushing Strout in *American Quarterly* from Spring of 1969:

For all his fears of majority tyranny in his first volume, he had concluded that republican government in America exhibited in a “conciliatory” way ‘the tranquil rule of the majority’ because that majority respected **both private rights and general principles**...In **both** volumes the American example functions as historical proof that liberty **and** equality can serve each other. At the same time it also illustrates the profound tensions between those ideals (93) [**emphasis added**]. (1969, Page #)

For Indigenous People, colonialism impacted life in North America by shifting from co-inhabitants to “Settler vs. Native American/Native Alaskan/Native Hawaiian/American Indian/Tribal Citizen/Indigenous Person.” This settler dualism expanded from “it’s either my way or the highway” into *either a settler way of life or an Indian (plus derogatory terms) way of life*. Reciprocity was stripped from every interaction, instead, interactions became propelled by an “us vs. them” until our current system which may be better understood by some as “U.S. vs. them.”

I say this because of the overwhelming data to support it. Consider the findings from a 2020 Study which examined a sample indicative of “adverse childhood experiences [ACEs]” in Native Americans. The results:

Native American persons reported the greatest average number and variety of ACEs than persons from any other racial/ethnic group, and reported the highest

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rates of physical abuse, sexual abuse, parental substance abuse, and witnessing violence than members of any other racial/ethnic category. Native American females reported the greatest rates of emotional abuse, while Native American males reported the greatest rates of physical neglect; the highest rates of parental substance use among the race/ethnicity-sex dyads were reported by both Native American females and males. Significantly higher rates of sexual violence were reported by Native American females compared to other groups; almost 1 in 4 Native American females reported sexual violence. (Richards, et al., 2020, n.p.)

This data needs to be centered within the context of generational trauma and inequalities as:

...cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifetime and across generations, emanating from massive group trauma experiences” (Brave Heart, 2003, p. 7). In the United States, Indigenous persons have been subjected to genocide, colonization, and racism since the inception of the country. In the U.S., at least 300 Indian boarding schools were established in the late 1800s to assimilate Native American children in the Euro American way, as described in the often-cited motto, “Kill the Indian, save the man. (Trafzer, Keller, & Sisquoc, 2006). (Richards, et al., 2020, n.p.)

Regarding the colonial lens of duality and the further traumatic impacts of Boarding School, the authors include the following:

Olson and Dombrowski (2020) note that the impact of residential boarding schools on Native children was profound, resulting in “a dual loss – identity and family connection” (p. 62), and suggest that many boarding school attendees may be unable to form secure attachments in their interpersonal relationships, thus perpetuating a cycle of recurring trauma within Native families and communities. (Richards, et al., 2020, n.p.)

The findings continue to demonstrate the propensity of negative ACEs resulting from colonialism. Native American children are removed from their families 2.7 times more proportionately to the general population, and “Native American adolescents...experience disproportionate rates of violent crime victimization (Bureau Justice Statistics, 1999)” (Richards, et al, 2020, n.p.). The following summary is staggering:

The lasting impacts of genocide, colonization, and continued racism provide important context for the high rates of violence against Native women and children (e.g., Deer, 2015; Smith, 1999; Weaver, 2009). As Native women were sexually exploited and Native children were forcibly removed from their homes, their family environments were disrupted, their economic opportunities were

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restricted, they were disconnected from their cultural values, and their ties with other Native persons were severed. Further, traditional values regarding the sacredness of women and children and tribal government's legal power to respond to violence has been diminished (Deer, 2015; Smith, 2005; Weaver, 2009). (Richards, et al, 2020, n.p)

One of the visceral lessons that the immersive “Raven and The Box of Daylight” exhibit has left with me is the ever-present reminder that life is not filled with lessons that are cut and dry. Life is messy, and rarely does it fit into tidy little “boxes.” For example, The Box that held the moon released the moonlight, which coexisted with the darkness, even as it relied on the sunlight to reflect the light...into the darkness. The Box that held the daylight might have released the bright light, but the clouds could still obstruct the view of the light, without diminishing the existence of light. As in, the reality of clouds does nothing to diminish the existence, the identity even, of the sun. The sunlight and the clouds coexist in a **both - and** relationship. The Box that held the stars reveals the beautiful possibilities of existing outside of heavy duality. The stars are brightest on display in the darkest of night skies. **Both** the dark sky **and** the bright stars are at their best, their most beautiful, when juxtaposed in balance with one another.

Strout extrapolates on this idea with his observation, “Students of American life have been tempted to extract glittering phrases from *Democracy in America* rather than to come to terms with the subtleties of its theory” (1969, 87). This statement connects me to the difficulty that I have personally had with the messiness of transparency—and provides yet another takeaway from Singletary’s art installation—*Raven and The Box of Daylight* consists of carved glass pieces to tell the story. The light shines through the glass, or is impeded, depending on the way that Singletary carved each one. For me, the glass carvings are a physical representation of the messiness of transparency juxtaposed with the beauty of it. This insight did not occur to me

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until Sunday, April 2, 2023—and needs to be attributed to the sage wisdom of one of my interviewees, Jason S. Wesaw, enrolled member of the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians from the Turtle Clan.

KK: Do you see it as duality, so to speak, or do you think it's more just refusing to change who we are; -- and learning – I know some people call it “code switching” when you learn to speak a certain way in a certain situation. So I guess my question is, it almost sounds like within the interrelationships, we've created a way of having an interrelationship where we don't sacrifice who we are in the process, whereas other people would totally lose their identity in the interrelationship.
[24:10]

JSW: [long pause] Yeah, that's an interesting question, or, the way that you're asking it. I think it is a duality because I believe strongly there's duality in every aspect of life. So, we have this physical life we're leading, but there's also like, a deeply connected spiritual part of it, too. Or, um, [pause], if you didn't want to say a spiritual part of it, then like, that part of the great mystery or the unknown. And some people are very aware of that and embrace that in their physical life; other people are less connected to that side of things.

But yeah, there certainly is a duality. Again, like, I feel like some of the biggest strength that I see in my community is that we continue to live right in the heart of Potawatomi homelands here whereas even amongst Potawatomi, many were forced out of this area, or fled this area and went to different areas of North America. But, if you were to ask them, when they talk about coming home, this [points down] is home. [25:46]

So, there is...there's a lot of strength in those deep, deep, deep roots. There's a power source that we have, being connected to the land – here for many thousands of years. And so, that's different, you know, on my mother's side, or the Non-native side of my family. You know, to be able to connect with my ancestors from my maternal side, I would have to go to different places of America, and then different places across the Atlantic Ocean and really be immersed in whatever remnants are left of that culture and that land there. And to be able to do that for the rest of my life to even feel as strongly connected and clear about the way that I do from my Potawatomi culture, and that's because I've always lived here [points down]. I think a lot of our people would say that. There's something special about being on your ancestral lands that helps give you clarity and strength in your life.

Before interviewing Jason S. Wesaw, I was very angry at duality, and I viewed it as “bad” After speaking with him, I realized that my colonialism was showing. I was stuck in an

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either/or mentality—either I have duality, or I don't. Then, after he explained our deep connection to the land, and the existence of duality in “every aspect of life,” our conversation continued, and he offered the following insights:

JSW: ...So, I always have this work that I do here in the community, but through my art and the stories - that the art I create—lead into, that's almost like a way that I can communicate with the outside world. And that's, I believe, equally as important in the modern times because we don't just live in these secluded communities as Native People, we are a part of larger communities and we're a sub-culture that's part of a larger culture, so we have to be able to successfully interact within our own spaces but even more so in larger society and in dominant society.

KK: [pause] It's almost as if duality, instead of it being viewed as a burden, it's viewed as a gift.

JSW: Yeah.

KK: Yeah.

JSW: Yeah, because if reality is a burden, then I think it inherently is going to be tough for us.

KK: Mm-hmm

JSW: But if we see it as a gift, and that we're equipped to be able to thrive within it, and to be able to share within it, then just mentally or the way that you visualize it becomes a different thing.

The concept of duality as a gift has resulted in my mind opening like a morning glory to the sunshine. It has resulted in me approaching duality from a completely different perspective. As I grappled with this new understanding, and continued this new pathway of understanding, I interviewed Beth Fisher-Polasky, originally from Mackinac near Lake Michigan and Huron, who now lives in Petoskey near Lake Michigan. Beth Fisher-Polasky is of Deer Clan and is Sault Ste. Marie Band of Chippewa. The following is an excerpt from our chat:

KK: I think one of the things that I hesitate with sometimes is expressing, - just because I'm learning to live with the duality of being raised full blown, white, upper middle class settler mindset, and now being connected and mentored back

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in the ways of the Anishinaabeg - saying, Okay, this is this is the duality I carry. And I can own both. And it's okay. It's okay for me to say I am a descendant of, and I am informed by and this is what makes my heart come alive. And I'm not negating the other upbringing at the same time, but I am saying it needs to change.

BFP: Yeah, it's very complicated, I think. And I think about how, like you, I mean, I was also raised...you know, to be white...even though my dad was extremely dark, extremely Native, and my brother and I, when we were younger, we were also, you know, darker, I think that as you get older, you get lighter.

KK: We spend less time out in the sunshine.

BFP: True. And, yeah, I mean, we do...you know, reconciling that life, [with]...the methods that we were taught, the colonial methods, right?

Speaking, living, doing, being, and we, we have to reconcile that part of our life to move on to I think the Anishinaabeg part of our life, right?

And it's hard sometimes, because I have had so much privilege in my life, to not have to fight that part of my life, you know, whereas my husband who is very brown, and, you know, Alaska Native, right; has faced some form of white supremacy every day of his life. You know, and I feel guilty for having that privilege. And knowing what he's gone through and knowing some of the things that he's endured.

And, but I also, I think - because of my education, and research and all of that - I also can empathize with him in the things that he's going through. I could never fully understand it, but I can empathize with him. And the things that he experiences, and I've been with him when they've happened, you know, and I try not to get angry. Because you know how you speak when you're angry.

But it's hard not to be angry about those things. So, I struggle, I think with that - with my privilege, and he does tell me, you know, at times that I do that, and calls me out on it. And I'm like, I know. Right? Let me check that.

KK: Right. Let me check this at the door.

Beth Fisher-Polasky encapsulates the duality and the tension that we both face as we carry our privilege of appearing white, whilst still doing our best to stay true to the Anishinaabeg way of living. I do likewise wrestle with the guilt of being able to go into any white setting without blinking or having to be extra cautious. While Beth Fisher-Polasky's father was Native,

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and her husband is Alaska Native, and that differs from my upbringing; together we find a commonality in seeking to carry our duality well. This is evidenced in the following section:

BFP: Yeah, and yet, we are constantly (because of colonial beliefs) – made to think that the life that we live matters and is important – like we have to leave that mark on the world...the need to succeed, right? That kind of thing?

KK: Build your legacy! But they're talking about financial – which is...THAT's a duality in itself – finances. Because if you don't have money and play the capitalism game, then --- but if you don't, you also have a freedom that you can't if you do...

BFP: Yes! [pause] But think about how your ancestors are always there, you know? We never lose that contact with our ancestors if we honor them – ...if [we stay true to our cultural practices] ... if we just listen – if we just – if we're just there, you know? I don't think it's about success, I think it's about that connection that we have. Right? And we have that connection with the spiritual world as well. Some more than others.

Beth Fisher-Polasky and I continued our story gathering, and we continued discussing the duality of trying to walk according to both white colonial expectations and those of our Anishinaabe-mentoring community. Our conversation around this topic continued:

BFP: I know it's hard. It's hard, it's hard.

[01:16:00]

KK: ...It *is*. But one of the things I was challenged with was something that Jason S. Wesaw said. He is so, so wise beyond his years.

BFP: Yeah.

KK: We were talking about the gift of duality. He sees duality as a gift. I was laughing at myself, like, ohmygosh, me being me, I am all like, "Duality is bad! Colonialism brought duality in, and because of duality, we have to choose either/or!" And, I'm totally ignorant of the fact until he brought it up to me - that **both – and is a duality!** [laughs] That's a gift! And that's also a duality!

BFP: Yeah!

KK: It just depends on which path you take! Are you going to take the path of either/or? Which is not good, that is not a good path, or are you going to take the path of **both – and?** I feel *this* way, I feel **both of these ways and it's a blessing**

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and it's ok. I walk *both* of these paths, sometimes feeling like I'm straddling them, and it's ok. And sometimes creating my own path in the middle. And that's also ok.

BFP: You know, I think about the *both – and* all the time because there are some people who are just purists when it comes to our life, and culture and our language – all of that. I feel like they're really ostracizing the people who have learned to be Anishinaabeg, but also walk in this world in a way that we are able to succeed. I mean, look at us! I mean, who would have thought, for me, ME to be [on this path of studying right now]?

KK: Same, same!

BFP: I never would have imagined this in a million years! I knew when I started walking on this path that this was right for me...[It was made very clear].

KK: Amazing.
[01:18:08]

BFP: I have never felt more right about anything than I have doing this. And, it's the *both – and*, right? I can be who I am, I can be Anishinaabe...but I can also be [on this good path].

KK: Yeah!

I also interviewed Jacob, Descendant of the Crow and Cherokee Nations, Southern Cherokee Nation of Kentucky–Bird Clan. Most of our nearly two-hour conversation surrounded the tension of being Native within colonial spaces and institutions. As we spoke about our projects, and data-gathering as Indigenous People, Jacob stated the following impactful insight:

But I think it's important, for us as Indigenous People, we understand that within that data, and more important to that data is...is the stories behind the data - like that's what moves US but that's not what moves institutions...the *story* telling part of ethnography.

I think for me, and research is what touches on those Indigenous Methodologies but often times, the way it's presented is, I think, kind of what strips away the most important parts of that to just the fundamentals. To say, "Hey, this is what...it all boils down to," and I think that's what a lot of like colonization is – it's saying, "All the details don't matter. We just need what it boils down to."

...[softly] But that's really dehumanizing.

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I will elaborate on Jacob's statement more in a moment, but first, I want to pivot. My Indigenous Mentor, Lin Bardwell, is our coordinator for the GVSU chapter of Native American Student Association. She is also the Assistant Director in the Office of Multicultural Affairs. She graciously allowed me to use findings from her Summary Report #1, Native American College Student Cultural Experience & Perceptions Survey (June 2, 2019, 7:31 PM MDT). The following photo details one of the results from her findings:

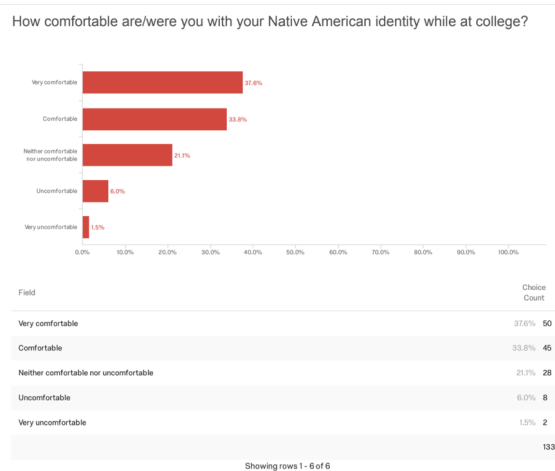


Figure 1 Summary Report #1. Native American College and Student Cultural Experience & Perceptions Survey. June 2, 2019. 7:31 PM MDT. Compiled by Lin Bardwell, MPA. Assistant Director of Multicultural Affairs at Grand Valley State University.

Of the 133 students who submitted their surveys, 95 were/are very comfortable or comfortable with their Native American identity while at college. To me, this demonstrates a strong interrelationship to culture and cultural identity. It does not minimize the horrors and atrocities inflicted upon Native American/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian Peoples, but instead, I believe it demonstrates the same central theme from my interviewees; our culture is interconnected with everything we do, see, say, think, and learn. It is our lens through which we

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see the world. Colonialism attempted to impose a heavy burden of duality on us, but for the most part, we are learning how to innovate our mindset and see duality as a beautiful gift of *both* – *and*. We are still here. We are not invisible. Unfortunately, though, our data is still missing from many databases—in yet another cruel twist of colonialism, we aren't often even considered in studies—it's as if either we don't exist, or research is enacted upon us (like an animal with a pedigree).

When Jacob stated, “But that’s really dehumanizing,” my heart lurched in my chest as the full impact of his words hit me. I began to ask myself who ultimately gains if an entire group of people is “dehumanized”? What if it’s a generational system that eventually becomes a machine of its own? Who gains then? What do they gain? The flip side of these questions is “Who loses?” Since the first settlers arrived, colonialism, tyranny and genocide have been enacted on my kin. Heavy burdens of duality were assigned to us. The statistics tell the story—our story—of “survivance” as Dr. Gladstone cited, and the stories of decimation. To simply skim over them as “data” is to divorce them from the stories, the atrocious stories of trauma and intergenerational genocide enacted upon community members of Sovereign Nations – Native Americans/Alaska Natives/Native Hawaiians, my kin.

It's interesting that my kin are not the only ones negatively impacted by colonial duality. These questions connected me to a recent example of the devastating ramifications of duality in our modern American society. The train derailment just outside of East Palestine, OH occurred on February 3, 2023. Many residents who live in proximity to the accident site and the impacted areas are disgruntled by the slow response times of the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), as well as the lack of direct interaction with officials from Norfolk Southern railroad company. Residents waited for 18 days before a party was even named responsible for cleanup (Shapero,

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2023). The people who are directly impacted by the derailment want to be designated an EPA Superfund site. However, a dualistic (and slogging bureaucracy) approach is found in the process surrounding Superfund. Superfund is the unofficial nickname for the 1980 [Comprehensive Environmental Response, Compensation and Liability Act \(CERCLA\)](#). It empowers the Environmental Protection Agency (E.P.A.) with what they need for cleanup on site when contaminated. Additionally, power is vested for responsible parties to “either perform cleanups or reimburse the government for E.P.A.-led cleanup work”. E.P.A. receives funds from Superfund if no other liable party is found (EPA, 2023). Initially, part of the delay was due to the E.P.A. finding the site ineligible for aid because Norfolk Southern was the responsible party. However, after a public outcry, on February 17, 2023 “The Federal Emergency Management Agency (F.E.M.A.) also agreed to deploy a support team to help with the response, after DeWine said earlier in the week that the federal agency had found them ineligible for aid” (Shapero, 2023, n.p.).

On Feb. 21, the E.P.A. [ordered](#) Norfolk Southern to identify and clean up contaminated soil and water; reimburse the E.P.A. for cleaning residences and businesses; attend public meetings and take other measures. If the company failed to complete the actions, the E.P.A. said it would “seek to compel Norfolk Southern to pay triple the cost” of the work...Pete Buttigieg, the transportation secretary, visited East Palestine on Feb. 23 and promised support for the community. (Hauser, 2023, n.p.)

Thirteen days after the toxic derailment, F.E.M.A. deployed a support team. The delay? Superfund only goes into effect if there is no viable responsible party. So, [either](#) there is a party to blame, [or](#) the E.P.A. Superfund is applied. All the while, American citizens were waiting for assistance, and government systems were tied up in red tape and bureaucracy originating from dualism? How is colonialism benefitting the lives of those impacted? In this case, it seemingly gave extra time to Norfolk Southern, while making constituents wait for action.

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On the other hand, what could it look like if a *both - and* approach were implemented to F.E.M.A.'s Superfund? Could it look like a quicker, tangible response? What if emergencies weren't just seen as either a F.E.M.A. issue or a "responsible party" issue, but instead were treated as a "state and/or national disaster" issue? Heaven forbid, if our nation were ever under a chemical attack, and a colonial bureaucratic approach were implemented for evaluation, how many weeks would pass before there was an emergency response, delayed as it was debated if there was a "responsible party"? Not to mention that every moment of delay in hypothetically responding to an infrastructure attack would prolong our defensive readiness, resulting in a delayed offensive focus, leaving us more susceptible to other attacks. This is just one recent example of how duality has negatively impacted our modern American society.

While Jason S. Wesaw and I were talking, he shared the following insight with me:

"...Not that Native People have it all figured out, but we do have to be at the table to try and sort out some of these problems that humanity has. Because, otherwise, they're not going to get sorted out. And so, when I think about how it says, "Interrelationships between our own cultures, Non-Native Communities, Businesses, Philanthropies, Institutions, what-have-you," we just simply need to continue being part of the conversations. And the conversations from the ground level, from the foundation of it all.

Not, like, calling us in at the end of a project, or to review something, and get a stamp of approval. If you want true interaction and relationship building, we have to be at the table from the get-go because I think we all have something to add and sometimes we have different ways of going about that. We speak differently, we think differently, we hear differently, we learn differently; so, it takes time to really forge these relationships that are really all about communication. Like, communicating effectively so that we can reach whatever set goal that we have in common."

Colonialism has dehumanized Native People by enacting colonial constructs onto us. In our cultures, everything is interconnected, and everything is relational. Colonialism has sought to strip away our humanity with our dignity. Instead of our cultural expectation within a gift-giving economy that there is reciprocity; colonialism has divided society into categories such as "the

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business sector,” “philanthropy,” and “community,” and then given us the silent treatment and completely ignored us as part of the solution. We were physically here for generations before anyone else. We have more centuries of wisdom regarding how to care for and move with nature, not against it. My kin and I don’t typically think in the settler ways of thinking—and that’s a beautiful opportunity for *both – and*, if we are “invited to the table,” as Jason has said.

As part of this participatory action-informed project, my husband and I launched a family-owned business so that I could learn how to be a part of business as a descendant of Indigenous People. We sought to apply the Seven Grandfather Teachings to all aspects of our business. As a reminder, these teachings are Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility & Wisdom (American Indian Health Service of Chicago, 2021).

After spending 15 years in West Michigan, where everyone assumed I am Dutch, I began claiming my ancestry in all things relating to our business.⁶ The difference in how I was treated by local government systems is appalling. One City official refused to update our address in the City and County-wide network. It took four months of my phone calls and eventually one solitary email to allow us to receive our mail, and access Google advertising. In those four months, we missed out on a local restaurant’s \$20,000.00 bid. Clients had a check payment for their yacht recovery returned to them in Chicago after our city’s post office marked the address as invalid. A neighboring city in a separate county was rumored to have upcoming bids for upholstery projects. After almost a year of phone calls and emails, we are registered as a vendor, but I still have no word on how to access the open bids—although we are registered for direct

⁶ Before launching our business, I had applied to be a receptionist for a local City Fire Department. I fully claimed that I was a descendant of Native Americans on my application. At the interview, the very first thing I heard when joining the Google Meet was a whoop and a “giddy-up, let’s begin.” I turned down the job because if my ancestry was blatantly mocked in the beginning of my interview, I can only imagine how much worse it would be on the actual job every day. This happened in the late summer of 2021 within the Fire Department of a very large and very diverse city in Michigan.

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deposit if we can ever find out how to access the bids...so there is that. The former business still had their name on our awning for 6 months, and multiple people came in to pay their bill to that company. The side of the city street that we were on has yet to be restriped or resurfaced, although across the street where the white-run businesses have been repainted and resurfaced recently.

The neighborhood we selected for our business holds more minority-owned businesses than any other neighborhood in the city, and we selected the location for its diversity. Originally, my study was designed to have a sustained dialogue component to it. When a friend discovered the disparities that I was experiencing in the first city, a non-profit was formed to organize and advocate for better systems that were not so disparate. I am so grateful for that kindness and thoughtfulness. As background, originally the city had wards and an advocate from each ward went to the city. Budget cuts happened, and guess what ward advocates were cut from the budget first? The neighborhood our business was in, as well as other low-income wards. With the birth of this non-profit, I originally spoke to the mostly-white, newly-hired staff. We had great ideas around collaboration, and I was eager to participate and (finally) share my ideas, observations, and wisdom with a diverse group of people. Instead, I was sidelined into a parallel project. Each time that our sideline project had an idea about a survey or approaching a city institution, the original non-profit had already been there—and we looked like the ignorant party that we were—frozen completely out of communications. Despite signing up for communication emails, not once have I received any invitations to events at the new non-profit. Once, when I was on a phone call with a member of the non-profit, I mentioned an idea of how to include the Latin/o/a/x Business owners and patrons with a Spanish translation, it was originally brushed aside with a dismissive, “They don’t really understand how to scan the code for going to our site

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online.” When pressed further, it was discovered that at a past event, the directions were only in English, and the code may or may not have been double checked for functioning. From my observations, the “ruling body” of this non-profit is now largely made up of white people who “handle” all the planning.

Let me explain this in an allegory. One day our neighbors and we (in the most diverse neighborhood of the city) all realize that we don’t have bowls for eating soup. I start to mention this to people, that I notice none of us have bowls for soup. In my mind, I expect that this will become an incredible experience of relationship building as we select the clay together, prime it, cure it, throw it on wheel, fire it in the kiln, glaze it, re-fire it, paint it individually, and fire it again. Each of these steps involves learning from each other—from every diverse cultural tradition and perspective of how to best create a bowl for soup. Instead, some of my white friends get together, talk it over, and decide on their own *after studying us* to shop online at Ikea for each of us to have a plastic bowl. “Voila’ - now you can eat soup!” They are angry that, somehow, we aren’t overwhelmingly happy with their generosity. We are *both* grateful *and* devastatingly sad that once again, philanthropy in West Michigan means “othering” out the impacted voices by assigning us to “sidebar” tasks, and not taking the time to build a relationship with us. As Jason S. Wesaw said, “If you want true interaction and relationship building, we have to be at the table from the get-go because I think we all have something to add and sometimes we have different ways of going about that.”

In addition to this experience, consider that our county DHHS worker has had numerous errors on her side of our application for benefits for multiple months, so we have been denied assistance repeatedly. My call to her supervisor in December has yet to be returned. Had this been remedied earlier, we would have qualified for grants as low-income small business owners.

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A local bank manager told me “Don’t bother filling out those applications for a loan, it’s based on credit,” after learning that we have a Native-owned business. When she saw my arm was in a brace (I had broken my thumb months before), she looked at my brace pointedly, and said, “Upholstery is hard work on your body.” Only after I filed a complaint with the Federal Credit Union Bureau did anyone from the corporate office of the bank call me to apologize, but no reparations have been offered. That’s when I discovered that the Credit Union which I complained about is a partner with the State of Michigan for low-income women in business grants and loans—a program that I was repeatedly told was not available to me when I inquired about it at the local branch.

I went in person to a different bank, which was advertised online as a partner lending institution of the same program—somehow the man knew my name at the door; and I was told I would receive a phone call from a representative in another city. I have yet to receive the phone call. We were in process of putting in a bid that would have paid all our debts and gotten us financially stable recently, when our graphic designer took our website hostage and shut us down...after leaving town with the admin passwords and locking us out of our emails for 90 days. It is difficult to run a business without online access to any client information and/or email accounts for one day, let alone 90 days. This entire experience of starting our business as a descendant of Native Americans has felt as if each time we step forward, another five people from the local institutions and government in West Michigan clutch onto our ankles, trying to not only slow us down, but ultimately to pull us onto the ground in defeat.

We moved our business into our home to try and save money after a series of medical conditions—coupled with the hardships we encountered at the hands of a broken system—made it financially impossible to continue trying to start and launch our Native-descendant-woman-

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owned business in a dedicated space. Within weeks, my anaphylaxis to airborne latex came out of remission. I had three anaphylactic episodes within a month and my husband had a medical emergency and a four-day hospital stay in between. We now realize that I am physically allergic to our upholstery shop, meaning I can no longer enter my basement or garage. I cannot go into stores; I can occasionally go into a controlled environment after being assured that triggers to my anaphylaxis have been minimized. This means that I can only currently work remotely. Despite being told by a member of a local disability non-profit that the State of Michigan has short-term disability options while we wait for my SSA interview, I asked our local DHHS worker four different times in four different ways if I were eligible, and how to apply. She finally assured me she would add that to our application. In the last three weeks, I have not heard back yet.

While my husband was hospitalized, I had the opportunity to speak with someone who had just been told the difficult news that they made \$4.00 too much in the last month to qualify for emergency Medicaid to assist with their lengthy hospital stay. \$4.00 now disqualifies this person from having a hospital bill that they can never pay off, and the worker did not even verify their income, instead they only based it on an estimation given while the patient was on medication and hospitalized. Again, the either/or imposed on our society by a colonial system is impacting not only minorities, but also people of all ethnicities and races who experience medical emergencies.

As a small step toward remedying colonial duality, I would propose the following pilot program action steps be implemented by The United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (U.S. H.U.D.) to address the issue of low-income housing nationwide.

First, that the United States be divided into only three segments/regions. Those segments/regions are West, Mid-Central, and East. Our nation has been divided into North and

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South for too long. These three segments begin the end of the damaging duality and segregation that was put in place under a colonial system after the Civil War.

I propose that Recipient Advisory Panels be set up in each city, that they consist of diverse resident-recipients of H.U.D. programming, and that members of each Recipient Advisory Panel report to diverse Staff-Leaders who oversee groups of 50 or 100. The Leaders of those groups report to one Coordinator. The difference between the current state of the U.S. H.U.D. and this proposal is that the congested bureaucracy would no longer be in place. Instead, a “chain of command” if you will, would be established, allowing for increased communication, accountability, and efficacy, and increased constituency advocacy. Additionally, caseloads would not be burdensome, as each leader oversees a maximum of 100 Subleaders, and Subleaders oversee a maximum of 50 constituents. If the represented group grows in number, then a new Leader should be added to ensure an equitable representation of voices, and the same process put in place for Coordinators. Monthly Leadership Advisory Meetings would allow for advocating on behalf of constituent concerns, as well as further coaching, training, and troubleshooting, if necessary. This would also allow for brainstorming around effective ways to implement less either/or policies and more safety net policies that are *both – and*.

Leadership would be selected based on a criterion of capability, integrity, and a demonstrated desire to serve the public with honor. Selection process of the Staff Leadership should be implemented via an “undercover boss” approach—preferably with someone who is adept at discernment and has a heart for equitable systems. It would be preferable that they pass as a white person, as this allows for hidden racial biases to be surmised over the course of a few days in the state and regional offices.

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I am the first to admit that my reflexive case study, although thorough and detailed, may be better suited to a dissertation than to a Master of Arts project squeezed into one semester. Unfortunately, my current limitation is that of both space and time. Regarding areas for future research, this area of study is only in the beginning stages of study through a decolonizing approach of co-design alongside American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian/Indigenous People of North America. The devastating effects of colonialism's duality are becoming visible in multiple systems and processes across the United States, and the impact can no longer be ignored.

Conclusions (Micro to Macro):

In conclusion, colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems have impacted the interrelationships between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy by seeking to impose a heavy burden of duality and an either/or mentality upon me and my kin; not to mention the colonial genocide, generational trauma, and refusal to recognize our Sovereign Nation designation. Instead, as Jacob so aptly pointed out in our interview, "Our blood is tested like the pedigree of a dog or horse."

Who has gained from the dehumanizing of our People? How long will we be treated as invisible and/or nonexistent? How long will we be studied like a museum exhibit and denied invitation to the conversation? The only true experts on our experience are us – because they are our experiences at the cold and calculating hand of colonialism. How long must our cries for compassion, justice and acknowledgement go unanswered? The silent treatment is now considered a form of emotional abuse when used "...to punish someone or to exert power or control over them" by clinical experts (Leonard, 2020, n.p.). How long will the existing

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institutions and government systems continually permit this colonial abuse to be systemically enacted upon us?

When will we be rescued from the centuries of abuse, trauma, and genocide that we have endured under the rationalization of colonialism? Generations of war crimes have been committed against us, yet we are not even afforded our Sovereign Nation right to hold a Tribunal in our courts. Our livelihood is decided by a colonial Supreme Court system, devoid of representation, and imposed upon us. There is no other Sovereign Nation required to subjugate to the Supreme Court, why are we treated in this manner, devoid of our rights as Sovereign People? As an exercise of acknowledging Indigenous People of North America's Sovereignty, I have chosen to write two papers. This one that faces academia, has thoughtfully and intentionally had culturally-sensitive information removed from it. No one bats an eye when other Sovereign Nations "guard their State Secrets," yet Tribal Governments within current colonial systems are not allowed the same courtesy.

The multi-century attempt at complete extermination of my ancestors has failed, so please address the heinous injustices that we have endured for generations at the cruel hand of colonialism. Are not the Seven Grandfather's Teachings (Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility & Wisdom) the same seven pillars that would guide a society well? Why aren't *both* certain American ideals *and* these Seven Grandfather's Teachings interwoven into an improved system, where we are also "invited to the table"?

Further, in my interview with Beth Fisher-Polasky, they recounted this recent interaction:

I had this conversation the other day with one of my student workers, right? They're very much into philosophy. We were discussing this conversation that they had in class – about where humans, plants, and animals rest in a hierarchy. So...they're like, 20. They're still learning. Obviously, they think that humans rest highest on the hierarchy, right, and then plants and animals are down there. And I looked at them and I said, "You realize that if we left, then Earth would still

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be around, everything would still be ok. Animals would still be able to live. Plants would still be able to survive. Water would still be okay. Everything would still be okay if we weren't here. But if *they* weren't here, then we'd die!" ...I [asked], "Why would you put humans at the top part of the hierarchy when in reality, we don't matter. We don't matter to anything in nature. Nature is higher than we are."

This point was also brought up by Jason S. Wesaw in my interview with him, it follows

(although I did not bring up this topic to either Beth Fisher-Polasky or Jason S. Wesaw):

...an interesting thing about America is America does have its own culture now, but before the onset of America, there were many hundreds, perhaps thousands of different cultures that were thriving here. And even then, you know, we had a lot of the same issues plague humanity. Whether it was grabbing for resources, and territory, and intercultural squabbles, warfare, disease, you know. There really was a more humble approach and a complete awareness or acknowledgement of our place amongst all of creation. And so, when you have that, it really humbles you to the fact that as a human being, we don't sit on top of a pyramid, but we are very powerful, and we have the pleasure of choice in our life. And life's choices breed consequences.

So, we do have some things that other creatures of the animal kingdom don't have, but we're not at the top of a pyramid, we're merely part of everything that's going on. And so, I think that a lot of that mentality is what's subsisted us through a lot of really thin and very difficult times. It's that we continue to understand our place amongst all of creation. And that, yes, our lifeways have changed drastically and in many ways, we're just now living in generations where we are revitalizing a number of the traditional and foundational aspects of our identities as Native People, but they never did die off. Just kind of went by the wayside for a long time. Out of necessity. But the teachings and the knowledge is still there. Because yes, it's contained within human beings and within teachings, within oral histories, within writings, within songs, and ceremonies, but the knowledge is also alive within the land itself.

...we have to re-engage with the land. And that's why I think that all throughout the world, the people that you see on the frontlines of environmental issues and trying to fight back against the degradation of Earth and the resources is Indigenous People because of that kinship and that place amongst creation we realize we have. That if things are destroyed continually and weakened, that that becomes reflected in our race as human beings.

Indigenous Knowledge Systems acknowledge that humans, plants, and animals are all living entities. Water must stay in balance biologically for plants, sea life, and humans to prosper. It's

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not about either we thrive, or they do, it's about "...a more humble approach and a complete awareness or acknowledgement of our place amongst all of creation." How can *both* humans *and* animals thrive in balance? How can *both* plants *and* humans thrive in balance with one another? How can our policies enforce the necessity of keeping water in biological balance? Additionally, how can we as humankind start embracing a decolonizing approach to our colonial society? Regarding a relationship between my Jason S. Wesaw, the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi, and a University that was built on land that once belonged to the interviewee's Tribal Members, the following excerpt offers some great first steps in the decolonizing process:

JSW: There's some good folks there [at the University] And I've only met a handful of them, but some very passionate people there. They realize that as it pertains specifically to my community, they have an obligation to explore this relationship that we've had for so long in a much more meaningful and deeper way. And through that...I kind of take that that they're pleasantly surprised at how simultaneously we're firmly rooted in our traditions and our identity as Pottawatomi People, but we're very modern, too. We're very successful...it's okay to see us as Businessmen, or Circle Keepers, or Doctors, Lawyers. Yeah, we're all of those things. We're not a community that's stuck in the 1700's.

A further example can be found in the peacemaking work that the Pokagon Band of the Potawatomi undertakes, as follows:

KK. I'm curious, you mentioned your peacemaking work?

JSW: Yeah.

KK: Is it a formal thing? Is it just a...thing where you just get brought into these instances?

[34:38]

JSW: Yeah, well I think it's a couple things. So, it IS formal – I mean, I'm the coordinator of our Peacemaking Program here for the Pokagon Band of Pottawatomi [at the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Court and Peacemaking Center], it's just a part time position, but I do all the community outreach, I take all the referrals, I set up the sessions. Oftentimes, I'm a part of the sessions or I help to conduct them. But yeah, I'm doing that work part time for my community.

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And I've always – my entire adult life I've done different jobs, so to speak, here in the community but it's all just been a life's work, so to speak. So, yeah, we have that program – it's a couple years old now but we've actually been building it since the early 2000's. So, for the better part of 15 years, we were hosting traditional people, peacemakers, knowledge keepers, medicine people here in our community but we are also going to communities all over North America and visiting with them talking about peacemaking. And that's what we call it here, they call it different things in different places, but really, all it is is the way that our communities have always maintained balance within the community.

So, we never needed police forces or judiciaries to uphold laws within our communities before we ever had laws in this country because we had the Creator's Law, and we had laws in expectations within our communities of how we were to act, and we had consequences and all of those things, they remain alive within our traditional knowledge ways. And so, we by hosting and visiting other communities, Yeah, we learned a lot from them – but what we really learned is that the tools that we need to do this work in our own community – we already possess because they're inherent within our traditional culture.

So, we use very specific elements of our Potawatomi culture is kind of like the foundation of our peacemaking program. Now, that doesn't mean that there's not room for people that don't believe traditional ways, um, to participate, because there certainly is – it's not dependent upon what your spiritual beliefs are, but we generally use our traditional ways as the benchmark for how we promote peace within the program and within the community. So, yeah, that's work that I do. I've been a part of it in the community and done the site visits and stuff with a core group of community members ever since I was a very young man.

It's worth emphasizing that before the first settlers and the institution of colonial policing, there was no police force, because community relationships were the foundation of justice and peace. Tribal Communities together determined the restorative justice that was necessary. Jason S. Wesaw again emphasizes a theme of the interview—that for centuries, Native Americans have been trying to be involved and included, to have a voice in the process. Additionally, in my interview with Jacob, he had some thought-provoking insights that follow:

J. I just, I think it's hard to escape the feeling, because I think, no matter what, just like the idea of research like THIS [asking assigned, set questions and mechanically recording answers] - is just so colonial.

KK. Thank you.

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J. Because why...because why would we, as a community need to put it together in some paper, when the productive thing to really be doing would be to come together as a collective right, and have these discussions.

And instead of saying, “Hey, I think you should do this, yes or no”? Say, “These are what we can offer. This is what we all want.” How do we find that compromise? That to me is the decolonized form of it.

There's a lot more work that has to go into actually being at that point, and institutions aren't there yet.

As current colonial systems and institutions are re-evaluated, the following are a couple applications/action steps to consider:

- Start inviting us to the table. Include us at ALL stages, we are not an afterthought.
- Re-examine your biases regarding hierarchy.
- Don't minimize our stories, our beliefs, our culture...and especially our community.
- Duality is beautiful when it's **both – and**.

I leave you with the wisdom that Lin Bardwell, MPA, shared with me:

“You are not invisible, I see you, all of our ancestors see you, and the next seven generations to come, they will see you.”

~ Dr. Cheryl Crazy Bull, President of the American Indian College Fund

My closing question is, when will **you** see **both** yourself **and** us?

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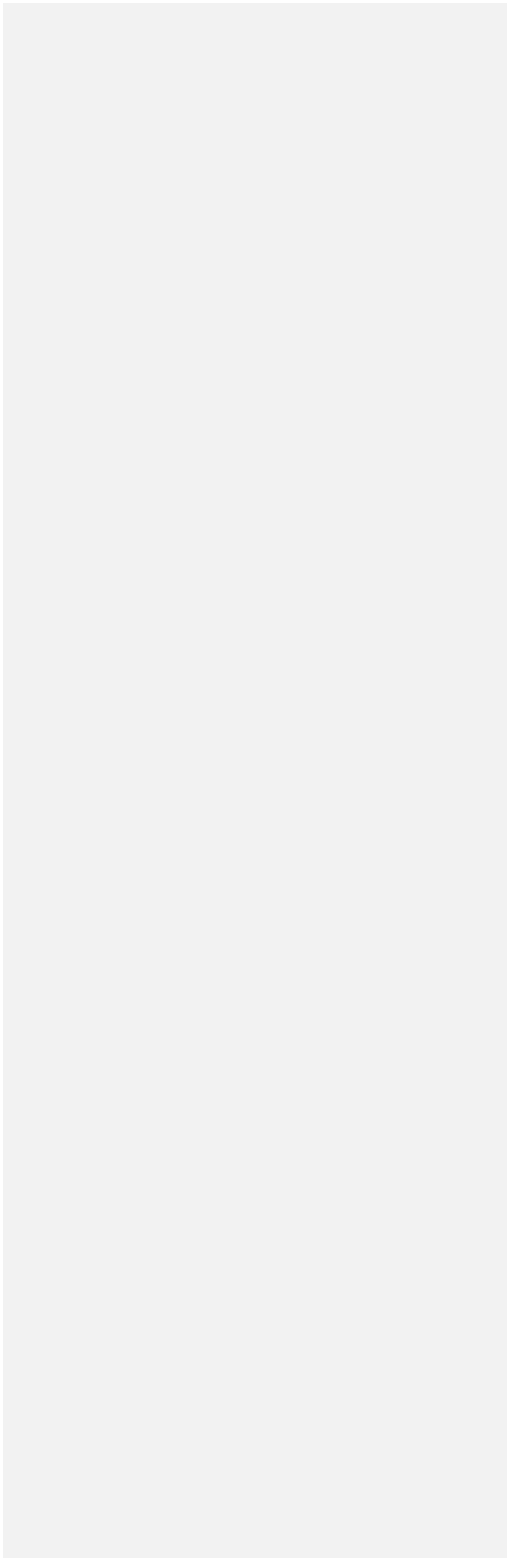
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Appendix A: IRB Questionnaire:

- Will your project be exempt, expedited, or need full review?
 - Exempt
- What procedures will you use to obtain consent and ensure confidentiality?
 - I will guarantee confidentiality through keeping and maintaining my master data off-site and secured; implementing “negotiated consent”, collective identity guidance, Indigenous leadership involvement regarding risk analysis, pre negotiated agreement regarding shared ownership of data, continuous assessment of risk throughout the process, and reiterating voluntary participation at every stage of the research, plus emphasizing that participants can withdraw without repercussions.
- If there are vulnerable participants in your research, how will you protect their rights?
 - PAR-informed approach
 - Risks will be mitigated by submitting to an Indigenous mentor, pre-planning in advance to clarify expectations and responsibilities, holding continual assessment meetings along the research process, as well as utilizing reflexivity.
- How will you recruit subjects?
 - Snowball recruiting
 - Case Studies
 - Webinars
 - Articles/archives/online blogs/public domain/journals, etc.
- How long will your interviews, etc. take?

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- Interviews = an invitation for “story talking” about my Project Question - range varies depending on availability of interviewee, average between 60 mins - 120 mins.
- What questions will you ask them? Why?
 - The questions within the context of my Project Question follow:
 - a. How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the Interrelationships for you or your kin between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy?
 - b. Do you have a story containing wisdom about how to embrace the Seven Grandfather Teachings in everyday post-colonial life, and/or a true story about personal experiences with any part of the project question?
 - c. Where did you/they come from?
 - c. Where are you/they now?
 - c. How did you/they get here?
 - c. Where are you/they going?
 - c. We will also ask follow-up questions to follow the natural progression of the conversation.

This approach will mitigate risk, as I conduct the project alongside an Indigenous Person, within the local Indigenous Community, according to local Indigenous protocol - I will *not be performing research on them, I will be asking questions as a community member alongside them.* Additionally, I will prepare one paper for the communities that assist me in my project - safeguarding culturally sensitive discoveries. A separate paper for Academia will also be prepared.

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- I wish to ask these questions because they demonstrate the intersectionality of post-colonial/decolonizing methodologies and the interrelationships of four sectors of Social Innovation. These questions will be used as a guideline, with story gathering being the ultimate purpose of this project. At the very least, I wish to use the question of “where did you come from and where are you going?” as analysis tools within the stories that are collected within the context of my Project Question.
- Will you compensate participants for their time?
 - That will depend on what my Indigenous Mentor finds most ethical and respectful. At the very least, an honorary pouch will be gifted to participants respectfully for their time, as is customary in Indigenous cultures.
- Where will your research take place?
 - In person interviews will take place at a Public Library - in a reserved, private space.
 - Virtual Interviews will take place via Zoom.
- Do you anticipate any problems associated with your research methods?
 - In the instance that I cannot gather all four interviewees in time, I can pivot my focus to additional archival documents and public domain stories regarding my project question.
- Do you foresee any benefits for your participants?
 - I see the ability to preserve Indigenous wisdom as a benefit for future generations.
- Do you foresee any physical, psychological, social, mental, economic or legal harm?

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- Potential risks to the participant could consist of the following: emotional: stigmatized for working with a woman raised off the reservation, financial/social: stigmatized for working in “colonial academia” with a woman raised off the reservation, psychological: potential to trigger a trauma response.
- How will you minimize risk?
 - These risks will be mitigated by submitting to my Indigenous Mentor, pre-planning in advance to clarify expectations and responsibilities, holding continual assessment meetings along the project process. Additionally, I would guarantee confidentiality through keeping and maintaining my master data off-site and secured; implementing “negotiated consent”, collective identity guidance, tribal leadership involvement regarding risk analysis, pre negotiated agreement regarding shared ownership of data, continuous assessment of risk throughout the process, and reiterating voluntary participation at every stage of the research, plus emphasizing that participants can withdraw without repercussions. Lastly, offering the conditions of using either an alias or embracing anonymity.
- Are there any conflicts of interest in your research?
 - As a Dutch-Irish-Native-American female business owner, I stand to gain in my business practices. Additionally, I am studying for my Masters Degree in Social Innovation - and this research is part of my Masters Project. This research could get published, and I potentially could also gain a community of tribal wisdom and friendship. These conflicts will be mitigated by my PAR-informed design with a SEER approach, keeping my Indigenous Mentor involved in decision making every step of the way, as I intentionally utilize Reflexivity in my Case Study.

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- How will you store and manage your data?
 - Data will be collected and kept locked up off-site, only allowing co-researchers to see P1, P2, P3, etc. for Participant 1, etc.
- Provide appropriate consent forms.
 - See Appendix B
- Provide protocols for research instruments (i.e. interviews, surveys, etc.)
 - Videotaping will occur via ZOOM or via camera.
 - Taping will be transcribed.
 - Confidential Identifiers will be assigned to transcripts.
 - Confidential information will be stored off-site and locked up.
 - Patterns in the transcripts identified.
 - Patterns shared with my Indigenous Mentor and Principal Investigator.

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Appendix B – Informed Consent Form - Revised

CONSENT TO BE PART OF A RESEARCH STUDY

1. KEY INFORMATION ABOUT THE RESEARCHERS AND THIS STUDY

Project title: Is my colonialism showing? | How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the Interrelationships between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy? A Reflexive Case Study.

Principal Investigator: Professor Krista Benson

Co-Investigator(s): Nicole “Knicki” Karsies

Study Sponsor: I was awarded the Orosz Fellowship in Philanthropy by The Dorothy A. Johnson Center in Philanthropy.

You are invited to take part in a research study. This form contains information that will help you decide whether to join the study.

1.1 Key Information - Things you should know:

- The **purpose** of the study is to gather stories from Indigenous People about how colonial research methodologies have impacted North American Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and the interrelationships between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy. Stories may contain wisdom about how to embrace the Seven Grandfather Teachings in everyday life, and/or they can be true stories about personal experiences with any part of this question.

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- If you choose to participate, you will be asked to allow a recording of you telling your story. This will take approximately 1 - 2 hours to complete.
- Risks or discomforts from this research include offering your time, being recorded, and having your story collected so we can look for patterns between how North American Indigenous People live out the Seven Grandfather Teachings in everyday life, business, philanthropy, culture, and/or community. We will also look for patterns in how colonization impacted the interrelationship between these areas.
- You may choose to (a) be anonymous, and only have your story put into writing without your name attached to it, (b) to pick a pseudonym or an alias that you wish to be known as, or (c) you may choose to have your name, and People Group connected to your video recording of your story. You may change your mind at any time, and you may stop being part of this story gathering project at any time.
- The direct benefits of your participation are recording stories about the Seven Grandfather Teachings for the next Seven Generations.
- Taking part in this research project is voluntary. You do not have to participate and you can stop at any time. Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

2. PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY

The purpose of this project is to study the stories of Indigenous Peoples in North America to look for patterns as they relate to my Project Question. My question follows: How have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge Systems impacted the Interrelationships between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business, and Philanthropy?

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3. WHO CAN PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY

3.1 Who can take part in this study?

Anyone 18 years and older who identifies as a North American Indigenous Person whether by ancestry or current membership. Participants must be or must have been active in traditional cultural ways as well as modern post-colonial life in North America. Participants must also wish to be recorded while sharing a story pertinent to my project question regarding the impact(s) of colonial research methodologies on Indigenous Peoples in North America, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, and / or the interrelationships between Indigenous Culture, Community, Business and Philanthropy.

4. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY PARTICIPATION

4.1 What will happen to me in this project?

- You will choose if you want to meet in person or on Zoom.
- We will meet, and story tell to get to know each other.
- When you are ready, we will record you telling your story.
- You will decide and write down if you would like to stay anonymous, use an alias, or have your name connected to your story.
- We will write your story into words so that we can compare your story to other stories and look for patterns.
- After we find patterns, we will share the patterns that we found with you, Indigenous People Groups that have also shared stories, and also other people who have shared stories. This way you may each decide what to do with the patterns,

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if there is wisdom to be applied, if the stories need to be shared within the community or shared further.

- Sometimes Indigenous people have sad parts to their story, and we understand if you decide that your story is too hard to tell.
- Please know that any culturally sensitive stories will only be shared among Indigenous People. We will compile a separate paper, without any culturally sensitive information, to be handed in to Grand Valley State University.

4.2 How much of my time will be needed to take part in this study?

- This should take you 1 - 2 hours to tell your story unless you have multiple stories.
- If we have a question for you after your story is recorded, we may contact you to ask you the question.
- The goal is for this story collecting project to be completed by April of 2023.

5. INFORMATION ABOUT STUDY RISKS AND BENEFITS

5.1 What risks will I face by taking part in the study? What will the researchers do to protect me against these risks?

Risks:

- Stigmatized for working in “colonial academia” with a woman raised off the reservation.
- Time taken to story tell if it interferes with work time.
- Potential to trigger a trauma response IF your story has sad parts to it.

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Protection:

- Because this study collects information about you, one of the risks of this research is a loss of confidentiality. See Section 8 of this document for more information on how the study team will protect your confidentiality and privacy.
- All information connecting your name to your story will be kept confidential and locked up off-site UNLESS you state in writing that you would like people to see your name and story together.
- Different time slots will be offered for telling your story, so we can work around your work schedule.
- If your story is hard to tell because it is sad, you do not have to tell it. We will also have counseling resources available if you would like to talk to someone about what you are feeling.
- You may choose to stop telling your story. Please see Section 6 for more details.
- You do not have to answer questions that you do not want to answer.

5.2 How could I benefit if I take part in this study? How could others

benefit? You may not receive any personal benefits from being in this study, or you may gain new wisdom about your story and how you live out the Seven Grandfather Teachings. However, others may benefit from the knowledge gained from this study.

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6. ENDING THE STUDY

6.1 If I want to stop participating in the study, what should I do?

- You are free to leave the study at any time.
- If you leave the study before it is finished, there will be no penalty to you.
- If you decide to leave the study before it is finished, please tell one of the persons listed in Section 9. "Contact Information".
- If you choose to tell the researchers why you are leaving the study, your reasons may be kept as part of the study record.
- The researchers will keep the information collected about you for the research unless you ask us to delete it from our records.
- If the researchers have already used your information in a research analysis it will not be possible to remove your information.

7. FINANCIAL INFORMATION

7.1 Will I be paid or given anything for taking part in this study?

- You will be at least gifted with an honorary tobacco tie.

7.2 Who could profit or financially benefit from the study results?

- Indigenous People groups in North America could potentially benefit from the collection of stories if they decide to use the patterns as a way to help others.

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8. PROTECTING AND SHARING RESEARCH INFORMATION

8.1 How will the researchers protect my information?

- All information connecting your name to your story will be kept confidential and locked up off-site UNLESS you state in writing that you would like people to see your name and story together.

8.2 Who will have access to my research records?

There are reasons why information about you may be used or seen by the researchers or others during or after this study. Examples include:

- University, government officials, study sponsors or funders, auditors, and/or the Institutional Review Board (IRB) may need the information to make sure that the study is done in a safe and proper manner.

8.3 What will happen to the information collected in this study?

- We will keep the information we collect about you during the project. Your name and other information that can directly identify you will be stored securely and separately from the information we collected from you.
- We may contact you again as part of this project.
- The results of this study could be published in an article or presentation, but will not include any information that would let others know who you are.

8.4 Will my information be used for future research or shared with others?

No.

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9. CONTACT INFORMATION

Who can I contact about this study?

Please contact the researchers listed below to:

Obtain more information about the study: karsiesn@mail.gvsu.edu

Ask a question about the study procedures: karsiesn@mail.gvsu.edu

Leave the study before it is finished.

Express a concern about the study.

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How would you prefer to be named in this interview? You may be anonymous, you may use a pseudonym, or you may choose to be named. Please write your preference below:

Would you prefer to also identify according to your Clan, Band and People? If yes to your Clan, Band and People, would you please write out the exact way you would prefer me to reference you?

My signature below and/or verbal consent serves as authorization for the use of my interview transcript.

Today's date:

IS MY COLONIALISM SHOWING?

Interview Transcript of

Jason S. Wesaw, an enrolled member with Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Indians
and from the Turtle Clan.

JSW Transcript

JSW: [I] want to stay on track.

KK: Thank you, I just started recording. Thank you, it doesn't have to be 'on track'; I am more interested in the 'Indigenous Methodology', if you will. Like, I would rather just story-talk. [laughs]. Just so you know, I am not like, 'I have to do it in this order.' I am not going to panic, I won't. [laughs]

JSW: Yeah.

KK: So, just as you see fit, I do appreciate you doing the background dive into that and into the questions [before we started recording], and I would feel more comfortable even if we just let you lead the conversation, and then, if there's a pause, I might ask a question for clarity. But I would just love to hear your thoughts on my questions.

JSW: Yeah. I've got them pulled up here in front of me, so...

KK: Wonderful, thank you.

[Pause]

KK: I think in some ways, you already spoke a little bit to the interrelationships.

JSW: Yeah, there's a lot contained within these first couple of questions. You know, a lot of how I connect with institutions, universities, museums, all those sorts of places; how I connect with them a lot now is through my artwork - in exhibiting my work, telling stories in that fashion. But my first real interaction with those type of places in my really late teens, early twenties, was through doing repatriation work. And if you're not familiar with repatriation, that's the work that we do in our communities to try and get back our cultural objects, our ancestral remains, all the things that were looted, stolen, sold out of desperation from our communities into the hands of collectors. And then these collections have been built up over the last couple hundred years by institutions that have money and have the spaces to tell these stories about our people. So, for many, many, years I have worked closely with elders in my community, and knowledge-keepers. Being a young man, I kind of...they were in the lead for doing all this work and negotiating with non-Native people to try and get things released from their collections. This was even before there was NAGPRA [The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990] Legislation and legal maneuvers that we could use to try to do this work. So, [it was] kind of like standing in the background and watching them do it. I really learned a lot.

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I learned a lot about what we sacrificed, not just historically from our communities, but what we are sacrificing in the present day as far as the way that our stories were being told for us, the way that we were being relegated to history and not being seen in the present day, let alone in the future. So, just the work that we had to do to continually affirm that, you know, that we are here, we are in these places that we've always been, and that our stories and the things that we hold as sacred, continue to ring true. They're probably the same thing that anyone else would hold sacred. You know, like if you had a family burial ground that had been dug up and robbed, looted, and stuff taken out of it, I think anyone would, you know, have a sense of sadness and like, physically and spiritually, emotionally feel hardship from that.

But, you know, we did that hard work, and hard work even continues to this day. Some of those elders that I worked with and learned with back then are gone now. But the work continues. So, it's good that I was around, and that I paid attention and listened and learned from them because now I can continue to do some of that work, and I've even expanded it, but the work will never end, so there's younger people that are coming up behind me now – they are doing the same thing that I did back then; they aren't in the lead, but they are learning and preparing for when it will be their time to do the work.

So when I think of, like, colonial institutions or research methodologies, or people that have put their careers into documenting and researching and academically writing about our people, even in instances where they've worked directly from us, or that some of these narratives have been first person, it's changing nowadays from what it once was, but it once was literally that they were studying us and getting everything they could from our cultures because there was a time when they truly believed we were vanishing and that we weren't going to be around. So that's why there was this strong desire to capture everything about us. [6.25] Whether it was our languages, our stories, medicinal and plant knowledge, the objects, ceremonial knowledge – whatever it was, they wanted it. They didn't want us to have it, you know, in many instances it was illegal – literally illegal for us to practice certain things or to speak our language. So, we couldn't have those things, but there was like, a rush for the research to be done before we no longer existed. Well, you know, fast forward two hundred, three hundred, four hundred years, and we're still here. We're more than just surviving, we're thriving.

I think, I wouldn't say that the tables are starting to turn but we certainly have a voice nowadays that we haven't always been afforded. So, I see a lot less of us recreating the wheel, or like, continually having to go back to square 1 every time we go to a new institution. Or, every time we start a new project, what have you; it seems like these relationships that we're forging are starting to become more long term or they have a vision attached to them; where it's not just a one-off project. We're meeting people and working with them and they're finally realizing or acknowledging, like, "Hey, these Indians, they kind of know what they're talking about." "Like, they know what they're doing. They're experts in their own field, and in their own cultures. Their stories are much more beautiful in the way that *they* tell them than us relaying these stories for them."

And so, I feel like we're living in sort of a renaissance period where Native People are really beginning to have the venues to understand that our stories are your stories. In that, there's not always this need to have everything wrapped up in the past. History is part of everything, but it

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doesn't start or stop with that history. There's things that we can do in the present time, and there's ideas that we can work on together about the directions that we're going in the future that will not just benefit Indian People, it can benefit everyone. There's like a certain amount of humility that people have to bring to the table. Quite often, the humility has always been one-sided; it's been us like humbly trying to get people to pick up the phone when we called, or to open the door when we came knocking – for whatever the issue was. Nowadays, people are coming to us and trying to work together, and looking for help and acknowledging that we have good things to share in this society.

KK: Hmm. I can see that.

JSW: So, it's...important for the younger generations to be able to come up and take these positions because, the old guard of professors and researchers, and anthropologists and archeologists, I mean, in some ways, they're just terrible people.

KK: Mmm-hmm.

JSW: Not just their methodologies, but the crass way in which they would interact with us, let alone the ways that they would write about or put these perceptions out about who we are – it just ----- it wasn't good. And I see it changing, I do see it changing.

[Pause]

JSW: That's a lot [smiles].

KK: [laughs] – No, that's a GOOD lot!

JSW: I'm kind of rolling, but...

KK: Yeah.

JSW: I've been doing it long enough that I'm encouraged by the changes that I see. There's still in many instances the change is happening at a snail's pace but that again goes back to the reason why I feel like, with my own personality, and the way that I work in the world, it's more of a desire that I have, to help educate people and to learn together and build these bridges between cultures and between professions. Try to get everyone working together in a common direction for common goals.

KK: That is so good – I think that's what first attracted me to the Social Innovation program – it's all about interrelationships, and it's about building, not destroying. But it's also about analyzing what's been done inappropriately, what's succeeded, and what could succeed, and how can we take the best of everything that has worked, and build on that, and learn from the mistakes of what hasn't.

[JSW nods]

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I think, too, even as you were speaking, I kept seeing the imagery of, like, a tornado. I kept thinking how place has so many layers to it. We were taught for so long that there's a timeLINE instead of a time SPIRAL. I think a time spiral or a tornado is so much more accurate because when I step into a place, I am not just stepping where I am in that moment, I am stepping where ancestors have been before; where enemies and friends stood before. I'm stepping into – there is not a single place on this Earth or on this planet that has not already at some level, been impacted by activity that happened before I got there.

[JSW nods]

And I think that as a society, or as educated ones, as we grow up, and we start becoming more aware of that as a society, I feel like that [awareness] is only going to make us stronger as a society together with the bridges that we are building to what has already happened in a space, in a place. And also, to other cultures that are in the same space at the same time, instead of being so focused and solely focused on what we know.

[JSW nods, pauses]

JSW: Yeah, those are good points, and an interesting thing about America is America does have its own culture now, but before the onset of America, there were many hundreds, perhaps thousands of different cultures that were thriving here. And even then, you know, we had a lot of the same issues plague humanity. Whether it was grabbing for resources, and territory, and intercultural squabbles, warfare, disease, you know. There really was a more humble approach and a complete awareness or acknowledgement of our place amongst all of creation. And so, when you have that, it really humbles you to the fact that as a human being, we don't sit on top of a pyramid, but we are very powerful, and we have the pleasure of choice in our life. And life's choices breed consequences.

So, we do have some things that other creatures of the animal kingdom don't have, but we're not at the top of a pyramid, we're merely part of everything that's going on. And so, I think that a lot of that mentality is what's subsisted us through a lot of really thin and very difficult times. It's that we continue to understand our place amongst all of creation. And that, yes, our lifeways have changed drastically and in many ways, we're just now living in generations where we are revitalizing a number of the traditional and foundational aspects of our identities as Native People, but they never did die off. Just kind of went by the wayside for a long time. Out of necessity. But the teachings and the knowledge is still there. Because yes, it's contained within human beings and within teachings, within oral histories, within writings, within songs, and ceremonies, but the knowledge is also alive within the land itself.

And so, when we get desperate or fail to find teachers, as we would commonly think of a teacher, as being another human being, or a resource of sorts, whether it's a book – or nowadays, the computer, what-have-you; when we can't find those type of teachers, it's important – we have to re-engage with the land. And that's why I think that all throughout the world, the people that you see on the frontlines of environmental issues and trying to fight back against the degradation of Earth and the resources is Indigenous People because of that kinship and that

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place amongst creation we realize we have. [17.00] That if things are destroyed continually and weakened, that that becomes reflected in our race as human beings.

So, some of these things we are talking about may not specifically address your questions as you have them here, but I think they do sort of touch on some of those subjects.

KK: Absolutely.

JSW: Because, not that Native People have it all figured out, but we do have to be at the table to try and sort out some of these problems that humanity has. Because, otherwise, they're not going to get sorted out. And so, when I think about how it says, "Interrelationships between our own cultures, Non-Native Communities, Businesses, Philanthropies, Institutions, what-have-you," we just simply need to continue being part of the conversations. And the conversations from the ground level, from the foundation of it all.

Not, like, calling us in at the end of a project, or to review something, and get a stamp of approval. Like, if you want true interaction and relationship building, we have to be at the table from the get-go because I think we all have something to add and sometimes we have different ways of going about that. We speak differently, we think differently, we hear differently, we learn differently; so, it takes time to really forge these relationships that are really all about communication. Like, communicating effectively so that we can reach whatever set goal that we have in common.

That's a lot of what I do in my work as peacemaker, too. I can't make peace for people.

KK: Unnh-huh [shakes head]

JSW: But I can utilize some of the teachings that I have and what I've learned, and my communication abilities to try and set the table so that people can make peace themselves. It's not my job to make peace for them. [shakes head]. But I am certainly there to help them do that between each other.

[Pause]

So, it really, a lot of what all of this is coming down to; in my opinion, with human beings; it comes down to communication. Now, that's aside from what I see as a hoarding of resources throughout the world. There's enough for everyone but the resources that are there are being hoarded by a certain few. A very small segment of the population that has all of the control and all of the money throughout the world. So aside from that huge problem, the rest of it, I believe, just comes down to communication. Even between people that have extreme ideologies.

You know, it still comes down to communicating between the cultures, between the races, and between spiritual beliefs and communicating even between the different classes. Because there certainly are classes in our country. It's different than what we may see in other places, where perhaps they have a caste system or something like that, but there certainly are classes within this country. And, I think a lot of times, race is brought to the forefront, but I don't think class; the

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different classes that are being established, are acknowledged as - as big of a problem as what it really is. And so, then that part of it all goes back to resources. You have so many people that are struggling and desperate, that they don't have time to think about how to make the world a better place for our children, because they're starving today. They're lacking housing and healthcare today. You know, so it's difficult to talk about these broader subjects and to have a true vision that you can stick with when your stomach's empty or when you're constantly beaten down.

[21:58]

My community has been there before in generations, so we understand it. But I do believe that because of my ancestors' perseverance and their wisdom and really ensuring that we're able to maintain our identity as Pottawatomie People, that's a big part of what has enabled us to survive. To the point where now, my community is beginning to thrive because we've understood how to, how to speak the language of "dominant culture" [gestured air quotes], so to speak. So, many of our people are extremely highly educated, successful in business, you know, very integral parts of the communities that they live in and making those communities better places to live.

So, along with being able to speak the language of dominant culture, like, we also have maintained our traditional identity to varying degrees. And so, within those deep, deep, roots, there is a lot of power. So, when you have that coupled with the knowledge of how you live and succeed in the modern world, then that's like the perfect combination right there.

KK: Do you see it as duality, so to speak, or do you think it's more just refusing to change who we are; -- and learning -- I know some people call it "code switching" when you learn to speak a certain way in a certain situation. Um, so I guess my question is, it almost sounds like within the interrelationships, we've created a way of having an interrelationship where we don't sacrifice who we are in the process, whereas other people would totally lose their identity in the interrelationship.

[24:10]

JSW: [long pause] Yeah, that's an interesting question, or, the way that you're asking it. I think it is a duality because I believe strongly there's duality in every aspect of life. So, we have this physical life we're leading, but there's also like, a deeply connected spiritual part of it, too. Or, um, [pause], if you didn't want to say a spiritual part of it, then like, that part of the great mystery or the unknown. And, some people are very aware of that and embrace that in their physical life; other people are less connected to that side of things. But yeah, there certainly is a duality. Again, like, I feel like some of the biggest strength that I see in my community is that we continue to live right in the heart of Pottawatomie homelands here whereas even amongst Pottawatomie, many were forced out of this area, or fled this area and went to different areas of North America. But, if you were to ask them, when they talk about coming home, this [points down] is home. [25:46]

So there is...there's a lot of strength in those deep, deep, deep roots. There's a power source that we have, being connected to the land -- here for many thousands of years. And so, that's different, you know, on my mother's side, or...the Non-native side of my family. You know, to be able to connect with my ancestors from my maternal side, I would have to go to different places of America, and then different places across the Atlantic Ocean and really be immersed in

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whatever remnants are left of that culture and that land there. And to be able to do that for the rest of my life to even feel as strongly connected and clear about the way that I do from my Pottawatomí culture, and that's because I've always lived here [points down].

I think a lot of our people would say that. There's something special about being on your ancestral lands that helps give you clarity and strength in your life.

KK: I think that's powerful, and I think that's so true. I mean, even my mother's parents were both first generation Dutch-Americans so they were the first to speak English and to learn the ways of the [air-quotes] "Americans", but to blend that in the fact that [my mom and my dad] grew up in the same neighborhood that my father's ancestors grew up in; and that's how they met, and got married. But then to go even deeper, and know that my mother's Dutch Father, when he found out that I was Indigenous, (he knew before I did), because my dad's dad confided in him before my dad's dad died –

JSW: Mmm-hmm

KK: But he went out of his way to learn every morsel he could about Indigenous ways and he taught that to me from a young age. He taught me how to work the land and how to pay homage, and how – he taught me about ecosystems without saying, "I'm going to teach you about ecosystems".

JSW: Mmm-hmm

KK: But he fed the ducks – he put out bread at night so that the ducks would come to the pond in his backyard, and that's how I learned that if you have ducks, you don't have mosquitos. But not once did he say, "If we have ducks, we won't have mosquitos", all he did was hand me the breadcrumbs, and say, "Go put these out and see what happens!". And so I did, every day for a week until I saw what happened. But I am so grateful that, for him, the humility that it took for him as a Dutch-American Man – to do, to find, to seek out whatever Indigenous Knowledge Systems he could, so that, when the time came for me to fully understand my ancestry, I could walk into it and have an affinity for the land in Grandville – and then discover the deeper affinity of "Well, why do the [Ancestral] Burial Mounds constantly call to me?" Well, because when my dad's great – grandfather came, this is the place that he probably wanted to be returned, but he couldn't – because he couldn't openly practice his belief system. That's why I feel drawn to the mounds.

JSW: Mmm-hmm

KK: That's why, along the riverbanks, my heart cries but it rejoices at the same time at the Grand River. Because part of me is weeping for what's been done to it, but the other part of me is rejoicing that the river still flows.

JSW: Umm-hmm.

KK: So, I really appreciate it – yeah.

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JSW: Yeah. So, you were saying, your community – I'm gonna write this down – is Micmac and Maliseet? [Correction: Maliseet are part of the Wabanaki Confederation, Micmac, too].

KK: Correct.

JSW: Is that what you said?

KK: Yeah. That's what I said. And Wolastoqiyik is how they self-refer. And interestingly, Wolastoqiyik means, "People of the Beautiful, Bountiful River" because the [Wabanaki] territory stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the St. Lawrence River...and their – community is the first one to find the unmarked graves in Canada. That's the community land.

JSW: Oh-kay.

KK: It does make sense, piecing it all together from a historical perspective –

JSW: Mm-hmm

KK: Sad sense, but it makes sense.

JSW: Yeah, that's cool. We, I mean, we have similarities in our cultures. As Anishinaabe People here in the Great Lakes, like our brothers and sisters are ancestors all the way to the East Coast and some of that is evidenced through our Creation Stories. And the prophesies. The journeys that we made, many, many hundreds of years ago. [There are] different ways of thinking about that – but you can really see the connection through languages.

KK: Hmmm

[31:00]

JSW: So, like that whole Algonquin dialect of speaking – you can see a lot of similarities, when you start picking apart language. And that, right there, can - it shows you the interconnectedness and the deep, deep relationships we had with each other.

KK: Mmm-hmm

JSW: And those, in my opinion, those still continue to become even stronger in 2023 than what they were probably a hundred or two hundred years ago because we were all in survival mode back then.

KK: Right?

JSW: All of our people were, so. So, what do you think? Are we talking on these [questions] at all, or...?

KK: Absolutely.

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JSW: Am I giving you something you can use, at least?

KK: Definitely, you're giving me a lot of things that I can use. A lot, a LOT!

[pause]

KK: And I am going to be very careful as well. Like I mentioned, I am having two papers. One that safeguards cultural[ly] sensitive things, and that will only be returned to you and to any of the other Indigenous People who have helped me, like the National Museum of the American Indian helped me by letting me go through the archival things that were not made public. So, I will be returning them 1 copy to safeguard [air quotes] "National Secrets" of the Indigenous. And then the other one will face Academia because I am trying to set a precedent with my case study, that if this is how we treat other Sovereign Nations in the U.N., then this is the way that my People in the Tribe, and Nations, and Peoples represented need to start being treated as well. [32:48]

We need to have our dignity restored by us deciding what to hold back and what to tell, to whom.

JSW: Really good. [nods] I applaud you for that.

KK: Yeah, it's amazing. I'm curious if I can ask you – but I'm curious, you mentioned your peacemaking work?

JSW: Yeah.

KK: Is it a formal thing? Is it just a...thing where you just get brought into these instances?

[34:38]

JSW: Yeah, well I think it's a couple things. So, it IS formal – I mean, I'm the coordinator of our Peacemaking Program here for the Pokagon Band of Pottawatomi, [at the Pokagon Band of Potawatomi Court and Peacemaking Center], it's just a part time position, but I do all the community outreach, I take all the referrals, I set up the sessions. Oftentimes, I'm a part of the sessions or I help to conduct them. But yeah, I'm doing that work part time for my community. And I've always – my entire adult life I've done different jobs, so to speak, here in the community but it's all just been a life's work, so to speak. So, yeah, we have that program – it's a couple years old now but we've actually been building it since the early 2000's. So, for the better part of 15 years, we were hosting traditional people, peacemakers, knowledge keepers, medicine people here in our community but we are also going to communities all over North America and visiting with them talking about peacemaking. And that's what we call it here, they call it different things in different places, but really, all it is is the way that our communities have always maintained balance within the community.

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So, we never needed police forces or judiciaries to uphold laws within our communities before we ever had laws in this country because we had the Creator's Law, and we had laws in expectations within our communities of how we were to act, and we had consequences and all of those things, they remain alive within our traditional knowledge ways. And so, we by hosting and visiting other communities, Yeah, we learned a lot from them – but what we really learned is that the tools that we need to do this work in our own community – we already possess because they're inherent within our traditional culture.

So, we use very specific elements of our Pottawatomi culture is kind of like the foundation of our peacemaking program. Now, that doesn't mean that there's not room for people that don't believe traditional ways, um, to participate, because there certainly is – it's not dependent upon what your spiritual beliefs are, but we generally use our traditional ways as the benchmark for how we promote peace within the program and within the community. So, yeah, that's work that I do. I've been a part of it in the community and done the site visits and stuff with a core group of community members ever since I was a very young man.

In fact, the first trip that we went on, to learn more about it, was up into Canada, and I went on that trip with a bunch of people from the community but, in a very special way I ended that trip with my grandfather, who's now 92.

KK: Oh, my goodness.

JSW: We kind of like started that journey together, and I think, in a lot of ways, the community kind of probably saw things in me before I even saw them in myself. So, it's not like I do this work as a [air quotes] "job", so to speak, I do this work because it's what I am gifted to do.

So yeah, it's uh – I love it! It keeps me super busy because even though I only do it parttime, between my family and the work that I do in the art world, it's, you know, like I'm fulltime, fulltime plus!

KK: Right.

JSW: But it's really good, like heartfelt, individual work. You know? Helping individuals understand that they matter.

KK: Hmmm. That makes sense.

JSW: And yeah, we have, like a really beautiful facility down here. We have a lot of community support and things are really growing. [nods].

KK: That's incredible.

JSW: It's even growing into the outside community because, of course, what we call peacemaking other people might call it "alternative dispute resolution", or "restorative justice", there's a lot of popular terms by which it's known nowadays, but we just happen to call it peacemaking. [nods].

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KK: That makes sense.

JSW: So, it's not like, us or tribes are the only ones doing it – there's a whole movement throughout the country and throughout the world because people realize in many ways that the courts, the schools, the prison systems, the policing, there's something wrong with it. It's not succeeding. It's tearing apart individuals and families and communities at a really alarming pace.

KK: That's true. For so long, people have been deciding the punishment that should be dealt against somebody, instead of walking along with the perpetrator and the offended.

JSW: [Nods emphatically].

KK: Like you said, it goes back to “Start with everyone at the table, and then you won't have a mess afterwards.”

JSW: Yeah, it's really difficult and time-consuming work, but we're talking about people's lives here.

KK: Right.

JSW: And the trickle-down effect of what having negative interactions with police and law, that does not just to an individual, but their family, and how that can lead into generational trauma, it's something --- it's a serious issue. And of course, Indian People, along with many, many other minorities understand those things firsthand. Obviously, we're not dealing with heavy-duty crime and violent crime, we're dealing a lot more with family issues, interpersonal disputes, sometimes custody and guardianship issues. Even employee disputes within tribal government here.

But we've increasingly been working within the non-Native Community, with peer-to-peer resolution in Middle Schools and High Schools. Just trying to help people understand that they can play an active role in resolving disputes and in finding common ground with each other when wrong doings have happened. You have to empower the individual. People have to play an active role in it.

KK: That is so true. I noticed that [42:52] the University of Notre Dame has a PhD program in strategic Communications that will roll out this coming Fall, I think, or the next year; and it's all about peacemaking --- communications and peacemaking...they do a lot of international peace brokering (I don't like using that word because then it sounds like a transaction instead of a reciprocity).

JSW: Yeah, that's interesting that you mention Notre Dame because Notre Dame was founded and erected on land that they purchased from my ancestors here in the Pokagon Pottawatomi Tribe. So, historically, from the very onset, and continuing up 'til today, you know, we have this

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deep and intertwined relationship with Notre Dame. And, their Center for Social Concerns down there, we've really been forging a relationship with them over the last year or year and a half.

KK: Wow.

JSW: At the University there. There's actually going to be students, some staff, and administration are going to be visiting here in our community. So, we're going to have a whole contingency from the University and the Center for Social Concerns coming to visit us and find out more about how we interact with each other and try and maintain balance and make space and clear up wrongdoings and such, so, we all have a lot to learn from each other, so these things are really exciting opportunities for me to be a part of. 'Cuz like I said, I learn a lot by working with other people. Even in a venue where I may be perceived as the teacher, I'm learning a lot by sharing what I know.

KK: That does make sense.

JSW: Sometimes, it's not even a conscious thing but, like a presentation will end or whatever, and I am just like, "Wow, did I really just say that? I need to investigate that myself more and it's really amazing!" I say that in a humble way, but it's really amazing. We should be able to acknowledge that when we do amazing things as individuals, especially when we're sharing that with other people, so we have to encourage ourselves sometimes, because there are times when nobody else is going to.

[46:10]

KK: That's true! That IS true. That's so good. I really appreciate the way that things are so interconnected.

JSW [nods solemnly]

KK: I continually get invited into more white spaces constantly, and constantly; and at first, I was shrinking back from it until she mentioned it's because my face looks familiar to a lot of white people, so they will allow me into spaces, in her words, that she would not be invited into. And that's okay, as long as I carry with me what I know and learned; and as long as I stay true to "This is what I've heard or learned, or observed, this is my experience only."

JSW: Mm-hmmm [emphatically]

KK: "This isn't everybody's [experience], but this is the part I'll carry with me."

JSW: Mm-hmm [again emphatically]

KK: "And this is what I'm going to ask for, respectfully, or as far as I know, but if you want more, then I will have to go back and ask for more." That has been a beautiful thing, just to start to see the shift ever so slightly, even in those little moments of, "Why don't you have a land acknowledgement? Why is it buried on the back of your web pages? Why isn't it on the forefront? Why?" So, just asking those little questions and considering myself to be kind of a

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low-key ambassador of starting the conversation and starting the thought process so that institutions can start to change their perspective.

JSW: Mm-hmm. Yeah, that sounds like good work that you are doing.

KK: Chi Miigwech

JSW: Yeah, I felt for many, many years, not necessarily in my community, but in other spaces; like I didn't feel like I belonged, it wasn't necessarily my place to be there, that I was even worthy of being there in some spaces, but as I've matured and come to know myself, I have really accepted the gifts that I have been given; and how I can best use them. The acceptance and embracing of that has been really important in my life and motivational, but it has enabled me to share my gifts in a far-reaching kind of way. So, I always have this work that I do here in the community, but through my art and the stories that the art I create lead into, that's almost like a way that I can communicate with the outside world. And that's, I believe, equally as important in the modern times because we don't just live in these secluded communities as Native People, we are a part of larger communities and we're a sub-culture that's part of a larger culture, so we have to be able to successfully interact within our own spaces but even more so in larger society and in dominant society.

KK: [pause] It's almost as if duality, instead of it being viewed as a burden, it's viewed as a gift.

JSW: Yeah.

KK: Yeah.

JSW: Yeah, because if reality is a burden, then I think it inherently is going to be tough for us.

KK: Mm-hmm

JSW: But if we see it as a gift, and that we're equipped to be able to thrive within it, and to be able to share within it, then just mentally or the way that you visualize it becomes a different thing.

KK: When you just said that it connected me back to that moment [of a culturally sensitive memory], of it's a *yes-and*, yes, we're going to take the horses that the settlers bring in with them, and we're going to make something beautiful out of them [Appaloosas], and they're going to be fastest **because** they're a *yes-and*. Because they're both. Not because they're dual, that doesn't slow them down, it makes them even better. That's the gifting of the *yes-and*.

JSW: Yeah, that's an incredible analogy, I like that.

[53:40] –

Regarding a relationship between my interviewee's Tribal Citizenship Members and a University that was built on land that once belonged to the interviewee's Tribal Members:

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JSW: There's some good folks there [at the University] And I've only met a handful of them, but some very passionate people there. They realize that as it pertains specifically to my community, they have an obligation to explore this relationship that we've had for so long in a much more meaningful and deeper way. And through that...I kind of take that that they're pleasantly surprised at how simultaneously we're firmly rooted in our traditions and our identity as Pottawatomie People, but we're very modern, too. We're very successful...it's okay to see us as Businessmen, or Circle Keepers, or Doctors, Lawyers. Yeah, we're all of those things. We're not a community that's stuck in the 1700's.

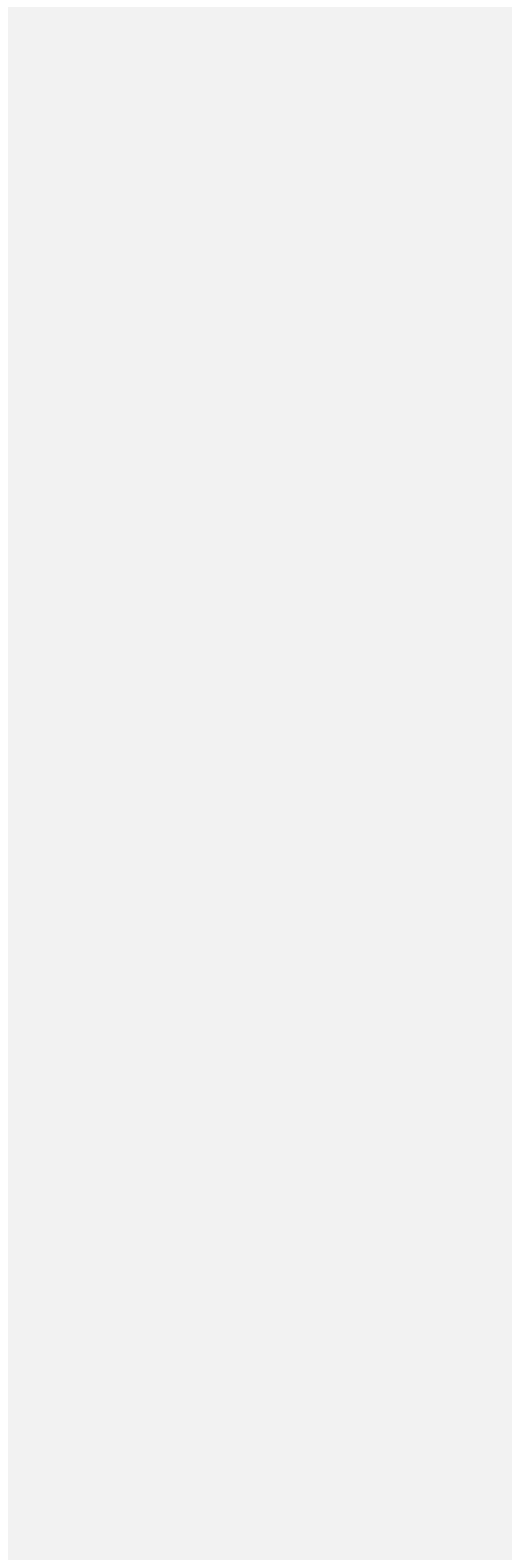
KK: That is really good – it gives me a lot to think about...thank you so much, I really appreciate your wisdom, and also just the encouragement of knowing that being a peaceable person who is still a disruptor is possible. [laughs]

JSW: [laughs and nods] Absolutely it is, we gotta have the balance, you know?

KK: Yeah.

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Interview Transcript of
Beth Fisher-Polasky,
originally from Mackinac near Lake Michigan and Huron,
now lives in Petoskey near Lake Michigan,
is of Deer Clan and is Sault Ste. Marie Band of Chippewa.

KK: There and there it is. Okay.

BFP: Yeah, no, that's fine.

KK: Okay, so is my colonialism showing? And then how other methodologies?

BFP: Oh, yeah, no, that's fine. I remember now. Okay.

KK: Okay, perfect. And then I could scroll into the questions. Try not to make you dizzy at the same time.

BFP: I think I have the question in my email.

KK: Do you? Okay. And I don't know, like, yesterday, when I, or a couple of days ago, when I interviewed, the interviewee wanted to have it up, just so that they could kind of stay on task, which is totally fine. But I was like, you don't have to.

You don't have to answer all of them. And my methodology is, I just like letting the conversation lead. So, I will end up probably just letting you guide it. And then I'll interject from time to time, like with questions, follow up questions. But yeah, I really liked the way that Oprah does her podcast. [laughs]

BFP: Yeah, I get it. I mean, I think it's more of, there's a lot more... It's a lot more... What's the word? Sorry, I...have like, brain fog sometimes.

KK: Bless your heart! That's so frustrating!

BFP: Yeah, it really is! Yeah, ...is a lot more. Original. That's not the word I want to use. You know what I mean? It has like a more natural flow to it.

KK: Yeah. I'm just more of a relationship...

BFP: Yeah. So it's just like asking questions and answering questions, which,

KK: Right? It's true. I feel like too, just to honor the ways, in order to put things in context, I feel like that's so much more important too, if we're going to have relationship built, and we're going

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to decolonize the process, then I think relationship is such a big part of that. So I shared it in chat, in case you want to cheat.

BFP: Oh, yes. Okay.

KK: And that way, I don't have to awkwardly share my screen through the whole thing, because...

BFP: it's fine.

KK: So yeah, I guess in the questions, too. Yeah. Like how have colonial research methodologies on North American Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Knowledge system impact?

BFP: I think it's two separate things, though, really, when I was reading it, and I was thinking about it, because when working in a library, too; that's really kind of, like, enlighten me to that too, because... Just a little aside before that, so we have this display, I guess. We have this whole section on Native American, you know, Native American authors and history and stuff like that, right?

And so, I was kind of looking at it. And I'm like, first of all, who curated this, because it's just kind of like, history, authors and random Native American stuff, right? Culture, right? Culture, language, that kind of thing. And I was looking at it and first of all, there's some problematic stuff in there because I mean, it's kind of older stuff, you know, that probably shouldn't be there. Like I found a book on Thanksgiving. I was like, why is this in here?

KK: Right? What are what are we propagating people?

BFP: I read it and I was like, man, who is this person who wrote this book? And they made everything just seemed like it was just really great and cooperative. And just, I looked at the year I think it was like in the 90s, or something. And

KK: Oh, my word!

BFP: ...In the summer, though. I want to go through it and, you know, weed out the books that don't belong there.

KK: Yeah,

BFP: ...And fix it. So, I get it when we talk about like Indigenous or, you know, the research methodologies on Indigenous People. I think that we, for so long have expected other people to be experts...and it's not us. We're not experts on ourselves. You know, you can't...Non-Indigenous people are not experts on Indigenous Knowledge.

KK: Right.

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BFP: And that is something I think that we are NOW allowed to say but weren't allowed to say for the longest time. You know...that we couldn't be experts on ourselves because our history was already written for us. And that. And so now, now, we're changing that history. I mean, when you look at one of the books that I just read it - it's An Indigenous Peoples History of the United States by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz. It's good.

I mean, it really pinpoints you know, like, certain sections of it, you know, history itself, and all of, you know, Indigenous History in some ways...But even then, it's so it's...like a very condensed version. Because we're all different, everyone has different histories. And I think that we have focused on how do we research, we research how we were taught, right? We were taught in a colonial method to research because that's the only way we knew. I mean, I think about how I started, I started right, even in undergrad, how I started. And now I think about it...my research is more intentional than it is just looking for research, right, and finding it and grabbing it and being like, this is really what I need.

But now I'm a lot more intentional, like how is it going to affect the way that I write the paper? And how is it going to affect the way that people look at it and non-Indigenous people look at are they going to look at and be like, oh, man, she's just like really getting out there? You know, as a Native, because sometimes don't you feel like you're...on the soapbox and preaching about how we're a Native and how we're Indigenous and, you know...how our life is; how our culture has been lost, and we need to find it and embrace it?

And I feel like some days, that's all I'm saying is that, and when...our writing becomes something like that, and...it's like our intention to put that out there. Like every paper that I've written so far has been from an Indigenous viewpoint that I've been writing. And sometimes I've had, like, the paper that I wrote last semester, and I think I told you, it's white supremacy and nonprofits. Oh, yeah. I think I wanted to write it from an Indigenous Viewpoint. Yeah. He was like, "Well, no, I think that you would really, you know, like, it would be too focused if you're reading it." And I'm like, "But dude, I am Indigenous, how else am I going to write this?"

KK: Right? This is my case study. This is MY reflective case study!

BFP: Right. So, you know, I think that and one thing I did do on the paper was I didn't capitalize things like united states, and, you know, all of those things, all of those things that we that we are even like, colonialism didn't capital this or that. I DID capitalize White Supremacy, though, because I felt like that really needs to be capitalized. Because that's what I'm talking about. And that is a problem.

KK: Yeah.

BFP: ...Because I just won't. Like, christian, catholic, any of that won't have a capital letter in it, nothing like that. And I told him that and I'm like, This is how I feel about it. And I wrote a little letter and explained it to him. And I'm like, I'm not gonna capital all these and these are the reasons why.

KK: Right? Good for you to explain. Good.

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BFP: And I think that standing - by something like that, really removes that colonial belief that it should be respected by capitalizing it, you know, the love of the written word. Right. Right. And how we love to write how, you know...colonialism wants us to write. I guess that makes sense.

KK: Yeah, it does make sense. I'm just connecting so many dots, because even in my...

BFP: I'm sorry,

KK: No, don't apologize. I'm totally connecting dots, it's good. It just connects for me, even in my reflexive case study, because I did the same thing. To a certain extent, there were parts that I did not capitalize. And then there were parts that I did. And even in my Google search, before I did my project presentation, Indigenous Peoples was the only thing that wasn't capitalized on Google in the search, but all the other ones were.

BFP: Yeah.

KK: But after I reported on it, after I checked it, within three days, they had fixed that. So I was like, well, that's progress. Right? So now it's fixed.

BFP: Yeah

KK: But then they started decapitalizing other ones. So I was like, This is not ok --- like you don't get to pick and choose. It's either all or none. And then I did a creative tension guide with my paper, which I encourage you to do as well, when you do yours, just explain the perspective because one of the things that Krista had me put in there is, it's okay like other people, other Indigenous People, or Native Americans, might capitalize things that I don't. And all of this is okay. It's simply us from our perspective.

And I think one of the things that I hesitate with sometimes is expressing, - just because I'm learning to live with the duality of being raised full blown, white, upper middle class settler mindset, and now being connected and mentored back in the ways of the Anishinaabe - saying, Okay, this is this is the duality I carry. And I can own both. And it's okay. It's okay for me to say I am a descendant of, and I am informed by and this is what makes my heart come alive. And I'm not negating the other upbringing at the same time, but I am saying it needs to change.

BFP: Yeah, it's very complicated, I think. And I think about how, like you, I mean, I was also raised, and, you know, to be white, you know, even though my dad was extremely dark, extremely native, and my brother and I, when we were younger, we were also, you know, darker, I think that as you get older, you get lighter.

KK: We spend less time out in the sunshine.

BFP: True. And, yeah, I mean, we do we do, you know, reconciling that life, in the, you know, the methods that we were taught, the colonial methods, right? Speaking, living, doing, being, and we...have to reconcile that part of our life to move on to I think the Anishinaabeg part of our life,

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right? And it's hard sometimes, because I have had so much privilege in my life, to not have to fight that part of my life, you know, whereas my husband who is very brown, and, you know, Alaska Native, right, very brown; has faced some form of white supremacy every day of his life. You know, and I feel guilty for having that privilege. And knowing what he's gone through and knowing some of the things that he's endured.

And, but I also, I think, and because of my education, and research and all of that, I also can empathize with him in the things that he's going through. I could never fully understand it, but I can empathize with him. And the things that he experiences, and I've been with him when they've happened, you know, and, and I try not to get angry. Because you know how you speak when you're angry. But it's hard not to be angry about those things. So, I struggle, I think with that with my privilege, and he does tell me, you know, at times that I do that, and calls me out on it. And I'm like, I know. Right? Let me check that.

KK: Right. Let me check this at the door.

BFP: Yeah. But you know, I... started...later in life, learning about myself and so learning about my culture and my language and...everything - and about my spirit, and in a way that I didn't know about it, and had no understanding of it. And I know that. What did you say about the seven grandfather's teaching?

KK: Oh, yeah. Do you have a story containing wisdom about how to embrace the seven grandfather teachings and everyday post-colonial life? Or, and or a true story about personal experiences with any part of the question? Which, I think you kind of just hit on too.

BFP: Yeah

Kk: And it can even be, Yeah, like it can even be a passed down story, too.

BFP: Oh, man. Oh, let me think about that. I do have stories, but I have to think about that. There are some really good ones, though. My dad was like a really good storyteller and honestly, ...[laughs] ...I feel like it is the Seven Grandfathers Teachings because of the way that he told the story, but okay. He's a really good storyteller. So, my brother and I are 15 months apart, right? So, we're very close in age and my dad - we lived in Mackinaw City - and my dad worked for the city. He was...a fireman and he also did a lot of things, ...he would move the snow in the winter. So, he had...a big...bulldozer thing and he would move the snow all over the place. So, he would build like a big hill in our backyard and stuff. So, every Saturday, and my dad would usually, you know, he would go out to the bar on Friday. And so Saturday he would take us - I can't imagine like taking my kids out all hungover early. [Both laugh] Because, we were, like, crazy kids!

KK: So yeah, that's probably why he did it right? Get 'em outside. [Both laugh]

BFP: He would put us in his truck. And I have to say that, like, now that I'm retrospectively now that I think about his truck. So, we had this red Ford pickup truck, and it was like, probably 1978, maybe that.

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KK: Awesome!

BFP: Now that I look at it. And so, it was bright red, and he had someone from St. Ignace paint, like a Native American on the door. And it was like, very, very much a Chief, but it also had like, the feathered you know...[motions around head]

KK: Yeah!

BFP: ...the feathered regalia. And um, Anishinaabe don't wear that. [Both laugh] I think about that now and I think, "Dad! Why were we so stereotypical?"

KK: Yes [Both laughing]

BFP: You had a stereotypical Indian, like, you know, painted on your door!

[Both still laughing]

BFP: It was really good. [Both giggling]. It was like, a good painting.

Anyway, so he would take us out, on Saturday morning for a drive in the truck. And he would take us to...so we had like an actual dump. Yeah. And...we would go to the dump...and get rid of our garbage and my brother and I would always look for bears, because that's what my dad told us to do [both laughing] And we would pick up garbage along the way. And we would always come back, like with a piece of junk. And he would be like, "No, you can't take that". [Both laughing]. Like, a doll without an arm, or... [both laughing].

KK: The difference here is that my mom would let us take it, we had all sorts of crap in our house, keep going. [Both laughing].

BFP: So across from there, there was like the water treatment plants, right. And, and so we would always drive through there because my dad would like "check the plant", or really just take us for a drive...so one of the areas it was like this huge pond, it was probably about as big as a swimming pool. And it was where the snapping turtles lived. And so yeah, it was really neat...so my brother and I would always, like, get out there and pick up these little baby snapping turtles and like, put them in this bucket and then take them home. And then they would die because they'd try to escape and look for water.

And we didn't know that because we were dumb kids. But so, my dad would say, whenever we drove through there, I mean, a good portion of the time. "Let me tell you guys, do you want to know how, how we got you?" How...they got my brother and me. And I was like, "Well, how did you get us? Because like, I've seen pictures of me, in a little Christmas stocking - and y'all bringing me home from the hospital. So, let's go."

But you know, we're kids, and we believe stories that our dads tell us, right? Because we love them, and we want to believe their stories... So, he said...one day he was driving along on the pond at the waste treatment plant. And one day he was driving along, and he could hear like this

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little cry for help, you know, and someone yelling, "Help, help, help." And so, he looked, and he drove around, and he went to the turtle pond. And he saw this little girl on the back of this giant snapping turtle. And it was just swimming around. And she was yelling for help. And so, he parked his truck, and he got out of his truck, and he dove in the water. And he wrestled with the turtle, and he rescued this girl and put her in the truck. And so, they're driving, and they come down to this big...it was like a huge like probably three swimming pool size ponds, right?

And he said, "I got down to the big pond and there I heard someone crying for help." And he said and "I looked, and I drove down and I can see this little boy on the back of an alligator, right?"

[Both laugh] I mean, no alligators in Michigan, but my dad thinks there are. [Both giggle]. So, he parks the truck and he gets out and he goes and he wrestles the alligator and he gets this little boy and he puts them in the truck and - and then he takes them home and that's how they got us. And so, we believed that story for like the longest time!

KK: Did you really? That is so beautiful! I love it.

BFP: We did, we believed it for like the longest time and oh my gosh, and my dad would do like the whole wrestling thing you know [gestures] and...

KK: Yeah,

BFP: ...you know that only men can do.

KK: Yeah, [both laughing].

BFP: Yeah, we believed it and then I was like, you know, I think he was wrong. [Laughter again].

KK: And then school happened.

BFP: I know. [More laughter] Right? And then you find out that there aren't any alligators in Michigan.

KK: [Laughter] And then..."Wait, how did my brother actually get here?"

BFP: I know, I think about that, like, he was such a good storyteller. And he would tell us stories like that all the time. You know. And I think that in ways that he was really teaching us different things about, you know, like, respect and love. And you know, all the grandfather teachings, I think were in there. And I think for me, the hardest one is humility. Because, gosh, I like to be smart. [Both laughing] And, I like to be right too.

KK: Yeah, heard and understood.

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BFP: So, I do struggle with that. But I think, you know, I think that he really, without knowing that he was imparting that wisdom to us, he was giving it to us in some way, because he lost on that culture. You know, he lost out on that, because that's when, you know, people were being taken. He was born in 1932.

And that's when people were going to boarding schools and stuff. And he fortunately didn't go because my grandmother was white. And so, he stayed with her. And he was very lucky. But, you know, he, he himself missed out on learning things that we in turn...missed learning. And, like my brother, he doesn't know anything about our culture, or language or anything he doesn't. And, you know, he chooses not to, and that's fine. ...I don't know, he...likes his life the way that it is, and I understand that.

But, you know, when I, when I started working at the tribe, like that first week, I met this guy named T. and he came to me and introduced himself to me in Anishinaabemowin, and then told me his name, and all of that, you know, his clan, everything. And I was like, "Who is this person? Who is he?" And my husband had worked with him...And T. was...kind of like a mentor. ...And T. was really one of my biggest...He was one of the people who taught me the most when I first started working at the tribe, and he would always talk to me, and he would always answer my questions. And I would give honor him [in a culturally appropriate way with a gift] and he would just stand there and hold it and think about it, and then we would talk about it.

And he knew so much that it just surprised me that he could always answer my questions. And there was another woman there, her name is D. And she is...the sweetest lady ever. And I love her so much. And she also taught me a lot and talked to me a lot. And she made me my first medallion. And she is an amazing person. And she does everything with such love in her heart, that if I ever had any questions or needed anything, or whatever, I could go to D. with [a culturally appropriate gift] after and she would do it. Everything is just so, so, loving for her...she taught me a lot about nature, you know about how to love nature and respect it and what it means to us and how we carry it with us.

You know, in our spirit, in our DNA, you know, it's there...it's always there. And we've always had that ability to speak with animals and trees, you know, and plants and everything. We've always had that ability, it's just that we have to figure out how to unlock it - each one is different, right? Each person is different. And you know, we were talking about trees and how you know how we feel that connection with the trees, just by touching them and being around them and being near them. I remember your telling me about how you have this tree in your yard and you know, I think about - I think about that actually a lot when I'm walking with my dog because I always touch the trees and, you know, greet them and, and talk to them. And, you know, the conversation doesn't have to happen out loud.

Which I think is important, especially when I'm walking my dog because sometimes there's people there.

KK: I feel you. Yeah, sorry for interrupting you - when I did an internship a year ago in Chicago, not this past summer, but the summer before. We went into the kill center of the US, like, where the murder capital is - that's what they call it on those corners. And we walked in that neighborhood, just handing out water bottles and popsicles and inviting people for a free meal

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and free backpack stuff for their kids. And I remember, as we walked, there was - I had cried the whole way, like, one of the days I cried the whole day long just because it used to be the neighborhood that I was in a lot with my friends when I was in college.

So, to see it become this was not okay. And there was a tree that you could tell like it was just - it was struggling. And mind you, I was with a faith community of people, and I walk up to it, and I put my hands on it, and I'm just like, "You WILL live. It's been rough, but you are going to live!" And I'm like, prophesying, essentially blessing the tree out loud, just going at it like holding on to the tree. And I look up. And people in the neighborhood were at their windows, and I didn't realize that there was anybody home. But after that it was really cute because my friends the next day, they're like, "You are the hippest of the hippies!"

BFP: I mean, Yes.

KK: Yes, and this poor tree has had to live through shootings too; like, it's scared to even open its leaves, like it was summertime and it still had baby leaves that it was like, I don't know. And so, it's just interesting, because often, I think about that tree. And I think just blessing it - just bringing attention that there's something living still persisting in this concrete jungle...has that shifted the atmosphere and has that shifted the root system? So, I'm right with you, like, someday, in my dreams, in reality, we will walk together, and we'll just go through the forest and touch all of the trees that need the love!

BFP: Yeah, you know, and how connected they are to each other. Like, even if you touch one tree, you're touching so many other trees. You know...and I think that, for some of us, that's our strength. I think, also, for me, water is also my strength. And I always have to be around it and near it. And so, when we walk, we walk by a river...and that's the other thing that I have a hard time with is saying, "The trees" instead of "trees", and "The river" instead of "river."

And I really have to be conscious of that. And I do correct myself when I say that because trees are living beings. River is living being, water is living being, and if we "THE" it in front, we take out the living part of it and just make it SOME thing. Instead of a river, instead of a tree, instead of a lake.

We remove it from our - you know, we remove it from how we identify with the trees and the animals, you know, and the spirits and all of that. And so, for me, I think it kind of like removes the spirit from my "othering - it" from us. So, I was reading about that somewhere. And I think about that all the time, about how I have to really not say "The tree" and say "tree" instead. And I walk amongst trees. Think of them as one of us.

KK: [Pause]. I'm just connecting. There was a video that I saw last night, I think Instagram, and it was a dance of two, I think they were men, but you couldn't really tell. But somebody had super imposed a root system over them. So, as they did their choreography, it became one tree and then it became two trees. And then it became one it was so- I have to find it and send it to you. It was absolutely phenomenal. It was just - it was visceral. It was - this is how I see it. Because, I see trees. I don't just see the trunks. I see the root systems and I see the interconnectedness. I feel like that's even a parable for a post-colonial Indigenous reality.

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BFP: Yes.

KK: Like, it's that superimposed difference - that you might put pavement here. But we know that there's a system working underground, and we know that it's connected.

BFP: Yes. You know, in a perfect example, a friend of mine is - I think they're in like South Carolina or something, right? On vacation. And they toured a plantation. And she is also Indigenous. And...you know what she said after like she showed pictures of the plantation, which I don't agree with, because I think that we give power to something that shouldn't have power like that. And she said at the end that she left in tears, and I'm like, "Well, why did you go? Why did you go there?"

But one of the pictures that she had was like they, and I don't know if it's like all over the place. But I know I mean, I've been south like North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia and stuff. And they really value A tree, right? The age of A tree. And so, they were showing, I forgot it was something oak, it was something oak, whatever the plantation's name was. And they were saying that it was 900 to 1000 years old. On a plantation.

And all I could think is like, how much this tree has seen - how much it has seen and experienced. And they are treating it like it's an heirloom of some sort. And not that they've --- tortured it, tortured this tree, tortured it by having it witness everything that it's witnessed. And I just I find it so ironic that they would value ONE single tree instead of ALL of the trees, all of them. You know...it just breaks my heart to see this single lone tree all by itself and nothing else around it. Just that tree, just...just one. ...I can't imagine going up, and I don't even know if I would want to touch it. I feel like if I did, I would really have to be ready for all of the feelings that it would invoke.

KK: That's real. Being an empath is nothing to be trifled with.

BFP: No, it's hard.

Both: Yeah.

BFP: Yeah, when I watch rescue stories of dogs on Tik-Tok, I am sobbing all the time.

KK: I can't watch them.

BFP: I can't - I cry - I cry so much! That stuff just - being empathic to animals, and plants...when I see that there's a tree that I really like that was cut down, I was like, [softly] "Why? Like, why? Why did you do that?"

I think the hardest thing for me is when I walk with my dog is that trees will fall down because of where they're located, and the work that they have done to the area, and they've totally shifted the natural habitat in ways - and so I think that they can't live anymore because of what's happened. And so, there's this group of cedar trees that have fallen, and they have been sitting

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there for as long as I have been walking – so, two years? And, they had to cut them [motions vertically] because they were over the path. But, they just left them there. And I feel so sorry for them every time I walk by – and they are now dead. But, there’s no honor in what they do with the trees there.

[long pause]

KK: Hmm, it is really heartbreaking for me to live out here where they are expanding – constantly. They’re expanding their Industrial Machine. There was a place close to us, and when they broke ground, it had been a natural habitat – it was, like, a marsh-ish area. And literally, overnight – we drove through it one morning, and my poor, sweet son, was in the car with me – and I just went LIVID – Like, [passionately] “Did you make an agreement with the land before you cut those trees?!! Did you even check the land? Do you even know it’s marshy?” And sure enough, they built this massive, heavy, concrete, refrigeration, whatever, multi-story by the highway – and all of a sudden, they’re like, “I don’t understand why the highway’s cracking!” [34:41]

Hmm! I wonder! I wonder if it’s because you put all the weight in a MARSH LAND where it shouldn’t have even been built – and now you’re gonna make FLOOD INSURANCE go up...because you BUILT in a flood plain – like, ALL the highway drains into the LOW GROUND – that’s how they built it. You can’t just – like we talked about [before] – you can’t just walk into a place and forget that there’s layers.

BFP: Yeah, Yeah. Colonial beliefs, right? “But, if it’s there, it’s for us to take – and for us to make it how we want it to be and, we think about the repercussions after!”

KK: Right...IF we do at all.

BFP: IF we DO. Let’s talk about single-use plastic, right? Perfect example of colonialism – in and of itself, right? So, what do they do? They create this thing that’s wonderful, but they have no plan for how to dispose of it, or what will happen with it – or - it’s all on the consumer. And we think about how EVERYTHING that we have is on us to dispose of somehow and figure out how to take care of it. And we know that Indigenous People are not like that. Everything we do is an intentional thing, and we’ve adapted ourselves in some ways to live in that climate and live in that culture. And, I know that I’m older – and it’s hard to break that habit of thinking about that disposable life – and how I don’t want to live that disposable life. But, I’m stuck in it – because, what do I do to change it? I can’t go somewhere and live in – rural Alaska...and live off the grid.

KK: Like on Reality Shows...

[both chuckle]

BFP: I mean, I guess I could, but...I DO like a hot shower.

KK: Yeah, I guess that’s what solar heat and...yeah.

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BFP: But you know? I mean...so I struggle with that a lot – accommodating myself to that – and that lifestyle and feeling guilty about it.

KK: I'm right there with you – I know I try to reuse our plastic stuff as much as possible until it breaks down, or cracks, and even then – our D-O-G gets a P.B. treat once in a while – [both giggling] – she's sitting right next to me, so I am trying not to say it! But I only use plastic knives for that because I am allergic to it – if I EAT it, but there have been times that the knife will break off in the jar or whatever, and I'm all like, "Seriously? Why am I even here with this?"

BFP: ...Let me try to get back on topic.

KK: No, no – you ARE on topic...being able to compare the two interviews has been amazing because you try not to have any preconceived ideas, right? But there's an art in story gathering and it's going to be gathering stories, it's not going to look like academia. ...It's intriguing because one of the things I have been thinking through is that an Indigenous Lifestyle means EVERYTHING (A) has meaning, and EVERYTHING (B) is interconnected. It's impossible to separate. It's just impossible. You can't look at things through the lens of, "Well, THIS is community, and THIS is this, and THIS is blank" ---- NO! We breathe in all the spaces, therefore, everything is connected, right?

BFP: Yeah, but when you look at how ...so, I was thinking about the interview, and I was thinking, "Man, she's gonna want, like, an Academic Interview!"

KK: Oh GOODNESS!

BFP: "But, I don't want to give that to her! I was like, I don't want to give that, I don't wanna do that – because..."

KK: Thank you!

BFP: I hate talking "smart"!

[Both laugh]

[41:33]

BFP: You know what I mean?

KK: Right?

BFP: It's hard to – you really have to put...a lot of thought into it. It's almost like writing a research paper and doing research for it and all of those things – and I'm like – not that I wouldn't do that for you – I would do that for you!

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KK: I know you would! But I didn't want you to!

BFP: Yeah!

KK: In some ways, I think this is so far ahead, because the philosophy is in there – and even more, I think... I keep getting this imagery that I've had for the last couple years, where it's a drumbeat, and it's constantly beating – but it's not loud – it's a low rumble, right? It's a constant heartbeat. When we're still enough, we hear it and we realize that it's beating within the Earth. When we all pause long enough, we're not MARCHING – we're DANCING to that same beat.

BFP: We are. [nods]
[42:45]

KK: But I feel like it's what you said – when we stop and we pause and we touch a tree, when we're silent, when we're not listening through our air pods and walking quickly, when we're fully immersed in the natural rhythm of nature --- we ARE dancing to that rhythm – we're back in tune with that rhythm. We're fully aware of the wind – and how everything is coming together. And so, it's beautiful to me - to see that in my own life – that's what I've really been – not striving – but I've been really *trying* to become more rooted in tune when I burn sage, and say, "I am a part of a different rhythm. I am *walking and dancing* to a different rhythm than colonialism has for me!" ...I think THAT is lightyears ahead of the "smartest - smart" that academia has – because in some ways, talking "smart" is SO shallow, it's *ONLY* looking at intellectual knowledge whereas *THIS* is philosophical and interconnected and interrelated, Ancient-Future Knowledge.

BFP: It is! It really is! You know, that colonialism belief is so *forced*. It feels at times like it's really forced upon us! We know that within our DNA that there's a different way. But we adapt ourselves to that so that to survive this world. We adapt ourselves to that colonial research life because that's how we have to survive!

[44:34]

BFP: I had this conversation the other day with one of the student workers, right? They're very much into philosophy. We were discussing this conversation that they had in class – about where humans, plants, and animals rest in a hierarchy. Right? So, they, obviously, they're just a baby – they're like, 20. He's still learning. Obviously he thinks that humans rest highest on the hierarchy, right, and then plants and animals are down there. And I looked at him and I said, "You realize that if we left, then Earth would still be around, everything would still be ok. Animals would still be able to live. Plants would still be able to survive. Water would still be okay. Everything would still be ok if we weren't here. But if *they* weren't here, then we'd die!"

KK: Right.

BFP: I [asked], "Why would you put humans at the top part of the hierarchy when in all reality, we don't matter. We don't matter to anything in nature. Nature is higher than we are."

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[both chuckle]

[45:55]

KK: Did that mess with them a little bit?

BFP: We don't matter, we're just here for a tiny blip of time compared to everything else that's been here.

KK: I have a friend that used to say, "Your life is a but a vapor – PAH – that's your life! PAH – that's your life!"

BFP: Yeah!

KK: It was pre-COVID, but it was SO funny, and to this day, when I'm getting big for my britches, I am like, PAH – ohhhh...that's it, that's the grand scheme of my entire life and its impact – it's PAH.

BFP: Yeah, and yet, we are constantly (colonial beliefs) – made to think that the life that we live matters and is important – like we have to leave that mark on the world...the need to succeed, right? That kind of thing?

KK: Build your legacy! But they're talking about financial – which is...THAT's a duality in itself – finances. Because if you don't have money and play the capitalism game, then --- but if you don't, you also have a freedom that you can't if you do...

BFP: Yes! [pause] But think about how your ancestors are always there, you know? We never lose that contact with our ancestors if we honor them – if we talk to them, if we *feed* them, if we pray to them, if we leave tobacco for them. If we remain in touch with them in some way, if remain in contact with them in some way, they're there if we just listen – if we just – if we're just there, you know? I don't think it's about success, I think it's about that connection that we have. Right? And we have that connection with the spiritual world as well. Some more than others.

KK: ...One of our children wanted to be a pastor when they grew up – for a long time, and then they got decolonized and they don't want to be traditional. Instead, they want to go into biology. They want to do...plant more than anything...I sat down with them and said, "I want you to understand that you're still a shepherd, you're still being a pastor – you're just pastoring *THE LAND* and connecting to it the way that our ancestors did..."

BFP: Yeah!

KK: ...That is a holy, spiritual, beautiful thing! You're still living out what you felt called to do. You're walking it out in a good path – that's ok, it's good."

BFP: Yeah!

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KK: So, I agree with you, even with your child...part of that is helping us to shift the framework – I don't like the word framework – but, the way we present things to our kids. Framework is SO colonial. I don't know what to call it instead – THE WEB, or the net that we would...the interconnectedness. How can we look at this from an Indigenous perspective?

BFP: ...Oh Yeah – [the ancestors] have so many important things to tell us – IF we just want to listen, if we just want to hear them!

KK: Right.

BFP: But we have to open ourselves up to that possibility, and you know, colonial teaching has taught us that speaking to our ancestors is an “evil” thing to do, right? “Speaking to spirits is an evil thing.”

BFP: ...Mourning [my mother after she walked on] is harder than it was, mourning my father, right? For so many different reasons. I know that my dad was here, I know that he was waiting for her, I know that he was going to guide her over. I know that's what was happening. Ancestors always show up, people we love **always show up for us**. They always help to guide us over.

KK: That's true.

BFP: That's how it is, and when my stepdad died – her husband died...we did some cultural things. That was when I was beginning to learn about my culture, and I think there were things that we did that I probably should not have done with him, and now that I know I should not have done them...and my sisters were like, “We should do something like we did for stepdad with mom.” I said, “Well, there are *some* things that I can do with you, but there are other things that we did that I *can't do*. I cannot do them with you because now I know that it was wrong to do those.”

[1:01:16]

KK: Right.

BFP: They just expected me to be okay with that – and they got a little mad when I told them that. But I said, “You guys, I am learning about myself and my culture, and it doesn't feel right to talk about those things with you. Even on inside, it doesn't feel right to talk about that.”

So, I was like, “We can do something, it just can't be what you want to do.”

KK: Right, right.

BFP: They're **not** Native – they're white, they have different fathers. They have a different dad. So, sometimes I think it's hard to explain the journey that I'm taking - to them. You know,

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explaining our culture, explaining white supremacy to them. I'm serious – like, explaining that to them, it is a *hard* lesson. [sighs]

[1:02:19]

KK: It is. I know.

BFP: To explain that to them.

KK: Yeah, it is. I think back to one of my aunties when I was explaining it, like, “Auntie, do you not realize for crying out loud, that the street in Grand Rapids is called DIVISION? *Division*. It literally redlined and divided between.”

She was like, “Well, no, it’s a division.”

“Y-E-S”

And she was like, “Of North and South.”

And I was like, “Are you listening? Auntie? Yes, honey...yes, honey.”

[01:02:51]

BFP: Yes, yes, exactly. Exactly my point. Yes. And I am okay talking about it, because they actually – for the most part, one probably listens more than the other, but...it’s always...

Talking with them about privilege, I think, is probably the most conversations that we’ve had. You know, it’s them telling me, “Why can’t you just?” [and me saying,] “Let me tell you why I can’t just...*JUST is a privilege that I don’t have.*”

KK: Right.

BFP: “That I don’t have access to.” Like, my sibling asking me, “Why don’t you just buy the house?” I’m like, “I don’t know, why don’t I just buy the house?” Because they want [a lot of money] for this house. I’m sorry – but I can’t commit my life to [a lot of money] for a colonial belief that I should own a house...

KK: Right, right.

BFP: ...and then spend probably another 50 grand more *fixing* this house. Because there are a lot of things wrong with it. And here we are thinking that “We need to own a house”.

KK: Oh, right.

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BFP: ...Oh my gosh, I know, right? You know, I just...life is too short to commit yourself to some place that you don't feel comfortable, some place that you don't feel comfortable being. I'm okay renting a place for a while until I figure that out! I'm fine.

KK: Right? Good for you!

BFP: I know it's hard. It's hard, it's hard.

[01:16:00]

KK: ...It *is*. But one of the things I was challenged with – with my interview this week – by a very sage elder – not really an elder, more like an auntie or uncle in the community, right? But, they are so, so wise beyond their years.

BFP: Yeah.

KK: And they were talking about the gift of duality. They see duality as a gift. I was laughing at myself, like, ohmygosh, me being me, I am all like, “Duality is bad! Colonialism brought duality in, and because of duality, we have to choose either/or!” And, I'm totally ignorant of the fact until they brought it up to me - that **both – and is a duality!** [laughs] That's a gift! And that's also a duality!

BFP: Yeah!

KK: It just depends on which path you take! Are you gonna take the path of either/or? Which is not good, that is not a good path, or are you gonna take the path of **both – and?** I feel *this* way, I feel **both** of these ways **and** it's a blessing and it's ok. I walk **both** of these paths, sometimes feeling like I'm straddling them, and it's ok. And sometimes creating my own path in the middle. And that's also ok.

BFP: You know, I think about the **both – and** all the time because there are some people who are just purists when it comes to our life, and culture and our language – all of that. I feel like they're really ostracizing the people who have learned to be Anishinaabeg, but also walk in this world in a way that we are able to succeed. I mean, look at us! I mean, who would have thought, for me, ME to be [on this path right now]?

KK: Same, same!

BFP: I never would have imagined this in a million years! I knew when I started walking on this path that this was right for me, because the ancestors told me that I was on the right path.

KK: Amazing.

[01:18:08]

BFP: I have never felt more right about anything than I have doing this. And, it's the **both – and**, right? I can be who I am, I can be Anishinaabe...but I can also be [on this good path].

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KK: Yeah!

BFP: I can do both! I can make both work in my life! And the purists, the people who look down upon people like me, (in the softest, sweetest voice ever) – Just EFF them...you know?

[both giggle]

BFP: Really because here's what's going to happen. You know? People aren't going to go to them, people aren't going to seek them for wisdom. No one's going to look to them to be an elder, to be respected, to be all of these things. Because, in some ways, what they're doing is like a colonial belief, right? They have the knowledge, they are the keepers of the knowledge, and that knowledge is only theirs. People who hoard their knowledge like that – they do *nothing* for their people. You know?

[01:19:12]

KK: Mmm.

BFP: Think about it, like at a school level, right, in college? Learning in the classroom, and having them teach us by dictating to us, right? I mean, how does that teach us, right? When I was in Grad School, that was the first time I had had a student-led class where we taught each other, we worked together as a group. The [student I mentioned earlier], we were talking, and I asked them, "Do you think you would like to go to a class where – and I explained to them what we did – and they were like, "Yeah, I would really like that!" They said, "I think that I would be more active and more present in a class by doing something like that."

I'm like, "But think about how *we* learn. We don't learn by someone talking to us like that. We learn together as a group."

KK: Right.

[01:20:04]

BFP: And think about Indigenous Knowledge, we don't learn by someone preaching to us, "This is how you do things", No! You learn together by doing it together. Someone teaching you...and look at how, for our names, we have a name when we're a baby, at 7ish years old, we would decide – we didn't even have...gender pronouns, really...we didn't decide until we were around 7ish.

KK: wow!

BFP: ...that we were gonna be whoever we were gonna be – I mean there's like, what? 14, 17 words for gender in our language?

KK: That is so beautiful.

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BFP: So, we didn't decide until then who we were going to be. And then later, as things in your life change, as you change – your name changes, your ideas change, your pronouns change. Things are always so fluid, and here we are, stuck in this world where we have to be male or female, we have to have all these gender ideas...being Gen X, we never really had the opportunity to identify ourselves, to identify how we felt as people. Even our culture has become, in some ways, like that.

When you look at our culture, it has, in some ways, become like that. I really feel, in some ways, that we need to expand ourselves, and look beyond – just the two, and look at how there's so much more. We were so much more into equality, right, earlier than we are now. I feel like we exclude so many people.

The queer community, I think, sometimes suffers in Indigenous Communities. I really do, I feel like – perfect example. There was a patient who was on the journey – transgender journey, right, on the way to transitioning, and they had just moved in the area, and they wanted to continue hormone therapy. I was formerly working somewhere that they would approve requests for things like that. Doctors would refer them, and then my workplace would decide, “Yes, we can do that, or no, we can't do that.”

They could go to that appointment, but it didn't mean we would pay for it.

KK: Ok.

[01:23:32]

BFP: So, some people were like, “Well, I don't want to pay for that.” I was like, “Why don't you want to pay for that? Tell me why! What if one of your children came to you and said, ‘Mom, I don't feel like this, I am this and I want to do this, to become this. What's the difference? If this person feels like this inside, why can't we give that to them? Everybody deserves to be who they feel like they want to be. Just because they're born like that doesn't mean that's who they are.”

I really had to push for this to happen, and it finally was approved, but why would that even be a thing that you would even have to consider saying “no” to?

[01:24:18]

KK: Right, and why is that your place?

BFP: Right, right – exactly! Why is it your place to tell this person that they can't be who they want to be, what they want to be, what they feel like is in their heart?

KK: Right.

BFP: For me, that is so heartbreaking, how the Anishinaabeg, how we [all] look at the queer community in some ways. I want that to change so desperately! [Some of my family] are queer

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in some way – I would never think to tell them, “No...you’re not ‘they them’, you’re born this, and this is where you have to be, and this is all you have to carry throughout your life.”

KK: Yeah – not okay. So many good friends – and maybe it’s because I worked in the theatre for so long – but I have SO MANY friends, even former boyfriends – multiple – who have made that transition, made that choice, and I fully support them and it’s beautiful. They’re still friends of mine...yeah. I don’t even know what to compare it to – except maybe like, when one of our children wanted to - didn’t want to be on the soccer team anymore – after they made it. We had to step back – especially me, I had to step back, because soccer had always been a part of my life. I had to step back and go, “Just because I expected you to play soccer in High School, doesn’t mean this is what makes you come alive!” When we gave them the freedom to leave the team midseason – which to me, was like, what?

Wait – we made that child stick with it for the whole season – and it did more damage to them emotionally than had we let them quit, because they were miserable. They weren’t a participant, they didn’t care, they didn’t give their all – and so, it taught me that it’s not always about sticking with something, just to say that you stuck it out, it’s about what makes you come alive! But, when that child got plugged back into theatre, then – they were a *whole different child!* Right?

BFP: Yeah!

KK: *Completely different* person all together! I agree with you – I’m glad that you are walking into that space with Anishinaabeg – because I frequently find myself in that place – within ultra-conservative white spaces, constantly trying to bring about the compassion with that reality of, “You. I love you, but you are looking through the tiniest of telescopes, and you’re totally missing what’s right in front of you. Can we put down the telescope? Can you put down the binoculars? Can we please just see the whole wide world?” [laughs]

BFP: Yeah!

[01:27:15]

It’s hard! I wish for better for our queer people within our community! I do. Just to ostracize them in that way, knowing how they were treated, before, even, colonization. It was different, it was just different. Completely different.

KK: Yup. It’s completely beautiful reading about it – and doing deep dives into it, as I have from time to time – it’s life giving... [01:27:50]

KK: ...Thank you for making this sacred space with me...Look at us...we see each other, it’s beautiful! It’s good. We are not invisible!

[both shaking head]

BFP: No.

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KK: No.

BFP: No, not anymore.

KK: It feels really good to be visible.

BFP: Yeah, it really does, like...to be acknowledged as an Indigenous Person, and an Indigenous Scholar.

KK: Yeah, yeah!

BFP: It's just so exciting, like who would have ever thought that I would be, like, that person? And it's so humbling, too – to know that this is where the ancestors are pushing me.

KK: Yeah.

BFP: ...I never thought that I was this smart.

KK: Right? Right!

BFP: I never thought that I deserved to be this smart, that I deserved this path. And you know what? Dammit, I do! I do –

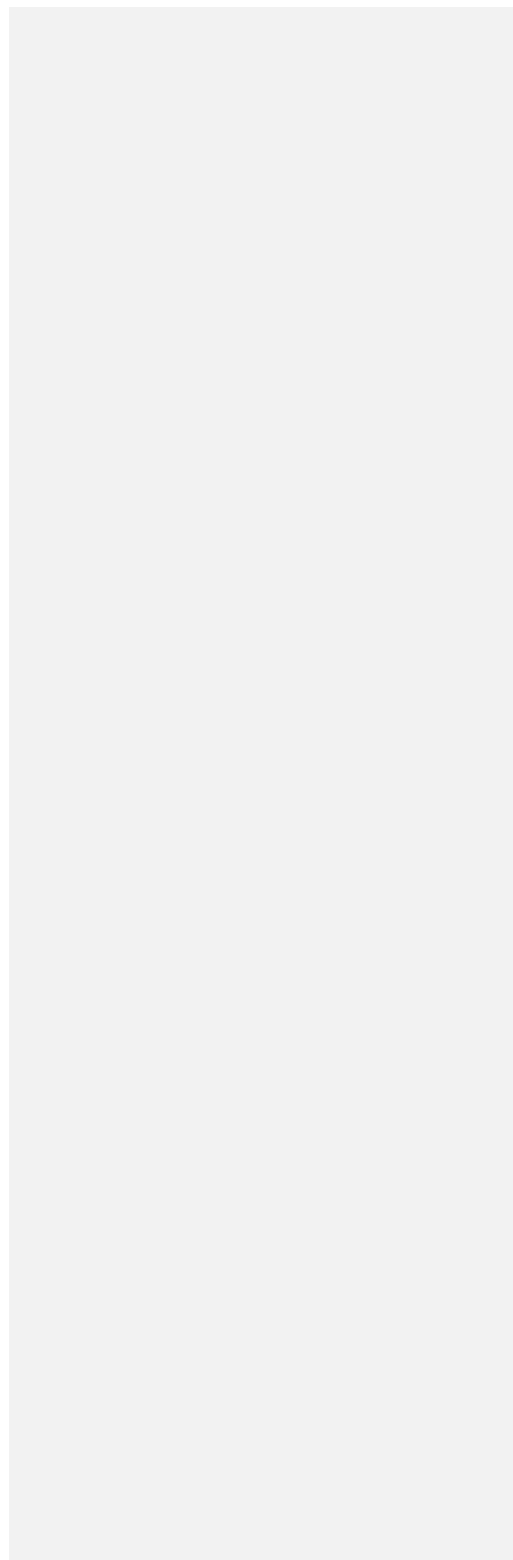
KK: You do! Yup, you do!

BFP: I deserve to walk on it, and the ancestors are pushing me there, and I just have to do it!

KK: Yeah, you do! You absolutely do!

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Interview Transcript of

Jacob - Descendant of the Crow and Cherokee Nations,

Southern Cherokee Nation of Kentucky - Bird Clan

KK: I've had some that go back and forth and then I've had some who are like, Okay, we're just going to storytalk.

J: Yeah.

KK: And I'm like perfect. I love story talking - it's my favorite thing in the world.

J: Yeah, I'm very "tangent-y" too. I'm a story person.

KK. But I think it's in our DNA. I'm the same way, unless I really focus on military mindset, but it takes a lot.

J. I definitely do think it's like embedded within us, but it's just hard when you're around other people who are so not the same way, like - Hmm. Talking to other people, sometimes it's just a real struggle because it's hard for me to be like, "I understand. I've told you this story like 5 times already. But I'm bringing it back up again, you know, in the future, because, like, it's pertinent to this conversation, this point here."

KK. Yes, it connects with me to that one moment, that one time that I did the one thing that we're talking about right now. Right? Right. I hear you. You're not alone that, Jacob. You're not.

So? How has... I'm transitioning because there's not really a good transition, although I will tell you I had a huge insight, huge insight yesterday, when I was wrestling through all this "wokism" stuff and the anti-Affinity Group graduation stuff and...

J. Yes, Lin and I were just talking about that yesterday.

KK. Hmm! So, I was wrestling through it. And I was like, Okay, as I'm trying to do a decolonizing perspective on my project right, and on this whole research thing --- the thing, I think, that finally struck me. - Have you read the book *Great Expectations*, or seen the movie?

J. I mean I know it.

KK. Okay, you know it. So. There's this part where Pip meets Miss Havisham right? And he walks into like the outer garden, and it's still set up from the wedding that she was supposed to have. But she was jilted on her wedding day right. It's like been 30 years. So, her cake is still out and petrified, and there's critters in it all the chairs are set, all the tables, all the decorations.

J. Hey, man, I need to watch this. She sounds like me.

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KK. It's like creepy. It's so creepy, and it's like the detail that he goes through when he's writing. ...Anyhow, it's amazingly good and detailed.

J. Yeah.

12:17:32

KK. But the point is, my insight was that is, people whose expectations that colonialism will always reign supreme, and then things start to shift, and they would rather hold on the moldy, gross, decrepit, outdated things that were 30 years old, and not even edible anymore because they are so bent on this is the way to do it...

J. Yeah.

KK. It's as if they say ... "We are supreme we are not letting anybody take us off our throne," and all the while we're like, "We're not even trying to. We don't really care what you do in your mansion by yourself. All we're saying is that we're not gonna eat stuff that's been laying out for a century."

J. Oh, yeah, I think for sure. I think they know it's a system that doesn't work right?

KK. Right.

J. ...But they're still interested in upholding it because it works, for, like the few of them.

KK. The 2 or the 20...so yeah, so that was my insight into colonialism. It was Miss Havisham and Great Expectations, and not letting go of moldy old cake.

J: I think it's great that you can pull an example like that out of something that is obviously like not int intending to be sending that message - like the book is obviously like very colonial within and of itself. But it can still, like stand to make a comment about the system that its standing in, because it's probably what it is, you know, in the grander scheme of things, a commentary on the system. Not realizing that it could be a larger commentary on THE system.

KK: Right. That's true. I was thinking about that, and then I was also connected to fidget spinners. Now hear me out. They do connect. When fidget spinners first came out they were designed for children with special needs, so that they could focus - kids with ADD and ADHD so they could focus in class, because you need to be doing something else when you have those mental capabilities - I've worked with special Ed students for years...more than half my life. But the point is, they need something else to focus on, and then they can zero in on what you're saying. Right?

And then what happened? All these parents had their kids come home and say, well, so and so gets a toy in class. I want one. And everybody was like, instead of just saying, "You know what? That helps them learn, that's the way their brain is made and created." Everybody went raised up

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in arms that every child should get us a fidget spinner, and then they launched because they made money and then what happens now? Nobody gets a fidget spinner anymore in class.

J. Yes. I mean, I mean, this that is exactly what we're talking about like with Affinity Group graduations, we talked about all the time with Lin and her work, in OMA, like the problem is that the majority already has...

KK. Yeah.

J. ...already has you know, all of these advantages, does not understand equity, and just wants equality, at least what they think equality is; which is literally everybody having the same thing, not understanding that not everybody needs the same thing, because some people already have advantages, right so like whether or not this person gets that - doesn't help them at all but now we're having to single out these people and these groups who legitimately need these things and whether or not you get them or not makes no difference to you - whether or not they get them means the whole world of difference.

So, we're talking about Affinity Group graduations. What does it matter what communities of color are doing for their own graduations, like, why do you care?

KK. Right.

J. It doesn't. It has truly no impact upon you at all.

KK. No!

J. If you want to not go to your graduation, don't go to your graduation. I don't understand where the thought that that is unfair comes from. I don't get it at all!

KK. I know, I know it's like a sorority or fraternity having their year-end celebration, which they do privately, and they're a closed society and it's okay. And nobody raises a ruckus and even convocation is open to all the groups on campus if you decide that you want to have a religious ceremony at the end of the year, and nobody raises a ruckus about that - so, my point, the thing that I'm frustrated with is, it seems to be a lot of religious conservatives who are up in arms about these groups and so lots of my time yesterday was spent back channel communicating and sending out my personal story about Native American Student Association. Why it matters to have my own individual graduation and still go to the other one, and why I want them essentially to back off.

J. Yeah. Well, Lin doesn't even think that any of this needs to be shared with the public to begin with which I agree, I don't...yeah, that's a whole different can of worms.

KK. Yeah. Fair.

J. It's just - it's ridiculous, but I think it speaks to the larger issues of like any of - doing any of this work is because this, like it, is the same issue that continues to get brought up over and over

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again, just in different forms of like, why is that fair that a group of a minority get to exist as a minority essentially.

KK. Right well, then, let's re-examine your systems that you created without having us at the table in the beginning, when you created them, so that we, you know...that's fine. Let's scrap the whole system and start over again with every voice at the table and see what we ALL come up with...oh, but then you lose all of your semblance of power.

J. I think, even about like the work that I did in the museum, like it is an institution that was set up for predominantly white audiences. It has AN exhibit that's focuses on native people. Do I think that that is proper? Should that exist? Yes, however, does it need to exist as its own exhibit? Not necessarily. But if we're also not including the stories of every other minority group in Grand Rapids within the existence of the Museum, then yeah, it has to have its own section, because if we're not including everybody, then we have to say at least hey, this group needs some special attention, not to say that the other groups don't also deserve that because I believe they do. But it's not my job as an Indigenous Person to go in and say, this is how you need to make these spaces for these other communities.

KK. Right, that's a discussion they have to have. That reminds me, I had a safety discussion with somebody. And one of the things I said was, please go directly to the source and find this out from each individual affinity group, because it will vary, depending on what culture you're dealing with - what somebody finds safe isn't going to communicate that to the other – Sorry, what were you saying?

J. Well, I think of even, how like, all of the different Affinity Groups choose to approach, these topics are different. So when we look at like specifically with [Office of Multicultural Affairs Orientation], every Affinity Group has their own orientation, it makes perfect sense to me that that should exist.

However, the way that Grand Valley has asked us to come together and almost wrap them all up is one thing is where it starts to become an issue, for the individual Affinity Groups. So, like last year they had us all gather in the Fieldhouse arena, and then asked each group to put on a cultural performance for the other Affinity Groups.

KK. Hmm!

J. And I think that was where the main issue was caused, because now you're no longer allowing communities to exist within their own communities, and just be themselves.

KK. Right.

J. You're now asking them to be performative for other people, and say, "This is our culture!" Which is not fair, because you're not asking white students to do that.

KK. No, no, you're not! It reminds me of when I was a single mom at a church for like 3, like 8 years, or 6 years, whatever. And I had 3 young kids right? And because I worked at a dance

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studio as a single mom, they called me and said “Oh, we're going to have a women's dessert night and it's going to be so calming.” And I was thinking, “Oh, my gosh, you're inviting me to a woman's dessert night! This sounds amazing!” and they follow it up with, “And since you work at the Dance Studio, could you please entertain us with a hula dance? We would love for you to come in and do hula for us!”

J. Oh, God!

KK. And I went, “Sure, I can do that. So, I trained my daughter, I taught her - like I did choreography with her, and we did – [laughs] Hawaiian roller coaster ride...

J. [laughs] That's cute!

KK. ...but it started out super slow, and the best thing ever was all the ladies were like. “Oh, this is so relaxing and so beautiful!” And I'm up there like doing the hula right, just super slow and intentional. And then I mashed up two tracks. So, all of a sudden it went to the really punk, angry boy cover of the song.

[both laugh]

KK. ...and so we did that and so my daughter's like dancing around, and I'm spinning her, and I'm lifting her up in the air, and just making it like dancing with the stars gone wrong...we wrap up, and they're just like what?

J. Our cultural activity was giving the land acknowledgement.

[both laugh]

KK. But again, like Lin says, “Why are we asked to do the land acknowledgement for land that you stole?” “I acknowledge that you stole this from me. I acknowledge again that you stole this.” What is that?

J. Oh, my goodness! When I had to go in front of General Assembly Student Senate to request funding for pow out, they gave me – they gave everybody in the room a rundown of the agenda. And at the top of their agenda, not the very first thing, but one of the first, you know, like motions was an acknowledgement of Native land. And when it happened, Lin and I actually didn't know that it had happened, and so much so that we were like, did they just skip over it? And we weren't really sure. The more I thought about it, they had a brief moment of silence, and I think - by brief, I mean, it was really like, “and a moment of silence – [breath] ok, thank you.” I think that that moment of silence was supposed to be their acknowledgement of Native lands.

KK. Oh, my goodness! Oh, my goodness! That is such a far cry from --- we have a friend who lives out in Oregon right, and he told me that out on the west coast of America I'm still like teared up by this -- people in every space in business professional settings when they introduce themselves they say, like I would say, “Hi! I'm Nicky, and I'm actually from Holland, Michigan, which is on the unceded territory of the Odawa, and Potawatomi and Chief Waukazoo was in

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charge when it was taken.” White people introduce themselves when they network, when they're out about their day, when they're in their subdivisions.

“Well, where did you grow up? I grew up in Minnesota, which is the unceded land of the Blank.” Every introduction. It's like as natural as pronouns on the West coast.

J. Sounds like a very West Coast thing. Give it like literally 20 years. Maybe 30, probably like 30.

KK. Oh, Holland might take 35. Hopefully not [that long] But isn't that - I was like that's powerful, and it's beautiful, and I wish it would catch on quicker.

J. Lin and me, we have something like that land acknowledgement thing happen all of the time - all of the time like it's always getting brought up and like, “Why are we being asked to do it? Why is it going on like this?” Like everything is just always so weird about it. When Adam was here talking about his movies, he took a second during his very first event speaking at Wealthy Street Theater to talk about how kind of weird the land acknowledgement was.

So, it's something that happens all of the time, and you know, I think that way we could talk about it all we want, but I just don't see the University, at least the right people aren't in the room, ready to hear about it, and I don't think that anything - anybody's actually initiating any change like all of the land acknowledgments that are used are always just The OMA land acknowledgement that has just been like copied and pasted. Which is the land acknowledgement that Lin wrote.

KK. Right? Again. Yeah, yeah. One of my classmates wrote the most beautiful land acknowledgement last year for class. And again they had her read it to start our class, but it was also because there had been some really bad colonial practices in class, and she and I were like, outspoken about being, you know, about me being a descendant and her being a card member and working for a tribe and they literally had this part of their project some of the classmates did where they stood up and they were like, “So alright, we're going to acknowledge what it must have felt like...so let's all imagine that we're Native Americans” And we are all like, “Nah – no, no!” So, we called it out, and I did it graciously with all the kindness of my heart.

But I was like, “I love you. Please understand that this is coming from a deep place of care and concern and affinity for you, but your colonialism is showing right now.”

J. Oh, yeah.

KK. It needs to stop. Yeah. But so that's why we got to do the Land Acknowledgement.

J. THAT WAS – it was pretty much - I was in Native people to North America before Steve taught it.

KK. Hmm!

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J. I mean, that was what that class was like. These books that she would have us read were just like so intentionally heavy and traumatic.

KK. Mm!

J. And just like we read *Lakota Woman*, which I don't know if you have ever read, but like it, the opening like the opening monologue, is basically her talking about all of her relatives and aunts who have been murdered.

[long pause]

...And then she talks about AIM and the occupation of the BIA.

KK. Mm!

J. And I'm like, I don't understand who that book is supposed to be for, and thank God it's not –

KK. [whispered] right.

J. It's no longer part of the reading materials for the course, but, like I don't...it was trauma porn, right?

KK. Mm-hmm, yeah.

J. That is what it is. I just don't...and that's just what so much of [air quotes] learning about Indigenous Peoples [end air quotes] are...but I think about...the insensitivity that was surrounded by all the people in that class...because there were 3 native students in the class.

KK. Hmm!

J. So like when we would speak. We're just not heard. There was no conversation, and it did feel like that - where it was like, "You put yourself in the shoes of these sad and oppressed people."

KK. Right. ... And how do you...like? [Big sigh] I don't know. I **do** know. I know that when I was taught like advanced interpersonal communication skills, one of the things that my professor gave us as an illustration that is stuck with me for years is that when you see somebody who is having an emotional experience about something they're going through it's as if you're walking along, and you see them at the bottom of a pit.

And so, you look around and you find, let's say, a ladder. So, you put the ladder down into the pit. You climb the ladder, you sit next to them, and you say, "Hey, I'm going to sit here next to you for a while, because I just want you to know that I'm by you that I see you're in a pit" and then over time maybe you say, "You know that the walls are kind of high, and I notice it's kind of cold and dark down here, and I see a ladder. I see a vine. What are you going to do from here? What do you want to do?" He said, after a certain amount of time, you might say, "I'm glad I could sit with you today. I hope you know that I'm here because I care. I have to get back out of

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the pit now, because I have other things to do and other people to be with. But I want you to know I hope you come out of the pit soon. I'm here for you if you do, and if not, I'll come back and check on you.”

J. Yeah. I think...and I think that's so much of the work, really, that Lin does on campus with students like, because the university is not a place that is set up to support them, right, in ways that is best suited for Native students, for traditional students, especially like it is...

KK. Right.

J. ...it is a very different experience, as an Indigenous Student If you're coming and trying to reconnect versus if you're already connected, and you're coming to campus for those students to specifically being here is so hard, and it is so much, Lin saying, “Hey, like I'm here for you, I'm checking in on you, let me know how I can help you”, but it ultimately is up to those people.

So, she does the...she does work that's good enough to keep them here, but long term, you know, it's really hard on these students. But I think...and that's with so much of my ethnography...was talking about looking at the areas of ...work that like were proven to help with student retention, and then where it could be expanded and where...it needs further support from the University...If you look at Tribal Colleges versus predominantly white institutions, the reason why Native students there have a higher success rate is because they are already culturally entrenched with the community, and they're creating – THEY ARE the spaces for Native students, and with that they have additional support programs that are suited specifically for Native students' needs.

And that's just...not what we have here at Grand Valley.

KK. Right.

J. It's what we are trying to create. But, as Lin has said, it's hard to do in an office space that only fits like 3 people.

KK. Mm-hmm. She needs room for a circle. She does. She just does, and it needs to be a drop-in.

J. I really like this new space that we're in.

KK. Really? I'm so... I wish I could get out of the house...you know, out of the house so I can actually see it.

J. Yes, it's pretty big. It's pretty nice. It has a kitchenette in it!

KK. Oh, my goodness! We should get pictures of that for the slideshow, too, for the year end.

J. Yeah. Lynn's office is in it...the only thing I don't love about is in dorms, but it's like also part of the like...the long-term process is that part of it can be dorms for Native students.

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KK. Oh, good! Good. I know she was meeting about that.

J. So they could be close to the center, and then Lin's office would be down there as well, and then they have a communal like kitchen area, too...

KK. Good! Oh, nice!

J. ...that's right next to it. So has a lot of potential.

KK. Good that'll change it. And people, I think that's part of the things that we've been trying to get across as Indigenous Descendants and Indigenous Tribal Citizens is that everything in our life is interconnected. All the interrelationships go together. It's not like her office space, even though she's doing an administrative job, needs to be close to the administrative space only - because everything is about community and about relationship. Everything we do is relationship based. We don't do anything without considering the relationship impacts. It's like everything is connected.

J. I mean, just because everywhere you go, you know, whoever you see; it's impossible to escape relations in a community that is so small.

KK. Right, right.

J. So like, I'm going to the Mounds Talk at the Museum on Saturday with [our classmate].

KK. I want to go so badly, I want to go SO badly!

J. Well, we'll see if we can because they have pre-sale tickets, so we'll see if [our friend] and I could actually get in. We don't know, we're going to go early and see what's up.

KK. Okay.

J. like I mean, that's something that's completely not even associated with campus. Yet probably every single person who's a Native Community member who shows up there is probably going to know each other because all of the work is interconnected too.

KK. Right, see now that you're saying it, maybe I will try and go. I got... I went to the... I don't know. Did Lin tell you about what's going on with me, and why I can't leave my house?

J. Not necessarily. I know, kind of what you have told me in my emails.

KK. Oh! Oh, I'll tell you. Okay. Yeah, I'll totally tell you so. I have had a life-threatening allergy to Latex, like to rubber bands and balloons before, and it went into remission. So, it was gone for 5 years. Well, it came back - so I had 3 near-death experiences, in a month - like EpiPens, ambulance, steroids...

J. Oh my God! That's so scary.

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KK. ...times 6. Like, so all my blood work is being done and they have other labs that are out as well. And so, but until we figure out what's been triggering it like we know it was something in our upholstery shop which we just moved into our basement and our garage.

So it's worse than Covid, it is so much worse than Covid, because I can't go grocery shopping, cause there's rubber bands everywhere, and balloons. I can hardly go into the gas station, so Tim and our son are going in to pay for me all the time. Tim's doing all the grocery shopping. Tim's having to do all the upholstery jobs by himself...

J. [Shaking head] That's terrible.

KK. ...Because I can't touch anything so, and I can't go into our basement. I can't do laundry, I can't go into our garage. So basically, I walk...

J. You're stuck.

KK. I am and even my yoga room is in the basement. So, I was like, Okay, cool, cool. I'll just do it up here in the living room by the dog. No worries so yeah, I know, I sound really spoiled right now. But yeah, I was really whiny about it the other day.

J. I mean, that's miserable. Nobody wants to be - like staying inside is nice, except for when you don't get to do whatever you want to do.

KK. Right? And like...

J. I mean, I was sick for the entirety of Spring Break! All I did was sleep!

KK. That's what you said! Me too - on steroids!

J. In a hypothetical world, sleeping off my Spring Break would be nice. It was not nice. I hated it.

KK. Yeah.

J. No.

KK. Right? Well, plus if you have things to do like I, because I was on so many steroids, I essentially lost 2 full weeks of writing because I was like, I'm not going to write when I'm on steroids. I don't trust myself.

J. Oh, yeah...I spent 4 days straight, just writing papers to catch up, and I...I took it first Monday and Tuesday back from Spring break off so I could write my ethnography.

KK. Oh, my word, yeah, and that's tricky, too, because I do my best work at a coffee shop locally, and the Baristas and the owners. everybody knows me, and so we have a routine. I go in

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at like 8 in the morning, or 7:30, I get my big froufrou drink. I sit down, about 2 hours later I go up and get like a bar or something, and then they give me a refill on my coffee, right? So that's my full day. From 8 to 3, and then I bring in my lunch, and they don't mind, and I work so good there with, like the background chatter.

J. Sounds nice. [chuckles].

KK. But here I am. Hi! I'm at my house. I can't leave my house, so I'm trying to get stuff done, especially with an upholstery shop in the basement – it's a whole different...it's a whole different universe. But we'll get there. So anyhow, I did sneak out Monday, though I did go to the [Cultural Event] and it was worth it – it was so, SO, impactful.

J. Yeah, I know it's - once [our friend] started talking about like all, all of that. [They] were like "Are you going to either of these events?", and I was like, "Hmm, I don't know, I will think about it, and as you started talking about it, I was like, "Damn, I wish I had gone!" But it's just so...I...

KK. It's so hard to balance.

J. I don't regret not going because I needed that free time. Also, I couldn't tell you what I DID with my free time. [both laugh]

KK. [still laughing] I hear you!

J. Was it productive? Probably not. [both still laughing].
I don't even know...which it has to be. But like I'm just ready to get past all this school stuff quite honestly.

KK. Yeah, I'm glad you said that. That's been one of my biggest struggles, because I'm doing a reflexive case study. And I wanted it reflexive on purpose, so that I would grow as I do it, right? What I'm struggling with is I did case studies, white papers...like nobody's business, because I understood colonial systems and institutions. And I think like I'm in a courtroom, and I get it.

But THIS side of it, after I've grown and changed so much in a year. [long pause].

I don't want to write with an outline.

J. Hmm, yeah. Well, and like for me. I was doing my ethnography, because that was really like the first time that I was able to technically *apply* all of these things I've learned like in my own study, in my own...however I truly wanted to do this was how it was, but I'm also working within a very limited timeframe within a very limited set of constraints that I ideally I wouldn't be working under - so like I've been writing all of these - my "white people papers" about how to decolonize the discipline of anthropology.

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And how to approach these things collaboratively and like, involve community, and now that it's my time to apply it, I'm like...How do I *actually apply* this? Especially given the constraints of like this...this colonial structure, because, like quite honestly...

So, for me, like my ethnography, I had, give or take, less than a month to do all of it, and which, like really isn't enough time to do anything collaboratively.

So, well it's nice that I already know [our friend], and I can use that to my advantage.

Like, if we're really being honest, I want to open it up more to more people than just one, because that's not an actual perspective.

KK. Gotcha. Right. It's more of like an autobiography or a biography.

J. [nods] So when I talked to [our friend] about it, I was like... it's challenging for me, because I still feel like, because ethnography and anthropology is already such an inherently colonial discipline.

I was like. It's so difficult for me to come in with my list of questions that I have prepared to ask you when, like, I don't necessarily actually need that to kind of already know what your answers to these questions are going to be. And sit down and have what is this very standard typical interview with you, and I was like that to me doesn't feel like I'm applying everything that I've learned, and we sat down, and we had a very long conversation about how like the prior relationship that I have had with the work and with them, makes the research itself fundamentally different.

KK. That's true! And again, it comes back to relationships.

J. And I asked...what I think so much of it, too, is within the **intention** of the project. Like my goal in this was never making it to just have it be just some finished and complete paper. I want it to be something that even if it doesn't get used, because not all research is necessarily good for research.

And I'm not going to claim that mine is the best - but I wanted to have the potential for Lin to give this to somebody and say, here you know, system, this this is this is what you want written down in the way that you want it. **That** proves everything that I have been trying to convince you of and say to you.

KK. Right.

J. So I think that kind of reframed it for me, but it still doesn't change that I think the approach is kind of questionable.

KK. Right? No, I understand.

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J. I just, I think it's hard to escape the feeling, because I think, no matter what, just like the idea of research like THIS - is just so colonial.

KK. Thank you.

J. Because why...because why would we, as a community need to put it together in some paper, when the productive thing to really be doing would be to come together as a collective right, and have these discussions.

And instead of saying, "Hey, I think you should do this, yes or no"? Say, "These are what we can offer. This is what we all want." How do we find that compromise? That to me is the decolonized form of it.

There's a lot more work that has to go into actually being at that point, and institutions aren't there yet.

KK. I agree, I totally agree. I find a lot of parallels between your ethnography and between the project that I'm doing ...so I refuse to call it research in our communities. I'm calling it a project because it IS - it's a decolonizing project, and that's why I'm writing one paper that's Tribal Citizen [Indigenous People] facing and one that's academic facing.

And when we were talking, I just went in my mind - maybe I should start with the Indigenous Tribal Citizen facing one first, and then I can pull out of it and turn it into the academic one.

J. Well, and I think that you're academic one might provide some points to be like, this is the crux of the information that's like [air quotes] "important".

But I think it's important, I think, for us, right, as Indigenous People, we understand that within that data, and more important to that data is, is the stories behind the data - like that's what moves US but that's not what moves institutions.

KK. Right.

J. So...

KK. Unless they're peppered in for marketing.

J. Like the *story* telling part of ethnography. I think for me, and research is what touches on like those Indigenous Methodologies but often times, the way it's presented is, I think, kind of what strips away the most important parts of that to just the fundamentals. To say, "Hey, this is what you know it all boils down to," and I think that's what a lot of like colonization is - it's saying all the details don't matter. We just need what it boils down to."

KK. Right.

J. [softly] But that's really dehumanizing.

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KK. You're absolutely right. You're absolutely right.

J. Like it even it was within my ethnography, like I had to write about [our friend] as if they are not actually [them], because then I'm breaching their confidentiality. But the thing is, is, I think if we were to actually approach this from an Indigenous Community-based perspective, there really wouldn't be much interest in needing to shield that aspect, because [they] are proud of their work and want their work to be shared and to be known...I very much consider them to be a co-researcher in what I was doing, which I think that is another important point in breaking down kind of the settler colonialism that is research.

It's that acknowledging that when you're interviewing people, those are contributors to the research, and they're also a fundamentally important part of the research like you might be interpreting their work, but they're providing you with all of that work.

KK. Right, and you're almost creating the work. You are - you are creating the work together, and I think that's why the conversational tone of the interview is so vital to me because we're friends first.

J. Yeah [nods].

KK. We're kin first. We're community members first, and as we story gather, how can we apply the lessons to help other communities? I mean, that's ultimately my purpose. Like, how can we look for patterns that are helpful and, how can we avoid hurtful ones going forward?

[pause]

And I hear what you're saying about like dehumanizing it. Right away, I thought of the process of taking a person, their entire life history and turning them into a social security number right? Like that...

J. I can't even get over how messed up I think social security numbers are.

[both chuckle]

KK. And they were originally designed - somebody had the idea to keep children safe from kidnappers. Believe it or not, that's how the whole thing started. It was if we assign them a federal number, then we will also be able to track criminals so it was like, how can we protect our kids? And how can we track dangerous people from getting too close, or repeating the same things in multiple states?

Well, the answer, if we backup further is, why are they being allowed to repeat their behavior?

J. Yeah. Well, and often, my mind's like - to me, I just look at these solutions. I just think they're not effective, because if somebody wants to get around that, it's probably really not that hard. That's my biggest thing... A lot of the time solutions to these problems aren't that hard, and the

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solution to these problems like aren't that hard. But the way it's being presented is really only complicating it more.

Like, Grand Valley right now kind of wants to just like tear everything down and rebuild. Well, that's fine. But like, have you structured into your rebuilding programming, like all of the areas that you're very obviously missing?

Because my assumption is now which just means that it's just going to be a larger campus with the same problems.

KK. Right. I'm so glad you said that I was talking to somebody who – together, we started the process to advocate for a certain health benefit statewide for Medicaid. Right? And...literally, it's been almost 15 years that this advocacy process has been going on. And now, granted, he did a ton more with it after I you know, had hands off, but I helped start the ball rolling, and, you know, raise awareness.

So we are talking this week, and he mentioned like, “Hey, it finally passed - like what you wanted essentially – this is so amazing!” Well, we haven't talked in a while, and I'm a little jaded, and so I didn't mean to be but I was like, “So I trust that one of the provisions was that the infrastructure has to be ready for that? Do they have providers to roll out this great, amazing benefit? Do they have a system of scheduling to make it equitable, and to make it go quickly, or are they going to end up with waiting lists and a quagmire?”

J. Yeah.

KK. And he literally was like, “And where were you a month ago?”

[both laugh]

KK. “Still here! Here I am, right here. You know how to reach me.”

J. But I feel like even as you were telling me this, I feel like, the obvious answer is, “No”, because right, they're never prepared for that type of stuff. The idea of new things is, I think, very...oh, I mean, honestly, it's foreign to institutions.

KK. Yeah.

J. I was literally thinking today about how we consider the treaty making era to be over, and how like actually - insulting that is to Indigenous Peoples. And when we consider treaties, to be living, breathing documents, and really, what they're just saying to us is “This world from 1866, 1839, 1829...that was essentially a completely different world from what we have now, is the only fundamental basis for any - even as you were telling me this - thing that can exist in the future.”

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J. And they do the exact same things with laws. Right? There has to be pre-existing laws to make new laws, and what sense does that make? If you were to ask me, that just seems like a great way to exclude any possible new thing, right?

KK. Right.

J. If we're no longer making treaties, then how are we ever going to recognize Tribes that have a right to be recognized but are never going to have any treaties.

KK. Right, but that's such a double standard, because if it's a written contract, you can't break it! ...That's in the court of law, going back as far...

J. I know - I keep waiting for like alright, our Indigenous uprising where like we collectively, obviously get together, and I can be like, "Hey, I'll join you guys and then we'll see stuff like treaties get upheld", but I mean even the fact that, we have to answer to a US Supreme Court is – [sighs] – just [sighs in disappointment].

[long pause]

KK. It's discounting our tribal [community and] citizenship.

J. My thoughts about all of this could be I think, summed up and just like the biggest, just like sigh, [sighs] because I don't...I think being jaded is fair, because what do we have to believe? That is, there's nothing setup in our favor.

KK. [softly] Right.

J. ...How are we supposed to reinforce these treaties if we can't even make amendments to them. Because "1829 world" is what we're living in essentially, right now, then.

KK. Right. You're not wrong. Then everything else that hasn't been ratified needs to go by the wayside.

J. That was, I mean, we have treaties that are like over 200 years old.

KK. 400. Some are 400 years old. Yeah, like the 1600's. It's ridiculous!

J. Mm-hmm, I mean the State of Michigan, though is around 100, 300 years old, and I mean that is supposed to be the basis of our government, and our "government to government" relationships. Like you said...they're not even being upheld in the first place.

KK. No, no! And it's...one of the things that came up on the Boarding School Panel this week. Panel discussion was...

J. Oh, yeah, that was on Wednesday. Busy week.

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KK. ...Yeah, I know it was really busy. But they were asking, oh, they were talking about blood quantum. And one of my questions was, "Wait a minute. Do dual citizens of other nations have to do blood tests to prove that they're Canadian Americans or Irish-Americans or...?" And, nobody does.

J. I know that the only other, like living being that essentially gets a pedigree, which is what a certified degree of Indian blood is...

KK. Right.

J. Is – it's dogs and horses.

KK. It's so ridiculous. It's not okay. That's not an okay way to treat people.

J. No, but I again, I think this is a structure that is in place.

KK. Hmm!

J. Do I see it leaving any time soon? Not within my lifetime. Do I see the majority of Tribes moving away from something like that because how do you move away from something like that when it was imposed by the Government? And my assumption would be that it is still continued to be imposed by the Government because they don't want to be paying Native People more money, and if you open up enrollment that's essentially what you're guaranteeing to do, to at least some extent, which is also why I'm convinced that they're so determined that this "treaty-making-era" be over, because they don't want to have to recognize any more tribes.

They don't want to have to make any more treaties, because then that just puts more responsibility on them that they obviously don't care to take on! Like, I think about my Band - Cherokee, which is not a federally recognized tribe and is not even a state recognized tribe – was **almost** a State recognized tribe in the eighties. But then that legislation never got passed through the proper channels because it was eventually ignored. And I just can't help but think if that's because they just didn't want another Tribe to have to worry about.

KK. Hmm!

It just doesn't make sense to me. Why would people intentionally hurt and try to erase and try to exterminate other people for *dirt*. I just don't...

J. It puts those nations at risk, right? Because now you have people who look at these, these Bands, and these Nations that aren't Federally recognized and/or State recognized and go, "They're not real. They're not legitimate. I don't care if they were almost state recognized - doesn't count."

KK. Hmm!

J. And which, you know, your own prerogative. Whatever. [Pause].

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Are they technically Native American according to the United States Government? No...

KK. Hmm. It's so frustrating. I just one of the things we are watching is a Caribbean life, you know, that show on Discovery, because we like seeing what the houses went for. Well, last night one of the shows, one of the episodes had a couple on this island, and they touted it as, "This is a prior fishing village that used to be just local...fishermen, who lived here" and now, instead, it's like, essentially like a subdivision on an island. It's all white people who live in these massive houses, and I looked at Tim, and I said, "Heaven forbid! But do you think one of the reasons that commercial fishing has taken off is so that they can out earn local fishermen?"

J. I'm sure.

KK. "And then snatch up the land and turn it into more subdivision living."

J. I'm sure, did you...there was a documentary on Netflix, I think. Just called by "fish",

KK. Seaspiracy? Was it that one?

J. It might have been! They were talking about just the commercial fishing industry and the fishing industry in general. And their whole like, take away from at least what I remember - I only watched it once, it was a while ago - was to just stop eating fish, to stop consuming fish, to stop fishing. And of course this is a documentary that I'm assuming was made by white men, and it's just like that is so [pause] ignorant to the millions and millions of local Native People all across the world, whose main source of subsistence is getting fish. And these people are sustainable. They're not doing anything to the numbers. The problem isn't eating fish. The problem is the companies that are over consuming fish that are basically raping the ocean floor.

KK. Right? Right? It's true. It's a good insight.

J. So, I think that that speaks to the larger issue of because Indigenous Populations are so small, and because the main issue that gets paid attention to is these big corporations and everything that they're doing - everything has to be all packed up in one nice easy answer that can just be applied to everybody!

Right. There is no one size fits all. The reason I became an "activist" to begin with is because there wasn't a one size fits all. I had 3 kids who were on Medicaid who needed WIC - I was an unexpected single mom. We ALL had allergies to food. So, guess what? I couldn't take a jar of peanut butter home at the time, because my kids were airborne anaphylactic to it. But the problem was, then I was in noncompliance, and one of the women literally threatened to have me arrested for malnutrition to my children for not taking peanut butter, and milk home.

So, I would take the gallon and milk home and dump it down the drain, and I was like, I'm **not** taking the peanut butter because then you're going to get me for child abuse and child endangerment because he's **physically** allergic to it. So, we went back and forth, and back and

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forth, and so I kept calling Lansing and I called the USDA, and I called our Federal Representative, and then finally they got it to change.

But shock face. It goes through the USDA. And that's why, because their peanut farmers had an agreement with the USDA, and that's why Peanut Butter had to be on the commodity list. Whether or not you're allergic.

J. Ridiculous. I mean that always is it, right? Like there's always some kind of relationship that you don't know about.

KK. Yeah.

J. You know, people just feeding into each other's pockets. Being at that GA meeting, I learned that Grand Valley has a 20-million-dollar budget for like just food.

KK. Wow!

J. And they're talking about like what they're doing to...better support lower income students with this, you know, 20 million dollars budget they have.

And I think that their solution was like they donate \$25,000 to some on-campus thing that then gets distributed to students in need and like that is their solution for, like sustainability. That, and like any unspent dining dollars, can like go back to other students. But that's not even anything that Grand Valley is paying for themselves, right?

KK. No right. And that how does it help with the circular economy, people? Why don't we take the food scraps from Grand Valley, put them in a compost and start growing our own hoop barn garden, so that we can have farm to fork...and fresh micro greens and everything else – so that low-income students can actually have healthy food. And maybe we could all start deciding like, “Hey, I really like Turnip Greens.” Can we please look up a recipe and I'll give background on why it's important to me. This is why it's featured, but not just throw it on there and pretend that you're doing a token meal for whatever month it is.

J. Oh, yeah, and my, I know the relationship that, like Grand Valley has with Aramark, who's like their main food supplier. People have really major issues with. I have had issues with them for 4 years. I remember speaking on like a random. There was a students...honestly, I think there's a group on campus that's possibly called “Students for Food Sovereignty”...that is run by **white students**.

Ummm, they asked me...this was when we were all, we are all online. They asked me to come and speak about food sovereignty on some, you know, larger panel, and their main issue was with Aramark and their relationships, and the contracts that they had with this larger supplier. But of course, that's not any different now.

KK. Right, so, yeah.

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J. And I have not even talked to “Students for Food Sovereignty” since then, which again, I think, is one of the issues on campus. We're organizing but we're not organizing very well, which is quite frankly, not right...I don't think this is the student's fault. As a student who is very busy and “involved”. ...I'm upset at the University for claiming to be like “student led”, “student driven” and then not letting students do the things that they want to and need to do like taking classes to graduate when they're ready to graduate. It's not designed and set up to be easily navigable, or to have even free time to organize.

KK. Right. It should be part of the curriculum. When I was at Taylor for my undergrad, part of our calendar and curriculum for the semester was intentional cross collaboration between majors, between groups like we are assigned as freshman, until, like in into a freshman group, right for orientation, and for, like the first semester or 2. We still checked in all the way through like most of us, checked in with each other, but we always had time to check in and build relationships. That's what's missing. You're absolutely right. There IS no time in the schedule.

J. No, and even then, there's no like. There's no organizing place, there's no organizing body like how, as students are, we supposed to not only just find each other, but like, make the time to get together and then where do we go from there? Right?

There is no...Grand Valley has so many different departments and systems that if you know what you're doing, I guess it can be useful like right now, with my class situation like, because I know Lin, and because Lin has connections, I'm able to navigate it easier; but that does not mean that it's convenient.

That does not mean I have a time for it, and that does not mean that it's like a quick process, you know. It's been like 3, 4 days, and I still am not in any different of a situation than I was when I found out that they weren't offering my classes in the first place.

KK. Right, right.

J. And then, realistically like, it's a pretty big thing like I kind of need to get that figured out now.

Why, if this is somebody's job at Grand Valley to be doing this, why isn't it actually happening in a more speedy process? Like, why isn't somebody's job to organize all of the different Affinity Groups and say, “What do you all need from us”?

KK. Mhmm. That's true.

J. Because I feel like, technically, in all the departments there should be somebody on campus who's that's their job.

KK. Right! They should be. It should be like a Member Advisory Council...I understand there's a student body [board] but the student bodies are so politically different from Member Advisory Council. They're not even the same thing.

J. And let me tell you, granted, I think about half the Student Senate was missing. These people.

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Not representative of this students that *I see* at Grand Valley, because the students I see at Grand Valley don't have the time or the energy to meet the requirements to be on student Senate. ...I look at NASA specifically in NASA leadership, and how we need to get ready to begin the next transition of power. So, I'm not going to be here forever.

And currently, I kind of am the person who does like everything which is really scary to like pass that off. And I'm thankful to see the younger generation of students has expressed interest in being involved on that level. But I worry for them, and the amount of like and the amount of **actual work** that it is, the distribution of work, and even just the being able to complete the work.

There are students who, I think, would be so well suited to be in like a higher position at NASA, so I don't know if the University would actually let them, which is bull[oney] because I could tell you that being in that position would benefit their overall experience on campus and their overall retention, their overall involvement, all of that.

KK. That brings up such a good point that instead of colonial measurement systems for who can lead or who can't lead. [pause] Why isn't it based on something different?

J. Actually, one of the articles that I had read, or reports that I had read when I was doing my ethnography with [our friend] was a study of leadership perspectives of Indigenous College students, and, like what qualities *they thought* made for good leaders and I mean, it is interesting because it is different, and a lot of that ties back to "What are you doing for the community?"

It's all work that is going back into the community, and I don't see that as being the students on Student Senate. I mean, one of the very first things that was said the Student Senate meeting was an amendment that they a movement they had like added into the schedule so the President could talk about how they needed to stop "crap-talking" to each other because of elections, and that to me does not describe people who are working towards like a collective betterment of campus.

KK. Right. That says it's all about politics, right, politics and cliques?

J. Right.

13:17:09

And I mean, just...looking at the room, it's not diverse at all. At least from the people who *were* there. And even if you know, there are people of color who are there, but who aren't at the meeting, why aren't they at the meeting? And why aren't there still more people of color to accommodate, for I don't know, the one or 2 who can't make it?

KK. Right, seriously. There's got to be a...It just reminds me, and I'm not saying that affirmative action, I'm not trying to open that can of worms right now. What *I am* saying is, when our kids were growing up, we had a voting system where everybody got a vote. However, it was a **weighted** voting system. So, Tim and I had X amount of, you know, points for our vote, and each

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kid had “x” amount of points so if it did get to the point like where the kids and Tim outweighed me, then I would stop and go, “Oh, snap I need to check myself.”

J. Yeah.

KK. Or if the kids got close enough to Tim and mine number, we could go, “You know what? Maybe there's something we're not seeing. The kids are **all** diametrically opposed to us on this one. We need to step back and look.” I think **that** is a system that needs to be in play.

Not that it's like, “you have to have this person of color in this position.”

J. Yes.

KK. But why can't it be that this person's vote carries X amount of weight or something?

J. Well, I think what you're describing is equity right and not equality. And this is - so [our friend] and I talk about this all the time, and I honestly feel like with this we have described, like very similar scenarios, and, like hypothetical situations of...this is how it really needs to be. Just because certain minority groups represent a smaller portion of campus does not mean that they deserve to be heard any less - they need to have a higher sway and when they get to speak, because the reality is that they don't need to be heard any less.

And I do think it's important that...if we do take votes, we take consensus, and if it is close, that to me is warranting of a re-evaluation, where I think for a lot of people it's not [something they can all agree on] Right? We look at presidential elections, and they're super, super, close. Is that not something that we should be re-addressing?

Then, maybe a two-party system, isn't the right choice.

KK. Right. I mean, just thinking. I agree with you, I totally agree. That's in my paper by the way. Indigenous Knowledge shows that there are 3 - constantly 3. There's Three Sisters, even Raven and The Box of Daylight offers 3 choices. There's something missing, and even George Washington himself said, don't ever let it become a 2-party system essentially, and we did.

J. Yeah.

KK. But the thing I'm thinking is, I wonder if we could do something similar to the House of Representatives on Grand Valley State campus with Representation. That was my first thought, and my second thought was, what if Office of Multicultural Affairs, what if all the different groups within decided to become one group and each had a delegate or 2, like you were responsible for 2 delegates from? And then that group of 10 or 12 or 15 or 16 went as a group in unison.

Because I started thinking...we had a multicultural council when I was at Taylor, and that's one of the things we did. We would have our meetings, and then we would send our representatives, and if they wouldn't listen to the first 2 then we'd send 4 and then 6, and you just like, keep filling the office until they're like, “Oh, we have to listen.”

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J. I mean I can't speak for the other affinity groups. We have Nack. I technically am a student representative on Nack. Why is Nack also not then being represented on Student Senate?

Why aren't all these different Affinity Groups being represented on Student Senate, or, you know, in all of these rooms; really.

But no, that's something that we've definitely talked about is...there is no reason for there not to be representatives from other groups and for that to be a position that is created. I truly don't understand why, in 2023 that isn't like something that isn't already initiated.

KK. Right, right. So, one of the things that my husband told me about was that there was a study that showed people with diversity on their governing board were actually - they had a harder time getting decisions made and the interesting thing about it is - it's because your colonial system isn't designed for it. You're only designed for Group Think. It's not the problem with the diversity, the problem is with the system.

J. I actually had heard that, too. I don't remember where I heard that from, but I have heard that.

KK. So bizarre. So then, do we have any recommendations for how to fix it? A weighted voting system.

J. That! I honestly think that if we were to open it up, it probably would be a lot of roadblocks, and I don't know if Grand Valley would really listen to us, which is why I almost feel like I don't - I don't *need* to be included and I think [our friend] has expressed ideas that are kind of similar to this - I don't need to feel included by white people. I already don't. I just need a space where I'm allowed to be myself, and I need to be allowed the same affordances as any other student, and all the other Native Students need to be allowed the same opportunities. We just need to be offered them ourselves. I don't need to "get it" with all of the white students, right?

KK. Right.

J. Cause to be honest, they probably don't want that, anyways.

KK. They can be really mean. Girls...were sometimes raised to be mean.

J. All we need? Is it "for" us? You know. I think if Grand Valley were to say, "Here, have what you asked for" like obviously within reason, but I don't think anything that's being asked for is unreasonable.

KK. Right? Right agreed. Like we just want our own space so that we can convene and communicate together and build community.

J. Because, I think it's most important that we create a community on campus, and we have that, but it has to get stronger before we can make a larger change. So I think...infiltrating the structure of Grand Valley is probably a far longer-term goal. Or I think what is more reasonable

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in the short term and honestly, what's more important to our students, short term and for their retention, is creating a space **for** them. If it's secluded and excluded from the white spaces, how is that different from what it is right now? But at least the difference would be, we have *something*.

KK. We have something, yeah, agreed. Yeah, like, even with the learning camp that we're so excited about...and then the Fire Marshall!

KK: So many good things to take away from this conversation.

J. I hope!

KK. Lots!

J. It wasn't very structured.

[both laugh]

J. That's how it is, right?

KK. But we're talking stories! It's not supposed to be. I mean, when you sit down with your friends around a fire, do you come with an agenda?

J. I mean, oh, yeah! When I interviewed [our friend], it was...for me, it was...one, because I already knew them and we talk about all these things so often, it was like I obviously - I always have an idea in my mind of what we're going to say to these questions, right? I'm only asking them like this very formally, so I can get a very formal answer. That is just like, here's the question. Here's the answer but even now that doesn't work for people to tell stories because they go so "tangent-y". So, like after the interview that we had...I was very soon to realize that like all the conversation that I have with [our friend] just doing work. Though they're often a lot longer than like this just question, answer, interview. They hit them, all of the same points, all of the same points, almost always. Because it's circling back to what's important and truthfully, why are you asking questions about some stuff if it's not that important, at least in this very formal setting.

KK. Right. That connects with me to the fact that people who want to have a diverse understanding, who want to be teachable are more likely to have friends and associates that have totally opposite perspectives. Because as you build that friendship and you sustain that dialogue over time, you know how they're going to answer things. You're not surprised when they do answer things in a way, but you're reminded that maybe there's more to learn about that issue than what you thought.

J. Oh, yeah. Well, I think with [our friend] too, One of my favorite things, is noticing things that will come up again and again, and even just like the way that they phrase them, and how they phrase things the same and it's like, "Obviously it's something that you thought about a lot so like

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if it came up multiple times, it's basically the same way." It's every time, it's talking about higher education is like being in boarding school 2.0 because it's based on the same foundations.

But that delivery, "Boarding School 2.0" was said the same way, no matter who you were, and no matter what [our friend's] relationship with you was, and that's what I think made it so important - is that it doesn't matter what the relationship is, this is how **they** feel about it, and while it might seem extreme to somebody who isn't Native, obviously this is the reality because if it wasn't a reality, it wouldn't be being said the same way every single time.

KK. [softly] Right. So, this this brings me to the question then because I was comparing and contrasting like my experience at Taylor when I was right out of high school right? And I'd gone to private school oh, every day of my life, preschool all the way through and I had gone to colonial church every week of my life, right from birth on, we were there.

I loved my time at Taylor, but who I am now with my understanding in the way, I think, and there were things that I thought at Taylor, and I was like, "no". But I'm wondering for college to be viable, maybe it needs to offer another path within. Like, maybe it needs to be instead of just the colonial pathway. Maybe what I'm hearing is there needs to be some kind of other experiential pathway within college that still meets standards for graduation, but it's done in a relational way.

J. I have so many, so many issues with how the university system is structured. I think [our friend's] point of school being like Boarding School...for me, really hit hard, because literally, for me, school at points felt like I was in Boarding School, you know.

KK. Oh!

J. Obviously I don't understand what the true experience is like, but I have the cultural knowledge and the cultural trauma that is boarding school, and its impact on Indigenous People, and because this is fundamentally the same system - like it brings all that back up. So, for me when I was in Angela Reed's class, Indigenous People of North America, like I saw the patterns being repeated while also being constantly re-exposed to the topic and conversation of boarding school.

So, I was talking about it in class. I was talking about it outside of class. I was going to like lectures and stuff like, and I was going into this class, and it was almost like a manifestation of all of the trauma that was happening that we were talking about.

So, you know, after that, I think it really disillusioned me from the whole, like college experience.

I used to want to be a professor, you know.

KK. Right.

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J. Maybe we'll get there again one day, but I think I just realized that like this just fundamentally does not align or work with me. You know, I think, going into college. I was, you know, I couldn't have imagined a different way to go about college but as I came here, and I think as I continued to decolonize myself, I just realized, like how silly a lot of this is, and how I think there's such obvious ways to make this experience better and more viable for **ALL** students, but for an institution like this it's more difficult because it's not as measurable, right?

Like, for me, I think college needs to be much more experienced based. I have worked in the field of my discipline enough that I know I can go into that field, get a job and be okay. There really is no reason for me to continue being here other than I have not met the qualifications that this university says I have to meet. But, in being here I realize how redundant a lot of this work is and how non-essential it is to the actual day to day of doing a profession within any given field.

KK. Okay, that makes sense.

J. So I think so. I think, with your point of like, "Does it need to be more like experiential"? Absolutely like, why aren't we putting people in practical workplace scenarios more often early on? Why is my work with Lin not able to count for something when really like I'm doing good and important work on campus that is so easily be translated into further career opportunities, and why is that not recognized by the University as practical college experience?

KK. Right. It's such a good question. Even, for crying out loud, doctors have practicums all the way through medical school. When I was going through athletic training, part of my hours were practicum hours that I had to have every semester. It just makes sense. It does. And that's even an old "English style" of something with apprenticeships that people can understand from the Dark Ages, do you know what I mean? That should be easily transferable into college life!

You wouldn't waste half as much money with people changing majors 3 years in, because they'd have time to say, "No, this isn't for me."

J. Also, I think that it would be...it just translates well, right? Like, I'm looking at these options of like, what do I do I'm looking at these options of what do I do if Grand Valley can't accommodate me with these courses. Well, do I go somewhere else? If I go somewhere else, I'm in the same boat of I probably have to take even more classes now to accommodate, because "What is this you know, IN 283 class they're offering here at Grand Valley. What's Anishinabek Lifeways? We don't know what that is - doesn't count for anything."

KK. Which is SO bizarre. How is that not translatable, number one. But also, how could it not be...class is an independent study, or as an internship? Can't your hours for NASA count as either of those or both of those?

J. [shakes head] Mm-hmm

Well, when I worked for Andrea, I was also working for the museum. I used my museum time as a Practicum. My work with Andrea didn't get to count for anything.

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KK. Why? Because that's anthropology, or because she's Indigenous?

J. It didn't count for anything because I was already using it. I was already having a practicum. The only thing it would have been is extra credit hours, which I didn't even need.

KK. But if you had them now...

J. But why can't that count as a class? Why is that not a class experience, when I'm literally on the ground doing the work that I'm supposed to be being taught about?

KK. Right, right, an application class if nothing else.

J. Because, like, I have taken so many archeology classes that are literally just reiterations of the same thing, that I really struggle to find almost the point in it.

KK. Right, that's so sad to me, too, that there's not like a check and balance system of "Hey, we taught this in **this** class. We don't need to teach it again."

J. Well, so I think part of the problem is because our scope of education is just like "We're going to talk about these very specific things." We're not talking about very broad topics, like when I talk about... So, for example, I'm in Archeology of the Middle East class right now which is very reminiscent to An Origins of Civilizations class that I took. We're talking about all of the exact same things, granted are these the oldest civilizations? I guess, technically from an anthropology standpoint.

Sure, you know. But like, why can't Origin of Civilizations class talk about - I don't know - the origins of civilizations in different continents outside of the Middle East? And these areas that are really only super heavily focused on, because they're part of the Bible. Maybe if you just expanded our education a little bit, which is what I think people are really asking for, we're asking for Indigenous Professors to come in to expand everybody's education, not just ours.

KK. Right? Right? Thank you. Like 2 of my favorite classes have been with Azfar, and he is from India – dot, not feather. The interesting thing is, so many of my white classmates have such an issue with the way he teaches, and every time I'm like, "You cannot have such a Western mindset when you're being taught by an Eastern style professional! You cannot think like a Westerner."

J. Well, well, I think part of that issue comes in how we prepare people for college. In the fact that we don't.

KK. Right. We train them to be industrial workers.

J. So much of high school is just, just the same experience, right? Like every high school, is pretty much the same. There's not a lot of diversifications. So, when you get to college, when there might be diversification, students who appreciate this traditional mode freak out!

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KK. It's true. That's true.

J. So I was in an introduction to African American studies course, last semester that was primarily freshman, and that class started out with Gosh, probably with like 30 people, maybe ended with less than 10, because people thought the homework and the course content was so difficult. And it's just, it was hard for me, because I looked at it – and thought, this is a very rudimentary college course, like introductory college course. Level 200 it was truly, do the reading and maybe get an assignment, so not even.

It wasn't hard at all, so like trying to understand how a student who in that class, in that setting finds something, as quite honestly in my mind, is basic and fundamental to like the colonial side of education difficult, I struggle to see how somebody like that is capable of adapting to a different style of teaching, which also then brings up the point of like, isn't again, isn't this a point of college to ready people to be capable of adapting to different types of environments?

KK. Right? Right?

J. Sorry, like is college failing at delivering the ultimate goal?

KK. And at the same time, how do we fix it upstream so that elementary schools and middle schools and high schools start preparing students to be adaptable enough to learn even more adaptability in college.

J. [shakes head] Oh, gosh! I don't even know how we could do that because parents are so much more involved, right, in that world. They want everything to be so structured. And I do think that structure is a big part of the problem. It's so much structure that it makes everything hard.

KK. Right. It's rigid. It's not pliable.

J. Like with all my course stuff like it is, in a way, a wonderful asset that Grand Valley, has so many departments that I can email them and try to figure stuff out - but also, then it gives me so much more work, so much more time on everybody else's end, where, if it really was just like person to person communication about like my classes, my graduation, it really would be so much easier. Because, also, like there's just too many people here. Right?

KK. Right.

J. Like if everything was just too big, too major; I don't know how to scale that down, which is why I think, for now the right answer is to just focus on like us as a community and what can better us, and then taking it from there to say, "Okay, University."

KK. Right.

J. "Maybe we have better numbers now, maybe you're more willing to listen to us."

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KK. Right. I agree with you, and I think at least at the end of the day there's a community there with you. That's been the biggest takeaway for me is the reciprocity of the community in Native American Student Association because even though I haven't physically been able to be there, I'm still getting emotionally supported.

J. I mean if I didn't have Lin, I'd *probably* still be in college but honestly, if I didn't have just like the rest of the Native Community here, really like who knows where I would be, because, well, I don't always love **all of** the responsibility of having to be this token Native student in so many aspects. Like, it also holds me to this campus and creates a sense of responsibility *that is* important within our community and does keep us motivated and diligent about completing our work.

KK. Right. That's true.

J. Sound. [pause] I don't know, like everything needs to be easier. And I think it's really just - the solution is not that we need, we need no work at all. As students. I think that this work is important to like keeping us involved in campus life. I just don't...I think that the burden of responsibility is...the balance is really inequitable.

KK. To that end. Do you think that in some sarcastic way the university political system is set up to prepare us for the real world?

[both laugh]

J. I think that the University is set to prepare us for, like this real world that doesn't really exist unless you're trying to stay within these types of institutions, right? Like if I was planning on being in education then I would know that's...really stressful and I would be falling apart all the time.

I go to intern at the Museum, which is, you know, still a colonial institution. But when I look at like the work that they're giving me there, I have a month to complete a presentation that the university would give me a week to finish.

Okay, cool. So glad college prepared me for this hard work.

KK. [laughs] Yeah, I hear you.

J. You know, I think that it's...fostering an environment that's so full of anxiety and stress with the idea that the rest of your career in your life will be full of this anxiety and stress because I think that's what the system wants it to be, right? You know, you try to just constantly feed into it. You're trying to create products and end goals. But, we know that for Indigenous Students, the Indigenous Community, like that isn't necessarily where our fundamentals are.

So, I think for me when I very first started at college like, yes, that's what my idea of the future was that it's going to be really stressful all the time.

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But I realize through like, just like having bad experiences and college, decolonizing myself, like just talking to other people in the community, having a part of the community that, like there's so many different ways to approach how you want to do your work, right, that that the university isn't telling you about and you really only find out through experience. But it doesn't have to be like that. Which is why I'm ready to get out of this environment because I know that it doesn't have to be like this but that doesn't change the fact that being **in** this environment will always feel like that, because it's how it's been designed.

KK. Right? That's fair. Yeah, that's valid.

J. Like I'm ready to get out, because I'm ready, and I know that I'll be fine and successful in the environment that I know exists out there for me.

KK. Right.

J. But I don't need to be in **this one** anymore, because I know that it's not necessary, which I think is my main frustration - is that so much of this just feels really unnecessary, and I don't like it. It's very frustrating to me that society is like, "We want everybody to be stressed all the time." I truly don't comprehend it - I think it's still [messed up]

KK. Really it really is. I mean, if you think about the fact that even it's not even true to "settler-ism" in its original form, like, think about it like *Little House on the Prairie*.

J. Yeah.

KK. They had downtime - they were up when the sun came up, but they were, you know, fiddling at night around the fireplace, and then they had days that like in the winter where they holed up inside and there were just like feeding the animals, but they yes, they did schoolwork, but it wasn't - It didn't lack relationship. Relationships came first even with the original pioneers. Relationships were everything. So how did we shift as a society from that?

J. Oh, yeah. Well, because they had this, yeah, because they depended so much on community to get everything done.

KK. Right, right.

J. Which is so fundamentally different from what this university is doing. And university wants you to think that everything is you as the individual, which I also think is a lot of society. So, I see the need for that readiness to know that this is what it could be like.

But it's you know, it's important, I think, to acknowledge that it's not how it **has** to be.

KK. Right, just because it *hasn't been doesn't mean it can't be*.

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J. That's not what *has* to be, and I think a lot of students of color know that. But most students, you know, who aren't of color don't know that and if you don't have a strong community base then you're just going to continue to feed into that ugly system. That's just terrible!

KK. Right. Where the duality is heavy, like that makes duality heavy. But duality can be a beautiful thing if you embrace the *both - and*.

J. Yeah, no, I mean honestly my whole goal after college is to have a job where I can leave the work at work. [Lin's background laughter] That's like, that to me. That's...ideal. I want to be able to go home and sit down and do nothing until I have to go back to work.

KK. Preach.

J. [directed at Lin] I'm not like you. I'm not going to be texting my assistant at 11 o'clock.

Lin offscreen [I told you to silence my texts]. [All laugh]

J. I don't respond if I don't have to! Here's the thing like I don't mind - like I am a workaholic, that is - I acknowledge - a cog in the system.

KK. I do the same, although, I have learned. I totally have learned to set an alarm, and when the alarm goes off at night I'm done. It doesn't matter like I'm done, or within 10 min or 15, whatever. But okay, I'm going to finish this one task. And then that's it.

J. I think that's the I think for me, and I'm sure you feel this is somebody who, you know, owns your own business, it's like, "Wow, business work is work. But also like on my own time. So, it's not quite like work work."

KK. It used to not be, but now that I'm stuck at home, and I'm balancing the books for taxes. It's a whole different thing.

J. Oh, God, no!

KK. Which reminds me, I have to cancel that appointment tonight. But I'm glad you said that. But I did tell Tim the other day, I said, "You know, when my classes are done there's one thing I want to do. I want to pack up a book, and I want to go somewhere away from home and just sit and eat and read all day long with my book with no interruption. Nobody knows where I'm at. I don't want my cell phone on unless it's for music. I just want to sit, and leisure read for an hour." Like that for me right now is Mecca level of happiness.

J. I got asked what I wanted to do once the semester was over, and I said "nothing."

KK. Right.

J. I think nothing - I know I had 2 internships last summer. I don't need to take on any more extra work. I have a little business, you know, I can work on that, and just like, take a break.

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KK. Nice!

J. It might be different with my classes now, so we'll see.

KK. Hmm right!

J. But, that, you know, that's the goal. For years, and that's what's bothered me really, about this system a lot, too, is that there is no time set in for breaks, right? We're expected to be students, employees, plus whatever...else, like, half of the students on campus, have relationships, have children.

There is **no** time, and like I'm ready for people to start acknowledging that, like they are literally having their life stolen from them, because that's what I feel right now. Being forced to be in this institution, that I don't want to continue at but like being so close to being done that like I have to stay in, but also them being like, "You might have to stay even longer on top of how we told you 'You have to stay even longer'." They are legitimately stealing from me, and where is people's issue with that? Because I take issue with it!

KK. I take issue with that on your behalf, too, because it's not okay, not only like the financial perspective but the mental and emotional perspective, too! And, I feel it because, as somebody does not like living in Holland anymore, has wanted to be gone since, like we lived in Virginia for a year, and I loved it and then we had to come back - for 5 years - and now it's been 4 and I'm like, can we move on with the show?

J. Oh, yeah, oh, and that's it. I was like - also to just to do that - at the moment when you think you're going to be done too, it's just like, it's even that much worse, because, like, I don't know what's next. But I'm open to any possibility that comes next, and it's not at Grand Valley.

KK. No, and I don't say it lightly, I was 6 weeks away from graduation from my undergrad - 6 weeks, and I was one credit hour short, because when originally, I registered, there was a class that was offered for 3 or 4 hours and I got signed up for the 3.

So, I was one credit hour short. It took me an additional year, because anything that could have gone wrong, that semester like afterwards in the summer, did. I sprained my ankle so I couldn't drive my stick shift to get back to campus for my job and so I lost my housing and I lost my financial aid, and I couldn't afford to go full time when it was just for one class. And so, everything just came off the rails...I'm so sorry.

J. Yeah, I know that it'll all be fine either way. It's just even the idea that, all of a sudden, this is a problem that I have to take care of in and of itself is an insult. Truly? Again, how much more can you ask of students?

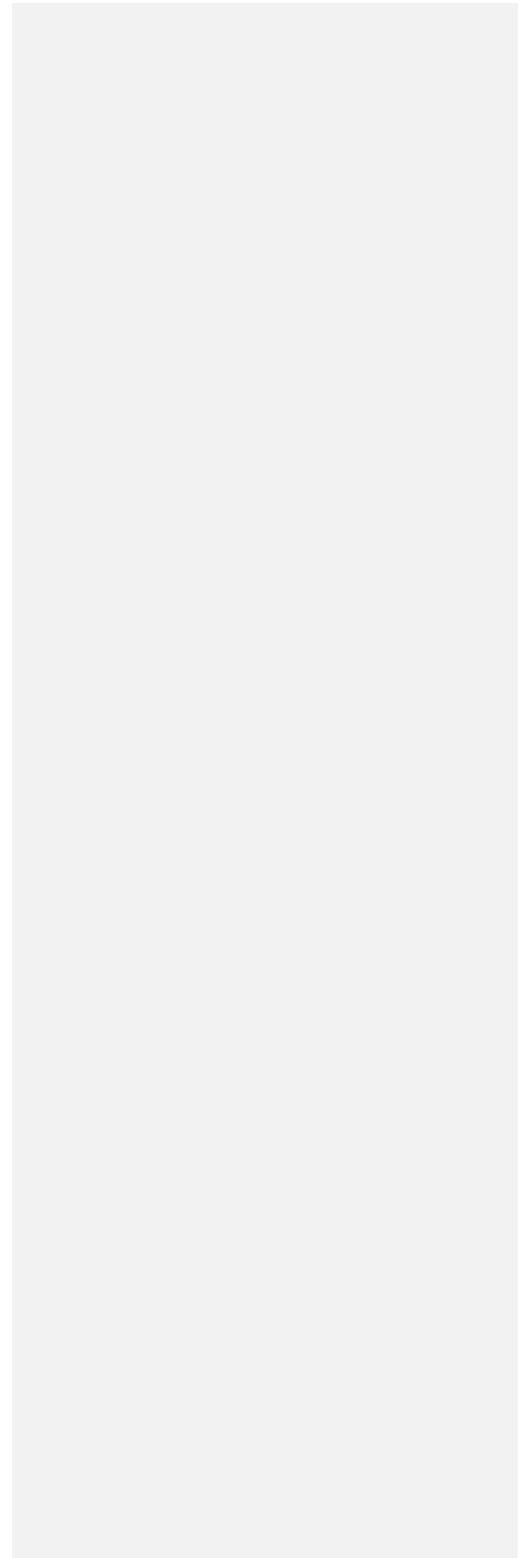
KK. Right? Could you please do your jobs, people?

J. Okay, I do have to head out here pretty soon to get to class.

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KK. Jacob. This was amazing.

J. Thanks. Thanks for talking to me for 2 hours. It went pretty fast.



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Resource list of Native American Counselors in Michigan

The list below is some counseling resources around Michigan and for online therapy. Please note that these resources are not endorsed by Knicki Karsies, Dr. Krista Benson, or Grand Valley State University, but are simply available as a support.

[Inclusive Therapists](#) - Grand Rapids and online therapy

[Nicolette McGahey](#), Detroit, MI area

[Danie Duron](#), Holland, MI and Grand Rapids, MI, plus online therapy

[Breana Carter](#), GVSU alum, online therapy

[Joseph Conrad](#), Grand Rapids, MI and online therapy

[Axel Francisco Hettinger](#), Grand Rapids, MI and online therapy