

DISSERTATION

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL BRIDGES: INDIGENOUS WOMXN ARTISTS USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES
TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE

Submitted by

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In partial fulfillment of the requirements

For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Colorado State University

Fort Collins, Colorado

Fall 2022

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ABSTRACT

BUILDING BEAUTIFUL BRIDGES: INDIGENOUS WOMXN ARTISTS USING SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES TO ADDRESS VIOLENCE

Using Indigenous aesthetics, critical technocultural discourse analysis, and Indigenous storyworks, this study explores how Indigenous womxn’s art practices challenge settler-colonizing visual and media representations of Indigenous peoples that feed violence against womxn, girls and two-spirits; and in the digital realm, how sharing their art-stories is testimony to the unique voices of Indigenous womxn’s leadership. A critical technocultural discourse analysis of in-depth interviews and social networking site (SNS) posts reveals underlying settler-colonial discourses. Through their art-storytelling, artist-participants use technocultural discourses of generosity, collaboration/reciprocity, calling in/calling out, creating and respecting boundaries and fierceness to shift dominating discourses. In a real sense they are building bridges between on and offline realms, strengthening community networks, and bringing together past, present and future to prevent violence.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I hold a lot of respect for Indigenous artists who contributed here, and for my community of friends and relatives. In particular, I want to lift up the names of those who listened to me with enthusiasm and support through a long process of attaining a doctorate and working in higher education. Yakokehoke to Ava Hamilton, Christinia Eala, Dominique David-Chavez, Phillida Charley, Roe Bubar, Tiffani Kelly, Cindy Christen, Susan Harness, Arlene Nededog, Patricia Vigil, Joy Enyinnaya, Valerie Small, Kris Kodrich, Roy Reynolds and Amy Wilson, and the wonderful Indigenous Inquiries Circle. All of the artist-participants here are people I deeply admire, and it is their voices above all that I hope can be heard in the conversations about the importance of Indigenous creativity. I am grateful for the friendship and guidance of my committee members David, Emily, Tori, Peter, and Joe. Each of you has helped me find harmony in the work, despite the chaos. I am a lucky person to have family who challenges my thinking, encourages me to take risks where I might have been more hesitant, and walked with me when the trail got tough. Yakokehoke Danika, Kyle, Mitch, James, Alice, Vickie, Alicia, and Pasha – my essential team in this life. And to Brian, who adventured with me all along the way.

This literature review is much more to me than quotes and ideas I want my work to be in conversation with. Many of the brilliant researchers and community leaders cited here are my inspirations to keep going and contribute where I can. I have walked through many doors opened by those who came before me, and have left my little pebble that I hope will help build bridges we need.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of “Native TikTok” in 2018 and the almost 30-year history of the Cyber Pow Wow website are two examples of digital worlds rich with stories of the strength of Indigenous cultures, ingenuity, knowledge sharing, and the ongoing challenges users face on and offline. These visually driven media platforms are contested ground with a long trail of crumbs leading from early contact to today.

Visual media have promoted conquest of the Americas. Engravings, staged photography, paintings, and film/TV all reinforce settler colonization by casting Indigenous people as savages (e.g. Gaudio, 2008), and casting Indigenous womxn in stereotypical roles: Queen, Princess, and Squaw, to name a few (Green, 1975). Conquest requires eliminating and replacing their actual voices with rhetoric of settler-colonial myths of discovery, racial superiority and divine right to land, resources, and people (Wolfe, 2006). Even the term “settler” sounds innocuous and belies the malicious methods employed in displacing Indigenous peoples from our lands.

The territory of the internet is also fertile ground for myth making and has amplified misperceptions. It provides a ready archive of documents supporting settler-colonial myths, even as the digital world promises advantages in connecting a diasporic and transnational Indigenous population. It also holds promise for documenting colonization, genocide, and attempted erasure of Indigenous existence. To the point, the internet is not *terra nullius*, designed with benign logics that only serve as a tool for creativity and open discourses on important topics.

These serious issues are also not simply a matter for academic discussion – stereotyping myths lay the foundation for U.S. Indian law and policy, which in turn, inform a legal system that has failed to provide adequate services and protections for Indigenous peoples (Bubar & Thurman, 2004; Lucchesi &

Echo-Hawk, 2018). Criminal justice and Tribal data point to a long history of violence against Indigenous womxn, which is brutally high in the United States and Canada (Bubar & Thurman, 2004; Rosay, 2016; Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018; National Inquiry, 2019; Heidinger, 2022). According to a U.S. report (Rosay, 2016) 84.3% of American Indian and Alaska Native women have experienced some form of violence in their lifetime, including sexual violence and stalking. In Canada, 64% First Nations and 64% of Métis women have experienced violent victimization in their lifetime (Heidinger, 2022). These statistics point to not only an undeniable crisis for Indigenous communities, urban and rural, but also a crisis in lack of consistent and comprehensive data to accurately track gendered violence.

The process of erasing Indigenous voices, erases and continues to silence those voices when talking about violence. Data show that more than 90% of the perpetrators of violence against Native womxn are non-Native men, which is unique in the larger picture of violence against womxn, and is a large contributing factor to the lack of prosecution (Rosay, 2016). Nowhere is this lapse in justice more evident than in the serious disparities during the COVID-19 crisis, where chronic underfunding and inconsistent policy support of health and human services (Joseph et al., 2017) undercut ongoing responses to the pandemic for Native Americans. Early data indicated high infection and mortality rates (Arrazola et al., 2020), and most central to the current study, increases in interpersonal violence (Nix & Richards, 2021; Evans, 2020), which affect Indigenous womxn, whether they live in rural or urban settings (Bubar & Thurman, 2004), and whether they are off or online (e.g. Bailey & Shayan, 2016; Brown et al., 2021).

Despite the harmful influences of stereotyping and inaccurate media representation, Indigenous womxn have often expressed their strength and resilience through art. A key area of inquiry is the way artists are bringing awareness to the violence and disrupting the settler-colonial construction of who they are. Using Indigenous aesthetics and storyworks, this study explores how these expressions challenge dominating non-Indigenous visual and media representations of Indigenous persons; and in

the digital age, how sharing these expressions online is testimony to the unique voices of Indigenous womxn's leadership in a time of great turmoil. Their art is not merely in response to crises, but is part of the legacy of ancient communication strategies, artistic discourses, and innovative cultural production, which contemporary Indigenous artists claim and reclaim through their continued work. In the same way, the necessity to move social interactions online during the worst of the pandemic did not solely define the relationship between Indigenous artists, their audiences, and digital technologies. It is in this long-standing discursive space where the current research both recognizes the practicalities and urgencies of the times, and further seeks to uplift the cultural strengths and leadership of Indigenous womxn artists that bridge past, present and future.

Research Goals

This study explores how Indigenous womxn artists use digital spaces to open dialogue, tell stories through art, and lift up and memorialize those who have been impacted by violence. The hope is to articulate how visual media both perpetuate and challenge the projects of colonization, and their historical patterns of violence against Indigenous womxn. This research also seeks to add to the growing digital media scholarship in conversation with community practice. And finally, it considers how Indigenous womxn's actions inform a larger body of art activism. To examine these questions, the study used in-depth interviews with Indigenous womxn artists in video game development, graphic arts, painting, fashion design, and other visual arts, with storytelling in mind. Additionally, using Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis through qualitative visual and discursive texts, this study looked at several social networking site (SNS) posts that engage the issues of violence against Indigenous people created by Indigenous womxn artists with roots in the United States, Canada, and Mexico.

The goal is to better understand three levels of phenomena. First, creating art and posting it on SNS has the potential to disrupt existing narratives, and in this case, the stereotyping discourse around Indigenous people, especially womxn and girls – namely as sexual objects and as technophobes. And

secondly, by examining these posts and talking with those who create the art and SNS messages, identify underlying discourses that arise from dominating cultures reflected in both content and structure of SNSs. Finally, by interrogating online spaces from the points of view of Indigenous womxn artists, this study explores how interaction in these spaces moves the discourse across colonizing constructs, reclaims space, and reveals bridges along which social movements and online communication can be effective in social justice work.

Potential Impact

The results of this work could be used, alongside other current scholarship and praxis, by community-based and Native-serving organizations to help develop social messaging campaigns, work with artists, and create messages that can be used to secure funding, enhance partnerships, and mobilize support for their programs. Further, indigenizing digital spaces has helped Native nation building, which is a central aspect of cultural continuance and self-determination. My hope is that further work in this area can help extend my own commitment to reciprocity with the communities and individuals impacted by violence.

Because Indigenous peoples are perceived as an insignificant percentage of the U.S., Canadian and Mexican population, our voices often go unheard and unheeded. But the artwork is always in demand. By understanding the power of these artistic expressions, the issue of violence against Indigenous people may be brought to broader audiences and addressed. And in so doing, support the work of Indigenous womxn in the larger ongoing efforts to create positive change in the world.

CHAPTER 2. RESEARCH CONTEXT

This section highlights the background context in which this research takes place. Some language is specialized, and in an interdisciplinary work, I think it is important to clarify my position toward the work, terminology, emerging research practices, and a specific historical and cultural context.

Discursive Delineations

This work calls in terminology from several disciplines and exists in contemporary discursive spaces outside formal scholarship. Many voices from different periods of history enter and exit the full conversation in this research, so this section delineates the discursive geographies implied in terminology used throughout this paper.

I use the terms Native/Native American, American Indian/Alaska Native, First Nations, Métis and Inuit, and specific names as needed. The term Indigenous is limited here to groups in the North America, Pacifica, and Australia to focus on the identities and scholarship that come from these regions. However, the interview population and social media settings are specifically in the United States and Canada. I bounded the study in this way to talk about common impacts from particular projects of Western European capitalistic patriarchal (WECP) settler-colonization. Some of these projects occur more narrowly within the United States and others occur as “American” or in the “Western Hemisphere.”

To reflect Indigenous understanding of gender I use the term womxn more generally, and specific terms of self-identity (e.g. two-spirit, femme, butch, *nádleehí*, they/them, etc.) as expressed by individuals included in this discussion. This issue is really central to the understanding of the way WECP genocide erases and silences Indigenous ways of knowing and being gendered. Using the English language in this paper is a limitation I have tried to navigate by using inclusive language and providing

criticism of where the language breaks down. Hashtags by nature, for instance, are meant to be specific and widely shareable. But hashtags that become widely used may not fully encompass Indigenous ways of knowing and being, especially with regards to gender. I offer my apologies to those impacted by the erasures of language. I also acknowledge that such attempts at language do not always serve the daily needs or aspirations of Indigenous communities. And so, in that way, this work is limited by its scholarly nature.

The international and intercultural nature of internet hashtags, like #MMIW (missing and murdered Indigenous women), is also expressed in variants that include the many who are affected by violence against, for example: #MMIR (missing and murdered Indigenous relatives), #MMIWG2ST (missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, two spirit and transgender people).

Indigenous Feminisms/Indigeneity

“Indigenous feminisms” as theorized by writers, lawyers, artists, and scholars offer an important perspective built on ancient ways of thinking within matriarchal, matrilineal and gender-balanced patriarchal systems. These perspectives are not often included in generalized feminist discourses (or in academic circles until recently) because they are built on pre-existing systems outside WECP. The goals of generalized feminist movements, in contrast, have been focused primarily on gaining equal status with white males rather than protecting and asserting birthrights of leadership, power and valorization found in Indigenous systems (Pesantubbee, 2005; Anderson, 2000). Some Indigenous feminist and matriarchal thought leaders argue that white feminism plays a part in bolstering the institutions of white male patriarchies because white womxn also benefit from such structures (Anderson, 2000; Goeman, & Denetdale, 2009).

A growing number of Indigenous scholars argue against using the term feminist at all when talking about Indigenous frameworks and systems. These systems often include patriarchies as well as matriarchies, and do not typically include gender-based oppression in the same way that WECP do.

Indigenous frames can be inclusive of multiple gender identities and not exclusive. Indigenous frames are often referred to as a matriarchal view and not feminist because they are based in ancestral community recognition of womxn’s leadership and ways of knowing and being, and their kinship to others inside and outside their communities. One major difference from white feminisms is gender role construction that does not imply hierarchy of genders; its logics do not seek to erase gendered roles from any concept of equality and equity (Anderson, 2000; Goeman, & Denetdale, 2009). From conception to discussion, this study centers Indigenous experience from the points of view of womxn from a wide range of gender identifications, and their relationship to community.

Indigenous Approaches to Research

A holistic worldview is the hallmark of Indigenous approaches and informs the arguments presented here. Indigenous aesthetics affords an interdisciplinary discourse, and relies on decolonization of language, choice of literature, methodologies, and analysis of data. This is especially important when re-examining the tenants of media communication literature and approaches. Tuck and Yang (2012), and Waziyatawin and Yellow Bird (2012) define Indigenous decolonization across disciplines. Their work calls for decentering non-Indigenous and dominating discourses beginning with the basic terminology of engaging history. Tuck and Yang (2012) focus on seeing action beyond rhetoric. “Decolonization brings about the repatriation of Indigenous land and life; it is not a metaphor for other things we want to do to improve our societies and schools” (p. 1). Intent is not enough. Holding scholars and practitioners accountable avoids what Tuck and Yang term “settler moves to innocence,” which further entrench colonizing and genocidal systems. Those who once were Indigenous or enslaved peoples in past systems may also support colonizer sidesteps.

This work makes moves to decolonize the frameworks of digital spaces, which were not created for or by Indigenous peoples. And yet, Indigenous internet scholar Marisa Duarte (2017) notes, “while SNS are far from being egalitarian participatory democratic spaces for Indigenous peoples, they offer a

compelling set of communicative affordances” (p. 1). While Indigenous social activists may find an outlet for their necessary communication, the digital world is also rife with threats to self-determination for Indigenous peoples (Two Horses, 1998). Cultural appropriation, copyright violation, identity/ethnic fraud, harassment, and doxing are all forms of WECP opportunism and oppression expressed online, especially against womxn (National Inquiry, 2019). In addition to talking about the creative process, this research asked Indigenous womxn artists to share their strategies and concerns for successfully navigating these sometimes-treacherous waters, and the ways in which they hope to create safe spaces for important communication about violence, community values and culture-based systems of justice, bridging on and offline worlds.

Despite the wide diversity of Indigenous populations, there are approaches that act as a foundation for research across many disciplines, which are well-established in the academic and community praxis literature. The three primary sources informing this study’s Indigenous-centered research practices are Margaret Kovach’s (2009) “Indigenous Methodologies,” Shawn Wilson’s (2008) “Research is Ceremony,” and Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s (2008) “Decolonizing Methodologies.” Each of these use several case studies to illustrate how cultural ideologies of specific Indigenous communities can speak to the broader needs of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers in shifting the paradigms from so-called objective, positivist, essentialist frameworks to more accurate and restorative visions of research methods. This is not a new project of Indigeneity. Our own stories tell us the history of colonization, “what it means, what it feels like, to be present while your history is erased before your eyes, dismissed as irrelevant, ignored or rendered as the lunatic ravings of drunken old people” (Smith, 2008, p. 29).

The shifts are no small task as most forms of researching Indigenous issues and people are built on what Smith (2008) calls Western constructions of “who is worth saving, who is still innocent and free from Western contamination” (p. 74). Her analysis cuts deeply into the assumptions of biological

essentialism in which racial othering is justified through positivist research aimed at creating racial determinism. The idea that Indigenous people are somehow purer in a moral sense places them in the past, preserved in a historical metaphor of Eden-like innocence:

At the heart of such a view of authenticity is a belief that Indigenous cultures cannot change, cannot recreate themselves and still claim to be Indigenous. Nor can they be complicated, internally diverse or contradictory. Only the West has that privilege. (Smith, 2008, p. 74)

The result of such epistemologies is what Smith refers to as a Foucauldian disciplining of colonized bodies through “exclusion, marginalization and denial,” resulting in Indigenous ways of knowing and, in fact, being, pushed to the margins or ignored all together (p. 68). To counteract this heavy-laden and woefully incomplete vision of humanity and legitimacy, Smith (2008), Kovach (2009), and Wilson (2008) draw from the many strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing and being to create a more holistic, dynamic foundation for research that comes from Indigenous values: respect, reciprocity, relevance, relationality, reverence, resilience, retraditionalization, reflection, and revolution – the R’s of Indigenous/Indigenist research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991; Weber-Pillwax, 1999; Kovach, 2009; Archibald, 2008; Walters et al., 2009). Wilson (2008) deconstructs and re-envision the process as ceremony that takes into consideration the relationship between what the researcher brings with them, the worldview underlying the goals, and the community context of the individuals who participate. Wilson (2008) argues that to move through Indigenous research requires putting aside positivist language of “research methods” and adopting the framework of “strategies of inquiry” (Denzin & Lincoln, 2012). Indigenous strategies require deep listening, cultural humility, self-reflexivity, and a way of moving through the process with a sense of curiosity.

Kovach (2009) also indicates from her Plains Cree worldview that objectivity is inadequate for expressing these values, so the emphasis of research writ large can include consideration of cultural protocol, story, interpretation, and experience lived within a specific geological location and time, as well as the human landscape of kinship systems.

I also consider the ways in which Indigenous experience is not simply descriptions of the past and present, but how those experiences simultaneously include consideration of the future. Indigenous approaches are very compatible with Brock's (2018, 2020) Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis framework as they include cultural context/ideologies, and relationship with technology and practices. CTDA adds a digital dimension to analysis of how Indigenous visions of past, present, and future are in constant conversation with one another, and away from the framework of "traditional" versus "contemporary" distinctions in art and media. Indigenous cultural ideologies also pull the narrative away from the frozen images of Indigenous peoples as only existing in the past, or in an impoverished present devoid of agency and creativity, especially in discourses concerning art (Meredith, 2021; Mithlo, 2020).

For my analysis, I draw upon the many visions of R's of Indigenous research to help center Indigenous ways of knowing and being. I come to this as an observer/listener, outsider/insider, and my life experiences as a Chahta womxn of a diasporic community, who continues to develop and embody her own sense of Indigeneity.

Transnational Identity & Digital Diasporas in the Age of COVID-19

One of the cultural aspects (and ironic points) of this analysis is the idea of a diaspora within, and not completely outside of the physical homelands as other communities have experienced (e.g. Tibet and Afghanistan in Brinkerhoff, 2009; African diasporas in Everett, 2009). Relationship with land and specific place/space is foundational to Indigenous languages, and ways of knowing and being, even online.

Ramirez (2007b) argues that Indigenous identities and lived experiences encompass not only Western European and U.S. constructs of race and race relations, but also the more Indigenous-centered understanding of nationhood, Tribal sovereignty, and transnational experiences. To be removed from their Tribal lands does not necessarily erase connection to community and identity. Despite constant interaction with U.S. institutions, Ramirez (2007b) says, Indigenous individuals do not

“progressively lose a sense of their tribal identity and become closer to ethnics or other minorities” (p. 14-15). Further, the sovereignty of Tribes to use longstanding cultural methods of recognizing members of their own communities implies that transnational identity can be maintained outside of U.S. systems of race by blood quantum, or enrollment in any state or federally recognized Tribe.

These stories of removal and leaving home are common but not universal. There remains a contentious idea of homeland and new homeland that is often marked by hopes, regret, pain, identity confusion, and creative community building, which are similar to the digital diasporic experiences described by Brinkerhoff (2009), Everett (2009), and Mallapragada (2014). Transnational experiences set the foundation for the creation of virtual homelands and communication in the digital realm. Duarte (2017) invokes the possibilities of digital life to “provide spaces for collectively imagining alternative social and political visions, naming social phenomena, processing tragedy and trauma, and correlating personal experiences to social and political forces” (p. 2). This is especially so when pandemic requirements of physical distancing and quarantining severely limited travel and many typical in-person gatherings for cultural practice in 2020-2022. The pandemic is one among many disruptions of lifeways Indigenous peoples have experienced. Social networking sites (SNS) have provided a necessary and ultimately creative space for building kinship ties with others who have been similarly isolated.

Art-Story as Framework

Art-Story (Folsom, 2018, Figure 1) is storytelling that arises from embedded meanings in works of art, and lives in specific cultural contexts through social interaction. It is a framework in which Indigenous worldviews can inform an understanding of cultural appropriation, and hegemonic myth-making that promotes commodification and corporate influences of the visual arts. It recognizes that art is a vital part of culture (Williams, 1965/1995; ahtone, 2009; Farrell Racette, 2011; Mithlo 2011) and exists at multiple levels that broaden the scope of what may be considered “authentic” art (ahtone, 2009). Williams (1965/1995) says culture exists as a lived experience of a time and place; a record of a

certain period; and selective tradition that connects present with past. This is certainly true of art-stories as manifested in many modes, such as sustainability and transcendency (Figure 2).

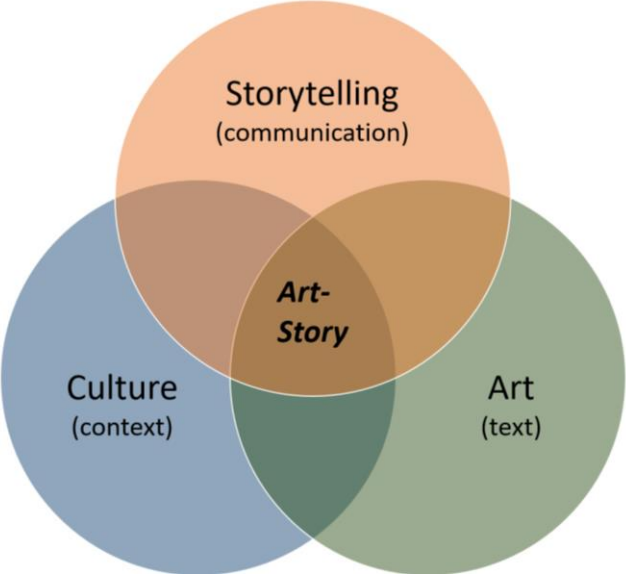


Figure 1.

Art-Story Model (Folsom, 2018)

Note: Art-Story has three components of text, context, and communication. It is storytelling that arises from embedded meanings in works of art, and lives in specific cultural contexts through social interaction (Folsom, 2018).

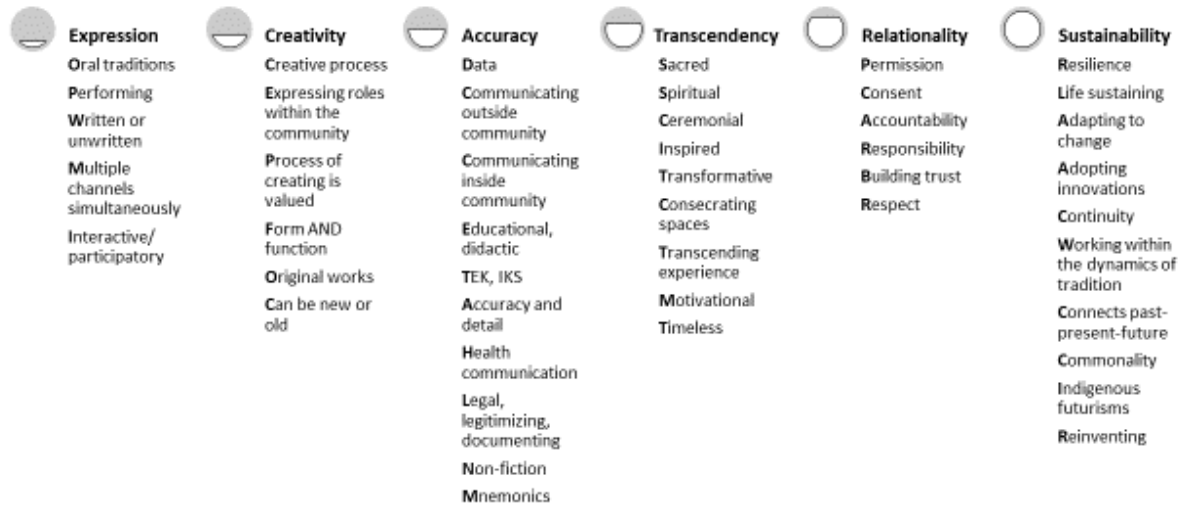


Figure 2.

Examples of Modes of Art-Story (Folsom, 2018)

Note: Each of the modes of art-story are ways it can be expressed.

Stuart Hall (1980/1995) argues art and culture should be considered as “relationships between elements in a whole way of life” (p. 338). However, culture is not simply practice, nor is it descriptions, but is rather “the sum of their inter-relationships” (p. 338). Art scholar and curator heather ahtone (Chickasaw Nation, Choctaw Nation) talks about inter-relationship built through metaphor and metaphoric thinking that is deeply embedded in Indigenous art. Metaphoric characters, such as tricksters, exist in narratives, and “through their representation they are actively incorporated into the vitality of timeless culture through the arts and storytelling” (ahtone, 2009, p. 380). Splitting up this inter-relationship of cultural context, art and the storytelling that are so central to the reproduction of Indigenous cultures is damaging.

Disregard cultural context, and the void is a slate for assumptions about “primitive” and “underdeveloped” cultures. Cultural appropriation, for instance, often uses decontextualized symbols. Taking a “pretty” beadwork design and changing its colors can remove important data, such as the type

of flower, the season, the family tradition, and gendered aspects of the piece that require an understanding of a specific culture to be legible. Such images, even with a story behind it, can become a stand-in for any culture, in the way that some Plains art has become a stereotypical representation of all “Indianness.” Remove storytelling from the discourse, and designs become a simple visual commodity that can be reproduced and removed from community use. The information that goes with it may include instructions on how to use the knowledge, a treaty, an origin story, or other meaningful story data that goes beyond the visual appeal and a Tribal connection. Remove art from consideration and erase its relationship to oral traditions, leaving popular notions of storytelling as entertainment, rather than conveyance of important information across generations. Art is a central form of media technology as hypertext (Haas, 2007) and durable archive. One inspiration for the art-story model was Australian Aboriginal rock art. These images are not drawings on their own, nor just any rock art, but a whole system in which specific Aboriginal cultural teachings are encoded and decoded, remembered, and shared through oral storytelling. Implied here is that art-storymaking is a creative field of media technology that promotes Indigenous intergenerational cultural production and survivance.

Inspired by stories that have been shared with me since childhood, and connecting with historical and contemporary works by Choctaw writers Michelene Pesantubbee and Leanne Howe, I reformulated the visual model of art-story (Figure 3) to show the interaction of the chaos of settler-colonization and western frames of art, storytelling, and culture siloed into separate disciplines (L), with the processes of decolonization and cultural production of Indigenous aesthetics (R). The double-coiled design is very common in Choctaw culture – primarily on clothing and beadwork - and among several interpretations, is the story of a journey, a good road or hina hanta, a bright path. Also relevant to the story is its association with the uncoiling and recoiling of a serpent shedding its skin, renewing itself and life. With the many versions of this art-story, the symbol also represents my path as a researcher, and the Indigenous womxn artist’s way of pulling meaning from the chaos to build a bridge, a pathway from chaos to harmony and wholeness.

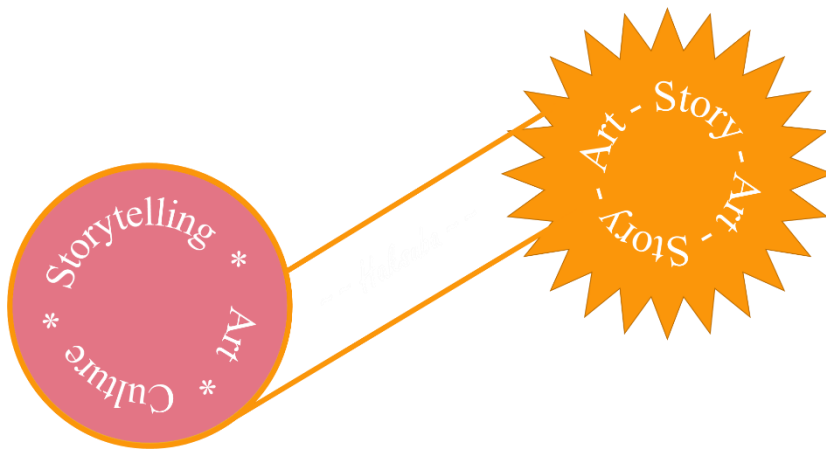


Figure 3.

Art-Story Model as Choctaw Storytelling (Folsom, 2018)

Note: A visual of the art-story model shows the dynamic interaction of the chaos and fractured vision of art, storytelling, and culture from settler-colonizing discourses on one end, (L), bridged to a harmonious balance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being (R). It is a Choctaw art-story, representing the uncoiling and recoiling of serpents as they shed their skin and renew life.

Art-Story is an Indigenous-centered aesthetic that reveals the role of Indigenous artwork: 1) used to express individual identity within a complex socio-cultural community of social networking sites; 2) affirmed to serve as didactic materials and mnemonic references to cultural ways of knowing and being; and 3) instrumental for intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge via digital art-storytelling.

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis

CTDA is a compatible approach for inquiries that look beyond the nominal and help make very different assumptions about how culture and technology, as with other socio-psychological fields, interact. This study assumes an interrelatedness of on and offline experiences in keeping the CTDA's goal to "interrogate their material and semiotic complexities, framed by the extant offline cultural and social practices its users engage in as they use these digital artifacts" (Brock, 2018, n.p.) Brock (2020) distinguishes between Black culture online and Black cyberculture. This study aims to articulate a similar hermeneutic frame in which to not only understand how the Art-Story model, with its interrelated understanding of technology, communication and culture, shows up online, but speak to a unique Indigenous technocultural discourse grounded in the experiences of Indigenous artists. CTDA is a useful approach to bringing in Indigenous media communication as, "culture-*as*-technology and culture-*of*-technology" (Brock, 2020, p. 8, emphasis his). In order to move the conversation into an Indigenous specificity based in culture, this work is predicated on the idea that the digital medium of social networking sites is not only a location, but is the enactment of the relationship between Indigenous and settler-colonization, and as with Brock (2020), does not "leave behind" Indigenous bodies.

Also of note for this study is the way in which the digital world can offer more representations of Indigenous people than legacy media like television and films (Mitten, 2007; Kopacz & Lee Lawton, 2011). This may work in favor of current Indigenous artists to create their own content and distribute it online and in digital forms. Rather than broadcasting stereotyping images through one-way media like

television, community-building media like Facebook and Instagram afford marginalized voices the ability to reach and interact with audiences that would not otherwise experience diverse perspectives in ways Castells (2015) proposed. Although not completely autonomous in the way Castells (2015) theorized, Indigenous networks do build community in occupied spaces that are “charged with symbolic power” of WECP hegemony, and where “transformative practice” on and offline is established in part by cultural production. Not only have many of the opportunities presented by the internet realized for Indigenous people, but this study explores the gains, successes, and challenges of asserting Indigenous identities in digital spaces, where important conversations about violence and colonization/decolonization take place. And, where cultural communities are nurtured and sustained.

Research Questions

This study is based on three claims. First is that the art-story can help bring Indigenous aesthetics in conversation with media communication scholarship to interrogate the visual discourse of stereotypes and myth-making that justifies violence against Indigenous womxn. Secondly, that Indigenous aesthetics are an important influence in both online and offline life, especially in reclaiming rhetorical spaces and strengthening Indigenous identities. And finally, that Indigenous womxn artists are key message creators, whose work is rich in culture, advocacy, and influence. Specifically, this study will explore these claims by asking:

Research Question 1: How do the social networking practices of artists reveal underlying settler-colonial discourses concerning the historic pattern of violence against Indigenous people?

Research Question 2: How do Indigenous womxn shift the narratives around violence against Indigenous people through art and social networking sites?

Research Question 3: How might these social justice activities speak to other similar movements that hope to subvert dominant discourses and their harmful effects?

Although this research makes many moves to bring the past in conversation with the present, the goal is to call in visions of the future, relying on the lens of today’s Indigenous womxn artists to

clarify and articulate what lies ahead and what is already going on in communities. Rather than clinging solely to past and present understanding of how violence interrupts such visions, I hope to help widen the bridge created by generations of Indigenous womxn to continue the legacy of change for future generations.

CHAPTER 3. LITERATURE REVIEW

The areas of literature I cover are interdisciplinary, drawing from legacy mass media scholarship, critical cultural theories, art history, as well as discourses from Indigenous feminism, aesthetics, and futurisms. This approach to media analysis can reveal aspects of lived realities that may move the conversation about violence against Indigenous people and their communities forward through the power of artistic endeavors, kinship building and careful consideration of the place of digital technologies in Indigenous justice movements. By asserting a distinct worldview, Indigenous womxn artists across the world call in cultural resources centered in their roles in the community, elders and others who have been marginalized by settler-colonization. Also part of the cultural resources is the concept of kinship – the idea that approaches to research, aesthetics and technocultural discourse are all rooted in relationship building. ahtone (2009) notes, “The use of relationships is a part of the coded language embedded in all aspects of Indigenous American culture” (p. 376).

In the spirit of reframing and understanding “personal manifestations of culture” (Kovach, 2009), this study features popular culture voices and spaces, such as social media videos, comic books, and video games, in addition to the academic literature, because that is where significant conversations and analyses happen on the topics covered here.

Art as Media Communication

Indigenous art historians have placed the inter-relationships of art and ways of life in not only specific cultural contexts of Tribe and style, but also in relationship with specific experiences, geographies and “philosophical dimensions, encompassing and superseding Western categories that privilege chronological, regional, and decorative attributes alone” (Mithlo, 2020, p. 49).

Bourdieu (1984) places art as one method of cultural production of class, particularly for the distinction between those who have cultural capital through birthright (the elite), and those who acquire cultural capital through education, or in this case education through cultural reproduction. These differences in cultural capital are expressed through taste in art. I argue Indigenous people are the rightful arbiters of taste when it comes to the meaning and value of their own works of art in its many forms. Although, part of the process of genocide has been to undermine and erase this authority, replacing it with settler-colonial myth and its valuation systems.

Arbiters of Taste

Bourdieu (1984) defined the arbiters of taste as those who are consulted first to decide what belongs, or what is worthy. Taste as defined limits the ability of even the artist to control how, when and where their works may be used. It also limits what is acceptable media and what is not. Indigenous works of art, literature, science, and technology have often been dismissed from the western canons of the arts with terms like “primitive” and “craft.”

One problematic location of cultural arbitration is museums. Farrell Racette (2009) notes most museums set up a Euro-centric narrative through categorizing and displaying “curiosities” of the world’s peoples, removed completely from their original context:

[The] persistent colonial legacy of museums [is] the organization and arrangement of natural and cultural materials that engage the observer in the wonders of the world, while simultaneously constructing a trajectory of development that classifies human societies along a continuum that ranges from the primitive to the civilized. (p. 284)

Mithlo (2020) describes a similar harmful path of normalization of violent control of Indigenous peoples and lands through WECP visual arts. The justification for conquest is not only argued through non-Indigenous art, but also by privileging and neutralizing Indigenous art in formal analysis. The Fort Marion American Indian ledger drawings, for example, have most often been addressed for their aesthetic qualities and value. But, Mithlo says, “This scholarship has always bothered me for its

antiseptic approach to “what is essentially evidence of war crimes” (p. 54). However, if, as Mithlo suggests, the role of arbiter is filled by Indigenous artists and historians, we can see more fully the value, impact, meaning and vision of pieces that have been languishing in museums and galleries.

Further, we are able to see the complexities of how cultural ways of being and knowing have been supported by innovation and creativeness of Indigenous artists. Indigenous creativity is its own pursuit and not only does not have to reference cultural knowledge, it does not have to be in reaction to other forms of art, or make gestures of disruption.

Disputed Ideas of Aura in the Digital Age

Benjamin (1935) situates art in the realm of mass media and how art interacts with the technological advances of mass production. He, like Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) believe there may be something lost by having art as part of mass media, even as he argues for the potential for mass media and revolution. Instead of defining an idealized value, place, or vision of art separate from history, Benjamin broadens the idea of what can be considered art, and how its unique place in its creation gives it a special quality – “aura” – that can become both problematic in the replication process, particularly mechanical reproduction, and the potential value in losing aura. He asserts, “the uniqueness of a work of art is inseparable from its being embedded in the fabric of tradition” (1935, p. 19).

While many Indigenous peoples recognize the uniqueness of an artwork lies within the original creation, some cultures extend “aura” to reproductions. These copies carry the essence, the life, and the power of the original with them to the next person who interacts with the piece (e.g. Brown, 2008), and is an exemplification of art-story. In a 2012 study of Canadian First Nations and Māori concerns about sharing cultural property in digital form, Brown and Nicholas noted copies and originals “are equally powerful, sacred, or otherwise instilled with vital values and thus require appropriate care and protection.” Even the concept of artwork can be vastly different from WECP frames, as individuals and

communities may both be related to creative works in a way that complicates easy definitions of property and material goods. They say:

For many indigenous peoples, for example, there may be little or no difference between cultural property (i.e. things) and intellectual property (i.e. ideas or knowledge) and thus no separation between intangible and tangible aspects of cultural heritage, nor, indeed, between past and present. (p. 309)

Brown and Nicholas (2012) also found that digitizing both extends existing cultural context - systems of carrying and disseminating cultural knowledge - and requires a different approach to protecting that knowledge from theft, and inappropriate commodification and use. This threat to culture – “the infinite simulacra” as Brown and Nicholas describe it – perpetuates settler-colonization, even as it presents the promise of helping promote its healthy and intended sharing.

Hegemonic Mythmaking & Stereotypes

Gramsci (1971/2006) argues that art is one of the places of the “struggle for meaning” (p. 13) between the subaltern and dominant discourses. Barthes (1972) describes the way in which myths are built to serve the purposes of cultural, racial and/or national projects, like museums. His book *Mythology* presents some interesting interpretations of hegemonic myths, which are stories constructed through media arts encoded with justifications for imperialism and the progress made possible by capitalism, for example. Barthes says the myth, as speech, is built for the person who wants a world where they are “at once the god, the master and the owner” (1972, p. 67).

The technological and cultural context of the internet is a highly influential location for production and reproduction of hegemonic ideologies. Schiller (1989) argues cultural control involves the willful destruction of the public realm of creativity, which raises some important questions about Indigenous creativity and cultural production in the context of the digital world.

The concept of media as ecology posits that media behave like living systems, but early on was conceived of as a way to articulate media interacting with media. Media ecology scholar and critic Neil

Postman (2000) places human experience in relation to media technology and production as a literal space, where we can see how culture is formed and maintains “symbolic balance.” He asserted that media is not morally or ethically neutral, but that context of human experience is profoundly intertwined in relationship to media. Included in this are ethical and moral questions of the potential impacts to humans. Canadian Mohawk and Jewish scholar Steven Loft (2014) further argues that for Indigenous peoples, the concept of media ecology is founded in “the epistemologies, histories, traditions, communication systems, art and culture of the Aboriginal people of Turtle Island” (p. xvi). This ecosystem is a dynamic inter-relationship of socio-political, technological, environmental, aesthetic, and intellectual systems – Indigenous ways of knowing and being. Art is a vivid framework in which to express and understand this ecosystem and its impacts on human experience.

Most settler-colonial logics are built on the central tenets of capitalism: commodification, mass production, and reductionism. These values could not be further from Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and have characterized the chaos-inducing irrationality of settler-colonialism in the Americas. Marcuse (1964) says, “The more blatantly irrational the society becomes, the greater the rationality of the artistic universe” (p. 239). He argues for the power of art to transform the world by projecting existence as a mirror for society’s self-reflection. And “Rather than being the handmaiden of the established apparatus, beautifying its business and its misery, art would become a technique for destroying this business and this misery” (p. 239).

Hegemonic myths persist, especially into the digital age, and often insist on erasing and replacing Indigenous existence. Baudrillard (1981) argues visual arts can become a way hegemonic factions (in this case, settler-colonizers) simulate subaltern cultures first through pretend. As an example, the construction of stereotypical “Indianness” collapses the great diversity of Indigenous peoples, and is done through cultural appropriation (feathers, buckskin, tomahawks, and art motifs). These are then used to simulate “Indians” (Eagle Scouts, non-Native pow wows, artists claiming vague

Native heritage, etc.), and finally, replacing their own myths and narratives for actual Native existence (Bird, 1996; Deloria, 1998). Baudrillard (1981) notes pretending “leaves the principle of reality intact: the difference is always clear, it is simply masked, whereas simulation threatens the difference between the ‘true’ and the ‘false,’ the ‘real and the ‘imaginary’” (n.p.). Pretending and simulation through the arts is a way to invalidate historical fact and undermine continuing Indigenous existence. In other words, art as a logic, a means to eliminate Indigenous realities (Wolfe, 2006). Further, stereotyping through media, in particular, asserts control over imagery, preserving settler-colonial discourses and undermining Indigenous control over their own imagery. De-centering WECP narrative control reveals the fruits of commodification disrupting cultural reproduction and is especially visible in digital spaces.

Stereotyping images present incomplete and inaccurate narratives that help elide the truth about settler-colonization through myth building (Barthes, 1972), invented traditions (Hobsbawm, 1983), and simulation and simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981). Through these myths, signifiers are stripped from their context of past, present, and future realities of Indigenous peoples. The signifiers then become a manifestation of settler-colonial imaginary, which makes “Indians” both hypervisible and invisible. Hall (2009), for instance, notes this double effect for Kanaka Maoli:

Hawaiian womxn have been made hypervisible, while still unseen, primarily through the sexualized marketing the ‘hula girl,’ whereby products such as dashboard hula dolls, coconut shell bras, and plastic grass skirts turn a cultural form with sacred, political, and sexual dimensions into a kitsch spectacle. (p. 17)

Stereotyping imagery also limits the understanding of Indigenous people as simply a matter of race relations, which in turn, is predicated on biological essentialism and determinism. The cultural and political formation of Native nations is lost in such discourses, and Tribal sovereignty of 570+ Native nations – for example, rhetorical (Lyons, 2000), visual (Raheja, 2010), temporal (Rifkin, 2017), food (e.g. Declaration of Nyéléni, 2007), and body (e.g. Cole, 2017) – is ignored in favor of superficial “pan-Indian” signifiers (braided hair, bows and arrows, and tipis). Davis-Delano, et al. (2021) found that many

common popular media, like television series and Wikipedia pages show both invisibility of actual Indigenous peoples and high visibility of stereotypes. This one-two punch of omission/commission (as theorized by Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2017) by non-Indigenous media producers has an additive effect of reinforcing settler-colonial control over imagery and reinforcing stereotypes for non-indigenous audiences.

Empirical research links stereotyping imagery, such as mascots and animated characters, and psychological effects. A set of five experimental studies (Fryberg & Oyserman, 2008; Fryberg, et al., 2008) examined the effects of stereotypical imagery on psychological well-being of Native versus white youth: self-esteem, regard for their own community, and visions of their future. The findings of Fryberg and Oyserman (2008) looked at stereotype exposure, and present some very troubling validation of claims to harm:

The current American Indian mascot representations function as inordinately powerful communicators, to natives and nonnatives alike, of how American Indians should look and behave. American Indian mascots thus remind American Indians of the limited ways in which others see them. (p. 209)

Further, Fryberg et al. (2008) looked at the effects of viewing stereotyping imagery, like mascot logos, on white youth. As Native student self-esteem scores and perception of their community went down after exposure to such images, white youth reported higher scores, compared to the control group. These effects were seen even with “neutral” or “positive” Native stereotypes. These studies show the direct interface between the so-called abstract and the embodied affect.

Stereotypes can also contribute to creating an unhealthy social setting for Native and non-Native people. Kraus et al. (2019) found non-Native people with less racially biased attitudes reported lower sense of belonging to a campus community when exposed to racist images on t-shirts, caps, and other common exposures to stereotyping imagery. Earlier findings from LaRocque et al. (2011) note a significant difference between Native and non-Native students and mascot exposure, with Native

students experiencing greater psychological distress. Covarrubias and Fryberg (2015) note that even in social settings of Tribal colleges, misrepresentations can adversely affect a sense of belongingness for Native students compared to their non-Native peers. Stereotyping imagery findings are consistent with cognitive theories: stereotype activation (Fiske & Taylor, 2013; Wheeler, et al., 2001), media framing (Scheufele & Scheufele, 2009; Shah, et al., 2009), and schema formation (Wicks, 1992; DiMaggio, 1997).

The current study is concerned with examining social settings online, where stereotyping imagery proliferates, causing concern and caution for participating in activities on sensitive and controversial topics, and where it concerns Indigenous womxn and girls.

Visual Mythmaking of Indigenous Womxnhood

Michael Gaudio's (2008) *Engraving the Savage* details the ways in which from the earliest encounters with Indigenous peoples of the islands and continental areas, the images of Indigenous womxn reflect not only the delight/horror of encountering new civilizations, but also the challenges to existing understanding of the place and very nature of womxnhood, as seen through the eyes of European men and the hierarchical gender systems of WECP. Gaudio (2008) notes visual discourse – primarily engravings – constructed stereotypes of Indigenous womxn, which became blueprints for relationships, formal and informal policies concerning the use of land and people. Gaudio says, “It was not a shared style or subject matter that defined these new classes of images, but a shared epistemological status and uninterpreted nature” (2008, p. xi). The creation of hegemonic WECP myths began in the visual imaginaries of early voyagers, but was popularized by illustrators who never actually crossed the Atlantic.

The rise of capitalist enterprises played a large part in the way in which images of womxn were used to sell America as a desirable location for business in the early colonial period. Gaudio (2008) describes the works of De Bry and other engravers as liaisons between European capitalists and the new set of resources that lay across the Atlantic. In some of DeBry's work, his portrayal of Virginia, for

instance, the Indigenous population is cast as “productive,” which inferred the land was productive. Throughout early visual media, Indigenous bodies, especially womxn, came to represent the land and all it appeared to offer for their purposes.

Many ideations and portrayals of Indigenous womxn fall into two basic types: the dark, violent, sexually aggressive womxn, who emerged in the initial accounts (e.g. Green, 1975; Gaudio, 2008; Hanawalt, 2011), and in stark contrast, the good, virtuous, and submissive womxn. They both came to symbolize the way settler-colonization genders land in the Americas. Green (1975) says, “Europeans easily adopted the Indian as the iconographic representative of the Americas. At first, Caribbean and Brazilian (Tupinamba) Indians, portrayed amidst exotic flora and fauna, stood for the New World’s promises and dangers” (p. 701). She was portrayed as an Amazonian Indian Queen: rich in detail with flora and fauna, feathers, jewelry, and often armed and riding over a slain enemy. Green (1975) says, “She was the familiar Mother-Goddess figure – full-bodied, powerful, nurturing but dangerous – embodying the opulence and peril of the New World... her large, naked body, attached her to Old World History as well as to New World virtue” (p. 702).

The other archetype – The Indian Princess – is variously portrayed as Pocahontas, beauty pageant winner, and Butter Princess¹. This symbolic woman represents the male desire for successful conquest through finding a fertile land, a place to hold fantasies of idyllic nature in its pure form. Both types gender womxn as heterosexual beings, who either vie for male control and power, or inevitably submit to male superiority. Both types also erase and replace Indigenous womxnhood as well as Indigenous maleness, “having been sexualized, gendered, and racialized as penetrable within colonial and imperial discourses” (Finley, 2011). The two archetypes have been played against each other in serving the projects of white male superiority. They also appear in many of the works of Indigenous

¹ “The Butter Princess” is the brand image found on packages of Land O’ Lakes’ products.

womxn as they have created their own rhetorical agency and creative spaces to challenge the long-standing representations.

Colonizing processes of sexualization, gender norming, and racialization necessitate integrating otherwise siloed theoretical disciplines. By centering an interdisciplinary lens, like art-story, such logics are exposed as ongoing violence against Indigenous peoples. Arvin, et al. (2013) argue:

This recognition... makes possible new visions of what decolonization might look like for all peoples. It also opens up the possibility of new forms of activism based on critically thought-out alliances, rather than always taking the shape of alliances within and between seemingly naturally formed and identifiable groups of people - namely, women and people of color - as given. (p. 9)

Further, Finley (2011) argues both Indigenous theory and queer theory can actively and critically engage with each other in order to challenge “heteronormative discourses of colonial violence directed at Native communities” (p. 33).

It also bears saying that none of these stereotyping images of Indigenous womxn imply a use of technology or innovative thinking. They are merely reflections of a WECP gaze, where womxn wield sexual and emotional influence, but not power of capital, rational thought, or self-determination.

The Ecological Indian

Computer technology scholars (e.g. Haraway, 1988; Everett, 2009; Mallapragada, 2014; Castells, 2015; Duarte, 2017) have demonstrated how technology is not neutral, and how spaces like the internet reflect the social/cultural systems in which they are developed and used. Stereotypes and myths develop around such interactions: White male nerds invented the internet as a place for free exchange of ideas; Asians are naturally adept at using computers. And for this discussion, an influential myth is The Ecological Indian – a variant of the noble savage trope that mythologizes Indigenous knowledge systems and the relationship with the natural world (Krech, 1999; Harkin & Lewis, 2007; Smithers, 2015). In addition to the arguments that romanticize pre-colonization societies or erase the body of Indigenous science knowledge, the myth of The Ecological Indian does not interrogate WECP concepts of

environmentalism, conservation and even the terms “nature” or “wilderness” (Harkin & Lewis, 2007; Gilio-Whitaker, 2019).

One of the implications of the narrow view of Indigenous people living in Eden-like purity, is how this image excludes technological innovations, adoption of technologies, and the vast diversity of Indigenous cultures. Duarte (2017) describes this as a colonial logic placing Indigenous peoples “as canaries in the cage of modernity [who] suffer the onslaught of neoliberal technologies, and therefore digital technologies are socially detrimental for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples” (p. 1). This frame is constructed through the colonial logics that place Indigeneity as a natural haven from the perceived ills of digital technology and justify settler-colonial intervention and preservation of this “salvo for the pathos, alienation, and uncertainty of a contemporary networked social order” (p. 1). It is at this juncture that Indigenous peoples have been perpetually historicized, romanticized or vanished from “modernizing” technology and the processes of science. This is especially true of the erasure of Indigenous womxn in WECP techno-logics. A false dichotomy, a stereotyping narrative, is created where Indigenous peoples either support science/technology or traditional (often read as “primitive”) ways of thinking and being.

Despite pre-conceived notions, Indigenous peoples are not necessarily techno-averse (Mitten, 2007; Gaston Anderson, 2003; Chambers et al., 2004; Ramirez, 2007a; Brooks et al., 2012; Rice et al., 2016). Mitten (2007) notes in her survey of Native American websites that Native people were early adopters of internet technologies, for instance, and were able to tell their own stories to much wider audiences than before around this “electronic fire” (Two Horses, 1998). Once graphic user interface (GUI) became widely available in 1994, Tribes, organizations, and individuals established websites to organize efforts, educate outsiders, market handmade and mass-produced items, etc. Indigenous language preservation/education sites developed special characters, incorporated interactive features like flashcards, and used audio/video clips of elders and teachers to enhance learning. Duarte (2017) has

described the ways social media discourses can strengthen community ties and facilitate social movements for marginalized groups, in that they both raise awareness of socio-political factors and provide a space to voice opposition and navigate complex realities informed by those factors.

Yet, the static view of Native people as anti-technology persists despite eons of technological innovation. News coverage of recent protests over building a second large telescope on the peaks of Mauna Kea in Hawai'i demonstrates The Ecological Indian construct in popular media (e.g. Lam, 2019; CBS News/Associated Press, 2019). "Science" is portrayed as one side in the debate, with Native Hawaiian belief systems on the opposite side. Smithers (2015) notes this common portrayal of Indigenous resistance to science and technology prevents nuanced understanding of the complexities of Indigenous environmental theory and practice, as well as ignoring issues of land and cultural sovereignty. Although cultural differences may impact adoption of new technology, for instance, the political and economic needs and aspirations of Tribes are also a major factor. Adopting "First World" technologies can be regarded as a "means of working toward decolonization" rather than simply a weapon wielded against Indigenous people's existence (Duarte, 2017). Indigenous womxn are at the forefront of this work.

Anishinaabeg scholar Grace Dillon (2016) developed the term "Indigenous Futurism" (IF), which she says is a continuing thought experiment that places us in a future time, similar to the concepts of Afrofuturism. The expression of a unique sense of space/time by Indigenous artists is explicated in Herr's (2020) dissertation, which centers Indigenous artist voices and links to theory-building through IF. Based on these premises, the questions of how Indigenous people and cultures will change, given that we did not disappear, have gained more traction with digital media, and have at the same time, created visions of ourselves that reflect our values and lived experiences, including womxn's birthright to power. In the past, settler-colonizer visions of "Indians" erased or predicted our demise. Indigenous futurisms accepts the idea that current popular culture and creative works (including art-stories) are descendants of

Indigenous media and communication technologies from ancestral times (Noori, 2010) and will be ancestors to whatever comes in the future. This includes art-stories, mapping technologies, data storage and sharing, legal and scientific data gathering and analysis, as well as entertainment and social media systems (Chambers et al., 2004; Haas, 2007; Noori, 2010; Herr, 2020).

In an interview with Indian Country Today (2021), Marlana Myles (Spirit Lake Dakota, Mohegan, Muskogee) relates her personal experience with internet technology that shows a continuity of cultural values through technology:

I think Native people have always been innovative whenever we get a new piece of technology, we find a way to tell our culture, our history through it. And so as a kid, my mom bought us a computer so that we would stay out of trouble. And I really got into coding and making my own art onto it as a teenager back before everybody had this kind of technology... So I was like, they're in the early days of the internet that I was creating, starting my digital art journey. (n.p.)

Arguments for Indigenous perspectives on digital technologies not only articulate impacts from strong engagement in digital life, but also shift the narrative of that participation from romantic ideologically driven frames to more Indigenous centered frames of decolonization and matriarchy.

Indigenous Feminine Aesthetics

While Indigenous aesthetics (IA) is a broad brushstroke, one of its central principles is that understanding artforms is best when grounded in specific cultures (e.g. Igloliorte, 2007; ahtone, 2012). Further, understanding Indigenous aesthetics requires great detail, rich contextual analysis, and respect for the protocols around knowledge sharing within and without individual communities (e.g. Farrell Racette, 2011; Wemigwans, 2018). IA recognizes that both self-reflection and self-determination are necessary to engage with Indigenous artforms appropriately and successfully.

Leuthold (1998) describes the way Indigenous aesthetics differs from Western ideas of art. Similar to the art-story model, he argues for an Indigenous understanding not founded upon a deficit model. He says:

Finding art in Indigenous aesthetics arises not from the absence of 'art' in Indigenous cultures, but from the narrowness of contemporary Western definitions of art. If one impoverishes the idea of art, of course it will be difficult to find art outside of one's own culture. (p. 46)

A thorough critique of Leuthold work appears in ahtone's (2009) thought piece that builds the foundation for a more finely articulated model of Indigenous aesthetics. She argues a stronger model moving forward is built on three major tenets of Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and the role of Indigenous artworks. Art objects are:

- 1) used to express individual artist and Native viewer identity within a complex socio-cultural community
- 2) affirmed to serve as didactic materials and mnemonic references to traditional cultural cosmology and values
- 3) instrumental in intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge (n.p.).

In a similar manner, the art-story model was built to articulate Indigenous aesthetics in a media communication context. It describes the interaction of audience, channel, culture, and technology.

An important and common aspect of Indigenous aesthetics is humor, which is rarely talked about in non-Native spaces. More recent films like "Neither Wolf nor Dog," mixed media creations of Shelly Niro, and Arigon Starr's comic series *Super Indian*, are just a few examples of the way Native artists express humor even for very serious topics like historical trauma and cultural theft (Figure 4). In *The Trickster Shift: Humour and Irony in Contemporary Native Art*, Canadian artist and scholar Allan J. Ryan (1999) notes how Native artists often create artworks with multiple layers of humor as well as truth telling embedded in them. He says the humor can be geared toward multiple audiences in a single piece, even if an iconic symbol of comedy like Coyote or Raven is not part of it. These multiple layers of meaning and engagement are a hallmark of Indigenous life and as a visual form of signifyin' language. Humor is also a successful strategy for claiming/reclaiming rhetorical space.

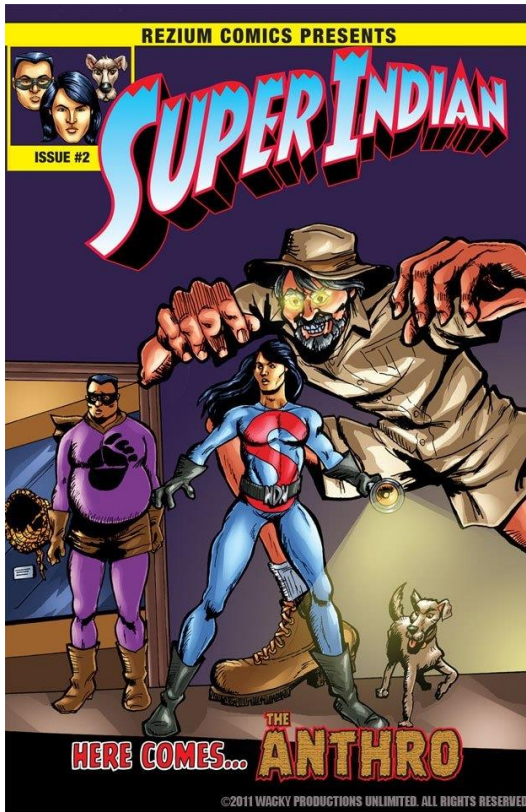


Figure 4.

Arigon Starr (2010). *Super Indian: Here Comes... the Anthro* [Comic book cover]

In 2019, collaborative traveling art exhibit “Hearts of Our People: Native Women Artists” (HOOP) created an opportunity for Indigenous feminine aesthetics to highlight works by womxn artists for artists, and inspired a model of community-engaged and kinship-centered curation. In her notes from HOOP’s exhibition catalog, “Making our world: Thoughts on Native feminine aesthetics,” ahtone (2019) deepens her previous model to formulate a circle of interrelated concepts: aesthetics, materials, reciprocity, metaphors, and symbols. Each concept is also based in building kinship in some way. For instance, relationality with ancestors and future generations through metaphor.

Indigenous artists, elders, community activists and knowledge keepers all co-create Indigenous aesthetics through theory building and interaction with art-stories. Further, it includes the ways of

knowing and being as a Native womxn. heather ahtone (2019) talks about art as a way to understand the place of Indigenous womxn in their communities coming from matriarchal systems. She says womxn contribute to and construct culture through their art. Their roles are valorized within matriarchal systems, and this more than anything demonstrates how settler-colonial disruption limits the way in which Native womxn are seen by outsiders. Womxn's roles in their communities show the true value of their work, which from the outside is often overlooked or misinterpreted as menial or quotidian labor. But ahtone asserts an Indigenous womxn's perspective that informs aesthetics, which reflects and helps embody community values and visions for the future. As much as possible, the HOOP exhibit for which she contributed commentary, identified powerful artworks, based on input from art history knowledge keepers from several Tribes (Ahlberg Yohe & Greeves, 2019). The exhibit is also designed based on long conversations and a wide range of voices of artists, time periods, Tribal knowledge and the values of reverence, reciprocity (even with the deceased), respect and relevance. It is a fully realized process of Indigenous feminine aesthetics.

Cree/Métis scholar Kim Anderson's model of Native womxnhood identity formation considers four realms: resisting negative identities, reclaiming traditions, constructing positive identities, and acting on those identities for the good of the community. By doing so, they claim space for themselves and their cultures. Her 2000 work *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood* demonstrates some of the powerful ways Native womxn can speak out about negative stereotypes through writing and other acts of creativity. She says that when Native womxn begin to express their creativity despite oppressive forces, it is a "source of strength and identity," and is "the beginning of a journey of discovery about their Native womanhood" (p. 142).

In a more complete view of Indigenous art and aesthetics, the work of womxn brings together cultural context, art as technology, and storytelling. For this study, I will be focusing my conversations on the stories womxn create through their aesthetic sense that recognizes the Indigenous feminine that is

knowledgeable, sacred, powerful, and beautiful, especially in the way Native womxn create and contribute to their communities that have been impacted by misrepresentation, degradation, and violence.

Asserting Indigenous Sovereignities in Digital Spaces

Warner's (2002) concept of counterpublics frames the actions of those in non-dominant groups as self-empowering. Groups that create spaces for themselves ("alternative publics") to engage in public discourse should have control over who is allowed in those spaces, and favor conversations that prioritize those who are affected by major issues, like discrimination, policies, etc. However, in order to truly become a counterpublic, Warner (2002) says, "It might only be through its imaginary coupling that a public acts." This further implies that alternative publics become social justice movements, "when they acquire agency in relation to the state" (p. 124). This ironic positioning is addressed in this study by looking at Indigenous discourses in corporate, capitalistic, and colonized spaces.

Similarly, Castells' (2007) concept of counter-power places these discourses in the digital world, where SNS activities are described as "mass self-communication." He notes the capacity social justice work to challenge and change systems of power at work through social institutions. He believes communication is the location of "the battle for the minds of the people" (p. 238). Castells (2007) also notes that power dynamics occur throughout a society, "because those who have power construct the institutions of society according to their values and interests" (p. 4). Further, that power is often wielded through force and by "the construction of meaning in people's minds, through mechanisms of symbolic manipulation" (p. 5).

Manipulation begins with how visual media are gathered, which, like museums, is often done without knowledge or full consent of Indigenous people. Mythbuilding that starts with WECP-centric ideations develops visual media by using Indigenous bodies and culture to manifest images that further the ideation. Photographs of "authentic" Native life by collectors like Edward Curtis idealize a "vanishing

race,” and set the aesthetic for images of Indigenous people that continues to influence perceptions today. Creating impactful counter messaging is often overwhelming against the “stickiness” of hegemonic mythmaking. But the necessary destruction Barthes imagined for artists starts with reclaiming Indigenous voice through media production on its own terms. Riggins (1992) says the advantages of using mass media depend on the ability of Indigenous artists and communities to produce media using their own languages, having creative control over scripts and characters, and affording wider distribution in the mainstream media.

Other digital technologies are also subject to questions of self-determination for Indigenous peoples in the form of data sovereignty. Chambers et al. (2004) looked at how one Indigenous community adapted a new technology (GIS mapping) for their own purposes and priorities. In their discussion the authors note a critical community concern over ownership of mapping information. They recognized “control of information is necessary for control over the land itself,” (p. 28). The researchers’ conclusion is apt: “Not all societies have the same mapping needs, and mapping solutions should be sensitive to culture and identity” (p. 29).

Additionally, this control over digital production, content and distribution may allow for input from community members, who are not normally a part of media making. Elders, for one (Smith, 2008; Folsom, 2017), are often consulted by artists and other media makers. Their input is not usually restricted to their words, but also their influence and guidance for artists as members of their communities.

Many scholars have talked about the line between “digital” and “real” life as disputed spaces (boyd, 2011), but in a very material way, the internet can be a protective barrier, a bridge with limited access, between those things that are meant to exist only within the community, and those that can be shared out. It is often through the influence of elders, many of whom grew up without televisions and cell phones, that technology is regarded with caution. The potential to amplify important information

and messages, the ability to connect with others across geographic distances, and the affordances of access to information are all moderated by media technology used to gain access to private and sacred aspects of Indigenous life (e.g. Brown & Nicholas, 2012). Some elders and other knowledge keepers, who see media as a choice and not an everyday necessity, can create clear protocols for what is to be shared and what is to be protected. By not posting information online, community members can help avoid public access to cultural knowledge and the great potential for the exploitation, theft, and appropriation.

This is not to say elders do not have a place in the digital world for helping guide appropriate, respectful, and necessary engagement with cultural knowledge. The Māori Maps project, for example, is a repository of GPS locations of marae to help those who may be disconnected from culture and belonging. It is a digital repository with three levels of access: open for public information, password access with approval of elders for more community-specific materials, and a collection that is only accessible to elders (Brown & Nicholas, 2012).

These are important and culturally specific adaptations of kinship building for the digital realm. Gaining access to protected knowledge without accountability, those outside the community can and will copy/paste, and distribute without attribution for financial gain. In a similar way, Indigenous artists can use the power of mass messaging to sell their work or inspire others, and at the same time be vulnerable to cultural appropriation and theft. Knowing these situations occur, many social networking Indigenous influencers have called for others to avoid sharing cultural ways like songs, ceremony, and explanations of traditions in public spaces. Another great concern is for the degradation and misrepresentation of land-based, experiential knowledge. Even the best designed interactive and culturally rich digital spaces are no substitute, and using Western digitizing and archiving methods may continue to erase and replace dynamic, lived Indigenous values, ways of knowing, and ways of being.

This study not only looks at the experiences of individual Native womxn artists, but also how they create public discourses through SNS, using both Indigenous and non-Indigenous technologies. Visual and rhetorical spaces can be considered through a number of lenses, especially when concerned with dominance, hegemony, and colonizing agents.

Claiming & Reclaiming Indigenous Digital Spaces

Despite misrepresentation, stereotyping and erasure of Indigenous womxn in media coverage (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018; National Inquiry, 2020), important initiatives in Indian Country, like those addressing MMIR, will still be visible to the Indigenous and local communities through in-person communication and SNS activist networks; these are long-standing examples of what Duarte (2017) describes as a socio-technical network thinking that is part of Indigenous worldviews. One example is the way the Idle No More movement (#IdleNoMore; Idle No More, n.d.) and social activism by Native womxn, targeted environmental issues and the overlap with community health and well-being. The movement was a call for “nation-to-nation relations based on mutual respect” to defend endangered treaty rights and use Indigenous ways to restore the land, waters, and sky. Deep overlap between online and offline activism like this shows “Indigenous uses of social media are thus inherently destabilising for dominant government processes.” (Duarte, 2017, p. 10).

Strategies built on self-determination and intertribal coalition continue traditions of making alliances for common goals both on and offline. One example of creating digital spaces “by us and for us” is the work of Cyber Pow Wow (n.d.), which began in the mid-‘90s. This website shows the ease with which Indigenous imaginaries bring past, present, and future together in creative, empowering ways to defy settler-colonial discourses. This set of artist pages and conversations is, in the words of Tuscarora artist and scholar Jolene Rickard, “an odd talisman but nevertheless an indication of how Native people are struggling to subvert the colonial borders of the reservation and... to redraw the boundaries of Indigenous space” (n.p.). Gaertner (2015) notes how early Indigenous people were to create interactive

space online in which artists could design, perform, and build community. The creators of CyberPowWow extended their mission to claim digital space and reclaim the ability to guide Indigenous representation in the new medium.

Traditional mass media such as newspapers, magazines, television, and film are expensive to produce and distribute and consequently exclude Aboriginal peoples. On the internet, we can publish for a fraction of the cost of doing so in the old media; we can instantly update what we publish in order to respond to misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and misreadings; and we can instantly propagate our message across a world-spanning network. And we don't need to fight through any gatekeepers to do so. (Lewis, et al., 2005)

Indigenous people have continued to use SNS and other web spaces to bring diaspora, art, and events together. The spring 2020 shutdown brought devastating news in health and in the well-being of Indigenous communities, for whom spring usually is the start of the pow wow season. Late cancellation of the Denver March Pow Wow left many disappointed, and small businesses that rely on such gatherings for their livelihood were left scrambling to create online opportunities. Facebook users and pow wow organizers Dan Simonds (Pequot), Stephanie Hebert (Mi'kmaq), and Whitney Rencountre (Hunkpati Dakota of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe) created a Facebook group called Social Distance Pow Wow (SDP). They conceived of this as a movement rather than simply another interest group on social media. Although they have not yet formed a non-profit organization, they state:

SDPs mission is to foster a space for community and cultural preservation, to retain cultural knowledge through indigenous songs, dance, and arts. Bringing our marginalized perspectives to the world for future generations (2022).

Their numbers have grown to more than 300,000 followers. The group has also added a special SDP Marketplace for those who did not have the resources for their own website or would like to focus their marketing on those who would normally buy items at an in-person pow wow – beadwork, custom regalia, jewelry, and supplies to make your own items. Online activities such as healing dances for MMIR, sponsored contest dancing, hand drum competition, and celebrations of birthdays continue on a daily basis, and co-founders organize special online events as well as attend in person around the

continent. Keeping a harmonious and cohesive online space for interaction is important to the co-founders. Group rules include no spam, no non-Native content, no religious or political content, and no bullying or race talk. These rules also protect the group from being reported by critics and shut down by the platform moderators, which is an important online safety issue for Indigenous people, who are often targeted by racist users (e.g. Kennedy & Frazer, 2021).

Similarly, they create affective publics (Papacharissi, 2015) based on the work needed for social capital. In Indigenous terms, social capital is primarily based in kinship building through trust and reciprocal action toward common goals. The affective aspects of these interactions are also deeply rooted in cultural practice and values. In this way, such publics can work together to “unerase” the Indigenous experience and even potentially address other contemporary issues, such as revitalizing language, supporting health and well-being, and creating community across geographic distances.

Hashtags

One way Indigenous networks, for instance, have developed decolonizing practices is through creating hashtags. As a coding system meant to trigger SNS algorithms, and place issues and activities in larger discourses, Bonilla and Rosa (2015) use linguistic anthropology frames to argue that hashtags “allow users to not simply ‘file’ their comments but to performatively frame what these comments are ‘really about,’ thereby enabling users to indicate a meaning that might not be otherwise apparent” (n.p.) For Indigenous actions, this two-fold function of hashtags can address issues of invisibility, bringing geographically isolated, local experiences like #MMIP onto the international scene, and thus identifying common patterns of violence against Indigenous people. The audience for such hashtags goes beyond the Indigenous community to allies, potential funders, critics, and news media, as was the case with #IdleNoMore and #StandingRock. Although it was not originally part of the work of this study, the prominence of hashtags in the data, calls in this growing area of scholarship that supports understanding Indigenous digital life.

Noble and Tynes argue in their 2016 chapter on digital intersectionality theory, “The importance of hashtags is their ability to group potentially disparate perspectives (p. 23).” At the same time, in cases where activists use signifying language, like #NDN or #twospirit, hashtags can create a loose boundary around digital spaces that circumvent the forces of the hypervisibility Hall (2009) describes. Either way, hashtags are what Bonilla and Rosa (2015) describe as “entry points into larger and more complex worlds” (n.p.), and a very useful field in which to understand the relationship between Indigenous people, their cultures and their use of technology. The art-story model can be a useful frame in which to see how the complexity of Indigenous understanding of art, aesthetics and social networking work together with hashtags as a gateway. They signify a special space for Indigenous people to interact for their own purposes, and I would argue, can function as a tool for decolonization by asserting rhetorical and visual sovereignty that bridges defense of land and existence into the digital realm.

Additionally, I believe hashtags are invaluable for Indigenizing digital spaces because they help Native people locate other Native people, and build kinship around ideas and interests. Connecting in this way restructures the geographical dislocation and isolation from community that U.S. Indian policies have enacted over the years. And in finding one another, we create not simply an imaginary, but a land-based Indigenous territory rooted in each location and each person, similar to the idea of Indian Country. Recent research (Duarte, 2017; Wemigwans, 2018; Morford & Ansloos, 2021) has explored how hashtags help delineate the indigenization of digital space and the relationship to land.

Kuo (2018) notes, “Because of their algorithmic construction, hashtags organize, link, and archive conversations and also make conversations more visible by trending them” (p. 496). Erasing and marginalizing are methods of genocide by colonizing institutions, and by making interests, and in fact, existence, more visible in the digital world, hashtags have been a way to strengthen ties across those divisions.

There are limitations to the power of hashtags and signifyin' statements. In a similar way to Black feminist hashtags in Williams (2015), they have the potential to expose transcommunity issues like violence against womxn, and racialization of higher education. In doing so they may help create safe spaces "to share their own experiences and, through doing so, challenge 'commonsense' understandings of [these issues] and promote... solidarity" (Berridge & Portwood-Stacer, 2015, n.p.) However, they can open the potential for online harassment and racist discourse. Studies of hashtag use by social justice movements indicate major pitfalls, such as hijacking (Knüpfer et al., 2022; Dempsey Willis, 2020), and the potential for hashtags to polarize discourse (Garimella & Weber, 2017). Even with careful use of hashtags, they may counteract the intents and purposes of social justice movements and provide access to conversations that include more private or sensitive topics, which is a concern with justice movement overall, and Indigenous justice movements in particular. As Indigenous experiences have become more visible online, they have also made the people more visible to those who exploit and misappropriate Indigenous cultures.

Storytelling & Technology

Engraved images laid the foundation for centuries of misrepresentation, but Indigenous people did not simply accept these characterizations. Round (2007) reports the United States itself was also "flooded with images of Native peoples that many Indians found wrong and wished to counter" in the 1800s (p. 272). Emerging Indigenous voices responded to stereotypes and rhetorical/iconographic erasure in one way by instituting Tribal newspapers. For instance, *The Choctaw Telegraph* (in 1848 *The Choctaw Intelligencer*) and *The Cherokee Phoenix* (1836) were published using illustrations by their own people and written in their own languages. Thus image-based storytelling through a kind of counter-messaging "provided a fertile ground for new kinds of Indigenous representational practices that merged traditional media and messages with new-found forms like lithography and woodcuts" (p. 272). Early on then, the formation of alternative Indigenous publics relied on strong visual countermessaging

and asserting agency (Warner, 2002) in the face of settler-colonization. However, unlike the common understanding of illustrations as tied directly to printed text, Round says, “Native illustrations... may not be referring to a written context at all. It is the bi-cultural, ‘supplementary’ role of Indigenous images” (p. 273). These examples suggest a unique relationship between storytelling, communication media and imagery.

Storytelling is almost universally recognized as a central aspect of Indigenous experience and cultures. Smith (2008) and Archibald et al. (2008, 2019) all situate storytelling in research methodologies. Smith (2008) speaks of it as one of the projects of Indigeneity that guide best practices in research with Indigenous communities. The data from such interactions as story sharing, whether they are older cultural and codified stories, or life story narratives, rely on a good relationship between the teller and the listener.

Smith (2008) also notes in all areas of research with Indigenous communities, storytelling is rich, not only as a source of data, but as an important way to build trust and relationality with the elders and community. Stories hold a central role to cultural life of past and present. “The story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, and the people with the story” (p. 145).

Oral traditions have not often been considered in mass communication literature because of the perception that its audiences are limited. Outside of Indigenous research circles, oral traditions are often considered “folk art” (e.g. Said, 1993; Maranda, & Maranda, 1971), a frame that places Indigenous cultures in a “pre-civilized” state that will inevitably evolve or yield WECP notions of progress (as described in Gaudio, 2008; McLuhan, 1960). This same assertion of WECP literacy is sometimes seen in art history literature. Prown (1982), even as a progressive voice in art history, argues artifacts are inadequate to the task of communicating facts, and therefore, “facts are transmitted better by verbal documents” (p. 16). This is a problematic conclusion. As “nonliterate” cultures based in oral traditions

and art-stories, there were and continue to be precise means of transmitting and storing information accurately. I argue that although oral traditions may be strongly connected to a particular geographical location, their strength in conveying information accurately across generations suggests a mass audience of the past, present and future. This is especially so when they take the form of art-stories.

Farrell Racette (2011) says, “Oral traditions were never solely oral. Images and objects were a form of visual literacy that through mnemonic practice supported oral text rather than replaced it, nudging memory, calling for a story” (p. 41). Stories live through interaction with us. “They remember. They remember us. They remember for us” (p. 44).

Māori storytelling is an important part of decolonizing because they often carry important data that is central to Māori knowledge systems. According to Māori scholar Joellee Seed-Pihama, they “are like glasses through which we can view, learn, and be taught more clearly by our ancestors, who live in every recitation” (quoted in Archibald et al., 2019, p. 112). The process of colonization includes capturing stories, reframing them for non-Indigenous audiences, and then codifying them through print and mass production. Stories relating important lessons were also romanticized and “sanitized” content to remove Indigenous ways of understanding sex and gender, for instance, which were unacceptable by WECP religious standards. Calvino (2019) based her chapter on a Māori maternal elder’s testimony in Māori Land Court and focuses on women reclaiming their voices through pūrākau (storytelling). Her elder says by reclaiming and recasting post-colonial storytelling to be relevant for Māori audiences, restating “what we can know” becomes a call to “what we can do” (p. 97).

Art-Story & CTDA

Art-Story (Figures 1 & 3) is a framework in which to articulate how Indigenous perspectives can inform the successful avoidance of cultural appropriation and disrupt the steamroller of hegemonic myth-making. It recognizes the multiplicity of art in lived cultures without reference to Western nation-states, or being othered, diminished, replaced, or erased (Figure 2).

Removing cultural context leaves room for assumptions and myths about “primitive” cultures that should remain in a “natural” state. The void erases an Indigenous culture or Native nation’s sovereignty over adopting and using technologies – WECP or Indigenous – in the normal changes of its cultural practices over time. Keeping a holistic view prevents a lot of the positivist views about non-Western cultures from dominating discourse about those peoples, sidesteps biological determinism, and honors the ways in which oral traditions and intergenerational systems have been both changed and sustained through ongoing settler-colonization. The myth of a vanishing race ignores the survivance and revitalization efforts of Indigenous cultures in spaces not normally thought of for Native people, such as social media and comic book conventions.

Benjamin (1935) proposes three forms of art reproduction: by pupils to learn, masters to distribute, and third parties for financial gain. While his work recognizes the very real effects of mechanical forgery, and suggests ways in which cultural appropriation occur, not all Indigenous artworks are created within a WECP individualist system as described. Rather, art-stories are often expected to fade away and transform over time. One example is Tlingit totem poles, which may be carved using special methods passed down through the centuries as tourist attractions (Moore, 2018). They are then left to weather and decay as part of their lifetime in the community, the same as any other person. The aspects of community belongingness and responsibility are deeply bound to artistic efforts, and are expressions of sovereignty – visually, rhetorically, and legally. Thus, mechanical reproduction, commodification, politicization, and commercialization may be understood in different terms of art-stories than WECP ideals of preservation, conservation, and resisting eventual death of persons and objects, especially in museum collections. Cultural context can help understand where these differences lie and help avoid oversimplification of the vast diversity of Indigenous cultures and stereotyping. This distinction between worldviews and art demonstrates what is at stake when Indigenous people take on the role of arbiters in museums, cultural events and in digital spaces.

Research Questions

This study is based on three claims. First is that art-story and other Indigenous art theorizing models can help bring Indigenous aesthetics in conversation with mass media scholarship to interrogate the visual discourse of stereotypes and myth-making in the context of violence against Indigenous womxn. Secondly, that Indigenous aesthetics are an important influence in both offline and digital life, especially in reclaiming rhetorical spaces and strengthening Indigenous identities. And finally, that Indigenous womxn artists are key message creators, whose work is rich in culture, advocacy, and influence. Specifically, this study explores these claims by asking:

Research Question 1: How do the social networking practices of artists reveal underlying settler-colonial discourses concerning the historic pattern of violence against Indigenous people?

Research Question 2: How do Indigenous womxn shift the narratives around violence against Indigenous people through art and social networking sites?

Research Question 3: How might these social justice activities speak to other similar movements that hope to subvert dominant discourses and their harmful effects?

Although this study makes many moves to bring the past in conversation with the present, the goal is to call in visions of the future, relying on the lens of today's Indigenous womxn artists to clarify and articulate what lies ahead and what is already going on in communities. Rather than clinging solely to past and present understanding of how violence interrupts such visions, keeping the discourse in poverty porn mode, I hope to help widen the space created by generations of Indigenous womxn to continue the legacy of change for future generations.

CHAPTER 4. METHODOLOGIES

Archibald's et al. (2019) Indigenous Storywork and Brock's (2018, 2020) Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis guide the ways in which this study approached in-depth interviews with Indigenous womxn artists, and qualitative content analysis of SNS posts. Interviews center Indigenous womxn's voices and understanding of how their art promotes awareness and potentially mobilizes action to combat violence. This study was designed to reach deeper levels of understanding of these complex issues through personal storytelling. My approach incorporated culturally relevant protocols, such as consulting with elders, gift giving and recognizing my relationship and responsibilities as an Indigenous person with those who are part of this research. I made a commitment to strengthen longer-term kinship between myself as an Indigenous insider/outsider, the research and the communities and individuals impacted by violence, as they are in many ways, my own. Overall, I have chosen methods that allowed me to look at how Indigenous womxn artists specifically express aspects of Indigenous womxnhood and the community impacts of violence.

Content analysis of SNS posts then helped examine the relationship of the art and discourse to communication technologies and cultural communities. The two major stereotyping constructs that are the backdrop, but by no means a center, to this inquiry were Indigenous womxn as submissive victims, and Indigenous people as in tune with nature, but not technologically adept. These lines of inquiry were sensitizing themes going into the research and are part of a set of assumptions about the non-Indigenous aspects of the digital world.

Referencing Steinhauer's (2001) stages of development of an Indigenous paradigm, this study is situated in Stage 3 – Emerging decolonization - making moves in approach and methodology toward Stage 4 – Indigenous-based Research for our own purposes (Figure 5).

Stage	Description
One	Indigenous scholars situated within western frameworks. Does not challenge existing paradigms.
Two	Emerging Indigenous paradigm but maintains western influences to avoid marginalization.
Three	Emerging decolonization. Challenges and indigenizes western methodologies.
Four	Fully realized Indigenous paradigm developed through research within and for Indigenous communities by their own researchers.

Figure 5.

Steinhauer’s (2001) stages of development of an Indigenous paradigm

Ultimately, this study fills a need for Indigenous research in media communication by bringing art history approaches, critical and technocultural methods, and Indigenous research methods to understanding Indigenous life in digital spaces better.

Strategies of Inquiry

Critical Technocultural Discourse Analysis considers culture and technical interactions, in this case distinct Tribal cultures as experienced by the participants in the study. It makes use of multimodal data to examine, “material connections between form, function, belief, and meaning of information and communication technologies” (Brock, 2018, p. 1). Discourse is defined as SNS posts, which includes images, text and hypertext, and narratives arising from in-depth interviews. I chose this method because it centers cultural aspects of how people create messages and online spaces for interaction within and outside their own cultural community. Since CTDA provides a “holistic inquiry into tech artifacts, practices, and users” (Brock, 2020, p. 8), it is in keeping with the holism and lived experiences of

Indigenous people, who have been largely ignored by researchers and theorists in the area of computer technologies. I believe this is true in large part due to the stereotyping and erasure this study addresses.

Decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 2008; Archibald, 2008) bridge theory building and methods, and are well suited for grounded theory because decolonizing recognizes the importance of co-creating knowledge, and therefore regards participants as partners and not “subjects.” In this study I situated myself as a listener and facilitator in interviews, and built upon existing theory that centers Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Indigenous methodologies (Wilson, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Archibald et al. 2019) suggest that cultural protocols be observed, and that respect and reciprocity are considered in every interaction with participants. Kovach (2009) notes, “Indigenous epistemologies assume a holistic approach that finds expression within the personal manifestations of culture” (p. 61). The research frame for this study is the personal narrative of each distinct Indigenous womxn artist.

Cultural considerations go above and beyond the typical requirements of the institutional review board process. As a result, I considered ways in which this work could contribute to the well-being of participants, Indigenous womxn and communities. Going forward, I will also make the results of this study as accessible to the wider Indigenous research community as possible by publishing in open sources.

Indigenous protocols included giving gifts, sharing/preparing meals, and consulting elders as needed before, during and after this study. Decolonizing and Indigenizing methods is in response to previous failures to recognize the legitimacy of Native ways of knowing and being that resulted in burning bridges with many Native communities. These failures have in part been redressed through legislation, for instance. However, it is each researcher’s individual responsibility to build trust and follow Indigenous guidance, whether they are part of the community or not. In this way, each study undertaken is a new opportunity for making reparations and supporting justice for Indigenous peoples. I

am striving to avoid any extractive data gathering by creating good relationships with the participants and will hope to continue to be engaged in the issues of violence prevention and support. Indigenous methodologies assume that every aspect – recruiting, interviewing, member-checking, and analysis will be done with relationality and integrity using Indigenous cultural values. This level of engagement also asks me to care of myself, to prepare carefully and mindfully, and to approach this endeavor navigating the intercultural space of humility and Weber-Pillwax's (2001) "good heart."

Ethical Considerations

One of the most important qualities of research with Indigenous populations – whether the researcher is Indigenous or not – is trustworthiness, a quality described Merriam and Tisdell (2016) as based in ethical practices in all aspects of research.

Kovach (2009) outlines four major considerations in research design that should be implemented throughout the study to build trustworthiness, known as OCAP (pp. 144-145). First is the concept of ownership. Kovach refers to the way knowledge is held communally, and consent is needed to use that knowledge in any way. Although each participant came with their individual manifestation of culture, I considered their home community's standards in mutually deciding what knowledge may be shared out. Only those who wished to go on record for this study were considered participants to avoid unintended consequences of anonymizing individuals in such a small and well-connected population.

Second is the concept of control. Kovach (2009) defines this concept: "First Nations people have a right to control various aspects of the research on them, including the formulation of research frameworks, data management, and dissemination" (p. 145). In this study all participants were in conversation with the work and were invited to co-create the findings with the researcher through narrative interviews and member checking. I sought permissions to use all images and SNS posts, whether or not the basic protocols require such an action. I shared my intentions of how, where and for

what purpose the information gathered will be used. This stems from my interconnectedness and accountability to the communities, and the need for extra layers of consent.

The third consideration is access to any data gathered. Although there may be some need to publish subsequent works based on this dissertation in restricted peer-reviewed journals, it continues to be my priority to include as much of this work in open access journals and repositories online (which may also be peer-reviewed). This access as well as co-creative aspects of the research are in keeping with Kovach's (2009) fourth principle – possession. This last principle allows communities or individuals to also be able to access and use data for their own purposes. I believe honoring this principle will allow me to help create something of value to give back to the community of Native artists or those who work to prevent violence against Native womxn. This will be one way to stay relevant to the needs of the community.

The final ethical consideration of this study was to avoid over-burdening participants or their communities. Although I offer a co-creative opportunity for participants, it is not mandatory, and each person engaged with this aspect of my approach as they saw fit. Pressures and rapid changes in the art world due to COVID heavily impacted workloads, accessibility, and burden of participating in this research, so extra time and considerations factored into relationship building with artist-participants and consultants.

Research Design

This study makes use of two main methods in an exploratory mixed methods approach: in-depth interviews in the Indigenous Storyworks model; and qualitative content analysis in a CTDA framework. Figure 5 outlines the complete research and analysis design. The pre-test phase was based in how the art-story model and CTDA interact, in that CTDA interrogates data in three areas, looking at features, capabilities and performance:

What – artifacts, platform, technology

How – technological practice

Why – cultural ideology

These areas combined with four key principles of art-story:

Art-storytelling is based in Indigenous **aesthetics**

Art, storytelling & culture are **interwoven**

Its work is to **claim and reclaim** the past-present-future from Western frameworks

Its goal is to assert Indigenous **sovereignty**

The main phase of research was also formulated in a CTDA frame, and data analysis culminated in response to the research questions (Figure 6).

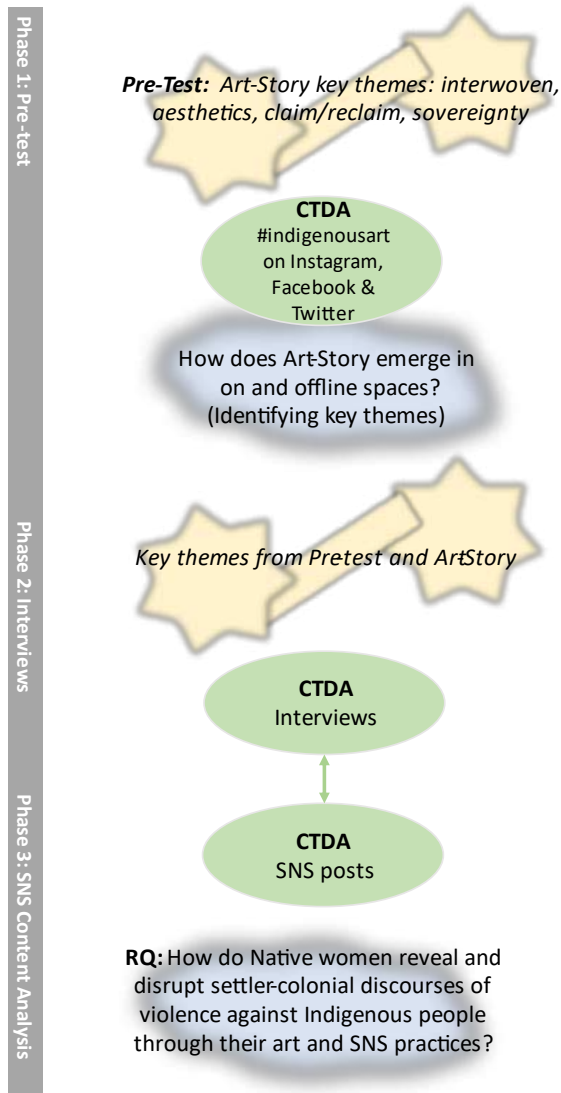


Figure 6.

Research Design and Flow

Mixed Methods

I conducted semi-structured narrative interviews first, and then examined SNS posts through qualitative content analysis. Results from interviews revealed specific themes to look for as participants then shared their SNS strategies using their artwork. Mixed methods approaches have successfully been used in Indigenous contexts to research education (Eastman, 2005); public health (e.g. Sinley, &

Albrecht, 2016); nation building (Duarte, 2017); and environmental sciences (e.g. David-Chavez, & Gavin, 2018).

This study took a grounded approach with the purpose of co-creating knowledge in the Indigenous research context. My approach assumed knowledge is situational (Haraway, 1988) and the goal was to access rich data through concurrent interviews and content analysis. It should be noted that my methodology used mixed methods but not to “triangulate” qualitative using quantitative. Nor was it trying to validate the knowledge expressed by interviewees. Each is valuable in their own right, and both are in conversation with the other. Using mixed methods in this study built knowledge (a similar concept to Indigenous co-creation of knowledge) as suggested by Hesse-Biber (2010), which helped to increase the “layers of meaning that often remain subjugated and undifferentiated” (p. 132).

Using multiple methods was also a good fit for this study, since the research questions were aimed at critical analysis of underlying power dynamics. This integrative approach also allowed me to see the data through two distinct lenses – art and digital spaces – as well as interpret how those two fields might interact, inform, and challenge each other. It is also a part of the conversation that Indigenous womxn artists are revealing silenced voices – perhaps their own – and doing the work of giving voice wherever and whenever they are able. Some have access to digital spaces, and some do not, and vary in their comfort with social media interactions.

Hesse-Biber (2010) suggests using multiple methods as a feminist approach to provide a way to honor “womxn’s knowledge building by testing out new theories, as well as placing womxn’s lived experience in a broader sociopolitical context” (p. 132). Although Hesse-Biber (2010) is talking about mixing quantitative and qualitative, I believe in this case gathering data from both the artistic process and the online interactive process called in the necessary information to address my research questions. Finally, Hesse-Biber (2010) contends this multifaceted approach affords social justice advocacy and change, which is an overarching goal of the participants as well as of this study.

In-depth Interviews

Interviews are one of the most common methods in Indigenous research. The heart of Indigenous Storywork (Archibald et al., 2019) is kinship building and storytelling, and interviews are the preferred method across such diverse issues as identity construction (Badoni, 2017) and justice systems (Jones, 2019). Building narratives together, and expressing the deeper meanings of an artist's work looked different for each person interviewed. But in Storywork, the point is to sit with a person in their chosen place and give space to let their storytelling unfold. It is listening quietly and allowing silences. The idea of in-depth interviews leaves the researcher to be flexible with time, so that any questions participants have can be answered. Being flexible with time also give a respectful setting where cultural or other kinds of concepts can be explained and reflected upon for meaning-making and interpretation. Even in virtual forms in-depth interviews in this case allowed the kind of rich data needed for critical and discourse analysis to emerge. Video conferencing, where used, allowed both the researcher and the artist to be in a comfortable space with various levels of sharing personal space.

Qualitative Content Analysis

Content analysis is a common method of interrogating media in many forms, including news (Gilchrist, 2010; Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018), television (Mastro, & Stern, 2003), online messages (Lasker et al., 2005), and health communication (Hinnant, 2009; Banerjee & Greene, 2013). Qualitative and quantitative analyses both have their uses in identifying key themes and categories, which can then be used to make inferences about attitudes and behaviors. Either method can be used within a larger discourse analysis, which is multilayered. Fürsich (2009) argues for the value of including qualitative media content analysis (i.e. textual analysis) to critical discourse analyses, such as the one undertaken here. He notes its importance when examining content production and reception of media messages through a critical-cultural lens, which contrasts with social scientific approaches. He says, "Textual analysis is generally a type of qualitative analysis that, beyond the manifest content of media, focuses

on the underlying ideological and cultural assumptions of the text” (p. 240). This type of analysis is more appropriate for many Indigenous research contexts in which the myriad cultural contexts of Indigenous North America can be examined without need for quantifiable or manifest categories (p. 240-41). Fürsich also argues that a specifically critical cultural approach – for instance Van de Berg et al.’s (1998) culture-centered textual analysis – will take a holistic view of cultural texts that “are signifying hegemony and ideology” (p. 241).

Qualitative content analysis can also be used to identify a range of information an interview alone may not afford. Some salient examples are hashtag activism (Williams, 2015; Carlson & Berglund, 2021); comic book analysis (Sheyahshe, 2009; Folsom, 2017); interface discourse (Kuo, 2018); and media bias (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). This study used two data sets for qualitative content analysis. Content analysis of SNS posts go hand-in-hand with the portion of interviews that entailed having the artist-participant talk through process and reflection on posts created to make use of their artwork.

Interviews

Although the interviews for this study were with key individuals from different cultures and not community-wide research, it was important to recognize each person’s kinship with their community, traditions, history and artforms. There were three different types of interviews conducted for this study: background interviews with elders and other individuals on the topic of violence; Indigenous womxn artist storytelling; and walk-throughs of social networking with artists.

Interview Sample & Recruitment

Two different samples of participants were created through purposive sampling: first, those who wished to share their knowledge of the issues around violence against Indigenous womxn for background and context for the data. Consultants were chosen for their specific expertise in working with community-based programs, and their desire to share their knowledge. They also informed some aspects of data analysis as needed.

Second is the sample of those who shared their artistic and SNS knowledge. This sample of artist-participants were identified using four excluding criteria:

1. Self-identified Native or Indigenous person of the Americas.
2. Self-identified adult womxn
3. Working on social justice issues around violence against Indigenous womxn
4. Uses or has used SNS to share their artwork online

I included womxn who are two spirit or queer to better represent what are often Indigenous womxn identities that go beyond WECP binaries. While not all artist-participants identify themselves as part of particular social justice movements, their work specifically addresses violence against Indigenous people.

Recruiting was done through introductions through my own networks and then snowballing. My starting sample included as wide a range of individuals as possible (purposeful sampling): cultures, nations, ages, and art media. I have an existing network of friends and acquaintances in the Indigenous arts scene. This was also an important way to sample in Indigenous communities because of laws around art and American Indian identity, and credibility within the community. I started with a sample of four, and asked for recommendations of others, for a total of 11 artist-participants. Snowballing is often a recommended method to find participants in Indigenous communities where personal networks and relationality are important. This approach can mitigate some of the past harm done by researchers in Indigenous communities, but is not sufficient in itself. Being cognizant of the fact that some or all of participants would take on a socio-psychological burden to share their insights on their work, I offered a compensation for their time, and followed any protocol around reciprocity that may have been appropriate.

Interview Data Collection

Interviews were conducted in the richest setting possible context: video conferencing or audio conferencing, with some follow-up via social media direct message or email. Interviews were semi-structured. Artist-participants were asked open-ended questions on two main topics: their artwork and their SNS activities. The questions focused on how their culture informs their processes.

Tracy (2013) suggests articulating the researcher's stance, especially when conducting responsive interviewing, where the researcher interacts closely with the interviewee instead of asking close-ended or highly structured questions and recording answers (Rubin, & Rubin, 2005). This is particularly important to research by and with Indigenous peoples (Smith, 2008; Wilson, 2008; Archibald, 2008; Kovach, 2009; Archibald et al., 2019).

As one of the voices reflected here in part, my identity as an Indigenous womxn, who creates artwork using many media, affords an insider/outsider perspective in these conversations. Additionally, my experience both personal and professional with violence against womxn helped guide my relationship with those who participated in the study. Indigenous research scholars suggest responsive interviewing is reciprocal, respectful, mutually engaging, and requires that I as the researcher reflect on my own part in the process to become more mindful of the possible emotional effects and risks: addressing historical trauma, settler-colonial interactions, and previous unethical methods used by non-Indigenous researchers.

Voices of Indigenous Womxn Artists

Eleven Indigenous womxn artists from many disciplines and communities shared the stories of their creative work processes, and the ways they consider, critique, and make use of social networking sites. Each gave their permission to reprint their art and social media posts, and reviewed the writing as it developed. Some have changed the ways in which they create art and engage in digital life over the course of two-and-a-half years, but their stories capture moments in time during the first year-and-a-

half of the pandemic. I am very grateful for their part in understanding the phenomena I hoped to explore in detail.

Jaime Black (Anishinaabe and Finnish descent)

Jaime Black is a multidisciplinary artist living and working on the traditional territory of the Cree, Anishinaabe and Métis people. Her art practice evokes memory, identity, place, and resistance, and is grounded in “an understanding of the body and the land as sources of cultural and spiritual knowledge.” She is primarily an invited artist, who works with organizations to install experiential public art. Her *REDress Project* is an installation of red dresses hanging in public spaces to draw attention to the great numbers of Aboriginal womxn who go missing and murdered each year, and the way violence is both gendered and racialized for Aboriginal peoples. We spoke via video conferencing in her home office space.

Karen Clarkson (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma)

Karen Clarkson makes her home in southern Arizona, but often travels to shows, galleries and exhibitions across Indian Country. She creates mixed media drawings and paintings that evoke stories and personalities of the people and characters she portrays. Clarkson describes her art as a journey of self-discovery and being in communication with others that has taken many forms over the years. For this interview we focused on her multimedia piece that incorporates QR codes, a historic photo of a Native woman wrapped in a blanket, and wings inspired by U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg’s iconic collars – *We Rise*. The piece is interactive, linking viewers to online information about murdered and missing, and violence against Indigenous womxn. I spoke with her via video conferencing in her home art studio.

Marcella Hadden (Saginaw Chippewa Indian Tribe of Michigan)

Marcella Hadden is the owner and photographer at Niibing Giizis (Summer Moon) Photography Studio located in Mt. Pleasant in central Michigan. She worked with her Tribe and is now retired,

contributing to cultural and historical preservation through the Ziibiwing Cultural Center. The Center's year-long virtual exhibit *The Boontak! (Stop It!): Stolen Daughters of Turtle Island*, which was created to bring awareness, education and action on murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. Hadden helped coordinate the exhibit, and in collaboration with her granddaughter, contributed a series of 94 portraits of North American Indian women and girls, who "volunteered to represent those who are missing and/or deceased." She spoke with me by phone from her home.

Chelsea Herr (Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma)

Chelsea Herr lives and works in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where she is the Curator of Indigenous Art & Culture at Gilcrease Museum, as well as a bead artist. Gilcrease went online with some of its operations during COVID, but continued to offer public programs including one that went along with an exhibit on the basketry art, life, and legacy of Eastern Band Cherokee artist Shan Goshorn - a panel discussion "How Boarding Schools Created Trauma in Indigenous Communities and the Effects Today." Our interview took place via video conferencing, where Herr spoke from her home office.

Kassie John (Diné)

Kassandra John is a freelance graphic artist with Bahozhoni, who describes her work as empowering Indigenous knowledge through design in illustrations, digital art, and sharing her culture. Her personal work most often promotes positive visions of Indigenous womxnhood, good mental health and well-being. Kassie spoke with me via video conferencing from her home in Utah.

Nayana Lafond (Anishinaabe from Wiikwemkoong Unceded Territory in northern Ontario, and Abenaki and Mi'kmaq from Three Rivers Quebec)

Nayana Lafond paints portraits in acrylic and says her art comes from her experience as a "woman of mixed race, a mother, cancer survivor, Bone Marrow Transplant recipient, activist" She has been a curator, art writer and artist for over 20 years. Her current works are series of portraits in black and white with bright accents of color, one a series on the COVID experience – *Quarantined and Immunosuppressed*. A second series of portraits with stark red accents, entitled *Missing and Murdered*

Indigenous Women & Girls, was featured on the Ziibiwing virtual exhibit *The Boontak! (Stop It!): Stolen Daughters of Turtle Island*. Most of the people portrayed are either missing or deceased. This second series was the focus of our conversation, which took place by video conferencing, where she was at home.

Elizabeth Lapensée (Anishinaabe with family from Bay Mills, Métis, and Irish)

Beth Lapensée is a designer, writer, and artist of games, emergent media, and comics. Central to her mission as an artist and researcher is to bring the past, present and future together to promote Indigenous understanding of science and technology primarily through Anishinaabek cultural expressions. As creator, co-editor, and collaborator on long-form comics *Deer Woman: A Vignette*, and *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, she explores the issues of interpersonal violence against and empowerment of Indigenous womxn through the diverse cultural visions of the Deer Woman. She spoke with me via video conferencing from her home/workspace in Michigan.

Shelby Rowe (Chickasaw Nation)

Shelby Rowe lives in Oklahoma, where she is a suicide prevention professional, bead portrait artist and designer. She uses software to generate and fine-tune her beading patterns, and adds nuance by mixing multiple bead finishes and tones. She is currently working on a series of beaded cuff portraits of prominent Indigenous Oklahomans, including Principal Chief Wilma Mankiller of the Cherokee Nation (1945-2010), and current U.S. Poet Laureate Joy Harjo. Her piece entitled *Hatchet Woman* was inspired by the stories of Chickasaw womxn fiercely protecting their people. Rowe shared the art-story of *Hatchet Woman* in our interview via video conferencing from her home studio.

Neebinnaukzhik Southall (Chippewas of Rama First Nation)

Neebin Southall is an artist, graphic designer, photographer, and writer currently based in New Mexico. Their work seeks to “represent Native peoples in a positive and empowering way.” Southall has created several pieces for social justice organizations to help prevent violence against Indigenous

people, as well as to reclaim the place of gender diversity in traditional culture from an Anishinaabe view. In our conversation via video conferencing, Southall discussed how they research archives and evoke fashion as identity, and how a series of drawings – *Butch Bunnies* – engages the public through cultural representations of caring relationships.

Monica Wapaha [Ndee (White Mountain Apache) and Tohono O'odham]

Monica Wapaha works in public health education and is a multidisciplinary artist based in Arizona. She uses many different approaches to address colonial structures from an Ndee (Apache) and Tohono O'odham's perspective. The pieces she shared and discussed were silkscreen and painted leather that confront media stereotypes and over-sexualization of Indigenous women. *The Revenge*, *Don't Trend on Me*, *Identity*, and *500+ Years and We are still laughing at the White Man* were part of a 2021 online exhibit and panel discussion - *Resilient Matriarchy: Indigenous Women's Art in Community* - hosted by Open Doors: Art in Action! She spoke with me via video conferencing from her home office space.

Maria Wolf Lopez (Purépecha)

Maria "Wolf" Lopez is a Chicago-based comic book artist and freelance illustrator. Her work is stark and gritty with multiple layers of meaning. She often includes cultural motifs to articulate subtext and context. She is an advocate for female empowerment, which is one of the reasons she became involved with the *Deer Woman: An Anthology* project. We focused on her piece for the anthology, which highlights transformation and protection of womxn who experience violence, through the character of Deer Woman. We spoke via video conferencing in her creative space at home.

Content Analysis

Content analysis is often used in media communication to systematically identify key terms, themes and/or patterns in a given text, which could be images, speech, or written documents. It has frequently been used to study media bias (e.g. Gilchrist, 2010; Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018) for

Indigenous populations. I chose qualitative content analysis, which does not count instances, but rather looks for patterns and themes for this study because my approach focuses more on interpreting, describing, building narratives through storytelling, and uses a small but rich set of data.

Content Analysis Sampling

The choice of SNS came from interviewees and what platforms and posting habits they have. Since all are based, at least part-time, in the United States, their choices in social networking sites were ones most used in the U.S. Data is missing on social media use for Native Americans, but based on my experience online, I started with Instagram, Facebook and Twitter because they were the most popular with artist and social justice networks. The increase in TikTok users and especially Indigenous creators during the pandemic proved to be a good addition to the SNS context. A great deal of the analysis relies on knowing cultural nuance, and so a more humanities/ethnographic analysis rather than a social sciences qualitative analysis was appropriate here.

Content analysis data collection. I pulled relevant posts from artists on topics of MMIWG2S, womxn empowerment, etc., and created a database of screenshots of posts with original text, but without comments, which are not included in the analysis to preserve privacy and identifiability of those who are not part of the study. This was a necessary precaution with Indigenous populations, which are small and highly interconnected, because of the risk of identifying individuals, even if online handles and avatars are redacted. It is also the recommended procedure according to the Association of Internet Researchers ethical guidelines (2019). Digital data (recordings and screenshots) and notes are stored on a secure server for the duration of the study and for five years afterward.

Data Analysis & Reporting

CTDA is the overarching analytical framework. Recordings of each interview were transcribed using Google and Word tools, corrected Zoom auto-transcription, and manual transcribing. Then using continuous comparative method, key discursive and cultural themes were identified (Kozinets, 2013;

Charmaz, 2014). Initial coding was developed using art-story themes, and post-interview coding was facilitated by both hand open coding and MaxQDA. The continuous comparison method was used to:

- open code by noting any statements or wording that spoke to the research questions (e.g. uses the term “Indigenizing,” or talks about reclaiming)
- abstract and compare to earlier themes or themes identified in other interviews
- check and refine themes and how they may be interrelated (Kozinets, 2013).

This process helped create a more in-depth narrative for each interview. This was the first level of analysis, which was geared toward answering the first and second research questions of how Indigenous womxn disrupt the narratives around violence against Indigenous people through art and social networking sites, and how their social networking practices may have revealed underlying settler-colonial discourses concerning the historic pattern of violence against Indigenous people. Although guided by themes going into the interviews, the open-coding revealed other themes that were interrelated with the technology used, technical practices and Indigenous ideologies. I approached the data in many ways, including using word clouds, MaxQDA visualization tools, organizing coded quotes by theme, and side-by-side re-readings of the transcripts grouped by art process, SNS practices and social justice. Each level added details to emerging themes.

Continuous comparison continued through the content analysis of SNS posts, which illustrated many of the stories artist-participants shared about their experiences online.

Interview data and content analysis is shared out here as a broader discourse analysis that considers the three research questions in narrative form: disruption of violence, revealing settler-colonial discourses, and SNS practices.

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS

This study began with an exploration of how art-story shows up in digital spaces by sampling Indigenous artist posts on Instagram and Facebook. In this chapter, I will present a brief description of how this pre-test phase informed the main findings, and then a story-based examination of the themes that emerged from interview and SNS post data.

Artifacts (e.g. hashtags) and nominative data (e.g. SNS platforms used) both added structure to the deeper grounded analysis and led to more nuanced conversations about how, what, and why the artist-participants use their art-stories in digital spaces. Overall, the interview data were interwoven with SNS data, and demonstrated forms of sovereignty: rhetorical, visual and body. They also revealed issues of settler-colonization and how to address the challenges.

Hashtags were a particular case where SNS and art-story practice met with underlying values to show kinship building and audience segmentation. Hashtags, being shortcuts using the English language (at least in this study) forces choices that do not always match Indigenous intention of inclusion, upholding Indigenous identities, and community action on issues of violence against Indigenous peoples. Appendix C is a list of specific hashtags reported by artist-participants and their partner organizations that posted their art in social media campaigns, as well as a few that were noted for non-use (e.g. “I don’t use hashtags”). This sample shows a wide diversity of identifying terms for Indigenous people, such as “NDN” and “#native***.” Some reported using #native***, replacing the asterisks with “artist,” “art” or “women,” for instance. Some used the hashtag for their own tribe (#anishinaabe) or location of exhibit (#redressproject***), or for the tribe of the person portrayed in their art (#*specifictribe*).

In the following sections I present the findings for each phase of the research, major themes that emerged, and finally, a discussion of hashtags as a special case of how Indigenous womxn artists bridge their land-based and digital communities on a path toward healing.

Pre-Testing & Reaching into The Chaos

Based on pre-testing of 20 SNS posts by Indigenous artists, several themes emerged and helped structure the interview script: Pride, Healing, Unity/Solidarity, Remembrance, Interwoven (Art, Storytelling & Culture), Indigenous Aesthetics, Claim/Reclaim History, and Sovereignty (Appendix D). Although many posts originally appeared on Instagram, for instance, they were pushed to other sites by the original poster via linked accounts. Pre-test themes and key principles from the art-story model (Indigenous aesthetics frame; art, storytelling and culture are interwoven; claim and reclaim the past-present-future from Western frameworks; and assert Indigenous sovereignty), were combined to become sensitizing themes as prompts for the interview script to help focus the first part of the conversation on producing art. These themes also helped connect the processes and approaches to art to the processes and approaches to using SNS (Figure 5). Although TikTok was not part of the pre-test sample, it did appear in the list of SNS that artist-participants used and is included in the analysis.

Main Findings: What, How & Why of Indigenous Technocultural Discourses

CTDA structured the way data from open coding was grouped into the function they serve in online discourse: the what, how and why artist-participants use SNS to talk about violence in their communities. The main study specifically gathered and considered in its analysis the following categories, artifacts, and phenomena (Figure 7).

WHAT?	ARTIFACT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hashtags • Emoticons • Indigenous language and/or characters • Hyperlinks • Photos • Images of works in progress
	CONTENT
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Announcing auction or sales events • Sharing stories behind the art • Partner organization posts using the art to promote exhibitions and events
HOW?	TECHNOLOGICAL PRACTICE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cross posting • Archiving • Participating in online events • Presenting on panels • Starting conversations • Sharing their experiences as artists • Advocating for equity for artists in pay and recognition • Using mobile, laptop and desktop to access internet • Finding workarounds for subpar internet • Taking breaks and shifting SNS use • Connecting and reconnecting with community, family, ceremony, and land • Guiding family use of technology • Learning and trying out new technologies • Managing time on the internet • Avoiding certain spaces because of the impact they have on mental health • Relating western technology with Indigenous technology
WHY?	CULTURAL IDEOLOGY
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To benefit their community because that is their responsibility and cultural value • To keep mental health a priority because otherwise they would not be in balance • To connect with and be considerate of others because that is part of being in Indigenous community, especially because it is in diaspora and disrupted by COVID as the latest hardship • To honor the ancestors and traditions because they feel their work is to continue culture. • To provide inspiration and information for future generations as a “good ancestor”

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get the word out on issues critical to community health and survivance • To educate the general public on misinformation, stereotypes and otherwise invisibility of Indigenous peoples
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Figure 7.

Aspects of CTDA in the Main Findings of This Study (Examples)

All of these data either directly or indirectly involve the features, capabilities and performance found in specific platforms artist-participants use or have used during the sampling timeframe of May 2020 to October 2021. Those connections are discussed below through artist-participant storytelling and discourse analysis. Discussion of findings and theory building address Brock’s (2018) two “requirements” for CTDA:

1. “The theory should draw directly from the perspective of the group under examination.
2. Critical technoculture should be integrated with... a cultural continuity perspective” (n.p.)

Emergent Themes from Art-Stories on SNS

Generosity

Generosity is an essential Indigenous cultural value that manifests in a myriad of ways – gift giving; caring for elders; traditional community “giving away” through ceremony and informal contexts; sharing food and foodways; and very often, sitting, listening, and sharing stories. This theme appeared time and again in our conversations, and takes on particular forms that bridge off and online experiences. Artist-participants expressed the value of generosity (e.g. LaFond, LaPensée); making the work accessible and affordable (e.g. Lapensée, Lopez, Herr); creating ways to continue culture through sharing and uplifting others (e.g. Clarkson, Rowe, Southall, Black, Wapaha); and generating opportunities for community members to learn and/or generate income (e.g. Lapensée).

Nayana LaFond's ongoing MMIWG Project is a series of portraits she paints of Indigenous people who have lost a loved one to murder or kidnapping, and memorial portraits of the missing and murdered. The series is black and white with starkly contrasting red to signify the spiritual nature of the overall awareness movement, and the connection to those who are still part of the community. She has reached out to families, but mostly, portraits are by request from the families through social media and other communication channels. She has committed to painting for everyone who requests, and shares free prints with the families. She began the project by asking to paint portraits to raise awareness, with some appearing on the Ziibiwing MMIWG online exhibit (Hadden, 2020). She shared the project on SNS and was surprised by the positive response and the great need for families to have her paint a loved one. She says:

I shared it with the group, and overnight I got something like 6,000 reactions. And that's when I was like 'Whoa, okay!' And people started messaging me and said, 'Hey, could you paint me?' And then I said I'll do a couple more, just a couple, you know, not a whole lot. And then I said, 'Anybody who wants me to, I will,' and the first day I got 25 [requests]. (Personal communication, August 9, 2021)

The series, which now has more than 90 portraits, is an act of generosity to the families who are often silenced or overlooked. LaFond (2018) says on her project webpage, "This project is not about me, which is why I don't talk about myself when discussing this work. This project is about each person and their story." When she is asked to speak, she gives the platform over to the families if they wish to use the portrait as a way to talk about these sensitive and traumatic experiences.

LaFond has also leveraged her art exhibits and sales to benefit the families and organizations that provide direct help. She says:

If each person gives me permission to sell prints on their specific image, then I will, but that money will only help me keep it going, and then in excess I donate. So that's why for specific women, I donate to their charity. So far, I'm still always in the red, but I always will be, and that's fine. (Personal communication, July 28, 2021)

For Jaime Black, a self-admitted critic of digital technologies and spaces, the relationship between herself, the work of the REDress Project and the wider community is one that also decenters herself and lets others into the process of creating, learning, and healing. She says:

At first, I was really just afraid of sharing that out, and sort of like allowing that to happen. But I think it's just very colonial to hoard and own, like have ownership over things. I was worried that the wrong people would get ahold of it and start using it for not great um purposes, you know? (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

Now that she is several years into the project, she acknowledges that although not all experiences and uses of the REDress Project are what she would hope for, she is glad people have taken the work beyond what she feels she could have done as an individual:

That's the power of generosity and sharing of these like ideas - they're able to continue to grow where otherwise they couldn't. And so it's been really amazing to see so many different creative people, you know, filtering these ideas through their own creative kind of perspective. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

The experience of open collaboration is a type of generosity, a leap of faith, especially when works and projects are shared through social networking sites. Open collaboration creates spaces both on and offline for families and other artists to express their experiences of violence and healing from that violence. Collaborative art-stories are an important bridge connecting siloed Indigenous communities and individuals by prioritizing and "glocalizing" their common issues around violence.

A REDress exhibit is unique to the location, and is usually starts through an invitation to Black by a university or museum. The exhibit partners then put a call out on social media and through in-person channels to have local community members contribute dresses, and oftentimes, create a panel about local issues (Figure 8). Black says this is an essential part of the project because the crisis of murdered and missing impacts communities in many different ways. She says host organizations often use local dresses in the exhibit and use public outdoor spaces to draw attention to the things that are happening in their own communities.



Figure 8.

Jaime Black, REDress Project

Note: Gilcrease Museum in Tulsa, Oklahoma, posts a photo on Facebook from the REDress Project exhibit March 6, 2021. The museum used social media to both promote Jaime Black’s exhibit and call for contribution of dresses to localize the project (Gilcrease Museum, 2021).

Although the experience of the exhibition is not ideal for digital spaces, Black says online promotion, calling for contributions, and hosting panel discussions have been effective ways to reach and extend potential audiences for the in-person experience. In this way, the generosity of inclusion and shared “ownership” of the art exhibit bridges the lived experiences of violence against Indigenous people, and helps create a place for understanding and healing in communities.

In contrast, museums and similar organizations have often been contentious spaces where they showcase settler-colonial desires to collect, keep and control Indigenous artifacts and intellectual property. Black and other artist-participants described the ways Indigenous generosity shows up to disrupt such narratives of exclusivity.

The typical museum operates in a way that can make access to the work difficult or prohibitive through entrance fees, even with exhibits that promote public awareness. In her position as museum curator, Chelsea Herr is making moves to create more accessible spaces, especially for Indigenous

people, whose art and artifacts are often set behind digital paywalls and literal walls, which is inherently an anti-Indigenous model.

Herr says the free entrance model is great, and “makes people more likely to sit down in your amazing café and spend money” (Personal communication, January 28, 2021). She believes the IPCC is a good case study of how institutions and communities could work. With her own childhood experience in Los Angeles of spending money to travel to and gain entrance to museums, free entry at the Smithsonian Museums in Washington, D.C., was a huge surprise. Now that she heads up the Indigenous collections at a museum, she is striving to find ways to make the exhibits inclusive. This is one way she is advocating for continued improvements and possibilities in Indigenous-led museum spaces that reflect values like generosity and relationality.

The rise of Indigenous created “cultural centers” like Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways in Michigan, and the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center (IPCC) in New Mexico, herald a progressive model of decolonization in part, by offering free admission for Native people. Selective admission prices can target financial inequities, but in this instance, it targets historical inequity and the rights of Indigenous people to have sovereignty over their own cultural items. An important aspect of reimagining and managing heavily colonized spaces like museums is making sure Indigenous people have access to not only view museum collections, but to participate in writing interpretive materials, guiding archiving methods, and keeping appropriate boundaries for the use of cultural items. This aspect of decolonization through generosity must be balanced by Indigenous sovereignty, especially in digital spaces, where boundaries are less clear. Access for Indigenous people is one step in decolonizing that also helps create a different interaction with museum spaces on and offline for all visitors. Interactions that establish an atmosphere of Indigeneity by showing values like generosity can also model a different way of setting respectful boundaries.

Shelby Rowe, who is also based in Oklahoma, was awarded Chickasaw Nation Dynamic Woman of the Year in 2020. Her loomed beadwork often portrays prominent people and stories from her culture, and being given an award for her work in suicide prevention efforts, is related to the way she interacts online through her art-stories. She avoids using hashtags that directly point to violence and statistics for Native people, and is careful in the way she shares art-stories to promote her culture and in many ways, model Indigenous values. She says the award is not just a point of pride for herself, but a mantle of responsibility for what that visibility might mean for her community. She asks herself:

What am I doing to give back? What am I doing to be a good role model, to promote our culture? I mean, what am I doing to kind of lay that path for people to come after? So [the award and work] was more of wanting to live up to my relatives. (Personal communication, February 9, 2021)

Similarly, Elizabeth LaPensée, sees her role as a resource for others, especially on social media, where she sets up groups and spaces, and then lets others take on leadership roles to maintain them. She likens her presence in the vastness of the internet as an “Auntie with tea.” And in this role, she has worked to create Indigenous-centered projects – comic books like *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, and online games – which fund new and rising Indigenous artists and designers, channels money to non-profits that address violence in communities, as well as support free and open game access to players and readers. Because she has a profession that allows her time and resources to create such projects, she is able to make those projects available across as many platforms as possible. She says:

It's been really important for me and my work to make sure that anything I can do can be downloaded from the ether, like it can be downloaded somewhere where there's internet access, and there's an ability to continue accessing it without internet. (Personal communication, June 16, 2020)

She has collaborated closely with people to make sure they are given credit but also to build capacity with community members. Such processes, especially online, need more time than non-Indigenous projects, which is not, according to Lapensée, necessarily the way the internet expects

games and books to be created. Creating safe, interesting, engaging, and important spaces online takes a level of generosity of time and talents. She says, “It means knowing, and it means to be responsible for training people and taking the time to understand that the project will take longer” (Personal communication, June 16, 2020). She expresses Indigenous ideas of time and project management that allow true inclusion and kinship.

Karen Clarkson also feels that sense of responsibility to give freely in the case of education about violence against Indigenous people. She says she decided to make copies of her piece, “We Rise” (Figure 9) available online to the public, especially to Choctaw people. The piece incorporates QR codes into the design, so that it becomes more than a work of art, but a work of education and potentially, action on the issue of MMIR.



Figure 9.

Karen Clarkson, “We Rise”

Note: Karen Clarkson (2020) posts on SNS with works in progress. She crowdsourced the name of the piece “We Rise” while in development. In her Facebook post, she explains the significance of the butterfly wing as an homage to for Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg’s dissent collars and her contributions to women’s rights.

The gift of someone’s time is an intervention of Indigenous generosity into fast-paced online and capitalistic processes. Anyone who has worked with Indigenous communities knows that it takes

time to build relationship and trust, in defiance of a long history of violation of those core values. All of the artist-participants in this study shared stories of the way they make time to support other Native artists and encourage others to seek their own creative voices. Multimedia artist Monica Wapaha says, for instance, it's better to work with others, and she, "always make time for Indigenous female artists all the time, and I will always make time for that, because I think that's powerful for all of us together" (Personal communication, May 17, 2021).

Expressing Indigenous generosity makes an important mark on decolonizing and humanizing digital spaces. It is not only a deeply held value to allow others to participate in cultural production alongside someone with a professional role, but also to bring positive experiences to others. Acts of generosity become a way to address the anonymity and individualism of online interactions. The individual artist takes on the responsibility to represent Indigenous values, but also to build a bridge to community well-being through relationality.

Collaboration & Reciprocation

One central aspect of Indigenous cultures is concern with the community. Kirkness & Barnhardt's (1991) Four R's of Indigenous Research – the values of relationality, respect, relevance, and reciprocity – emerge in the way the artist-participants create, share, and interact with their publics. Most reported working in collaboration with other artists or with Native organizations to create pieces that help promote common goals of raising awareness, building community responses to violence, and knowledge sharing.

Elizabeth Lapensée works closely with community not only to give them credit on the final works, but also in the belief that it's her responsibility to teach others. She says:

What I try to do with my work is like express myself as I need to be expressed, but then at the same time I'm always looking for opportunities to ensure that other voices are uplifted as well. (Personal communication, June 16, 2020)

She encourages others to collaborate and share knowledge as forms of reciprocity and relationality. “Understand that people are equal. And their knowledge, even if their technology or certain technology skills or certain access to resources are not.” Creating *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, was about giving opportunities to other Indigenous womxn who were writers and illustrators, to have something of their own, collectively (Figure 10). Creating a successful publication requires some skill with the industry: pitching stories, storyboarding, engaging experts and collaborators, coordinating via digital technologies, budgeting, etc. LaPensée’s expertise in this area is a responsibility to community to share knowledge and continue culture through art-storytelling and mentoring.

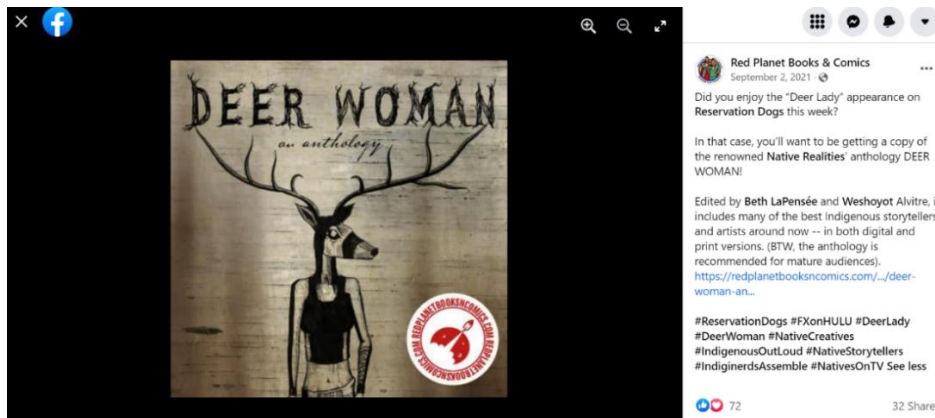


Figure 10.

Elizabeth LaPensée, Deer Woman: An Anthology promoted on Facebook

Note: Publisher Red Planet Books & Comics (2021) helped boost sales of *Deer Woman: An Anthology* by posting on Facebook with a tie-in to a “Deer Lady” storyline on the television show “Reservation Dogs”.

Jaime Black also put her talents toward creating a collective voice to speak to important issues that might not otherwise be heard. She says:

[The REDress Project] was just really like a turning point in me using my artistic gift in order to help get people’s voices heard. And start pulling out these issues that are happening in our own country out from under the carpet and getting it noticed. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

Invisibility is an issue artist-participants reported in their interviews. Gaining some notoriety and confidence using SNS is one way they help others make their voices heard in public discourse. They make not only the art visible, but the cause, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Additionally, artist-participants often described how they keep a balance between their time, talents and materials needed to do the art, and serving the needs of the community. Nayana LaFond created her series of portraits, one request at a time. She soon found the need to memorialize and draw attention to the victims and their families was great. Her way of reciprocating with community is to sell prints and donate the excess proceeds to local charities. She says:

If each person gives me permission to sell prints on their specific image, then I will, but that money will only help me keep it going. And then the excess I donate to the charities for specific women. So far, I'm still always in the red, but I always will be, and that's fine. (Personal communication, June 17, 2021)

It is important to her that families be an integral part of what she does, not only in money matters, but in the way she talks with them about their request and gets permission before sharing out or making prints. Her goal is to uplift their voices through her art, but she does not consider this her project. On her website, LaFond (2018) says:

This project is about each person and their story. If I am asked to speak about the project, I will always focus on the stories I am entrusted to share and often hand the platform to the person or family. Often these families and survivors and activists are not heard. If me painting these paintings is providing them with a platform to discuss this topic, then I should provide that platform to them. (n.p.)

Understanding the sacrifices and struggles of others, especially elders and ancestors, is a powerful motivator in Indigenous life. Chelsea Herr says she continued her education through graduate school, knowing many of her ancestors did not. Her grandmother, like many in earlier generations, did not make it through 8th grade. For Herr school is not a measure of intelligence but a way to find her own path to give back to her community. She says:

Knowing that to do good for my community and to honor and repay not only you know the sacrifices that [my grandmother] made, but everyone before her made, is going through this process of getting an education and getting into spaces that weren't meant for us. (Personal communication, January 28, 2021)

She found her way to contribute to her community through leadership in spaces where Indigenous people have lost control over almost every aspect of their lives – cultural items taken and put behind walls. As a museum curator now, the promise of virtual experiences is another step to connecting collections to those who are the rightful inheritors of the knowledge and social systems they embody. Virtual tours of the museum and other virtual programming are some ways to open up access, especially to Indigenous people, which is what Herr believes the collections are there for.

In bringing collaborative exhibits like the REDress Project (at Gilcrease Museum) and Hearts of Our People (HOOP; at Philbrook Museum of Art), museums can add another layer of reintegrating cultural items with the Indigenous community, both locally and more widely. In this way, Herr and others who are pushing the museum structures in new directions, are building bridges through the virtual world to those who are displaced as a diasporic people. At the same time, the local advisement at each location for HOOP and REDress is a more immediate bridge between the larger international issues of MMIR and misrepresentation of Indigenous women in visual media, and the way those issues specifically manifest in places like Tulsa, Oklahoma. Through Herr's experience on the REDress Project at the Gilcrease, she says the model of community guidance is very promising:

[Local advisory boards on traveling exhibits] is such a good way of doing things, because it recognizes that wherever you're going, you're going to Native lands, right? And having an advisory board that maybe they're aware of issues in that area that you aren't, and that's not common museum practice at all. (Personal communication, January 28, 2021)

Herr brings her knowledge and cultural values to her work in creating such opportunities. She views her role as taking leadership in places previously closed to Native people and innovating based in Indigenous ways of knowing and being. In this way, using collaborative approaches takes "giving back"

further than a one-way or one-time gift. It is creating relationship based in reciprocity and deep respect for the expertise already in the community.

She and Lapensée are also bridging their own experience and future creatives in the arts. This kind of reciprocity with past and future relatives is in stark contrast to western visions of transactional relationship, which requires some kind of payback or quid pro quo. This network style of communication and expression bridges the Indigenous diaspora created by attempts to eliminate Indigeneity and claims to land. By creating collaborations based on reciprocity, small efforts of many people come together to formulate a more prominent and cohesive vision of Indigenous creative expressions.

Calling In & Calling Out

Social networking sites often serve as a public bulletin board. For Indigenous activists and community practitioners they are places to publicly post grievances, clap back at misinformation, mobilize support for families in crisis, call for assistance in locating the missing, and invite people into conversations. It is a public space for Indigenous discourse to call out, or name organizations and individuals who are causing harm in the community, as well as to call in those who are impacted or interested in helping. Calling in ancestors, future generations and specific audiences for the work and topic around violence - activism at the heart of the need. But because the artist-participants in this study would not uniformly call what they are doing activism, I looked at other functions SNS serve as well in this context.

Photographer Marcella Hadden's community has experienced murder and kidnapping, and her care for the well-being of the people took the form of truth telling through an online exhibit. The timing for "BOONTAK (Stop it!): Stolen Daughters of Turtle Island" (Figure 10) from the virtual launch in fall 2019 to spring 2021, spanned the time in-person attendance had to be limited at Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways due to the pandemic. The virtual exhibit now is a video on YouTube (Hadden, 2020). Hadden collaborated with her granddaughter on the project. In an interview with *The*

Art Newspaper (Angeleti, 2020), she says she didn't choose the topic so much as it chose her through the community need. She put out a call on social media to women, offering a free photo portrait for those who wanted to raise awareness on MMIWG. The response was strong, and included Secretary of Interior Deborah Haaland, who has been a leader in the issue.

Keeping connected is vital for the reservation to persevere through the pandemic and the crisis of violence. She says she wanted the exhibit to call in the people who were suffering, even as it called out the grim statistics:

We've had a child that was murdered here on our reservation, and we have a young gentleman who is missing, so I think [the exhibit] helped put some things in perspective. Maybe give them support knowing that they're not alone and that there's a big movement towards it and building community pride. (Personal communication, June 17, 2021)

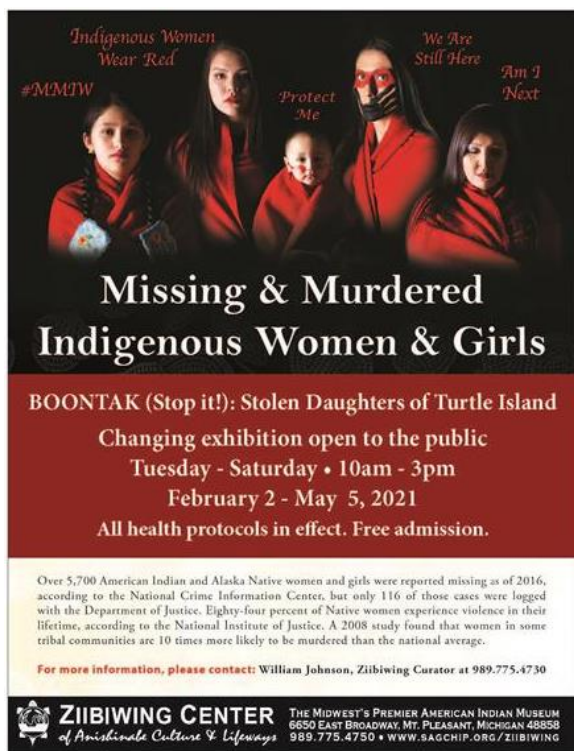


Figure 11.

Digital poster for “BOONTAK (Stop it!): Stolen Daughters of Turtle Island”

Note. The exhibit was produced by the Ziibiwing Center of Anishinabe Culture & Lifeways in Mount Pleasant, Michigan, and remained online after the original dates of exhibition. The digital poster features Hadden's and her granddaughter's photo portraits (Ziibiwing, 2021).

Karen Clarkson's art also carried messages of truth for the public to see. She says raising awareness through her art is important to her because "not only does it bring to life you know, the horrible truthiness of this, but also inspires [viewers] to see that we are more than this." She combines Indigenous beauty with symbolism and educational materials in a unique statement of the strength of Indigenous womxn to overcome and transform into a better life.

Neebinnauzhik Southall creates characters in traditional dress to remind audiences that two-spirit identities have always been part of Anishinaabe culture, even as the term is one that was created to speak from many Indigenous cultures and is used more widely. She does extensive research in historical archives, and uses color, style, and context to bring elements of long-standing culture into her illustrations. Southall says:

There's a way of reclaiming people's place in the culture and to do it in an informed way. I'm looking at clothing styles and like putting it in the context of our culture, right? And we do have agokwe, which are like in contemporary society, they would be someone like transgender women. And so it's really important for me to include that. So at one point an illustration with a person in a very old-style dress is saying that these people have been part of the culture. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

By showing the continuity of culture, Southall claims and reclaims a place for two-spirit and other gender identities as a way to welcome in those who are often ostracized, erased, and victimized. Her approach to violence prevention is one of positive messages and creating understanding. Figure 11 shows how the visual message of clothing complements the text, which was composed by two-spirit designer Cecelia Rose LaPointe: "Two spirits are cherished. Two spirits are valued. Two spirits are treasured."

The illustrations Southall created visually and rhetorically assert the rights and needs of two-spirits people to be seen in the culture and to feel accepted. A primary audience is two-spirits themselves, and a secondary audience – other Native, and non-Native people – view a narrative that

simply and beautifully defies WECP gender binaries and erasure from narratives about Indigenous cultures.

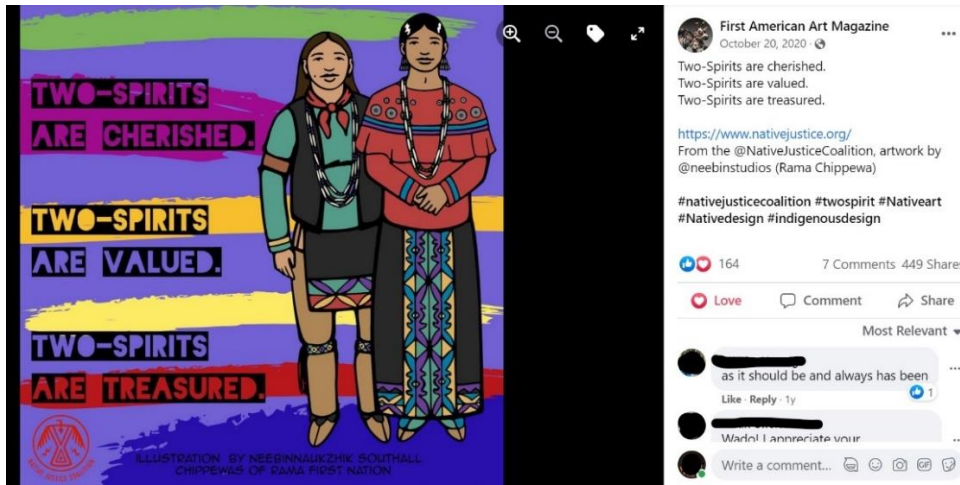


Figure 12.

Neebinnaukzhik Southall, “Two-Spirits are Cherished.”

Note: First American Art Magazine (2020) used this illustration to promote acceptance of two-spirits in a social marketing campaign on Facebook. The illustration Southall created was developed into this shareable graphic with the caption by two-spirit designer, Cecelia Rose LaPointe, for Native Justice Coalition.

Southall and others show a commitment to continuity of culture, which expresses the unique sense of space/time Indigenous artists imbue their work with (Herr, 2020). The regard for the past (teachings they have received), present (pandemic situation) and future (their place now and how it might impact the future) underlies much of how artist-participants view their place as artists. They situate themselves in community as it ranges on and offline and across a timeline that is distinct from western conceptualizations.

It is telling that as a role model and leader in her community through her art, Shelby Rowe talked about the line of ancestors who appear in the historical record. By reimagining history through her beadwork, navigating communication online, and applying Indigenous knowledges using digital technologies, she clearly expresses an Indigenous vision of the world. Calling in courage and inspiration

from her ancestors to embody her place among her people, she asks, “What am I doing to kind of lay that path for people to come after?”

The idea of calling in and calling out applies not only to the general public or current users of SNS, but includes in its audience those from the past, present and future who impacted and may be impacted by artist efforts today. Through their visual representations in public spaces, artists impact not only how we view contemporary Indigenous peoples, but also give us pause to rethink the past and envision a future that includes Indigenous cultures and peoples.

Creating & Respecting Boundaries

When meaningful collaborations are built with local Indigenous communities, artist-participants also described the responsibilities of being accountable and careful with sharing out information. In other words, creating relationships, whether online or in person, require consideration of impact to individuals and community.

Jaime Black described the impacts of the REDress Project exhibitions that go beyond quantitative measures, like number of visitors. These very public exhibits hold space for Indigenous needs – grief, acknowledgment, truth telling - that may not be communicated outside the families of MMIR, but are a vital aspect of the REDress Project experience. Black says:

There’s just so many different kinds of impacts, and so, like I think the dresses also provide a place where families who are going through this a place to mourn and also an open um supportive community of people who are coming to look at these dresses. And their will to be there for the families. And that’s necessary as well. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

Many of the artist-participants also expressed their need and desire to protect community, especially since the topic of violence is part of historic and ongoing traumas inflicted upon the Native community. This can create a double-sided message of awareness – awareness on one level for a public who rarely sees Native realities in context that is critical of settler-colonization, and awareness within the community to help those who may be targeted for victimization. Although Shelby Rowe most often

presents images of strength and leadership, she recognizes the need for important information within her community on the real possibilities of violence. She says:

The thing of my own journey [as a survivor], that's the story I wanted my nieces to know, and I wanted other women to know because as a community, it's so important to raise awareness of murdered and missing Indigenous women. But how do we do that and protect our own well-being? (Personal communication, February 9, 2021)

Creating boundaries is essential for herself as an artist and suicide prevention professional, and creating boundaries for the community, who are often inundated online and offline with stories of tragedy and violence. Even as the issue becomes more visible, the strength of community action is still often muted in the settler-colonial discourses of tragedy and hopelessness of the contemporary Indigenous experience.

Another boundary artist-participants talked about was their creative rights to images shared online. Walking the careful lines of what is shared out, what is permissible to use is a conversation between the artist, their inspirations and existing cultural knowledge (knowledge holders). Cassandra John created a graphic illustration for a pow-wow committee to use to promote the event and the theme – honoring and remembering MMIWG. John says because the pow wow was based in a community that she is not part of herself, she walked carefully through the design. She says, “They sent me different seamstresses' dresses, and I didn't want to copy their traditional family designs, so I thought I wanted to make my own.” She navigates the cultural systems and values of cultural ownership to create materials for a wide variety of clients, knowing that her work, whether distributed on or offline, is a reflection of who she is. Posting Indigenous art-stories on SNS often results in questions and comments from elders or community members about the origin of designs, where the knowledge about colors, plants, iconography, etc. came from, and often, who the artist's family is. Knowing this will be the case, artists often post such information up front to be accountable and transparent.

Nayana LaFond notes the parallels between on and offline interactions and the way SNS can be used to build continuance and business as usual. She is comfortable using SNS because she says, “It’s created a place where we can come together, where we can connect with each other, where we can still exchange and sell things and do the things that we would do we person if we could.” (Personal communication, June 17, 2021).

Even with positive aspects of using SNS, the lack of clear boundaries for non-Indigenous people, especially interacting online is evident in artist-participant experiences. Outright theft of Indigenous intellectual property is common (e.g. Turner, 2021). I argue this is especially true for Indigenous artists because such actions by non-Indigenous people reveals an entitlement over Indigenous existence, including land, people, and culture. Violating creative, visual, and rhetorical sovereignty is another manifestation of the systems and logics of settler-colonization in a similar way to museums. In this case, taking images of paintings created to benefit the families of MMIR is an especially egregious example of the kind of trade-offs Indigenous artists make when sharing out their works to the general public (e.g. Figure 13).



Figure 13.

Facebook advertisement for Native Pride Clothing (November 20, 2020).

The internet provides a tremendous tool to create, collect, curate and archive Indigenous cultural works. As such, the work of artist-participants is creating a lasting legacy on Indigenous terms. The content is filled with Indigenous-centered discourses, and reflects a holistic integration of art, storytelling and culture that considers the concrete ramifications of sharing out information in digital spaces. Care for community includes setting appropriate boundaries for self and others that have historically been breached by settler-colonization. The theme of boundaries that emerged from the data is a distinctively Indigenous manifestation of culture when it concerns WECP violation and Indigenous survivance and sovereignties.

Fierceness

A sense of fierceness is interwoven throughout the artistic processes and ways artist-participants talk about violence against Indigenous people. Asserting their autonomy as artists is a particular theme, where Native and non-Native audience reaction can sometimes attempt to enforce standards of what is appropriate and what is not. Artist-participants, as arbiters of taste, often call in the power of femininity and matriarchal authority to counter critics and assert the importance of their intended messages. Their art-stories and SNS content can call to mind the fierceness of the Amazonian Indian Queen, but their discourse reframes her powerful visage as protector of her people and not as a temptress.

In her portrayal of gendered violence in *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, Maria Wolf Lopez emphasizes the strength and power of womxn to defend themselves and others, despite the cultural messages that womxn are like flowers and are perceived as weaker. She says,

The story might never fully resonate for me. This story was never for me. The story was for them. The story was for them to be powerful and to be strong. And to not give up, you know, and to fight back. (Personal communication, July 31, 2020)

Her drawings (Figure 14) show Deer Woman as a ruthless defender with a pack of wolves backing her up. The idea that womxn are never alone, and can call upon this kind of strength to get

through a violent situation, is impactful in print, digital imagery, and in the way Lopez interacts with readers on and offline.



Figure 14.

Maria Wolf Lopez, "Deer Woman"

Note: Maria Wolf Lopez, "Deer Woman," 2017 [Illustrated panel].

Shelby Rowe's loom work starts with portraits, and are translated into pixels on graph paper, in a very digitized imagining of how beading technologies bridge off and online creativity. Like Lopez's graphic art, Rowe's art-story of Hatchet Woman (Figure 14) is also a fierce call to action, but based in historical stories of Chickasaw womxn defending their villages against French armies in the 1700-1800s.

Evoking their victorious counter attacks in both her beaded loom work and online prints, Rowe's art reinforces oral traditions about Indigenous womxn being anything but passive victims. This fierceness echoes the Amazonian Indian Queen, but rather than a WECP fetishization of the female

body, facial tattoos and bare breasts display the determination and lack of fear Hatchet Woman’s body carries in Chickasaw stories. Instead this portrayal clearly asserts the role of Indigenous womxn as protectors and defenders in their communities.



Figure 15.

Shelby Rowe, "Hatchet Woman"

Note: Artist Shelby Rowe shares her works in progress. This Facebook post on January 30, 2021, shows her packing up printed copies of her beaded piece “The Hatchet Woman”.

Rowe’s next piece in the series (currently in planning) will feature her son with similar cultural markings, but this time, in a contemporary setting carries those stories forward. Rowe says she wants to portray him tightening his tie:

He’s there with a ‘just try me’ look on his face – he should have a really confident rebellious look on his face. And [I asked] what would a modern Chickasaw warrior be? Because we’re winning our battles in the courtroom. And so to make him traditional, there’ll probably be the traditional markings on his hands instead of on his face. But to have his hair pulled back in the traditional braid and a feather. And that, yeah, that’s what a modern Chickasaw warrior is like today. That is how you fight for your people. (Personal communication, February 9, 2021)

She continues to pull together past, present and future in her work, and has been sharing her process via SNS. However, she recently shut down her Facebook page in order to concentrate on keeping connected with community and family. Her loom work is inspired by digital imagery, but at the center is a fierce dedication to expressing the present and future visions of what it means to stand up for her people, and fight for the success and happiness of future generations.

One of the icons of Indigenous feminine power is the “auntie,” who serves as second mother, confidante, and teacher. Aunties especially have become a popular topic on social media, where humorous portrayals of aunties and uncles acting up, drinking, and “snagging” (hooking up) has drawn both laughter and criticism in the Indigenous community. Graphic artist Kassie John created a visual campaign to challenge derogatory images, and lift up the true nature and importance of the role womxn serve in community (Figure 15). She says, “Native aunties are warriors for social justice and caretakers of our Indigenous knowledge.” In reframing their “fierceness” and asking her audience to rethink what they have seen on social media, she connects stereotypes with violence against Indigenous people and affirms womxn’s value and beauty on Indigenous terms.



Figure 16.

Kassie John, “Native Aunties are Educators”

Note: Kassie John (2020) created a storybook about Native Aunties that shows some of the many roles womxn hold in the community. In this image, John sets up a contrast between the role of warrior, and the caring relationship with youth.

Monica Wapaha confronts her art audiences on and offline by visually destroying stereotypes of Indigenous womxn as they are portrayed in popular culture and fashion, most notably in Western films set in the 1800s. She created her *Revenge* series while in graduate school to show womxn in strong frames that counteract victimizing and sexualizing images (Figure 17). Her painting “Identity” (2017) was part of an online exhibit and panel discussion on resilient matriarchy, hosted by Open Doors Arts in Action, a project of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in Flagstaff, Arizona, in early 2021. She describes her approach:

What I was doing with that was mirroring back how violent the topics look to me, and most of my work deals with stereotypes that bothered me, because in a lot of those Western films they use a lot of Apaches and the Sioux. But we're often depicted in the film as hypersexualized. (Personal communication, May 17, 2021)



Figure 17.

Monica Wapaha, "Identity," from the Revenge series

Note: Facebook post by Monica Wapaha (2021) helping promote the exhibition and panel discussion she participated in January-March 2021.

Wapaha often uses images, like womxn in bikinis and headdresses, to challenge sexualized interpretations, because she says, “A lot of society thinks it’s OK to use [those images] because they’ve seen it so many times.” She says this approach bothers and confuses many people because it might look like she is also exploiting Indigenous female sexuality. She says they also often comment about her messing with the familiar visions of “their American Indian.” But from her point of view as an artist, she is physically cancelling out the stereotypes. By doing this she is using an Indigenous feminist aesthetic to show a true side of lived experiences by disrupting long-standing false and destructive discourses about Indigenous womxn.

Each of these four artists come to the issues of violence from different contexts of Tribe and profession. They have built bridges between what they have witnessed and their intended audiences – other Natives on social media, Indigenous youth, womxn, and non-Indigenous media makers. The characters in each of the pieces presented not only convey important inspirational messages about the

power of Indigenous womxn, but also reclaim interpretations of that power. While the image of courage in defense of community might play into stereotypes of the Noble Savage, the term fierceness better describes the agency of Indigenous womxn who are empowered by their community's trust.

Indigenous womxn's leadership has been twisted by the WECP imaginary to create discourses of hypersexualization and weakness. Artists present counterdiscourses that contextualize fierceness as duty to community. They defend Indigenous ways of knowing and being in a sea of misrepresentation, disrupting settler-colonial visions of their work and their relationship with ancestors and future generations. An important part of their disruption is using digital technologies to create and distribute powerful Indigenous-centered messages that arise from their own Tribal teachings and creativity.

Technocultural Discourse

Shelby Rowe's loomed bead art starts with digitizing photos and creating patterns in grid format. She describes the way she started beading as an "aha!" moment where art met office life:

I was looking at someone's loom work, and I was looking at a hatband, I think. And I was like 'Oh, huh... that's kind of like a spreadsheet. I'm good with spreadsheets, ike maybe I could do this.' So I was like, 'lemme give this a try.' (Personal communication, February 9, 2021)

Some of Rowe's beadwork is now in museums and private collections. Her tribute series of beaded cuffs features prominent Natives, like Cherokee Chief Wilma Mankiller and U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deborah Haaland. She also did a small portrait of Chief Sitting Bull that was inspired by a larger project by Indigenous artist Steven Paul Judd, which used Rubik's cubes to form a mosaic wall portrait. Rowe's work similarly requires a keen eye for the subtlety of colors and the normal variation within dye lots of beads. Part of her SNS activity is to share works in progress, which brings the viewer into the slow process where the full impact of the image does not appear until near the end of the project when she zooms out. Hers is a profoundly technology-driven, contemporary process that is deeply connected to her cultural roots.

Karen Clarkson's piece "We Rise" stands out for being multilayered and uniquely interactive with the digital world, despite the fact that it starts with an historical photo (Figure 18). A few years ago, she thought about the potential impact of mobile technology and how she might leverage its connectivity. She says, "The cell phone has earned its way into our lives, and it's now become an extension of who we are" (Personal communication, October 30, 2020). Taking the Edward Curtis image of the woman, who is standing, wrapped in a blanket, Clarkson saw it as a cocoon. Although unrelated on the surface, the then-recent death of former U.S. Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsberg, turned her thoughts to the shifts in women's rights, and the way Indigenous womxn are still troubled by violence and oppression in the 150 years since the photo was taken. Using the frame of metamorphosis, she added butterfly wings based on Ginsberg's "dissent" collars. Beneath the womxn are scattered squares of quick response codes (QR) that direct the in-person viewer, via their mobile phone, to educational websites about MMIR. She says she wanted to show movement and change in the work, and make it a lasting piece one could interact with into the future.

I had to make it visually compelling so that it looks like she was breaking free of something and bits of her that were being disseminated... But long after I'm gone things on the internet have a life you, know, like people are still going to be able to research it and see a lot of information in it. It is our collective memory. (Personal communication, October 30, 2022)



Figure 18.

Karen Clarkson, "We Rise"

Note: Clarkson (2020)

Clarkson has created four similar pieces using QRC with the intention of having the viewer become involved in the piece and bridging the gap between audience and object to become a subjective, empathetic experience. She also bridges past, present and future, and on and offline worlds in the way she herself interacts with her posts on Facebook. Her intended audience is the general public, especially for an educational piece like "We Rise," but the features of Facebook also bring her into conversation with her art-stories. Clarkson shares her works on Facebook. She crowdsourced the title of

this homage piece and regularly asks her followers for feedback on pieces in progress. She says Facebook can be very static in the way it becomes an archive, but the Memories feature reminds her of what she has previously posted. This gives her the opportunity to see her work in a new light and offers the option to repost and refresh the presentation to a potentially new audience and continue it in the collective memory.

In creating the REDress Project, Jaime Black wanted to create an intimate interaction with the exhibit that she believes would not be possible with a virtual walk-through. She wanted to humanize and bring the missing and murdered into people's lives. She says:

I think one of the most powerful things about those dresses is that when you're standing beside them, you feel like you're standing beside someone. And it feels like. And you can't get that experience from looking at a monitor. That's not possible. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

And although she feels internet technology can distract her away from her path as an artist, she acknowledges the power of SNS to spread the word about the issue and the work of the project. As a witness to violence in the Indigenous community, she also believes it can serve a different purpose in addressing that violence. She says for those who are experiencing violence and oppression, especially when it involves law enforcement, digital technologies and SNS allow them to record incidents and share with large groups of people. She says:

We saw things happening between, you know, police and people trying to protect like their land firsthand, in ways like we couldn't before. And so, like anything, it's a tool and can be used in any way. Like great ways and really horrible ways. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

Monica Wapaha has also struggled with the way internet technology is part of her life, as a person who works on public health campaigns for her Tribe. She got burned out in 2020, as the deluge of serious news about COVID-19 hit her reservation community. She says she has not really been posting things since then because she felt overexposed and overwhelmed. Wapaha also lives in a rural area,

where the connection to the outside world became necessary in many ways. As she balances SNS use and a healthy level of screen time, she says:

Technology is working with me and against me. But it can actually be fun, and I know why people like it - because you can be really creative on how to make videos and photographs for Instagram and Twitter. (Personal communication, May 17, 2021)

As an artist who creates for many different audiences and purposes, Neebinnaukzhik Southall looks at SNS technology in terms of relationships and how people interact, contrasting Indigenous and non-Indigenous protocols and expectations. She chooses spaces based on audience accessibility as well as protecting herself emotionally and spiritually. She says the manufactured environment of SNS encourages superficiality and the structure interferes with more respectful and authentic interactions. She says,

There are only so many ways you can end up acting, right? I think we forget that. But again there's the idea of you sit down with a lot of people, you share food with them, you share stories, you learn more about them. That's the deeper way of knowing. (Personal communication, April 9, 2021)

The balance between advancing opportunities and protecting the well-being of the artists and communities became a larger challenge in 2020. The shutdowns for the pandemic were not only a challenge for land-based museums, but also became an opportunity to reimagine digital spaces for meaningful outreach on sensitive and vital topics like MMIR, intimate partner violence, and residential schools. Tulsa's Gilcrease Museum was in the process of wrapping up exhibits for their demolition and redesign when the shutdowns happened. Chelsea Herr and the education department pivoted some aspects of an exhibit on Cherokee basket artist Shan Goshorn with the state keeping spaces like Gilcrease open to the public. A Facebook Live panel discussion (Figure 19) on a topic Goshorn's work addressed – the violence of residential schools – became an inspiration to offer more free events like this even once all COVID restrictions were lifted and the remodel was complete. The open model of a digital event gave speakers time to tell their stories without the need for masks or some of the more

difficult aspects of sharing painful stories in person. The audience experience was similar, and Herr notes that people could join in for free from the comfort and support of their homes, and post comments if they wanted to without interrupting the speakers. The speakers were unaware of the hundreds of people, many of whom were sharing and connecting with other former victims of residential school violence.

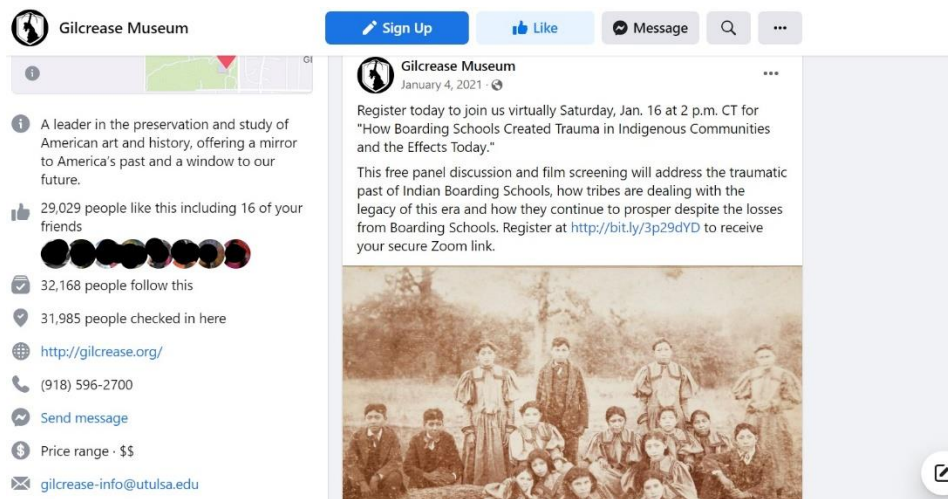


Figure 19.

Gilcrease Museum invitation to Facebook Live event

Note: Gilcrease Museum (2021). Invitation to “How Boarding Schools Created Trauma in Indigenous Communities and the Effects Today” Facebook Live event.

Before the panel discussion in January 2021, Gilcrease had never hosted an event of this kind before. Attendance was very high, with over 1200 viewers on Facebook Live. In debriefing, Herr says the committee recognized they would not have had so many people come if it had been in person, even if they had the capacity for it. Additionally, an in-person event would have prevented many from sharing their own stories and connecting with others, even though the chat function was not completely anonymous. Posting in chat shows your username and a very small icon of a person’s Facebook profile

photo. They learned that although many spaces on SNS are not conducive to such respectful, heartfelt, and serious interactions, an environment centered on and inclusive of Indigenous people, especially elders, can and could be a place of learning and healing. Herr says, “She says, “Being able to share our own stories provides healing; it provides healing for the individual sharing the stories, but it provides opportunities for community healing if it's shared in open spaces.”

Through the act of creating a digital space that centered comfort, truth telling and accessibility, this panel event demonstrates another way Indigenous creativity, generosity and technical skill shows up to bridge off and online processes of healing.

Hashtags as Rhetorical Sovereignty

Hashtags are short phrases that draw attention to a topic, posted content like artwork, or a created subcommunity around an interest. Hashtags are like headlights – people use them to see and to be seen online. More than with other themes in this study, the interaction of art-story and technocultural discourse is fully realized in the way artist-participants approached hashtags.

Several of the artist-participants have witnessed violence, either in their own lives, in their family or community. They talked about the way witnessing violence in person can often lead people to turn to the digital world for escape, solace, connection outside the situation, and reaching resources needed to cope. However, the digital world presents its own chaos in the form of violence: stalking, aggressive direct messages, spamming, doxing, copyright violation and taking over hashtags. Artist-participants use hashtags with precision and great thought for who they want to call in, and who or what they want to call out. In this sample they have “called in” and created online spaces for Indigenous youth who want to play computer games based in their culture (LaPensée), citizens of a certain Tribe (e.g. Clarkson and Rowe), families of victims (LaFond and Black), and queer and two-spirits (Southall and John). In posting their artwork online and promoting stories and issues, they have called out oil

companies, federal policies, sexist filmmakers, cultural appropriators, and perpetrators of violence against Indigenous relatives.

However, the form of hashtags forces users to chop ideas and issues into little pieces, especially abbreviations and acronyms that help communicate a social movement, like #metoo and #BIPOC. Hashtags are used to spread messages to mass audiences, which is good for awareness movements like #MMIW and creating its variants to address inclusion and precision of language: #MMIWG (adding girls), #MMIWG2S (adding two-spirit, which is sometimes written TS), #MMIWG2SQ+ (adding queer and other identities), #MMIP (persons or people), and #MMIR (relatives). Those in the anti-violence movement often debate about how to accurately and inclusively express who is impacted by gendered violence. A hashtag needs to be legible, and it has the potential to communicate a lot in a small space, but only for those who know how to read them. The term two-spirit may be familiar to some, for instance, but may not be recognized as the acronym 2S or TS.

Creating hashtags about an issue that impacts a small subpopulation, like American Indian/Alaska Natives, strikes a hard balance between being brief and conveying meaning in much the same way as hypertext. Hashtagging forces the user to confront the limitations of translating Indigenous ways of knowing and being into languages like English and Spanish. It pushes users to reduce their own needs into jingles. Who would know, for instance, that #MMIR meant that Indigenous people consider those who are lost to murder and kidnapping as relatives we still hold space for? Groups of Indigenous SNS users may know if they are involved in the movement to bring awareness or have been part of the conversations around visibility. The internet at large does not necessarily know how to parse #MMIR, and in this case, awareness campaigns are built on hashtag recognition.

#SovereignGames

Elizabeth LaPensée shared her approach to this dilemma. She described her own experience with harassment on and offline about a video game she created. The game portrays the violence of oil

companies destroying water, animals, and land. It gives the player the chance to use Indigenous spirit beings to heal the waters, the animals, and the land, and restore them to life. It is a game that calls out the violence of environmental destruction and calls in the power of Indigenous storytelling and traditional teachings.

The title of the game became a fairly popular hashtag and drew in people interested in designing games based in Native cultures. The hashtag became a way for people to share the game and also to support LaPensée when critics tried to shut her and the game down. As an artist and game designer, she has built community around Indigenous games developed by Indigenous people and primarily for Indigenous people. She considered using #IndigenousGames but felt that might draw in people who are creating games “inspired by Indigenous cultures” but not made by inspired Indigenous creators.

The violence of cultural theft, of silencing, of erasing and replacing by non-Indigenous people is rampant on the internet. Hashtags have been used for all these purposes. For many creatives, the contrast between #NativeInspired and #InspiredNative is an engaging way to talk about cultural appropriation, but also to define digital spaces for Indigenous creatives. LaPensée started using #SovereignGames because she says games created by us and for us are a form of sovereignty and self-determination. It is reclaiming rhetorical and creative sovereignty, which is an idea that resonates with those who want to find other Indigenous gamers and developers. It does not necessarily resonate with the wider public. She called in an intended audience with the hashtag #SovereignGames. She was creating a space that does not necessarily prioritize the number of likes or shares.

In other words, she has created a safe space in plain sight. It is a place of creativity and of healing.

#Two-Spirit, Indigiqueer & the Healing Jingle Dress

Kassie John created a series of graphic illustrations in 2020, exploring the many facets of Indigenous womxnhood. “Two-Spirit” features her brightly colored graphic illustration of a friend who dances jingle dress (Figures 20-21). She quotes her friend’s self-introduction, and explanation of how important and healing the dance is, and their gratitude for the guidance and respect of Indigenous womxn. John offers a brief introduction and a short, supportive response to her friend’s words. This helps establish relationality and context for her friend.

To bridge the work, John used #lgbtq to reach the wider community of gender and sexuality identities, as well as #jingledressdancer to connect to the wider powwow community. This expresses an Indigenous-centered intersectionality where hashtagging calls in multiple audiences that may not always overlap. The choice of hashtags is an act of inclusion and celebration of Indigenous queer existence. John says, “Our LGBTQ+, Indigiqueer [sic], and non-binary peoples are the most sacred members of our Indigenous communities” (2020, September 18). In this post, both John and her friend also express Indigenous concepts of style, protocols of introduction, and the kinship of powwow dancers, all of which transcend WECP norms of gender, style, and relationship. In this way, John bridges on and offline communities.

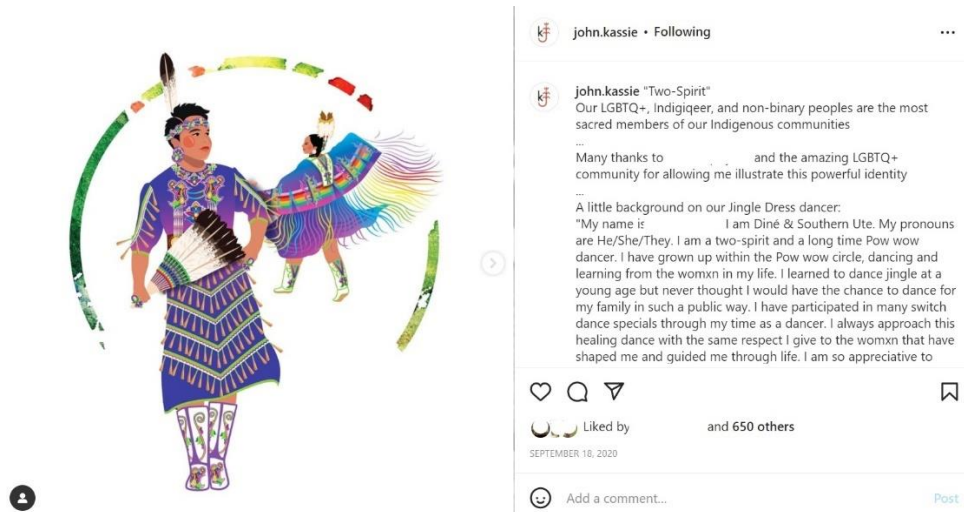


Figure 20.

Kassie John, "Two-Spirit," Pt. 1, Instagram

Note: Kassie John (2020, September 18) created a series of graphic illustrations that addressed the many facets of Indigenous womxn identities. "Two-Spirit" features a jingle dress dancer.



Figure 21.

Kassie John, "Two-Spirit" Pt. 2, Instagram

Note: Kassie John (2020, September 18). This screenshot shows the second half of her post with the hashtags she used.

Don't Trend on Me

In her Instagram post using the cover art from her glass accordion book, Monica Wapaha turns the phrase “Don’t tread on me,” into a declaration of autonomy and agency, creating a boundary between fashion trends and cultural appropriation (Figures 22-23). She uses a series of hashtags to augment the statistics around Indigenous womxn and violence in the U.S. and a short essay on stereotypes and the way genocide continues through exploitation of Indigenous womxn’s sexuality. She ties these themes to conquest of both Indigenous female bodies and the “wilderness” of the continent. The image of an “Indian” womxn in costume is both stereotype and realness as an unflinching representation of Indigenous femininity confronting the viewer with her gaze. Her list of hashtags, from #DontTrendOnMe and #RacistScopophila to #notacostume and #MMIW reads like a haiku of protest against projects of genocide.

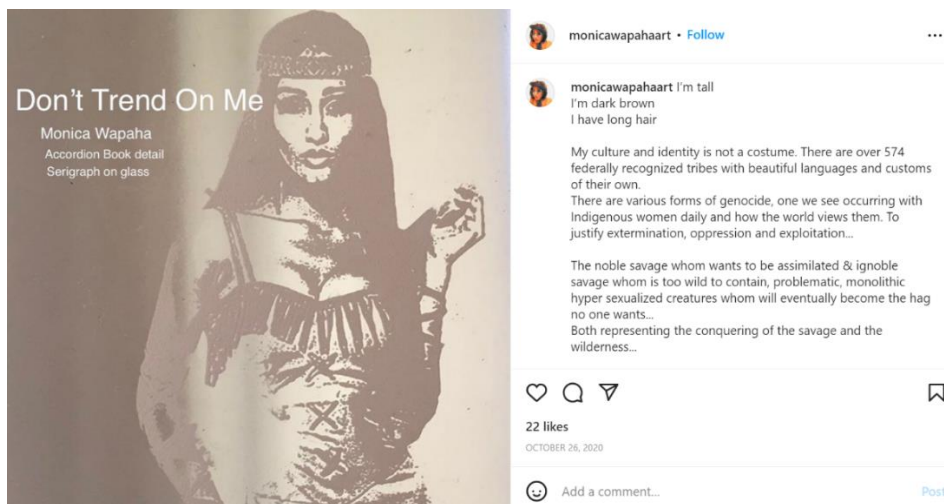


Figure 22.

Monica Wapaha (2020), “Don’t Trend on Me” Pt. 1



Figure 23.

Monica Wapaha (2020), "Don't Trend on Me" Pt. 2. Instagram

In addition to her artistic statement through visuals and text, she also calls in an audience who is interested in her work, and places this image within the context of the art market. #contemporaryart, #MonicaWapahaArt, and #BookArt are bookended with the message statements. The hashtag #halloween helps situate this post in the annual season for cultural appropriation and sexualization of the "Indian" through costumes. Her message calls out the past of stereotypes and the current continuation of appropriation. She calls for changed behavior that may have future benefits for those who have been victimized. In this way, she weaves together past, present and future. Her art and hashtags act as entry points into more complex worlds, as Bonilla and Rosa (2015) described, as well as framing the issues of violence and stereotypes as a coherent story.

Summary

In all these works, artist-participants have humanized digital spaces in particular cultural and creative ways that reflect values of empathy and connection for audience, message and community. Their art-stories disrupt long-held WECP discourses about Indigenous womxn as weak and willing victims. In doing so, they strengthen their own voices and place in community, enabling stronger

network ties to bridge the next wave of Indigenous artists. In this way technocultural discourse is not only cultural production, but also a bridge from art experience to material benefit for Indigenous communities by raising awareness, mobilizing support, raising funds, and furthering education on the unique issues Indigenous people face. Benefits to community ultimately reinforce cultural strengths and bolster sovereignty in several areas of Indigenous life, which is the focus of the discussion in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 6. DISCUSSION

Using the frames of art-story and Indigenous visual, rhetorical and body sovereignty, I discuss some of the implications of the data and how they may form a cohesive narrative on contemporary Indigenous justice work and technocultural discourses, and how they are related to larger frames of justice.

Bridging Worlds Through Art-Story

Art-story can help bring art and SNS storyworks into focus, and provides a model to understand the way art, storytelling, digital artifacts and kinship form a complex world where artists bridge between aspects of Indigenous existence that have been broken apart by settler-colonization. The challenges found online reflect the ongoing logics of settler-colonization. A critical technocultural discourse analysis reveals the ways in which Indigenous artists interact with these challenges and create discursive, social publics that are a continuance of the relationship between Indigenous and WECP, and deeply implicate the physical safety and well-being of Indigenous people.

How Settler-Colonization Shows Up Online

Regarding the first research question about revealing settler-colonial discourses, I want to note three of the ways this was seen in the data. First, many of the challenges artists face in creating their art reflect WECP logics that seek to keep the status quo from critical examination, especially by people who are the most impacted by the trajectory of violence those logics justify. Pushback from non-Indigenous audiences evidence this pull to conformity to WECP discourses. The criticism artists like Monica Wapaha and Elizabeth LaPensée face (i.e. artists shouldn't mess with "our American Indians", and Deer Woman is a seductress) show how removing cultural context and replacing it with hegemonic myth making is

destructive to the holistic and richly nuanced justice work Indigenous artists do, as argued by the art-story model (Folsom, 2017).

Secondly, SNS give ample space for change-resistant arguments to be implemented in defense of WECP created myths. Continued use of images in memes and SNS posts that uncritically promote stereotypes like Pocahontas and The Old West use nostalgia as a powerful emotional tool to marginalize and silence counterdiscourses. The images as arguments are especially visible during times of year when broader myths of American frontiers, purpose and exceptionalism are celebrated in national holidays. Thanksgiving and Halloween narratives of friendliness and fun showed up in the research sample as examples of Tuck and Yang's (2012) "moves to innocence." Tribal nations are reduced to Indians helping Pilgrims, an event worth celebrating. Costumes further reduce Indianness to "savage" and "sexy." Even some Indigenous imaginings can contribute to reductionism, as was the case with Kassie John's call-out for those using the concept of Native Aunties in derogatory ways. Media communication geared toward one's own community becomes public fodder for misinterpretation and misappropriation on SNS. The ironic nature of a lot of Native humor mocks misinterpretations, but is not readily perceived as ironic outside the community. This dynamic of artist understanding and multiple levels of audience and deploying humor reflecting double and triple entendres (Ryan, 1999) leaves space for hegemonic interpretations to override Indigenous intentions.

Even if Indigenous presence and representation can be more visible in digital spaces than in daily life in North America, it is still a small wedge compared to the dominating presence of myths that are hundreds of years in the making. For example, degrading and silencing of Indigenous womxn not only reinforces entitlement to restructure Indigenous gender, but also attempts to replace central concepts of identity with simplistic ideations. Reductionism sustains otherwise untenable assumptions about Indigenous womxn and violence against them. In the art-story model, reductionism disregards the respect Indigenous cultures hold for art and artists, which makes the artist's job even harder.

Reductionism is an argument against actual Indigenous existence in favor of entrenched myths that center WECP interests in the ways myth building (Barthes, 1972) and simulation/simulacra (Baudrillard, 1981) perpetuate cycles of erase and replace. However, artist-participants here offer counter arguments through multilayered art processes that span on and offline worlds. Many of their processes seek to sidestep or confront reductionism and spark teachable moments for their audiences, and will be discussed more in depth below.

A third way artists encountered settler-colonization in this study is the theft of Indigenous art. Not only is this a violation of the integrity of Indigenous cultural production, but it hijacks the place of art in the economic well-being of Native communities (Brown & Nicholas, 2012). It is violence that denies consent and removes the art-storyteller's voice, making artistic expression a mere commodity and novelty. Art created to raise funds is also art created as technology to document the realities of ongoing settler-colonial violence against Native people in the way the Fort Marion American Indian ledger drawings were characterized by Nancy Mithlo (2020). Taking a digital copy of original art and printing it on bedsheets, greeting cards and t-shirts places those images in a perceived public domain. In the process of replicating it, choices are made in order to make the image more marketable to the consumer gaze. Original colors and specific artistic choices can easily be changed to become brighter and simpler for the industrial color palette and trends in fashion. In the art-story model changes without cultural understanding changes important data and severs a vital link between knowledge keepers and future generations, especially if the original is destroyed in the process. Imposing a consumerist gaze on stolen cultural items also demonstrates the loss of aura Benjamin (1935) argues for. Beyond the loss of value of the art itself, within Indigenous views of the life of creative works, these changes and repurposing of the art may be experienced as violent treatment of a relative, and removal of that relative from their home community. Theft of intellectual and cultural property is also a threat to the

connection between artists and their communities, as it undermines their ability to produce culture for the continued benefit of their people.

A distinct dichotomy exists on social networking sites that contrasts two visions of Indigenous peoples: those of WECP ideologies and logics, and those of Indigenous realities and aspirations. One is static and the other is very much alive with creativity, innovation, and the necessities of counteracting settler-colonization.

Addressing Settler-Colonization

My second research question addressed the importance of understanding how Indigenous womxn artists are addressing issues like theft, erasure and the dominance of WECP myths. Their acts of generosity, setting boundaries, fierceness, and articulation of specific kinds of violence are counterdiscourses founded in their sense of responsibility to the ancestors and futures of their communities.

In order to counter the idea that Indigenous people should not change, artists depicted change and transformation using images like butterflies (Clarkson), Deer Woman (LaPensée, Wolf), and personal mementos of the missing or murdered (Black, LaFond). Tying imagery into both historical iconography and their visions of present and future potentials denies the narrative of a people stuck in the past (Davis-Delano, et al., 2021). In contrast, non-Indigenous centered imagery often repeats old tropes that romanticize a “vanishing race.” When actual Indigenous people are vanishing, the Native response is to call them back into community and reinforce their place in a metaphorical - and through dance and ceremony, a literal - circle of Indigenous life. By carefully selecting cultural ways and understandings that can be shared outside of community, artists are shifting the possible ways both Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences see a contrasting view, a wider set of possible places and spaces Indigenous people can belong.

Because the work of Fryberg (2008, 2015) and others is widely known in Native health, justice, and education work, efforts to protect the people from harmful effects of experiencing stereotyping has bolstered social justice efforts to change mascots, rename locations like mountains and buildings, and produce art that interrogates what change is needed to WECP imaginaries. Positive depictions of complex Native identities like two-spirit and AfroIndigenous fly in the face of logics that attempt to isolate 2SLGBTQIA+, Black, Latine, and Indigenous interests, and pit them one against the other. The holism of art-stories disrupts the idea that Indigenous people are the ones who need to assimilate and change to fit into the narrow confines of the modern world, and places the onus of change onto those who are holding onto myths from hundreds of years ago, mostly without recognizing that fact. It is ironic that settler-colonialist arguments like “mascots are our heritage,” are actually very true - the Noble Savage and Indian Princess are by and large, of their own making.

To speak directly to myths, artists also made the processes of mythmaking visible in their work. They depicted characters victimizing Indigenous womxn and girls, and included them in their ideas of audience. Perpetrator motivations and logics play out in the way they then react to justice – Deer Woman shows up, and they run off in fear. The French Army retreats and does not return. Those who thought Indigenous womxn were weak, were in for a shock. Artists share their works in progress and invite discussion about the stories behind the work. Creating spaces for all people to take time to understand the violence of residential schools, for instance, incites criticism of the logics of the church and U.S. government. Art-stories making use of social networking challenge mythmaking by punching through the fourth wall and inviting the audience to think about where they are in relation to violence, and their assumptions about Indigenous peoples. This realization process must include acknowledgment of their own histories, ancestry, and allegiances.

In a sense, bridging the experiences of violence to the audience’s own part in that violence can also reveal a vulnerable space for Indigenous people. Artist-participants took great care to protect

identities and confidences of the people they represent in their art, including themselves and their own families. They made choices to pull back from participating or marketing their art when the risks to health and well-being outweighed the utility of the platforms. Some have had to take legal action to help mitigate theft and personal threat, and have at the same time carefully crafted their participation on certain platforms to ease the isolation of the pandemic. In this way the generalized sense of belonging and responsibility to a community of Indigenous people emerges online through collective efforts to prevent violence.

Indigenous Sovereignty and Technocultural Discourse

Of the many frames in which to understand the complex interplay of art, technology, storytelling and culture, the concept of sovereignty is another way to succinctly articulate the larger picture of the way Indigenous womxn artists continue cultural production and innovation, as well as address the destructiveness of settler-colonialism in digital spaces. Rather than one overarching type of sovereignty, I reference three specific applications - rhetorical (Lyons, 2000), visual (Raheja, 2010), and body (e.g. Cole, 2017) to talk about issues of violence against Indigenous people and the artist's place in addressing those issues online.

Consent is key to sovereignty. It acts as a hinge upon which doors open and close, depending on who is controlling access. Consent is a common thread in Indigenous worldviews in the forms of kinship, respect, reciprocity and setting appropriate boundaries. While legal and physical consent has often been denied Indigenous peoples, many cultural stories carry teachings on how to make good relations – relational justice. An Indigenous understanding of the value of consent underpins the ability of Native nations and peoples to weather major challenges to existence. Underlying values emerge in art-stories and technocultural discourses concerning the topic of violence. In a history of forced dislocation and assimilation, the right to control land, people, visual representation and the “technology of writing” (Lyons, 2000, p. 1) is paramount to the fight against oppression and the fight for Indigenous existence.

Each form of sovereignty is informed by how art-stories as complex interactions of visual, rhetorical and body expressions, emerge through technocultural discourse. Although this study is focused on Indigenous discourses, themes and processes here speak to the need for decolonization and strengthening of essential aspects of sustainable social justice – consent, creative control, and respectful interactions even and especially in colonizing spaces like the internet.

Sovereignties in Indigenous Digital Life

Visual Sovereignty

All artist-participants described dealing with visual sovereignty issues in their work, especially in digital spaces. LaFond and Hadden, for instance, used care interacting with victims, families and community members to gain consent to portray issues of violence in their art. Acknowledging the way violence denies humanity and agency, they come to their projects from an ethic of kinship. Each portrait stands as evidence of Indigenous processes of respect, reciprocity, relevance, and relationality where it concerns consent, and especially where likenesses are shared publicly. Their approaches are in stark contrast to the ongoing WECP approaches of taking likenesses of Indigenous people without full consent or knowledge. Including perpetrators in the idea of audience breaks a silence and a spiral of shame frequently seen with victims and victims' families. Creating portraits in the context of MMIR helps give life to victims' experiences and demonstrates artist self-determination to confront the truth, call for justice and directly engage in healing processes. In these ways, Indigenous artists are creating vital alternative Indigenous publics, and in Warner's (2002) view, transforming their work into social justice movements by acquiring agency through visual discourses.

The process and publication of *Deer Woman: An Anthology* brought out alternative narratives to surviving and preventing physical attacks. The stories each Indigenous womxn created shows the shallowness of the myths of passive, even willing, victims of abuse. Each visually driven piece creates discomfort, empowerment and/or comfort. The message is that sometimes "compliance to survive,"

and sometimes “violence and vengeance,” are both rational choices and can each bring healing in their own way. This collection illustrates the many choices womxn can and have made, and clearly visualizes the strength of ancestral teachings to heal. The fact that a portion of the sales continue to go to a uniquely Indigenous self-defense program (Arming Sisters), speaks to the long-term dedication to supporting womxn through the tough choices they have to make in violent situations – a tangible benefit of challenging existing visual portrayals and offering more relevant ones for Indigenous people that bridges on and offline worlds. In this way, their art-stories bridge entrenched myths and lived realities by specifically calling out visual elements of WECP imaginaries in their work that would otherwise be a barrier to change – changes for those who need to see Indigenous people as human beings worthy of respect, and changes for those who are targeted for violence into what is possible. Asserting visual sovereignty protects the rights of Indigenous people to envision possibilities. By identifying, calling out and addressing visual misrepresentations on SNS, artist-participants reveal mechanisms of settler-colonization as they appear online.

Visual culture is a dynamic space Indigenous artists have stepped into to construct visions of future Indigeneity, based firmly in the past and present as one experience. An art-story understanding of the strategies of Indigenous survivance brings history forward and asserts sovereignty over visual discourses. The work artists are doing today is in conversation with what they hope will lay the foundations for Indigenous futures and coming generations. By Indigenizing digital interactions they are on the forefront of the very old battle for the minds of people Castells (2007/2015) spoke of. And whether those minds can also realistically and materially envision Indigenous people in the present and future will directly impact the imperatives of decolonization.

Rhetorical Sovereignty

One of the significant patterns of settler-colonization that continues to dominate media into digital spaces is invisibility and hypervisibility (Hall, 2009). Silencing/omitting Indigenous voices leaves

them invisible. And when voices do appear through commission/tokenizing, representations are inaccurate, placing Indigenous people and their worldviews in the past, conforming to predictable stereotypes (e.g. stoic warrior, poverty stricken, Indian princess, generic “Plains” culture; Davis Delano, et al., 2021). These patterns diminish Indigenous voices, but recent Indigenous-led media have pushed forward narratives that change the discourse by calling out inaccuracies and mocking them, and centering Native people in contemporary settings. Comedy-drama series “Reservation Dogs” (Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi, producers), and sitcom “Rutherford Falls” (Ed Helms, Michael Shur, and Sierra Teller Ornales, creators/producers) are written by teams with Indigenous creators, and feature Indigenous actors, many of whom are womxn. Both shows earned a second season due to their popularity. In particular, characters and plots show the ways Indigenous womxn can be both vulnerable and strong, and funny as well as tragic.

Traditional stories of feminine power, such as Deer Woman, have been twisted to sexualize the feminine through heteronormative visual and rhetorical discourses. Instead of the needed balance to gender relations, Deer Woman has become a seductress, tempting men away from their families, echoing the Amazonian Indian Queen trope of early depictions. In the context of SNS, a search for #deerwoman leads to settler-colonizing images and mythmaking that do not honor Indigenous art-stories or values. In the process of creating *Deer Woman: An Anthology*, the Indigenous response has been deeply based in cultural values of inclusion, reciprocity, respect, reverence, and relationality. First by leveraging platform and experience, artist-participants used collaboration and mentorship to call out the destructive and call in their peers.

Deer Woman: An Anthology also takes the reins in driving discourses of the strength and resiliency of Indigenous womxn. Each story incorporates female agency – avenging character of Deer Woman, positive knowledge sharing by a female elder, truth telling and breaking silence. The fact the primary audience is Indigenous people, especially womxn, gives the collection an unapologetic tone. It is

not necessarily for those looking to find out more about Native “legends,” but an intimate sharing between Indigenous womxn artists and those who need to know more about Indigenous ways of being and knowing. Their messages reach those who are likely to suffer adverse effects from encountering demeaning stereotypes online. Through visual and rhetorical discourses they pinpoint specific instances of harm – hypersexualization, disempowerment, dehumanization, erasure, and trapping Native existence in the past. Artist actions are an intervention in WECP rhetorical dominance for the safety and well-being of Indigenous people.

Indigenous created media address issues of representation on more levels than check boxes on talent lists. Rhetoric of dialogue and plot support the visual aspects of whether an actor looks the part, for instance, or otherwise visually represents Indigeneity. Comic book stories in this study show contemporary settings and more intimate portrayals of Native everyday life, which have the allure of the familiar and the bite of the unfamiliar. Such art-storytelling can be a powerful opportunities for shifting settler-colonial discourses. Additionally, the visibility of Native people’s reactions and discussions on SNS reinforces and contextualizes the rhetoric of Indigenous-centered media. Meaningful Indigenous representation is a much larger consideration that goes beyond the formal Western categorical priorities Mithlo (2020) describes, and pushes the boundaries of what media makers conceive and what general audiences expect.²

Body Sovereignty

Deer Woman exemplifies all three types of sovereignty, but the links between rhetorical and visual, and the tangible experiences of body sovereignty are particularly visible in the process of creating the vignette and the anthology versions. LaPensée says the original comic rose from her observations of misinterpretations and twisted stories on the internet. She says,

² Although it is not central to this study, the question of how media makers perceive the possibilities for Native talent and characters is an interesting area for further examination.

Social media was dominated by non-Indigenous depictions of Deer Woman and non-Indigenous interpretations of Deer Woman, which evoked her as a monster or a beast or as evil or as a seductress, or as like a temptress. Temptress was kind of like a huge theme.”

The view of Deer Woman as just another sexy Indigenous womxn to be fetishized diminishes the power of the traditional roles she plays in Indigenous cultures. A sexualized vision of Deer Womxn is in many ways another justification of assault by claiming willingness of the victim and reversing the roles of the victimized (men who are seduced) and the perpetrator (the seductress). Both versions of *Deer Woman* contain information on self-defense and data on violence against Native womxn, bridging its content to “real world” violence prevention and victim support. LaPensée shared the story of a young womxn who carried the vignette with her on public transportation, where physical harassment and assault are a frequent experience. If she spotted someone suspicious, she opened the comic to show the cover and contents. This was a way the book could provide tangible protection as well as invoking or manifesting Deer Woman into this world (Personal communication, June 6, 2020). This story reveals an unexpected connection between artist and audience, which implicates kinship and embodiment of lessons shared through art-storytelling.

By providing easy access to the book, and by sharing stories from readers, LaPensée is building a bridge from the typical way the comic book industry typically operates to an Indigenous approach that honors kinship and reciprocity. Current industry is in part characterized by paywalls, quick production timelines, frequent reliance on stereotypes, and hoarding copies to increase resale value. These aspects of the industry limit the way potential readers are able to physically interact with the books and the way characters embody Indigenous womxnhood. None of those characteristics were observed in any of the processes of art-storytelling and use of SNS in this study. Their work demonstrates innovative ways media portrayals can help audiences embody vital messages into their own lives in ways that can potentially prevent and mitigate violence. The bridge from art-stories to SNS to specific audiences to

offline experiences can be a powerful shift in discourse that at every step recognizes the agency and value of Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Another example of bridge building between artist and audience is Jaime Black's work, which demonstrates a way art-stories can confront the reality of the missing by embodying them in dresses in physical locations. The red dress has become an icon of the MMIR movement, rather than simply a reminder of the losses. A very feminine item of clothing becomes a powerful visual presence of strength and continuance of Indigenous power. By reaching audiences and inviting community input and participation through SNS, Black calls in audiences who may be able to experience the in-person exhibit and interact directly with the dresses. However, photographs depicting the red dresses in motion in the wind, for instance, can also evoke a type of connection to the people the dresses represent. Red embodies Indigenous existence, and its use is long documented in both Indigenous and settler-colonizing media. Red is a deeply spiritual color in many traditions, and by using it on SNS, the REDress Project and other such campaigns can invoke remembrance and awareness in the everyday life of audiences. Red travels from symbol to body in the form of a red handprint painted over the mouths of activists on SNS. In a similar way to red dresses, this use of red face paint literally embodies the sacred, the missing and the silencing of Indigenous womxn – all manifestations of violence against Indigenous people. This makes the unauthorized use of such powerful images even more damaging. The color red asserts Indigenous self-determination by claiming and reclaiming historical symbols of defiance of WECP authority, calling in people from across imposed borders, and demanding action to stop the violence.

Through their use of Indigenous and non-Indigenous technologies, artist-participants assert visual, rhetorical and body sovereignty, reveal settler-colonial discourses concerning the historic and ongoing patterns of violence against Indigenous people, and demonstrate ways they shift the narratives to more accurate and meaningful discourses around that violence. In doing so, they build metaphorical and meaningful bridges between the needs of their communities, themselves as artists and the wider

discourses about Indigenous issues found online. These bridges also connect artist and audiences in ways that demonstrate Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Implications & Applications

The findings of this study speak to successful strategies aimed at changing digital interactions and spaces through Indigenous art-story technocultural discourse. The insights and data shared through storytelling here not only serve as models for the next generations of Indigenous people, but also have messages for non-Indigenous audiences and creatives as well. Artist-participant efforts embody a form of decolonization that values those who choose to take the long game strategies of relationality, respect through protocol, reframing the understanding of the affordances of SNS, and seeing digital spaces as not just a network of people and ideas, but also of relationship with the past, present, and future. This represents a profoundly Indigenous alternative public not only built on communal values, but as a larger movement toward empowerment through connection. Castells (2015) says this coming together in digital spaces is an impactful way to contest otherwise overwhelming hegemonic forces. He says:

By connecting to each other, and by envisioning projects from multiple sources of being, individuals formed networks, regardless of their personal views or organizational attachments... togetherness helped them [social justice movements] to overcome fear, this paralyzing emotion on which the powers that be rely in order to prosper and reproduce, by intimidation or discouragement, and when necessary by sheer violence, be it naked or institutionally enforced. (p. 2).

A combination of Indigenous aesthetic and technocultural discourse presents a holistic model of how identity is expressed within complex socio-cultural publics of social networking sites, and how of digital art-storytelling is an enactment of intergenerational cultural production. It is clear from the stories shared here, that in order to effect safe and important interactions online one must draw on cultural values that promote community well-being beyond the basic rules of each platform.

Sharing out artist strategies can hopefully open up needed conversations about how social justice movements can better create sustainable engagement online that impacts offline needs, making

use of value systems that have lasted millennia as a guide. Creating cross-cultural collaborations is a necessary component of sustainable justice movements. The following are guidelines suggested by the findings of this study. They are not “takeaways.” They are call-out/call-ins from Indigenous social justice movements.

- **Honor visual and rhetorical sovereignty.** Be aware of already existing social movements, especially led by people of color. Visual representation of the red handprint, for instance, is meant to express the sacredness of protecting Indigenous womxn, and breaking the silence of a mostly overlooked crisis. Co-opting this powerful visual signifier continues the harmful pattern of erase and replace, and does not help build broader sustainable coalitions among womxn and allies. Visual signifiers from one movement do not necessarily translate to other movements without an element of cultural appropriation and silencing.
- **Honor the body sovereignty of those you seek to help.** Ensure the safety and well-being of victims and their families with careful use of hashtags, images, and events. Start with the perspective of balancing privacy and exposure for those who are impacted by the issues and causes.
- **Consider past, present, and future as one experience.** Expand the affordances of asynchronous communication online to include:
 - The past, to address stereotypes and misinformation, historical realities of boarding schools, and other forms of violence.
 - The present, recognizing the impact of change on a wide diversity of people.Continue to intervene with strong art-stories that connect to shifting audiences, knowing they represent complex worlds and impacts.

- The future, by imagining a better situation, and envisioning the place of Indigenous peoples in that changed world, whether or not the cause or organization is Indigenous-specific. Meaningful inclusion is an essential aspect of decolonization.
- **Reflexivity.** Revisit the assumptions you make of who belongs and who is impacted by the work. To engage with these practices requires deep reflection on how non-Indigenous organizations are implicated in settler-colonization and the nature of lateral violence. To avoid this tendency with my own work, for instance, I have avoided using the frame of crisis because it can shift the focus toward Indigenous trauma, community deficit thinking, and white savior discourses.

Limitations and Opportunities

The timeframe for this research was not clearly bound by any one event. But, since the beginning of the pandemic in early 2020, I have made adjustments to how I contacted artist-participants and the ways in which we were able to have the interviews. In that way, this research is ongoing as world events impacting Indigenous people and aspects of settler-colonialism shift in response. The current study is a snapshot of a moment in world history that will have long-range impacts to the lives of Indigenous peoples and how we interact online.

The constraints of attempting to bring together a diverse set of voices from a diverse set of nations is also challenging. The English language and the limitations of translating multiple languages and cultural concepts is always a concern with research that seeks to build theory. Where I can I have attempted to avoid pan-Indianism by keeping all analysis close to the words and intentions of the artist-participants.

One topic area I was not able to cover in discussion is the erasure and representation of Black and Indigenous identities in art-story and online. The sociopolitical structures around blood quantum, Tribal enrollment, descendance and ideations of race are beyond the scope of the current study, but

they are an essential and timely area of inquiry. The intersections of race, gender and cultural continuance are central to conversations on representation in digital spaces and coalitional social justice movements.

Indigenous digital life continues to be an area of great promise for study. Where this work might contribute is in the realm of media communication and understanding its place in ongoing violence against womxn, youth and two-spirit. Media technology-assisted violence (TAV) is an international concern, and research is emerging around violence prevention in online spaces in Australia and Canada. More research specifically around Indigenous people in the United States can address specific cultural disconnects between two world views at a time when legislation concerning Tribal sovereignty is rapidly changing. The understanding of Indigenous data sovereignty is gaining momentum, and for Tribes this will include cultural and intellectual data currently under the control of non-Indigenous institutions like museums, research corporations, and universities.

As with other areas of Indigenous study, data are difficult to bring together from the often-conflicting reporting streams of county, reservation, urban and national databases. But as a necessary decolonization process, Indigenous ways of knowing and being must be included for the types of analyses needed to address issues stemming from settler-colonization. This includes not only cultural and scientific instruction from elders and knowledge keepers, but also Tribal and urban organizational consultation, and greater, more rigorous accountability for those who gather, analyze, and distribute data from Indigenous sources. Data sharing is needed to bring together a coherent picture of larger strategies that may protect Indigenous safety and engagement in the digital world, and help bring together urban and rural communities to address common issues faced online. Data sharing must continue to be with full consent and adherence to protocols that uphold Indigenous sovereignties.

And finally, the simple act of reaching out to strangers on the internet to ask for their participation highlights for me, the importance of Indigenous ways of knowing and being and how

important introductions are. Our people have a need to know how a new person is related, and to delay any next steps until we have made that connection. It speaks to the ways asynchronous communication in digital realms give space and time for meaningful connections to be made. As expressed by the artist-participants here, we need to take the time to share our stories.

CHAPTER 7. CONCLUSION

Regardless of the challenges of how settler-colonialism shows up on SNS, Indigenous womxn artists are humanizing digital spaces using their values, protocols, and technology to build bridges and create discussions about violence against them and their ways of knowing and being.

Summary

Bringing CTDA and art-story in conversation with each other, this study has attempted to apply an Indigenous lens to the challenges of media communication about violence against Indigenous people. In the long history of the interplay of media and American mythmaking, two central stereotypes play out in the digital realm: Indigenous womxn as sexual objects and Indigenous people as technophobic, both of which are deficit frames. From the late 15th century, Europeans have created media and images of Indigenous people using hundreds of communication technologies – engravings, paintings, telegraph, personal letters, marketing materials, and mass media. The limited ways in which Indigenous womxn in particular were seen and portrayed was reflected in the narratives that reached audiences that were small but extremely influential. These initial but powerful images established stereotypes that continue to reinforce settler-colonizing logics of erase and replace, and continue to influence law and policy that impact Indigenous people. Social networking sites are a location where stereotypes are shared widely, enacting and amplifying WECP logics and projects. The digital realm holds the nexus of visual, cultural, and technological manifestations of the ongoing patterns of violence against Indigenous people. At the same time, Indigenous womxn artists are building beautiful bridges of art, stories, and technocultural knowledge that connect lived experiences to imagined futures and an end to violence.

Indigenous aesthetics and storyworks helped structure conversation with artists to elucidate how and why these bridges inspire better ways of engaging with online audiences and upholding

cultural values to sustain communities. The focused but informal conversations I had with Indigenous womxn artists, coupled with analysis of SNS posts shows a narrative of creativity, persistence, and ardent defense of Indigenous existence.

The Technocultural Discourse of Indigenous Womxn

In the context of SNS, Indigenous womxn artists are key message creators, and it is their stories that have provided a deeper level of understanding what the overarching issues look like at individual levels. Artist-participant storytelling illuminated the ways they have experienced affordances and challenges in digital spaces, how they addressed them, and how they see their work in the larger picture of violence against Indigenous people. Their stories brought in not only past and present visions but also their view of the future to the research questions of this study.

The key themes identified here exemplify the many challenges settler-colonial discourses present for meaningful engagement on SNS. Artist-participants brought with them cultural values and practices of generosity, collaboration, and reciprocity with community, calling in and calling out, creating and respecting boundaries, fierceness, and skills to create strong technocultural discourses. They told stories of how their worldviews, value systems, and cultural practices clashed with internet culture, revealing underlying patterns of violence against Indigenous people that persist and proliferate in the digital world.

I have used the metaphor of bridge building to illustrate the way the artist-participants demonstrate strategies of connecting their worldviews, community needs, and artistry with intended audiences on and offline. They often incorporated educational components in their work and the way they shared content via SNS. Some essential topics addressed were statistics on MMIR, media stereotypes of Indigenous womxn, historical trauma, support and services for victims and families, and opportunities for artistic expression as Indigenous people.

Building strong bridges between the needs of the community and the larger exposure the internet brings requires not only commercial skill in marketing art, but skills to create accurate and inspiring visual representations, and in a broader sense, visual culture. Indigenous artists also need the ability to reach specific audiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to connect with them in more meaningful ways than follows and likes. The shallowness of the typical interactions on SNS is a challenge that the artist-participants described as working against their desire to truly engage in cultural production that has meaning and impact. The layers of meaning – humor, signifyin’ language, data, hypertext, specific cultural heritage and context – are sometimes difficult to convey with text alone, especially online. All artist-participants included these layers for deeper engagement. To just engage on a shallow level drives the discourse in ways that prioritize the market and transaction, and pushes settler-colonizing narratives with little time for reflection or change. The fast-paced and transitory nature of the internet pushes against Indigenous values of taking time to create trust, observing protocols around meeting strangers and introductions, and protecting the most vulnerable, precious people and aspects of culture. They carry on a long tradition of understanding technology as an extension of experience, observation, and cultural production in Brock’s (2020) sense of “culture-as-technology.”

Climate shifts, the pandemic, new investigations into residential schools, and legislation that erode Indigenous sovereignties show the utter necessity of decolonization in these times. The findings of this study speak to successful strategies aimed at changing digital interactions and spaces through Indigenous technocultural discourse. The insights and data shared through storytelling here not only serve as models for the next generations of Indigenous people, but also have messages for non-Indigenous audiences and creatives as well. Artist-participant efforts embody a form of decolonization that values those who choose to take the long game strategies of relationality, respect through protocol,

reframing the understanding of the affordances of SNS, and seeing digital spaces as not just a network of people and ideas, but also of relationship with the past, present and future

Indigenous artists' work is visual leadership and helps bolster self-determination. The art-stories they create are discourses of power and balancing on and offline realities. They are discourses of protection, acceptance, and cycles of life and death. Their beautiful bridges are built on generosity and fierceness, on creating respectful boundaries that are much needed in digital spaces. They lay the path and the foundation for continuance of culture, and assert the rights of people to visual, rhetorical and body sovereignty.

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APPENDIX A. CONSENT FORM FOR IRB

TITLE: Indigenous womxn artists, social media practices and disrupting violence against womxn

WHY AM I BEING INVITED TO TAKE PART IN THIS RESEARCH? Your familiarity and experience with art and issues for Native womxn qualifies you to participate in this study.

WHO IS DOING THE STUDY? The research study will be conducted by Co-Principal Investigator Jennifer (Jamie) Folsom, M.S., a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Journalism & Media Communications at Colorado State University. Dr. J. David Wolfgang is the Principal Investigator on this study in the Journalism & Media Communication Department at Colorado State University.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE STUDY? This study looks at how Native womxn artists use social networking sites to address the issues of violence against Native womxn and girls.

HOW LONG WILL THIS SURVEY TAKE? The interviews will take 60-90 minutes in person, by phone or video conference, with possible follow-up by email or phone.

WHAT WILL I BE ASKED TO DO? You will be asked to share your insights into your experiences as an artist and share ways you use social networking sites to raise awareness and/or create conversations about violence against Native womxn and girls.

ARE THERE REASONS WHY I SHOULD NOT TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? Individuals under the age of 18 will not be able to provide consent to take part in this study. Individuals must be artists who also use social media.

WHAT ARE THE POSSIBLE RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS? There may be some risk of discomfort during interviews involving your artwork on the topic of violence against Native womxn. It is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but the researcher has taken reasonable safeguards to minimize any potential, but unknown, risks.

ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS FROM TAKING PART IN THIS STUDY? There are no known benefits from taking part in this study. You may gain some insight into your creative process and issues faced by Native womxn, and reflect on your personal experiences.

DO I HAVE TO TAKE PART IN THIS STUDY? Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you decide to participate in this study, you may withdraw your consent and stop participating at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

WHO WILL SEE THE INFORMATION I GIVE? One purpose of this research is to gain insight into Indigenous art, social networking, and social justice work. Your comments and experiences are a vital part of understanding these issues. Participants will be identified as part of the study to add validity to statements made. Recordings and notes will be kept in a secured location for three years past the conclusion of this study. They will then be destroyed.

WHAT HAPPENS IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?

If you have questions about your role as a volunteer, you can contact the CSU Institutional Review Board at (970) 491-1553; RICRO_IRB@mail.colostate.edu.

I am over 18 years of age, and give my consent to participate in the study.

I give my consent to use any of my quoted material that I included in the study as well as my name for educational and publication purposes.

APPENDIX B: INTERVIEW SCRIPT

1. Background information: Name, Tribal affiliation, relation to the community, artist info or bio, organizations she works with, preferred term – Indigenous, Native, Aboriginal, etc.
2. Tell me a story about how this piece came to be.
Prompts: Inspiration; traditional elements or stories; important messages about Indigenous womxn; co-creators/collaborators; organizational goals and outcomes
3. Do you feel any of these aspects of art are part of what you've created? And if so, how?
Prompts: Modes of art-stories: storytelling, Indigenous aesthetics, claim/reclaim history, sovereignty, healing, pride, unit/coming together, remembrance.
4. Walk me through your process of choosing and preparing a piece to share on social media.
Prompts: Platform(s) used, hashtags, tracking likes and shares, intended audience, grouping images together as a campaign, value added (giveaways, fundraising, etc.), linking to other artists or organizations
5. Reflecting on your work, how do you feel this piece helps get the word out about violence against Native womxn?
6. Is there another Native womxn artist whose work contributes to this issue that you think I should speak with?

APPENDIX C: LIST OF HASHTAGS USED BY ARTIST-PARTICIPANTS

#*artist’s brand*	#mmiwg2sawareness
#*specific tribe*	#MMIWGActionNow
#2SLGBTQIA+	#mmiwpaintingproject
#activism	#mothernature
#anishinaabe	#native***
#apache	#nativeamericanheritagemonth#mmip
#artislife	#nativebutch
#artistsoninstagram	#natedesign
#BookArt	#nativerights
#butchnative	#nativewomen
#chickasawartist	#NDNart
#contemporaryart	#NDNinktober
#deerwoman	#nomorestolensisters
#DontTrendOnMe	#notacostume
#RacistScopophilia	#ojibwe
#firstnations	#oklahomaartist
#genderbasedviolence	#oodham
#halloween	#portrait
#hatchetwoman	#printmaker
#hatchetwomen	#protestart
#indigenous	#reddressproject
#indigenousArt	#redressproject*** (specific place of exhibit)
#indigenousdesign	#sisterhood
#indigenousmotherhood	#sovereigngames
#indigenouswomen	#Stereotypes
#indigenouswomenrise	#thunderbirdstrike
#jingledressdancer	#twospirit
#lgbtq	#womenarelife
#matriarchy	#womenempowerment
#mfa	#womensportraits
#missingandmurderedindigenouswomen	#womensrights
#missingandmurderedindigenouswomen andgirls	#womxn
#mmir	#womxninpower
#mmiw	No hashtags
#mmiwg	Not #indigenousgame
#mmiwg2s	

APPENDIX D: SAMPLE OF PRE-TEST DATA

	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O
1	Post #	Date	Number of Reactions	Number of Shares	Number of Comments	Interface Artifacts	Pride	Healing	Unity	Remembrance	Interwoven	Indigenous Aesthetics	Claim/Reclaim History	Sovereignty	Post Content Description
2	1 - IG	4/15/2020	492	NA	NA	@harpersbazaar #HB19 #nationalwomenshistory month #patityrell (the photographer) @ other	1	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	Photo portrait of Maori woman with face tattoos
3	2 - IG	4/24/2020	466	NA	NA	#sweetgrass #earrings #beadedearrings #beadwork #sweetgrassbyheather #sweetgrassbeads	1	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	Beaded earrings with sweetgrass integrated
4	3 - T	3/4/2020	68	12	NA	#spring #butterflies #sunnydays #warmth #nature #weareallone @christibelcourt (the artist)	0	0	1	0	1	1	0	0	Floral painting on wood-like surface
5	4-T	3/11/2020	1	1	NA	clapboard emoji, microphone emoji, ticket emoji, @walkerartscenter link to arts center website,	0	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	Stillshot film about Native horse racers
6	5-F	4/22/2020	9000+	NA	344	No hashtags, tagged the artist	0	0	0	1	1	1	1	0	Necklace made from Sacagawea silver dollar