WHAT IS INDIGENOUS WELLNESS? PERSPECTIVES FROM INDIGENOUS YOUTH.

by

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DISSERTATION ABSTRACT

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In the US. Indigenous youth in particular have poorer health and educational outcomes than any other culturally diverse group face racial violence, are historicized and dehumanized creating a litany of health and educational related problems in a time that is critical to identity development. While resources are dedicated to addressing disparate conditions for Indigenous youth such as suicide rates, substance use, or even closing achievement gaps. While less is known about practices that will serve the interests of Indigenous communities or places where their members reside and receive an education. What are the culturally relevant experiences that promote Indigenous youth resilience and who are defining the importance of these experiences? Often, Indigenous youth and their voices are overlooked in research. This study addresses this gap by examining: 1) How youth express their understanding of health and wellness (e.g. cultural connectedness: values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality, connection to land); 2) What experiences do Indigenous Youth have that they believe contribute to their own health and Wellness (e.g. cultural connectedness: values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality, connection to land); 3)How do Indigenous youth express their cultural connectedness in terms of place (urban/rural)? Data for the study was gathered from focus groups conducted with AI/AN youth in the Northwest.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

This project focuses on the sovereign nations and their members that we in the United States (U.S.) have come to identify as American Indian/Alaska Native (AI/AN), Indigenous, a specific Indigenous Nations (eg.Tsistsistas or Diné) or Native American. There are about 576 federally recognized tribes in the U.S. today, with several other non-federally recognized tribes (currently seeking federal recognition) as well as tribes that are state recognized but not federally recognized. Members of these Nations live in urban areas (approximately 50%) and throughout rural communities, on reservations, villages, and lands that they have occupied since time immemorial. As I start this project I would like to extend a thank you, to the land of where my research has taken place, this is the traditional homelands of the Kalapuya people, many of whom are now citizens within Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde and the Confederated Tribes of Siletz Indians. As an Indigenous person it is important for me to acknowledge that through I was able to accomplish this project within this land and have an understanding that there are connections here to this land that have existed long before state of Oregon and still exist today. It is important for me to provide that piece of acknowledgement to the land as I have been taught to recognize my relatives, and to be good to them, in taking time here at the beginning of this project I am providing space to do that simple acknowledgement. With that I would also like to acknowledge myself I am an Indigenous visitor to this area and very fortunate to have taken part with this study here in what is traditionally known as Kalapuya Ilihi. I myself identify culturally and spiritually as a Cheyenne person, my up brining, ties to my community and continued involvement in traditional ceremonies guides my scholarship and understanding of this and my research. This introduction is intentionally placed here at the start as I have discussed above to show an example of the uniqueness of individual tribal members how that creates a complexity

of identity, an aspect with AI/AN peoples that research has not always accounted for (given the usual dichotomous nature of social science research). It is not my aim or intention in this project to create or propose services that would attenuate to a homogenous identity group of AI/AN Peoples. Nor is it my intention to create anything that would be generalizable to AI/AN populations as a whole or to create a pan-Indian idea about health. Rather, I hope to explore *potential* commonalities among AI/AN youth regarding beliefs of health and wellness. Also, I need to emphasize the immensity in understanding wellness, and that wellness is not just a single moment in time that is measured and diagnosed. Finally, the uses of terms such as AI/AN, Native American or Indigenous People will be used interchangeably throughout this project.

Indigenous people are strong and resourceful people, who have descended from communities that respect the fundamental beliefs of land, language, elders and community as being essential parts of the education process. These beliefs have been relied upon, and have guided the survival of Indigenous communities in both prosperous and challenging times since time immemorial. It is important to consider these illustrations of cultural values when we examine the links between cultural connectedness and resiliency or protective factors. Currently, many Indigenous researchers are committed to projects of decolonization in Indigenous communities (both in their home and outside communities), creating strength and resilience from Indigenous Knowledges. This work links stories, culture, awareness, land and identity in research with Indigenous youth (Mohatt et al., 2011; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016).

In addition to these shared attributes of culture and meaning amongst Indigenous nations in the U.S., Indigenous peoples have endured and persisted through times of genocide followed by social-political attacks imposed by the ongoing settler nation states/structures (Brown et al.,

2012; Grande et al., 2015a; Stout, 2012). Settler colonial theory is defined by an exogenous domination that seeks to replace the original population (Indigenous) of the colonized territory with a new society of settlers (Lefevre, 2015; Lloyd & Wolfe, 2016; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 1999). As Tuck and Yang 2012 describe as the need for this settler society to disposes land, by any means allowing the settler-state to continue as long as it has control and domination over access to territory. In this project the ongoing settler-nation-state (US) will be discussed in this sense of what Wolfe (2007) states as "Land is life or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be indeed, often are contests for life" (Wolfe, 2007b, p. 387). This act of dispossession of land, land that is associated with all aspects of life from language, healing, sustenance, caretaking of traditional foods and spirituality are constantly in a process of threat and reduction. This is due to the ongoing and continued agenda of the people who never left, ones who brought disease and genocide to our homelands and now maintain a power structure that benefits them. Dispossession of land has been the fundamental premise of settler society in the U.S. or wherever settler-colonial nation states exist (Killsback, 2011; Tuck & Yang, 2012; Wolfe, 1999, 2007b). In the U.S., the settler state needs to possess Indigenous lands and in doing so have created large scale acts of cultural extermination and genocide. The residual effects of these settler agendas are seen in lasting structural educational, health and economic disparities.

Despite the ongoing settler-state, many Native Americans have made a conscious effort to maintain Indigenous Knowledges through a variety of ways (e.g., elders and knowledge keepers, traditional concepts of orally passing down-storytelling, songs, converging with outsiders to document, etc.) creating sources of hope and guidance for resisting oppressive structures. Thus, Indigenous Knowledges persist despite the continued development and redevelopment of settler structures, which are maintained by social structures and constructs of

the U.S. society intended to create and reproduce systems of elimination and dispossession (Kelley et al., 2018; Killsback, 2013). In discussing the shared experiences across the U.S. with AI/AN people, it is important to understand effects of a settler colonial society on AI/AN people. The historical trauma that Indigenous people have, and continue to face, as well as the continuance of these acts through intergenerational trauma or post-colonial stress can be seen as life altering effects of the very intentional acts of the US government. Joseph Gone (2013) posits that historical trauma and intergenerational trauma have been used interchangeably, yet these two terms are very different actions. Historical trauma is defined for AI/AN's as a collective experience of trauma or, trauma that happened to large groups of individuals that is transmitted throughout generations and felt by many communities. Oppressive policies, wars, acts of genocide, slavery, and kidnappings have all caused collective historical trauma within the collective consciousness of Indigenous peoples. Intergenerational trauma is about the secondary impact of historical trauma, and is passed from one generation to the next—at the individual level—whether or not the causing trauma occurred within a collective (Gone, 2013).

Colonization is a not a historical deed to AI/AN communities as is evidenced by the ongoing impacts and residual effects that continue to negatively affect Indigenous communities. Thus, it is important to understand what Tuck and Yang (2012) have described as the "settler-colonial" state and how it operates on "internal and external" levels. In the U.S., this is seen through "empire, settlement and internal colony" of these there are no "spatial separation" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 7). As Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that we as Indigenous People have been in the way of the settler, and by means of erasure and destruction, of land-dispossession and enacted policies of land ownership, the settler has tried to make we/them disappear. Brayboy (2005) asserts that colonialism is a deeply embedded feature of American society and acts

agential to create health and educational disparities for Indigenous people. These embodiments of colonization can be seen today in the numerous disparate conditions by the gaze of the mainstream U.S., a mainstream that while at the same time places colonization as a historical time period and never seeing the salience in the ongoing settler-state that is operating today thus creating these structural conditions. Jacob (2013) labels these effects as "soul-wounds" that are intricately pieced and need real active efforts of language and cultural revitalization for communities to heal.

Indigenous scholars have long seen the impacts of assimilation from settler-colonization. Settler assimilation tactics that branded 20th-century political agendas in the U.S. leading to the *near* destruction of AI/AN peoples resulting in the devastation of Indigenous Traditional Knowledges and traditional healing practices for some. The assimilative processes, such as forced boarding school attendance(Adams, 1995), tribal termination and Relocation (Fixico, 1986; Fixico, 2000; Olson & Wilson, 1984), and wide-spread adoption of Indian children to non-Indians (Campbell & Evans-Campbell, 2011; Cross et al., 2000; Gone, 2006), that sought to dispossess AI/AN people of land, language, community, family and inherent rights.

Indigenous practices of health and education were not valued by the U.S. and instead health-care and education systems were implemented that had no place for holistic understandings of human wellbeing. Concurrently, new foreign health risks were introduced to Indigenous peoples in the US. While all of these issues still play a role in Indian Education and Health Services, AI/AN also understand these impacts from day-to-day experiences. Practices of education about and for Indigenous Peoples are often overlooked, minimized, categorized as burdensome for educators and historicized. For example, in a study with tribes from both the Northern Plains and the Southwest, Jervis et al. (2006) found that the past is neither forgotten nor

deemed unimportant among contemporary Indigenous People, providing a narrative for how the effects of colonization are still apparent in day-to-day lives of Indigenous people. As Yakama scholar Jacob (2013) points out, there is a need to acknowledge these effects on identity as it gives relevance to the disparities but not frame them as "individual deficits" (p.12) or lack of services. Jacob (2013) continues to provide direction for an Indigenous Research Method that looks to approach healing by looking at,

> [H]ealth and social problems in terms of land loss, genocide, warfare, assimilation, termination, and relocation. Likewise, indigenous peoples must view healing in terms of its long-term communal effects. To heal oneself is to help heal ancestors' soul wounds, and to help protect future generations from soul wound suffering. (p. 12)

The current harms to health and wellbeing for AI/AN, are illuminated in reports such as the 2011 Indian Health Services (IHS) report which showed that AI/AN people have increased rates of chronic health condition such as heart disease, malignant neoplasm, and diabetes (i.e., leading causes of death among AI/AN) as well as the unintentional/preventable injuries which result in death or serious injury (IHS, 2011). Indigenous youth face structural obstacles to health and wellbeing that parallel those experienced by Indigenous adults. Concerns about health and wellbeing among Indigenous youth, coupled with the day to day educational inequities they often experience (US, 2016; Castor et al., 2006; First Kids 1st, 2018) produce less than optimal social, emotional, educational, and occupational (Bureau of Indian Affairs, 2014; Ed Trust, 2013; Davis et al., 2016).

Indigenous youth are even further stressed to maintain their cultural identity within the very systems (i.e., education and healthcare) that are meant to combat these disparities. For example, some of the earliest points of contact and resulting stressors to health among

Indigenous Youth are evident in the work of Luther StandingBear, an Oglala and Sicangu Lakota who attended Carlisle boarding school and provided a first-hand account of how the cultural, physical and spiritual wellness of children entering boarding schools deteriorated as as changes in diet, lifestyle, connections to parents and elders were disrupted and destroyed (Vestal & Bear, 1933). This early analysis of Eurocentric values in education by an Indigenous person shows an understanding of how this system was disrupting his people's strengths. Today, Indigenous youth are faced with parallel challenges that stem from disconnected ways of being that are due mainly to "systems" that disconnect them from their traditional ways of knowing and being or "permit" them to engage such practices. Meanwhile, Indigenous youth are also dealing with typical adolescent development while being further stressed in dealing with a number of politicized implications for bodily, social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing.

Education is both a means of assimilating and a means for movement in a capitalist society. For many, it is not that our parents do not want our AI/AN students to have an education, rather we want to have say in the education our youth receive (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008). This understanding has occurred in some communities as the need for culturally relevant and appropriate education paired with interventions have begun to diffuse in tribal communities with strong support and ties to the schools.

Educational and healthcare inequities are well documented, especially for AI/AN children (US, 2016; Castor et al., 2006; First Kids 1st, 2018). The concern for both Indigenous youth's wellness and education are real, and inextricably connected. Studies have indicated the need for both a social shift in thinking about health and educational outcomes (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Ruglis & Freudenberg, 2010) in order to have an impact on the unequitable determinants to health that school failure has on students of color. The research to indicate that a

healthy school's model with a focus on Indigenous cultural values and language is next to non-existent. However, numerous Indigenous scholars (e.g., Lee & Cerecer, 2010; McCarty & Lee, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2015;Whitbeck et al., , 2001) have observed that academic gains and reductions in health-risk behaviors for Indigenous students are stronger in schools that utilize Indigenous pedagogy and culturally relevant interventions (Dellinger & Jackson, 2016; Kulis et al., 2013; Rasmus et al., 2016; Weaver & Jackson, 2010; Whitbecket al., 2001).

In education, Indigenous people in the United States, have some of the greatest disparities, as well as what is deemed as preventable mental and physical health conditions. The risks for Indigenous students to be diagnosed with a "developmental delay" is 4 times the rate of all other racial groups combined (U.S. Department of Education, 2016). This data reflects that Indigenous students are being placed into Special Education, and the only movement the students will see is lateral meaning that they will age out of services and not have any true gains from these Special Services. This overrepresentation in Special Education by AI/AN students is concerning, leading Indigenous Special Educators to ask, "Is there not an effective enough strategy to meet the needs of Indigenous students, their families, or communities?" These disparate outcomes between Indigenous people and the U.S. population is a constant reminder of the lasting legacy of U.S. settler colonial policies and assimilation campaigns such as: forced relocation, separation of families, and programs designed to terminate tribal cultural identity and inhibit traditional cultural-religious practices (Whitbeck et al., 2004) The educational relationships with Indigenous Nations throughout this country and the U.S. government have been one of colonial oppression, in which "many decades of physical, emotional, and spiritual abuse at the hands of oppressive government, and religious entities" (Frankland, Turnbull, Wehmeyer, & Blackmountain, 2004, p. 196). Education policies for Indigenous people were

created to assimilate AI/AN into a “civilized people”. Children were taken from parents and numerous atrocities were committed upon them by agents within boarding schools(Writer, 2008). All in an effort for the colonial state to deal with its “Indian Problem”. As Indigenous scholar Sandra Grande (2004) outlined

> The “Indian Problem” is not a problem of children and families but rather, first and foremost, a problem that has been consciously and historically produced by and through the systems of colonization: a multidimensional force underwritten by Western Christianity, defined by White supremacy, and fueled by global capitalism (p.19).

Health & Wellbeing

Indigenous youth, their families, and their communities are looking to their own strengths and supports to counteract the exposure to systems that implicitly and explicitly produce damaging educational and health outcomes. An important question, then, is how do Indigenous youth maintain health and wellbeing in contexts and systems that are meant to harm? Recent scholars have proposed that youth who maintain their sense of self and cultural-identity, experience deep connections to land (in home communities rural/urban), community, language and spirituality have a higher level of protective factors to buffer these ill-effects of continued settler-colonial systems of care and education (Crooks et al., 2015; Jacob, 2013; Saskamoose, Bellegarde, Sutherland, Pete, & McKay-McNabb, 2017). These cultural connectedness pieces are vital in the creation of meaningful learning experiences, which contribute to youth’s identity formation.

Health and healing as an Indigenous Knowledge construct go far beyond the reaches of Westernized notions of being healthy or being sick. Indigenous processes of wellness rely on

holistic and reciprocal connections to land, community and family. Although these same notions of holistic health and healing have been interrupted, the approaches of Indigenous Knowledge of health and Wellbeing, applied in natural circumstances through community and family learning, have shown powerful benefits (Donovan et al., 2015; Mohatt et al., 2011; Oré, 2016). Having a connection to family and place is necessary for Indigenous youths' understanding of health and wellness and form the basis for cultural identity,

Cultural identity has been defined as a protective factor for some of the disparate health and educational conditions Indigenous youth face (Donovan et al., 2015; Jacob, 2013; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Whitbeck et al., 2002). Often there are challenges to forming a strong protective cultural identity, these challenges are often linked to things like historical trauma stressors. Matters of identity and culture that Indigenous youth face create a distinctive and complex set of experiences that only they will navigate. Issues that Indigenous Youth will face do stem from the earliest points of contact with colonial settlers-settlements, and have persisted to the present day with harmful politicization.

Identity for AI/AN/Indigenous People of the U.S. has become a study in and of itself as current studies (Bombay et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2019; Kulis et al., 2015; Kulis 2013; Walters, 1999) have directly asked Indigenous Youth about their identity in terms of associations and participation in culture while others still are creating attention to processes of how Indigenous youth came to know themselves as being Indigenous (Brown et al., 2012; Dickerson et al., 2019; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016). This idea of Indigenous identity has become a place, where hope and truth are centered around thoughts of knowing yourself, your people, your stories and histories as a means to guide Indigenous people into understanding. Oftentimes, Indigenous identity also becomes a very close to the heart matter, due to attempts by

US dominant culture to damage and exterminate Indigenous People's cultural and social distinctiveness, in order to create and steady colonial settlement in the U.S. Historically, U.S. policy and legislation had the explicit goal of terminating Indigenous People by disrupting cultural and social identities to assimilate them into the larger U.S. society. Grande et al. (2015) further expand these ideas of disruption through the current settler-state, while also acknowledging the idea that Indigenous People need to grapple with difficult decisions of identity that do not align with Indigenous identities in the settler-state. The idea of "Indianness" has been created and designed with the intention of land dispossession and elimination for the benefit of the settler (Grande et al., 2015; Wolfe, 2007a). Indigenous people often grapple with an understanding of Indian identity, formed by outsiders, however this same basis of identity is now used (such as blood quantum and enrollment, white-passing, etc) as a way to understand the uniqueness of their socio-political identities (i.e., aside from community, nation or kinship). Grande et al. (2015) summarized this shift from a linear narrative of identity as something that is needed and assigned to the fostering of identity as something that is deeply rooted in ties to land, community, and being/becoming:

> By necessity the dialogical process of Indigenous identity formation must be built on a foundation of understanding, of the ongoing impact of settler colonialism, the continued disruption of tribal community life, and the ways that Indigenous peoples have been resilient in preserving cultures, knowledge, language, and systems of governance (Grande et al., 2015, p. 112)

This process of who *is* and *isn't* is important and the discourse around this topic has led to new discourses and analyses of Indigenous identity. Acknowledging all these courses of identity is important to place the perspective of Indigenous identity in youth themselves at a time when they

are formulating their own trajectories of how they determine Indigenous identity. Inevitably, "the power to name, reveal, and define one's people (i.e., the right to self-determination) is arguably the truest expression of sovereignty"(Grande et al., 2015, p.107).

Identity is, arguably, one of the most critical aspects of Indigenous Youth's ability to handle ongoing challenges that seek to erase and redefine who they are. Sense of identity is a protective factor for ethnically diverse students (Bombay et al., 2010; Chavous et al.,, 2008; Gaylord-Harden, et al., 2007; Newman et al., 2006). It is important to understand that all Indigenous Nations (federally recognized, state-recognized or non-recognized) have their own cultural values, ideologies, and social constructs that form their tribal-member's identities. In the U.S. almost 2,500,000 people self-identify as AI/AN or a combination of AI/AN and another race. Therefore, it is critical to understand the diversity of Indigenous groups within the US. Categorizing Indigenous peoples into one mnemonic group is a misnomer, which damages Indigenous identities and furthers colonization efforts and settler futurity. Efforts of decolonization specific to identity play a critical role in how we understand that each AI/AN Nation have their own specific identities that they continue to foster through distinct knowledges, beliefs, community actions, and traditions practiced throughout daily life. This reality is unique in the experience of AI/AN youth and adds to the complexities of identity formation. Kulis et al. (2013) investigated the idea of "American Indian ethnic identity" using Markstrom's (2011) "local identity model" to understand the variability and complexities of urban American Indian identities and how the youth view themselves as American Indian in urban settings. Their findings indicated that a strong sense of spirituality and involvement in traditions and cultural practices predicted a "stronger American Indian identity" (Kulis et al., 2013, p. 286). These are

acts of connecting to culture that need to be investigated at a deeper level with Indigenous youth to better understand their perception of that involvement.

Kulis et al. (2015) investigated how identity clustered in different ways for AI adolescents. These researchers examined how the strength and nature of AI ethnic identity varied across subgroups or latent classes to shed light on the complexities of constructing Indigenous identities in urban areas. AI youth from 5 public middle schools completed a questionnaire (N = 208) that assessed sources of Indigenous identity, which mapped the three theoretical dimensions of a model advanced by Markstrom: 1) identification (tribal and ethnic heritage); 2) connection (through family and reservation ties), and 3) involvement in traditional culture and spirituality. Results indicated that the urban AI youth in this study fit into five combinations of identity measures and that a larger portion of the youth were highly enculturated and reflected all three of Markstorm's (2011) three local identity models which included local, national and global. Additionally, and consistent with research on cultural connections and academic performance, youth in this study who ranked the salience of AI culture also had better self-reported grades. Thus, as noted by the researchers identity is "A major resource for promoting wellbeing, however, is that urban AIs are able to sustain their cultures and identities by maintaining deep connections to reservation homelands or tribal communities." (Kulis et al., 2015, p. 216) The researchers also noted that "There is relatively little empirical research on the cultural identities of urban AI youth, even as more AI families have lived for multiple generations in the city" (Kulis et al., 2015, p. 215), suggesting that more research is needed to better understand sources of cultural identity for urban AI youth and what it means for their academic performance and health.

To further recognize the complexities of Indigenous identity formation, Bombay et al. (2010) studied the relationship between ethnic identity and perceived discrimination among Indigenous people in Canada. This study included 165 (female) and 55 (male) First Nations adults between the ages of 18 and 64 years old and sought to understand aspects of ethnic identity as identified in research as social identity theory (Cameron, 2004; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Participants completed a survey instrument that asked about ethnic identity depression and perceived ethnic discrimination and the researchers then used hierarchical regression analyses to understand how three dimensions of ethnic identity: (a) group awareness/group membership/self-concept (centrality), (b) value ascribed to group membership (In-group affect or pride), and (c) sense of emotional involvement with other group members (in-group ties) interacted with perceived discrimination in predicting symptoms of depression. Findings indicated that perceived discrimination did predict depressive symptoms such that higher perceptions of discrimination were associated with greater depressive symptomology. However, "in-group" affect (e.g., pride in being "glad" to be Indigenous) predicted decreased depressive symptoms, regardless of perceived discrimination. Bombay and colleagues discussed the nuances of identity regarding the study participants aspects of identity as the "in-group" affect (greater pride in being Aboriginal) and "centrality" (salience of identity), had contrasting effects in their direct relationships with depressive symptoms and in their moderating roles in the relation between discrimination and depression (Bombay et al., 2010, p. 512). This study's attempt to analyze a linear relationship between ethnic identity and its moderating effect on depressive symptoms shows how measuring only certain aspects of identity, will not help in understanding the breadth of what Grande et al. (2015) illustrated as a "changing tides, ebbs and flows, the dialogics of identity formation"(p.111). Bombay et al., (2010) only minimally hinted at

understanding Grande's explanation was to incorporate aspects of identity that may have been missed by the linearity of measures. Specifically, these aspects are discussed as the participants' diversity in home communities.

Gloppen et al., (2017), used extant data to examine the relationship between bullying involvement and mental health among AI youth during middle and high school. . Using data from a 2013 Minnesota student survey (MSS) they explored factors that could reduce the impact of bullying. The measures that were examined were in four areas, (a) mental health problems (i.e., Global Appraisal of Individual Needs Short Screener, GAIN-SS); (b) bullying involvement using the California Healthy kids survey to query about recent bullying (within the past 30 days); (c) protective factors or internal measured using 14 items from the Developmental Assets Profile (i.e., I feel in control of my life and future, positive student teacher relationships, and feelings safe at school); and (d) demographic variables (i.e., gender, poverty, familial structures, disability status and type of school). Results indicated that having internal assets and feeling more empowered reduced the odds of experiencing internalizing symptoms (p. 416). This study also found that female AI's in this sample were more likely to report internalizing symptoms and suicidality than males. Additionally, female participants had significantly lower scores on the measures of internal assets, empowerment, and feeling safe at school and protective factors that could decrease the likelihood of negative mental health effects. Moreover, female AI student participants were significantly more likely than males to report relational bullying victimization and perpetration (p.417). Again, the use of data and creation of identity in a linear relationship with risk factors does not create a deeper understanding of Indigenous youth, rather, only quantifies the damages that are apparent to Indigenous community members.

The use of traditional teachings, songs, medicines and practices are transmitted

intergenerationally and provide vital pieces of information for Indigenous identity (Kovach, 2009). Field and Kroskrity (2009) conceived that the concept of "language as identity" (that language and oral tradition) links AIs to their past and provide a basis for continuity with future generations. Given the existing context in which Indigenous people often are shown in popular culture, there is little discussion about the value of identity and Traditional Knowledges roles in creating a sense of self in Indigenous Youth from their perspective. In fact, Jacob (2013) advocated for Indigenous Knowledges to be passed on through true experiences in which elders are sharing with youth in order to moderate risk factors; what she and other Indigenous scholars have labeled "*soul wounds*" (Duran et al., 2013; Jacob, 2013) to facilitate building a sense of identity that is stronger than the wounds. Still, the work that is done with AI/AN youth relative to their Wellness needs to create powerful and meaningful identity. So that Indigenous youth's strengths and desires are the main focus. Relevant to providing true and meaningful experiences are those that Indigenous youth have in learning their language. Indigenous language projects are part and parcel to Indian Education and should be considered a focus in all realms of education and Wellness as we move forward.

Culture and identity are a shared experience that Indigenous people have in common. While not all of the Indigenous Nations in the U.S. have the same cultural practices, there may be similar attributes. Culture from each Nation may have points of agreement such as; how they have maintained cultural teachings or Indigenous language use. These ways of Indigenous Knowing are reflected in Indigenous language use, relationships with the land (not just in untouched natural environments) and one-another; are what binds us together and allows us to share with others when we venture from our home communities and families. If existence is threatened and the need is to now shift the focus on the daily uses of culture within our

Indigenous communities where do the youth who live in urban, or rural areas attending public schools fit into this notion of enculturation? It is considerable to note that Indigenous culture is often threatened within these seemingly casual day-to-day activities that we participate in (such as school, employment, healthcare, physical activity), unless we as Indigenous people are actively defending against issues such as transculturation, globalization, and all the amenities of our twenty first century and "first-world" technological pleasures our youth will continue to not have access to relevant cultural education. While Indigenous communities and members of these communities continually attempt to maintain or re-shape our/their identity, Indigenous youth also feel the pressure of sustaining their culture in an ever-changing technological era of social media and instant gratification.

Youth are incredibly sensitive to building identity and efforts to create positive identities through revitalization of culture and language is essential in current education efforts (Donovan et al., 2015; Jacob, 2013; Whalen et al., 2016). Indigenous youth that are further disconnected from their families, communities (urban/rural) and traditional homelands (points of strength) may still rely on cultural connections to protect or buffer the effects of on-going colonial efforts to erase Indigenous people from the U.S. view. As Hatala et al. (2019) study that involved Indigenous Youth in an urban center in Canada showed that despite the disconnection with rural landscapes youth were still able to make reciprocal and meaningful relationships with the land/place that they were in. While current studies (Bombay et al., 2010; Kulis et al., 2015; Kulis et al., 2013) have created space for the concept of AI/AN youth identity, it was initiated without thoughtful consideration into how youth can be true partners in this narrative. Efforts that were mentioned above used methods that limited identification and insight into Indigenous Youth's identity and mental health by relying on linear design in creation of data and analysis of

the data produced. These narratives can have a direct impact on Indigenous youth's educational outcomes and overall Wellness as our youth will not be seen with the hope that they bring rather the risk factors that they pose.

Summary and Current study

In summary, a wealth of historical data highlights the disparities that Indigenous Youth face daily. Despite these assaults on their development, cultural connection, identity, language spirituality and connection to place (land/community) appear to promote positive Wellness for Indigenous Youth. However, missing from much of the work on the relationship between connections to culture and wellness, are examinations of youths' voices and narratives in the process of identity formation in relation to Indigenous Wellness. Youth voice is important to Wellness education, a clear insight that educators of Indigenous youth can use to assist in creating meaningful experiences for Indigenous youth. Experiences in wellness and community building that should reflect localized community respect and input, while also allowing for youth to tell us how they succeed with this seemingly arduous task of navigating systems of education and wellness while also maintaining ties to Indigenous identity. The current study is to understand Indigenous Youth's perspective of cultural connectedness and what role, if any, that those connections can have in promoting Wellness for Indigenous Youth.

CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and identify gaps in the literature related to culture as wellness for Indigenous youth. Stressors to Indigenous youths' wellbeing and health outcomes are reviewed and three Indigenous Wellness Models are reviewed to provide a conceptual and theoretical foundation for the current study.

Indigenous Wellness

Mental health and the continued wellbeing of youth is a growing area of concern for Indigenous communities in the US, as mental health issues differ from community to community and Mental Wellness concerns amongst communities are not always understood uniformly. This creates a need for a more integrative approach to Wellness. Specifically, a need for Wellness and healing of Indigenous youth in schools has arisen as an area of importance across Indigenous communities in the US. A prime concern as when compared to other groups of students, AI/AN youth have extreme disparities in mental health disorders such as: suicide, anxiety, substance abuse, and depression (IHS, 2011; Olson & Wahab, 2006). The disparities experienced by AI/AN, as compared to non-Indigenous populations, shows direct and indirect links to a capitalist made socio-cultural, political, economic, and environmental context in which surviving as an Indigenous youth today makes for challenging circumstances (Brave Heart et al., 2016; Czyzewski, 2011; Duran et al., 2013).

There have been several researchers with "good" intentions that have analyzed and commodified Indigenous Knowledge, leaving behind damage with Indigenous People (Cho et al., 2010). These researchers have left distrust of research, and damaged health of Indigenous people only to further research agendas. While developing academic/ health interventions through ceremonial exploitation and appropriation of intellectual properties of health and

education. An outsider's view of Indigenous People's health and education in the broader US society may be seen with a deficit mindset, it is important to recognize and understand that within AI/NA cultures (Gone & Calf Looking, 2015) and languages (Oster et.al., 2014; Whalen et al., 2016) solutions exist to deal with these extreme circumstances. As Walters (2020) has recommended, Indigenous health research should incorporate "three broad interrelated research themes: (1) documentation/articulation of Indigenous Knowledge (IK) systems across tribal nations to identify meta-measurement categories and constructs; (2) delineation of the underlying epistemological structures and learning/cognitive processes associated with Indigenous "ways of knowing" and (3) identification of ways in which IK and western knowledge are integrated into health intervention approaches." (Walters et al., 2020, p. 62).

Traditional Knowledge (TK), Indigenous communities have survived (and continue to be here) for millennia on TK, which have relied on understanding and responsibility of relationship. A critical function of this relational aspect is to detail how us humans existing within the places that we live, through culture, ceremony, sustenance, all in relation to the acknowledgement of all things in the place revolve and need one another. Knowledges that were instrumental for many generations, but the transmission of these teachings have been interrupted and nearly destroyed for some, when the structure of the Indigenous social composition was attacked through Western expansion. Through resurgence and revitalization efforts these knowledges are awaking and strengthening to reinforce and create community resiliency.

Integration of TK with western academic or health constructs is not a new coupling. The tools and strengths that are inherent in many AI/AN communities revolve around these often-interchangeable terms of Indigenous Knowledge (IK), Traditional Knowledge, and a term that incorporates use of science is Indigenous Traditional Ecological Knowledges (ITEK). These

terms are used to describe a common understanding about the inherent strengths, intellect and onto-epistemology of Indigenous Peoples. Currently there are no universal definitions for these terms however, it is not necessarily a dissoluteness of the projects of re-centering education and research rather shows the heterogeneity of Indigenous Peoples of North America. Traditional Knowledges are reflected in such things as: community traditions, cultural practices, values, belief systems, interrelationships with land and environment and more. These systems of knowledge have been expressed orally through language, stories, legends, ceremonies and songs to provide guidance and highlight things such as healing practices, spiritual existence, connection to place and relations, taboos, and laws, entrusted by individuals or groups (Irlbacher-Fox, 2014; Pierotti & Wildcat, 2000; Wildcat et al., 2014). Jacob (2013) describes TK as a vital part of the process of healing the soul wounds of the settler colonial acts of violence that Indigenous communities face.

Conversely the need to incorporate the use of Western health policy research in order to provide a context for which Indigenous people are situated is also a salient realization that some Indigenous scholars are articulating in their ongoing projects (Gone, 2014; Hartmann & Gone, 2012; Kelley et al., 2015; Martin, 2012; Vukic et al., 2012). The use of both TK and Western thought in creating positive Wellness outcomes for Indigenous youth is crucial for youth to succeed. Creating and planning for educational success and healthy outcomes for Indigenous youth attempts to reconcile the determinants of health that are AI/AN youth face at a disproportionate rate.

Relational Worldview. Indigenous Social Worker and Scholar, Terry Cross (1997) posits that there are two predominant worldviews—linear and relational. The linear worldview is secular in nature, and rooted in Western European, and cause-and-effect logic. This notion of

Western-linear thinking is shared by other Indigenous scholars (Fixico, 2009) that understand the need to contextually situate their research in an arena that expects conformation rather than alternative application. In comparison, a relational worldview reflects some AI cultures and recognizes events in relation to all others (non-linear). In a relational worldview, AI health is a function of balance between multiple interrelating elements. Cross (1997) describes Relational Worldview (RWV) Theory as a circle or hoop (Figure 1) with four quadrants equally distributed with connections among people culture and land. This theory of interconnections is fundamental to some Indigenous cultural beliefs and day to day practices, RWV allows for researchers (Indigenous & Non-Indigenous) to utilize this framework to illuminate similar constructs regarding relationships, environment, and identity.

The approach used in this project is unique in terms of the professional and culturally specific attributes of the methodology and the extent of community involvement. The theoretical model used to guide this research was based on the Relational Worldview approach developed by NICWA (Cross, 1997). The Relational Worldview (RWV) is echoed within many tribal cultures by an emphasis on the use of a circular rather than a linear concept of reality in which the four areas of mind, body, spirit, and social context are interrelated and in which balance among the four quadrants constitutes wellness (see fig. 1). Life is understood as a circle with the four quadrants creating a whole in which all things affect all other aspects of life (Cross, 1997). In this model, the context quadrant includes concepts related to the environment and relationships with others. The mind quadrant incorporates elements related to emotions, memories, and knowledge. Body refers to body chemistry, genetics, and physical well-being. The spirit quadrant includes spiritual teachings, stories, and other protective factors. The model incorporates interdependent relationships everywhere, and these relationships are understood as

complex, dynamic, and patterned. Used as a paradigm for indigenous research, data are gathered across all four quadrants. The Relational Worldview directs the research team to gather data that include not only the relationships that emerge in each quadrant but also the patterns across the quadrants. By examining the patterns and seeing the trends within the data, new information emerges that is impossible to discern from a linear approach alone. The interaction between the linear and the relational patterns helps inform researchers across cultural boundaries: "Where the circle and the lines touch, opportunities for the joining of tribal and non-tribal perspectives exist" (Lowery, 1998, p. 127).

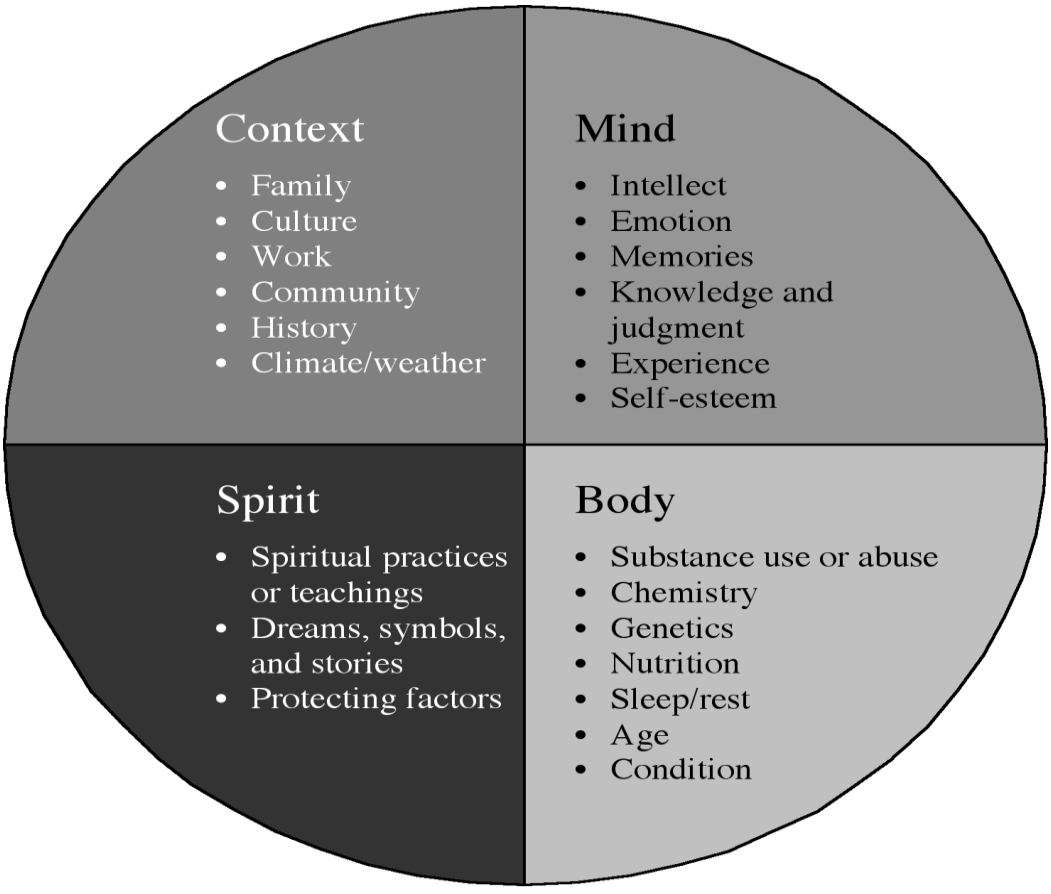

Figure 1. Relational Worldview Model

While this model of Wellness is critical in the concern that I have as a researcher, I also acknowledged that there are other research agendas focused on creating Wellness through the use of Indigenous thought and knowledges. However, for the purposes of this project I have elected to utilize this RWV model as it reflects clearly a framework that can be used to understand Wellness for Indigenous youth. There are clear connections of each of the domains (eg Spirit, Mind, etc) that are discussed here. These domains being dynamic and able to incorporate from the other domains to assist in a balance of Wellness. In doing so it is hoped that Wellness is seen as a way to promote individual and interrelated strengths in physical, social, spiritual, and mental wellbeing of Indigenous youth. There are many levels to understand as Indigenous youth and their knowledge about health and Wellbeing is varied. Furthermore, looking at a model that would create a sense of balance as it relates to Indigenous culture would be determined by place and culture of Indigenous People from that place, thus this model would not be generalizable. Rather an approach to understanding Wellness amongst Indigenous youth should include them and be guided with care about relevance or meaning to this subject matter from them.

At issue is not the need of a mediator for these outcomes, rather the way in which Wellness is conceptualized and does this differ from the damaged-centered gaze of research agendas in Western academia. Additionally, how do we envision using tools from Western academia that may benefit the production of an important reciprocal tool for the people to access healing and Wellness? These concerns are not novel to research and are presented here to remember as a researcher I am an active agent in an agenda, one that may or may not be shared by my counterparts. In an attempt to address these concerns, the identification of three types of Indigenous Wellness related models have been synthesized.

Culture: A Part of Wellness

Youth in general need adequate mental health services and Indigenous youth in particular need services that include specific cultural relevance as well as innovative delivery methods. Services like this can be approached, by seeing that opportunities for community involvement in all processes of the design from defining objectives, relevance, to intellectual rights are considered and respected. Culturally grounded protective factors are important for understanding the interactions between the individual, community, and holistic wellness (Mohatt et al., 2011, p. 445). The use of cultural understandings are emerging across both education and health research as an integral part for Indigenous youth success and Wellbeing (Lee & Cerecer, 2010; T. L. McCarty, 2003; T. McCarty & Lee, 2015; Mohatt et al., 2011; Rasmus et al., 2016).

Inherent strengths. Indigenous communities, Nations, and the Indigenous people that make these places and spaces have embedded within their stories and Knowledges routes to reconnect the disconnected (Cajete, 1999; Hall et al., 2015). Research has shown that cultural connectedness has been shown to have a strong association with mental health factors such as self-efficacy, sense of self, life satisfaction and perceived discrimination (Bombay et al., 2010; Snowshoe et al., 2017), as well as school connectedness and school success (Crooks et al., 2015; T. McCarty & Lee, 2015; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016).

At the Community level support serves a number of emotional, developmental, and connectedness functions. Specifically, support received from an Indigenous community may facilitate a sense of shared community, success and connectedness. Cross et al., (2011), purposeful investigation into what an urban Indigenous community defined as youth success. By utilizing a community-based participatory method and in collaboration with Portland, Oregon's

Native American Youth and Family Center (NAYA) (a non-profit) that seeks to enhance the diverse strengths of AI/AN youth and families in partnership with the community through cultural identity and education (that serves over 10,000 individual AI/AN people from over 380 tribal backgrounds annually).

Cross and colleagues convened a focus group. Focus group data were taken from six open-ended questions: 1) What does success look like for Native American Youth? 2) What is necessary to help support youth in achieving success in their lives? 3)What are the conditions that hinder a youth's progress toward success? 4) How do NAYA Family Center services contribute to a youth's success? 5) Are there other things that NAYA could be doing that would be helpful? And 6) is there anything you would like to add that we have not talked about?

The focus group data were analyzed grouped into themes and assigned codes. Findings of the characteristics of success were categorized into the 4 quadrants of the Relational Worldview (RWV): Context, Mind, Body and Spirit. Using this framework to investigate the focus group data, findings suggest that this group of Urban Indigenous people, who relied heavily on their cultural backgrounds (Plains, Plateau, and Coastal) viewed success in a holistic manner. An example from this group was, a student may be academically achieving at a high rate and therefore seen as a success in the mainstream, however this same student may lack knowledge of appropriate cultural protocols; then they would not be successful in the values of their own communities.

This type of research is important to Indigenous communities because great effort was put into the design and inclusion of community members. As an integral piece of cultural exchanges were provided to this study which allowed for definitions to arise from the community, while also working with a researcher to have meaning and understanding about

challenging a very Western concept of academic success and how this does not necessarily alleviate inequities if youth are not successful in their own communities' cultural beliefs.

Rountree and Smith (2016), utilized RWV an Indigenous framework created by Cross (1997), to search literature on indicators of strengths-based child-wellbeing in Indigenous communities throughout the world. As a result, the authors found that "research needs to be focused on empowering the patient or client using their inherent strengths, including both internal and external resources, and not on problems to be overcome" (p.217). Using RWV and those strength-based indicators identified by Indigenous communities will promote more accurate and complete reporting on the status of Indigenous youth. This article sought to validate research within Indigenous communities that focused on endogenous strengths such as contextual and spiritual domains first introduced by Cross (1997).

Research participation and generation that comes from Indigenous researchers and community members is meaningful and relevant in focusing on Indigenous community's needs. Meeting a need with Trauma-focused Cognitive therapy (TF-CBT) for American Indian and Alaska Native children in the forefront, Bigfoot and Schmidt (2010) utilized and integrated their own cultural knowledge into a TF-CBT. Bringing together their own specific tribal teachings and Western concepts Bigfoot and Schmidt were able to create a holistic view of wellness. Some of the unique concepts of this project included acknowledgement and respect for, "shared and tribal-specific teachings, practices and understandings"(Bigfoot & Schmidt, 2010, p. 849). These acts of Indigenous research that sought to link together both Western frames and Indigenous epistemologies creates deeper and critical understandings that build on strengths. Strengths that are seen in protective factors in Western frames and as critical to understanding self in relation to Indigenous Knowledges frameworks.

Cultural connections. Liebenberg, Ikeda, & Wood (2015), were interested in the effects of Inuit culture in relation to resiliency factors and the interpretation of such data with quality interview data. Use of both quantitative and qualitative analysis were performed for this study, allowing for data interpretations and connections to be made from personal narrative. The participants were 228 Inuit youth living in the North Coast communities of Labrador. Liebenberg and colleagues considered of importance young people's engagement in cultural activities (including speaking Inutitut) impacted the resilience processes surrounding youth.

Results from this study showed that youth who spoke at least some Inuit and those youth who did not were statistically different from the resilience scores on a context sub-scale. Data from case-studies with Inuit youth highlight the importance of language use, hunting, global views of success (e.g. doing well in school, future aspirations for attending college) and more. From this study came two important findings, "1) Importance of language and land-based activities for Inuit youth; 2) Data from study indicate that programs implementing policy aimed at cultural revival should be flexible" (Liebenberg, Ikeda, & Wood, 2015, p. 114). The concept behind this study was that resiliency is imbedded in cultural activities, and that support for Inuit communities moving forward would also provide opportunities for members of the community. Elders, language speakers, cultural knowledge keepers all were important interconnections in community cohesion and development. These points of community strength were seen as reinforcing to the resiliency processes of youth living in Inuit culture.

In 2015 Snowshoe, Crooks, Tremblay, Craig and Hinson, sought to develop a cultural connectedness scale (CCS). The CCS would illuminate areas of strengths for First Nations, Inuit and Metís children in Canada. Their rationale for this study has extended out of current Indigenous scholars' efforts to identify, discuss and create applicable research, research methods

and culturally focused interventions for Indigenous youth in Canada (Kanu, 2007; Kirmayer et al., 2007). This study sought to create a comprehensive theoretical model that did not just test for acculturation or assimilation into the dominant society but rather, how cultural connectedness can act both as a protection for First Nation's youth and as a link between theories of cultural connectedness and positive mental health outcomes.

Interestingly, this study found that "Identity and spirituality were modestly correlated with life satisfaction" (Snowshoe, Crooks, Tremblay, Craig, & Hinson, 2015, p. 255). Also, life satisfaction and identity had a significantly stronger association than between life satisfaction and traditions, "indicating that youth who see themselves as FN and adopt a FN worldview tend to report being happier with their lives than those who merely attend cultural activities or events"(Snowshoe et al., 2015, p. 255).

Through a combined research process of empirical testing (Exploratory Factor Analysis) and community collaboration (item generation) with expert groups and key informants (both focus groups and individual interviews) the process of determining a parsimonious grouping of factors was analyzed. 319 First Nations, Metis and Inuit youth participated in the current study. The result of the study was a concise list of measures in three area factor loadings of: 1) Identity; 2) Traditions and 3) Spirituality. This study while is significantly important due to the use of empirical testing and development of items that measure a sense of connectedness to Indigenous culture that is often overlooked in other empirical studies. Limitations of this study are varied and include: lack of measuring perceived discrimination and influence of age-related factors on the resiliency process over the lifespan (adolescence to young adult).

Using a social-ecological (SEF) framework to synthesize current research with AI/AN populations, Henson et al. (2017), identified nine protective factors throughout the following

domains: a) *Individual Level* (Current/future aspirations; personal wellness; positive self-image and self-efficacy). b) *Relationship protective factors* (Non-familial connectedness and family connectedness). c) *Community protective factors* (Positive opportunities and positive social norms). d) *Multi-level protective factors* (Cultural connectedness). Recommendations from the authors are as follows for "health interventions with AIAN youth: (1) identify and utilize innate, local protective factors present within an AIAN community to promote adolescent health; and (2) focus on creating environments that are rich in protective factors across the domains of the social-ecological model"(Henson, Sabo, Trujillo, & Teufel-Shone, 2017, p. 20). While the focus of this article is preventative in scope it still relies on a social-ecological model that is deficit-based approach to understanding wellness, and when compared to RWV models it is counterintuitive to communities that are affected by deficits. Further research and future directions from the authors indicate a need to understand the complexities of age related social influences from younger to older adolescents would enhance future exploration of adolescent assets and protective factors (Henson et al., 2017, p. 23).

Oré et al. (2016), reviewed 8 articles that were focused on AI/AN populations and used the Life-ways/life-course framework to analyze resiliency as a collective intergenerational mechanism. The method these authors used was a systematic review using guidelines from (PRISMA) and conducted descriptive content analyses of selected articles. Findings were synthesized and themes from these suggested that AI/AN resilience comes from a range of sources such as: worldviews, beliefs, values and practices. The authors also found that narrative played an important role in diffusion and reciprocal knowledge sharing.

In a systematic review involving three inclusion criteria (1) positive youth development (PYD) in (2) Aboriginal physical activity and (3) sport was conducted in three phases: Phase 1—

Indexed peer-reviewed literature, Phase 2—Non-indexed Indigenous literature, and Phase 3—Grey literature. This review produced 7 themes from a total of 35 articles. The themes were as follows: 1) *Empowerment,* 2) *Overall Health,* 3) *Traditional Culture and Values,* 4) *Education,* 5) *Barriers to Participation,* 6) *Resiliency and Mental Health,* and 7) *Negative Physical Activity and Sport Experiences* (Bruner et al., 2016).

The authors took a strengths-based approach and acknowledged a need to shift the paradigm of deficit-reduction approaches, which often disempowers youth by labeling behaviors as problematic and in need of being fixed. Conversely, a prevailing protective factor in a child's life is a positive relationship with pro-social adults and experiencing a sense of family connectedness (Allen et al., 2014; Goldston et al., 2008; Gone & Alcántara, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2004; LaFromboise et al., 2006).

The integration of research methods that are aligned to Indigenous Knowledges have become an ever increasing and effective means to creating relevance for communities that are often withdrawn from research. These inherent strengths-based or community assets focused projects that work to utilize culturally grounded approaches has extreme potential for effecting change in Indigenous communities (Blue Bird Jernigan et al., 2018). In an effort to grow the potential of First Nations Elders, Knowledge keepers and ceremonial people that is seen from the community perspective Hall et al., (2015), utilized research methods that were developed by Indigenous researchers. The idea was that using the "Two-eyed" seeing an approach that would neither preface Indigenous over Western or vice versa, rather use the right approach for the right place, times or occurrence in working towards positive outcomes for Indigenous People. The incorporation of a desire or aspirations-based approach is a promising practical approach, especially when working with adolescents.

Youth Perspectives and voice are often missing from research that is designed to either intervene and or help close some type of deficit gap. For instance, researchers have documented shocking physical and mental health disparities in Indigenous communities across the US, while limiting the scope of health research to producing health disparities and illuminating that Indigenous communities often lack the resources needed to maintain Wellness (Castor et al., 2006; S. E. Jones et al., 2011; King et al., 2009; Sarche & Spicer, 2008). Even in these projects and with all that they have brought out with intended and unintended effects, we often only hear from academics, researchers, PI's and not from active voices of those who are involved in the day-to-day; those of the youth. In a study with urban Indigenous Youth in Canada, Hatala, et al. 2019 took care to not only include but promote the research with Indigenous Youth as active participants. In the 2018 paper Cultural Repertoires, Searle and colleagues present an exemplary example of both active youth participation in the narrative as well as a culturally-responsive making in the context of developing location-based community stories. Through the Youth's narrative there was a shift from the very notion of artifacts of culture making being the dominant narrative in Indigenous Youth's life to the actual day-to-day processes that were used in making the artifact such as care and meaning as it applies to the making of projects from outside of cultural artifacts.

Summary

The variability and demonstration of protective factors linked or associated with such indicators as Cultural Connectedness to adolescent identity formation are not easily measured. The need to understand this variability and how certain contributions from culture can attend to health and academic stressors is the concern of this project. However, Indigenous scholars are increasingly critical of research that continues to produce a one-dimensional representation of

Indigenous communities (Tuck, 2009; Tuck and Yang, 2014). Inspired by Indigenous critiques of research, scholars like Tuck (2009, 2012), and Ahenakew (2011) point to the way Western frameworks of research often confuses Indigenous perspectives and voices, while perpetuating settler narratives of Indigenous communities as damaged and in need of settler interventions. As I have indicated in this section, health stressors have already been illuminated in the research and with both intentional and unintentional consequences for our Indigenous communities. As a primary concern of this project it is important to understand how youth are affected by these seemingly pervasive depictions of Indigenous people and their communities that may serve to limit youth agency.

With these concerns in our forefront, I look to Cultural Connectedness as a developmental process evidenced by heightened awareness of Indigenous cultural values and a constant ongoing process of learning about cultural norms, cultural and community values, and may include understanding the social-political constructs of Indian Identity. Indigenous values, that reflect a sense of respect, relationship, responsibility, reciprocity and relevance to your people. Cultural Connectedness and a relational worldview (RWV) may help to explain variation in outcomes in the research linking discrimination, ethnic identity, social support, and psychological and academic adjustment for high school students, Indigenous youth in particular. Situating my work within Red pedagogy (Grande, 2007) through reflexive and reciprocal practices, I expect to create a space for Indigenous youth to draw from their cultural legacies and traditions by moving away from the top-down approach to education in order to allow them to tell their own stories while being active participants in the project.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study is to understand cultural connectedness as an influence on the

resilience of AI/ AN youth who live in urban areas and public schools. The challenges that this population of youth have, along with the role that culture plays in how they continue to be successful and healthy in their communities. It is imperative to generate research to understand the social and economic factors affecting the success of the AI/AN populations. By studying the values associated within different Indigenous communities, there may be implications that can assist educators and community members to work cohesively to address the often inadequate educational and health outcomes for Indigenous youth.

Research Questions

The current study addresses the following research questions:

1) How youth express their understanding of cultural connectedness (e.g. values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality)?
2) What experiences do Indigenous Youth have that they believe contribute to their own cultural connections (e.g. values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality)?
3) How do Indigenous youth express their cultural connectedness in terms of popular culture?

CHAPTER III: METHODS

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)/ Photovoice methodology research design that was utilized in this study to address the study questions. The everyday realities that Indigenous youth live as socio-political people and the experiences associated with this can be complex, thus there is a need to better understand youth from their own input in these realities. As participatory research with Indigenous youth becomes more frequent, there is an increasing amount of literature from Indigenous scholars about how to include youth in research in a way that makes them feel comfortable and valued (Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017; Clark et al., 2013; Hatala et al., 2019; Wood et al., 2018). A phenomenological method is proposed to study the narrative data in order to understand the phenomena that exists with Indigenous youth and their perceptions/lived experiences of wellbeing.

Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA combined with photovoice is the research method used to better understand Indigenous Youth's personal narrative about Wellness IPA was developed for the psychology of health and wellness as a qualitative research method (Smith et al., 2009; Willig, 2008). The focus of IPA research is generally to investigate how individuals make sense of their experiences, this is the phenomenological study component. To further understand IPA, Shaw (2001), described how the aims of IPA are to explore the unique meanings that people assign to a certain experience, as well as examine how those meanings relate to the person's individual and cultural context, and to the experiences of others. Research questions for IPA studies are framed broadly (Smith & Osborn, 2007)and IPA utilizes elements that are fundamental principles of phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2009). The terminology refers to a philosophical grounding in both phenomenology and hermeneutics.

A phenomenological method involves "understanding personal lived experience and thus with exploring persons' relatedness to, or involvement in, a particular event or process" (Smith et al., 2009, p. 40) whereas the hermeneutic emphasis in IPA refers to the method of interpretation necessary to get an 'insider's perspective' on the phenomenon in question. For example, Smith et al. (2009) applied the idea of the 'hermeneutic circle' to the research process, pointing out that it rarely (if ever) involves a simple, linear movement from data to results. This illuminates the interpretivisms of IPA because the method recognizes there is no such thing as an uninterpreted phenomenon. As Smith and colleagues (2009) posit a reflexive and dynamic process of engagement: with the researcher's own aims, theories and preconceptions, as well as with participants and their accounts of lived experience. IPA, essentially produces ideas from both phenomenology and hermeneutics resulting in a method which is descriptive as there is a concern for how things emerge, while also letting things speak for themselves.

In an IPA project there is not a single path to follow as the flexibility in data collection allows for the analysis of the data to shape how meanings are constructed by individuals within a social and personal world (Smith & Osborn, 2007). However, Smith and Osborn (2007) provide several guidelines to assist researchers when using IPA:

(a) **Constructing a research question(s)** in IPA are formed more broadly and openly (p.53). The testing of a predetermined researcher hypothesis is not the aim, rather flexibility, exploring and detailing the phenomena are prioritizes in this analysis.

(b) **Deciding on a sample**: In IPA the sampling is purposeful and designed to be relevant for a certain group of participants. As Pietkiewicz and Smith 2012 reason, IPA, analyzes the similarities and differences are usually within a group that has been defined as similar according to important variables;

(c) **Collecting data** in IPA involves deciding on what constitutes data while simultaneously constructing questions that will prove useful in such a way that will elicit answers that can be analyzed using this method (p.55). Furthermore, the use of semi-structured interviews is the exemplar standard for IPA, in order to get a more accurate understanding from the individual's worldview or perspective;

(d) **Constructing the interview** schedule in advance of the interviews is important to this method as it forces the researcher to think explicitly about what the interview may involve (p. 57). Allowing for an advanced thought in how the interview may proceed depending on difficulties, wording, sensitive areas, and allowing some time prior to the interview for a work-through. A question protocol for the study is the sought-after item, but not recommended, creating this allows for questions to be grouped according to area to address the issue studied. Combing all these steps for the interview schedule also creates a way to envision possible probes and prompts;

(e) **Interviewing**, with IPA is generally a one hour or longer time commitment. The semi-structured form of interviews and thoughtful construction of questions allows the interviewer to ask questions in a convenient order. This order may differ from participant to participant as each interview may evolve new perspectives or topics, which were not anticipated, allowing for the researcher to develop more insight before another interview (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012). As in other forms of Phenomenological research all interviews need to be audio recorded and then transcribed verbatim (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 64); and

(f) **Analysis** is similar to and different from Phenomenology and Grounded theory (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 66). Initially reading and rereading the transcription. During this time of reading annotations are kept on the left side of the transcript, these may be comments,

attempts at paraphrasing and summarizing, associations and the beginning of interpretation (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 67). Next the phase of documenting emergent themes occurs, as the researcher goes back to the beginning of the transcript and documents themes on the right side. Notes are transformed into concise phrases that capture what is found in the text relating to the initial inquiry (p.68). The entire transcript is treated as data at this point and there is no requirement to generate themes on the whim. The number of themes is dependent on the richness of the transcripts data (p.71). Resulting from the themes is the next stage of data analysis in which the themes will be recorded on a new document in the sequential order that they appeared in the transcript. Following this a more analytical/theoretical ordering occurs as the researcher tries to make sense of the connections between themes, as they will cluster and others may emerge more subordinately (p.71). Finally producing a table of themes and identifiers (or groupings) to the subordinate themes. This process is then repeated for each interview (p.72).

For the purpose of this research project, the use of focus groups is an adaptation to the exemplary use of single participant interviews that IPA research recommends (Smith & Osborn, 2007). In a recent study from Phillips and colleagues (2016) IPA was applied to focus group data and this study provided strategies to illuminate the focus group content that is generally left out of IPA analysis. Furthermore, the quest by Phillips et al., (2016) was to make use of the interactional data to enrich the typical nature of either realist or discursive type of analysis that is formulated with IPA. Another study (Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019) sought to bring out the realities of the personal experience of Samoan children in New Zealand and used combined methodology of IPA and photovoice to produce a concept of wellbeing that balanced a Samoan way of life and New Zealand life experiences. Dunlop-Bennett et al., (2019) project focused on a

novel way to produce the individual's voice through a group setting while interpreting photos that the participants captured during the study. Specifically, the adaptations that will occur in this project will replace the step of semi-structured individual interviews with focus group interviews, while simultaneously generating data from photo's captured by focus group participants and then as a group discussing the individual's interpretation of said photos.

Setting

The setting for this study included ZOOM meetings and public schools located within an urban setting. The communities are across the state of Oregon and were selected due to the relative convenience of location and previous experience working within these communities. Indigenous youth attending public high schools in Oregon are the participants. Lane County's AI population is approximately 5,627 individuals or 1.6% of the county's population (US Census, 2010), representing a range of Indigenous Nations. Oregon is home to 9 federally recognized Indigenous Nations (Burns Paiute; Confederated Tribes of Coos, Lower Umpqua and Siuslaw Indians; Confederated Tribes of Grande Ronde; Confederated Tribes of Siletz; Confederated Tribes of Umatilla Reservation; Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs; Cow Creek Band of Umpqua Indians; Coquille Indian Tribe; and Klamath Tribes). As well as members of 573 other federally recognized tribes and various other state-recognized/terminated tribal organizations.

Participants

The phenomenological aspects of this study places importance in ensuring participants have the 'lived experiences' essential to answer the research questions being explored. As outlined in Smith and Osborn, (2007) having a smaller number of participants and placing the importance of each participant's shared stories, expressions of emotions and thoughts concerning the phenomenon, are critical features of any IPA project. In order for a researcher to fully

express a description of the particular phenomenon, participants must have experience with the phenomenon (Creswell, 2012; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, participants were purposefully selected to help ensure that the research questions could be addressed (Creswell, 2012; Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The participant population consisted of AI/AN youth (14-19-year-old), in grades 9-12th who had attended a public high school in the state of Oregon during 2020/2021. This study sought to gain perspective from any of the aforementioned tribal nations and as such the inclusion and exclusion criteria for participants was as follows:

Inclusion Criteria: 1) self-identifying AI/AN attending Oregon public high school, 2) between the ages of 14-18 years of age; 3) speak and read English.

Exclusion Criteria: 1) AI/AN are not attending high school AI, 2) are under the age of 14 or over the age of 19, 3) are unable to answer questions that indicate understanding of informed consent.

Using these criteria, a total of 7 youth was recruited to participate. Table 1 shows the demographics of the group participants including, age, gender, current community that they reside in and their Indigenous Nation that they are affiliated with.

Measures & Data Sources

Focus group interviews. A semi-structured focus group was used to explore experiences of Indigenous youth and their perceptions of Wellness through Cultural Connections, including 7 participants. Focus groups were visually-recorded through the use of the ZOOM meeting platform and transcribed verbatim and checking with participants after transcription to ensure that voices of the youth are accurate. Additionally, the researcher kept notes during the focus group and participant identifying information was removed prior to analysis of focus group data.

Table 1. Demographics of participants

Participant	Age	Gender	Community	Nation
P1	14	F	Urban-City	Klamath
P2	14	F	Rural/ Res	Klamath
P3	17	M	Urban-City	Siletz
P4	17	M	Rural	Siletz
P5	14	M	Urban-City	Navajo
P6	17	F	Urban-City	Blackfeet
P7	16	F	Urban-City	Cahuilla

In the IPA method an emphasis is placed on the amount of thought and care to develop relevant and useful questions to use during the interview portion of the process (Pietkiewicz, I & Smith, 2012; Smith & Osborn, 2007). In attempting to create a meaningful and relevant set of broad use questions for the focus group I use of aspects of RWV(Cross, 1997; Rountree, 2016) and TK (Gone & Trimble, 2012; Mohatt et al., 2011; Pierotti & Wildcat, 2000; Rasmus et al., 2016; Wildcat et al., 2014) to ignite a conversation in which youth will be able to share about the phenomena we are interested in (Wellness). As the current study seeks to understand Indigenous

Youth's experiences in culturally grounded protective factors (values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality); what if any level of importance they have associated with interactions between themselves, their current community, and wellness? The use of TK and tribe specific cultural teachings have developed across both education and health research forming a more complete part understanding in Indigenous youth desires and Wellbeing (Lee & Cerecer, 2010; McCarty, 2003; McCarty & Lee, 2015; Mohatt et al., 2011; Rasmus et al., 2016)

In Appendix B, I provide an overview of the questions that were used to guide focus group interviews. The following are the open-ended questions used with the students: (1) Tell me something about your family and where you grew up? (a) Have you always lived in this community? (b) Did you move here from another urban community or your home-reservation community? (2) What are some family traditions that you do? (3) Does your family speak or use your Tribal language? (4) What are the connections to your language/ or ability to learn it? (a) What are some Native language activities that connect you to your community? (5) Let's talk about involvement in specific cultural activities that you are active in, can you describe to us how you feel when you are connected to these activities? (Activities can range from Physical domain: Hunting, fishing, to running; to the Spiritual domain) (a) What locally are community-chosen activities that culturally supports Wellness? (6) What are some of your current sources of strength when you have to deal with stress? (a) Do these sources of strength help to enhance or increase traditional knowledge that supports traditional and contemporary physical activities at home, school and within your community? (7) How do you cope with stress? (Do seek guidance from elders, family members, or others?) (8) Are you able to make connections to place in an urban area? (a) Do you, your family, friends or community members go and gather, raise, harvest, produce, or preserve traditional healthy foods (or items for traditional makings)? (9)

Looking back on your own experiences, how would you advise youth who may be struggling with living in an urban area without a lot of other Indigenous people around them at once?

Photovoice

Wang and Burris (1997), describe the Photovoice method as a process of research participants using photographs to enhance and illustrate a concept within their communities; allowing the participants to self-define as opposed to being defined by researchers. Having participants interpret their own photographs allows a co-constructive process of data collection and initial analyses (Castleden et al., 2008; Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019; Jennings & Lowe, 2013). For example, Dunlop-Bennett and colleagues (2019) used this method with children from an Indigenous community (Samoan) residing away from Samoa and in New Zealand, the study showed that children were able to demonstrate an understanding of their cultural and provide documented photos of the factors that may symbolize their understanding or definitions of health. Castleden et al., (2008) adapted the process for photovoice specifically for a tribal community in Canada that encouraged Indigenous people to express their perspectives and personal narratives in this photographic platform. Photovoice has been identified as an approach that is useful when working with youth to help encourage and empower participants, and has been used in many health-related research projects (Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019; Jennings & Lowe, 2013) As the photographs that participants produce are vital to incite discussion and can be analyzed with discussions to uncover more culturally specific understandings. As Castleden et al. (2008), also cited that participants indicated that pictures they took were meaningful and documented their daily lives.

The methods of photovoice include three stages: (1) Research participants are trained in basic photography skills (such as how to view photographs & ethics; Jennings et al., 2018;

Wang & Burris, 1997). As Jennings et al., (2018) suggests, “Researchers must emphasize that the community retains ownership of the photographs” (p.525). Participants are then given cameras and asked to take photographs, and are informed of the date of collecting the camera and that the researchers would be returning to ask them about the developed photographs (Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019; Nic Gabhainn & Sixsmith, 2006; Wang & Burris, 1997). In the second phase, the photographs are analyzed using a focus group discussion about the photographs. From this the researcher then categorizes pictures according to theme. This type of analysis calls for the inclusion of research participants to inform the researcher(s) and be cocreators of the interpretations. Finally, the third and final phase includes reaching back out to community leaders, policy makers, and other stakeholders in the community to share the information that was gathered.

Specifically, for this project and as other photovoice research has outlined (Dunlop-Bennett et al., 2019; Jennings & Lowe, 2013; Wang & Burris, 1997), participants were asked to use their personal phone cameras and those that did not have access to a phone camera would have access to a disposable camera and asked to take photos of places and objects in their community that best capture their experiences with Wellness (as we defined in the first focus group session). All participants in this study had access to cameras on their cellphones and were asked to upload their pictures to a secure (invite only) “google drive” account. Once all pictures were gathered and either uploaded to the drive photovoice group work begins. Working in focus groups, the youth then provided details and descriptions of photos.

Procedures

There was a purposeful recruitment approach, for the focus group participants. Potential participants were identified from a convenience snowball sample by a regional

educational director. After potential participants were identified an email was sent to them to provide information about the research project. All materials for recruitment provided pertinent information about the project and participation. Participants were asked to self-report on whether they meet the criteria for study participation. Special considerations or permissions from specific Tribal Nations will not be needed, as the research will not occur within a federal reservation and will only be located in the aforementioned urban area of Oregon with tribal members residing in urban areas via ZOOM as we are in shelter in place orders due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Individuals that were interested in participating registered with an electronic link via Qualtrics created specifically for this project. This link in Qualtrics contained informed consent pdf's and the ability to sign for consent and download informed consent information. Focus groups were scheduled to accommodate participants school schedule, sessions lasted about one hour.

All participants of the focus groups, were only compensated after completion of both the focus group and photovoice meetings. They were compensated in the amount of a $30 online gift card. I recruited from local area high schools in Oregon by conducting "meetings" with Title VII coordinators, families and school district office administrators/building administrators. Public high schools operating in Oregon provide educational services for any one of the 573 federally recognized Indigenous Nations in the US, there is typically less densely AI/AN populations at these public schools (unless located within or next to reservations). Upon Institutional Review Board approval, consent will be obtained prior to the sending of any informational contact email. Seven parents consented for their youth to participate. Youth that assented/consented to participate received oral and written instructions before beginning the group and I was available to answer questions.

Participants attended two focus groups one at the beginning of this study and one after the photography exercise was complete. The amount of time scheduled for each focus group was approximately 75 minutes. The photograph data recording activities took place at the leisure of the participants to be completed within a two-week period for the follow up focus group.

Analyses

This adapted phenomenological study was designed to understand, both an individual's experience and the sense making of that experience (Smith et al., 2009) to provide understanding of the needs and experiences for those students. Doing so in the collective voice of Indigenous Youth, who participated in focus groups to discuss factors that impact Wellness for adolescents provides data generated directly from youth themselves that is invaluable to the adults who seek to create opportunities for Indigenous Youth health programming. The photovoice aspect of this project took place across two separate meetings. In addition, the participants were given time to think about their communities, families, social groups and how they ascribe Wellness to those supports. Participants had two weeks with their cameras and uploaded photos taken during that time to a shared password secured cloud platform (Google, Dropbox, etc) created specifically for this project by the researcher. After the photos were taken and during the second focus group, participants then had the opportunity to identify the meanings behind their photos. Participants were not mandated or pressured into sharing about their photos, rather they were encouraged to engage and share in the discussion if they are comfortable enough. The focus group with individual attention gives detailed explanations for the photographs, beyond an over simplified explanation of "this is a picture of a tree", or the like, by encouraging youth truly give voice to the important spaces they photographed. Included in this project are those photographs and any accompanying

explanations of them. Any photographs that would have compromised the anonymity of participants were not included (see Figure 2).

The study explored factors and themes common to participants through use of focus group interviews and photovoice in an attempt to understand the phenomenon under study. As it has been discussed previously the emphasis here is on Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and values, that create inherent and relevant strengths for assuring the wellbeing of Indigenous Youth is this study's focus. The research combined methods of IPA and photovoice when applied are relevant to Indigenous led efforts of self-determination; and that research dynamics reflect reciprocity and accountability to Indigenous communities (Kovach, 2010; Wilson, 2008; Louis, 2007; Smith, 1999) as this project aims and data will be shared with the Indigenous community where the participants currently reside.

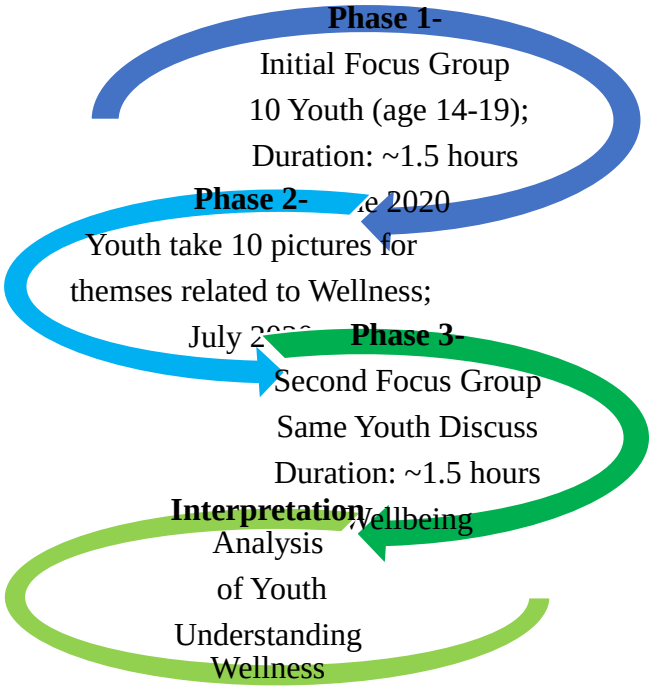

Figure 2. Focus group and Photovoice data collection process

Qualitative data analysis included the aforementioned steps of IPA (Smith et al., 2013; Smith & Osborn, 2007). After the data was gathered through recordings it was transcribed and read to identify phrases, comments and beginning interpretations of the data. The researcher followed methods in using the left side of the transcription to write these notes on and then continued after this first pass of reading to reread the transcript. This time going over the statements and documenting the emergent themes (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 67) on the right side of the document. After this step a more analytical/theoretical ordering occurs as the researcher tried to make sense how the themes were connected cluster and others may emerge more subordinately (p.71). Finally, I produced a table of themes and identifiers (or groupings) to the subordinate themes. This process was repeated for each of the following focus groups (p.72) Each of the transcriptions were treated like data and therefor the intention of this study was to explore and report the findings of an Indigenous wellness model. More specifically, an analysis of 4 domain areas of Wellness: (a) Spirituality (centering the model), (b) Physical, (c) Mind (Social/Emotional), and (d) Context (Land, Place, Community, Environment, and Language (Identity)).

CHAPTER IV: RESULTS

Over the course of three separate groupings of focus groups, with both gender specific groups (1x female & 1x male) and mixed gender groupings (Female & male group), an interpretative phenomenological analysis led to 7 major themes based on significant statements arising from the life experiences that Indigenous youth shared in these focus groups including: Indigenous languages, Community/ Being a good relative, Identity, Family, Friends, Land, Prayerful ways, Emotions and Positive Adults. Each of the 7 themes are described followed by supporting quotes from the interviews to illuminate each theme. Table 2 shows the loadings of themes from each participant and is labeled in a descending manner. Table 3 shows the loadings of themes for Photovoice from each participant and is again labeled in a descending order. As shown in the two Tables, many of the youth discussed each of themes during focus groups and using photovoice. It is important to note, however, that the "Indigenous Language" grouping was not evident in the Photovoice component of this research project, so there will not be any supporting pictures with statements for this theme.

Table 2. Themes for Focus Groups

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Indigenous Languages	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Community/ Being a good relative	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Identity	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Family, Friends, Land	X	X	X	X	X		X
Prayerful ways		X	X	X	X	X	X
Emotions	X	X	X	X		X	
Positive Adults		X			X	X	X

Table 3. Themes for Photovoice

Themes	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	P7
Family, Friends, Land	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Prayerful ways	X	X	X	X	X		X
Identity	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Emotions	X	X	X	X	X		
Community/ Being a good relative	X				X	X	X
Positive adults	X		X	X		X	

Theme 1: Indigenous Languages

We begin with this theme of Indigenous language as the root for our understanding of a connection to culture that youth are looking for access to and with speakers-knowledgeable others who speak their Indigenous language is at the center of this theme. Moving out from the center of the circle and thinking more broadly about language, all participants were asked questions about their use of an Indigenous language during each of the focus groups and all of the focus group participants discussed either a use of an Indigenous language or a desire to learn more than what they currently knew about their own Indigenous languages. This idea about coming back to language and its use as a connection to stories, cultures, traditions and overall Wellness is a critical component of how youth are able to maintain a cultural connection to their Indigenous Nation. Listening to the essential desire to learn more about languages showed that each participant knew there was more to language than just talking and that the ability to use it was determined by many factors, not just an o interest in learning. Ideas of ownership and care

were reflected throughout this first theme. The use of an Indigenous language varied across the participants, as P1 seemed indifferent initially about the use of language, stating, “We don't really use it. I mean we use like some words, and then like I know how to introduce myself. Yeah, that's about it.” While P1 acknowledged their ability to use it for some words, P1 also understood that there were knowledgeable others,

> Yeah, I know, I know some people that like, a lot of it. Like, P2 can speak pretty good amount. And so, it's nice to like, learn a little bit more.

A knowledgeable other in this case was not an elder or instructor, but rather a peer and also a tribal member from their Nation. This idea and concept of learning from peers is not new, but the understanding that access to critical points of connection come from varied places seems to deserve more thought later. It may be a place of learning for research.

While learning language or acquisition is a part of the process of becoming a fluent speaker, the ability to speak and test out words is important as well. In her introduction at the beginning of our focus group, P2 used her Indigenous language and then English to translate what was said. Furthermore, during a virtual meeting with P2, when asked about the use of specific Tribal languages in the home, P2 and her parent acted out a skit to illustrate how to enter a room as there was a knock, questioning of who it was, a response by the parent knocking and then a response by the youth to enter. This skill and strength that P2 presented, created a glimpse into a very contemporary use of Indigenous language, a use that can be seen as a mode of language thriving in this youth’s home. The ability to share with others as well illuminates how they interact within the community, and this coupled with P1’s acknowledgement of P2’s Indigenous language ability shows a reciprocity that creates identity.

Other participants acknowledged the limited use of an Indigenous language (that of which was supported by only one parent in the household). As, P3, P4, and P5 all reported difficulties using their language in an everyday context. In addition to challenges using language, some participants also indicated that it would be challenging to learn the language. For instances, P4 stated,

> I do kind of want to pick it up, but I'm. But, I know I don't really do well with learning another language. So, I kind of like keep putting it off.

P4 also indicated that his parent is a speaker of their tribal language and has taken P4 to cultural activities with their tribal outreach programs in which an emphasis was placed on language learning. Still there seems to be a pressure associated with learning language that P4 has already indicated and it shows in how P4 discussed going to these cultural activities with his parent as having “dragged them along”, however there is a distinct memory of this experience in which P4 is able to discuss in detail the activities that occurred for during this class.

Similarity, P5 as P4, P3, and P1 discussed the minimal use of language,

> Um, we speak a little bit of Navajo or Diné Bizaad. But yeah, we haven't really been, like, able to become fluent, or like fully speak our language, or like that kind of stuff but it's just like a little words here and there that we just are able to speak and say.

P5 also indicated that his parent is fluent that lives in the household and another extended family member who does not live with them is also fluent. P5’s parent is able to teach,

> Um, I get to learn some phrases from my mom and like learn words. And then I, I guess I use like Duolingo to learn sometimes.

Since P5 lives in an area far from their traditional homelands which is located (the Southwest), access to language learning comes from in the home. P5 indicated that during his time traveling back to his homelands that he was able to access language learning outside of his home,

> Yeah, when I went home to Navajo Reservation. A couple of summers ago, I got to. It was summer vacation or spring break I got to learn how to like read Navajo, and so I got pretty good at that.

P4 feeling about learning a new language, even that of his ancestors was worrisome for him. P4 indicated that he has always had a hard time learning language but that he did have a parental connection to language,

> For me It's only my mom who speaks. The tribal language in my family right now. I do kind of want to pick it up, but I'm. But I know I don't really do well with learning another language. So, I kind of like keep putting it off. I'm sure she's definitely not fluent, fluent fluid? But she can like hold her own in conversation.

P3, P6 and P7 expressed a desire to learn language, desires centered around love for the thought of being able to just begin to learn words, learn stories and traditions. P3 had a fond thought for language,

> Personally, my mom's side of the family, because I. We don't speak fluently, the language, but I really want to start learning how you know, just basic stuff like how to say like how to introduce yourself in my language like that's something that I would love to, you know, learn, and in my dad's side of the family they, they don't speak clearly but they can, they have, you know, they may know how to, how to say certain things and different you know different objects and how to say that in their language but learn to learn selects language and speaking of try to speak

Both P6 and P7 had a similar desire to learn their ancestral languages as a way to understand better who they are and where they come from. P6 while talking about a potential visit to her home reservation with her grandma stated,

> I'm like, I would love to take a trip back there and like go do this with her and experience it because the story she has to tell. I almost like live through her a little bit, but it definitely makes me more interested and I would and I would totally love to learn the language. I know at Willamette Miss Davis was trying to get led you don't want to butcher this name but I think it's like Chinuk Wawa or something. Yep, she's trying to get that started, I don't know if that ended up happening or not.

This participant has a desire to learn and is accessing different resources to help her learn about Indigenous people in general. However, she does not seem to reconcile that it would be in her home community with a knowledgeable speaker where she would be able to do the most learning of her language.

> Yeah, I definitely feel like if I like, If I'd had a better understanding of like not only just like my language like my tribe in itself and like all the traditions and like stories that come from it that I would like feel a lot more empowered.

P7 was also aware of how language learning could support her desire to understand more about her own people. P7 is advocating for her existence and exploring more about her Indigenous identity as she leans on the community she lives in. But she is still an Indigenous visitor, as her people do not come from this area. P7's thought about how encompassing language learning can be is insightful, and the powerfulness in a desire to learn, illustrates how youth are thinking about staying connected to their people.

Coming back to the initial understandings of this theme, we have seen a desire to learn language from youth, as was expressed by all participants. In all there seems to be a route to start the process of learning more of their Indigenous language, however, that path may look different for each of these participants as some may use parents or other family members to assist them in their language learning, whereas others may rely on knowledgeable peers, apps, or activities with tribal communities. Participants also in great detail discussed how connection to stories, cultures, traditions could be better understood if they were able to learn their own Indigenous languages.

Theme 2: Community/ Being a Good Relative

All participants had some form of interaction of Community/ Being a Good Relative. The discussions with the youth participants began to create this theme by really thinking about community building, community happenings, outreach, cultural practices and kindness.

The thought and intention with this theme were how community was a social concept, an idea as far as bringing folks together, with connections to identity, advocating for community and being a good relative. This theme was also discussed in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic as participants talked about how connections to community were complicated by the pandemic.

Community building is difficult under any circumstance and bringing people together in the last 18 months has clearly been more challenging than in previous times. With Covid-19 protocols of distancing and masking, not mention people having an increased or heightened sense about being others right now, social happenings and gathering have been impacted. Participants discussed a range of timelines from the first part of the shutdown to our current state.

This figure 3 picture and the statement help to provide some more understanding about how building community is an arduous endeavor, however once it is created you will be able to see all the good from it, P6 who is very involved with creating community discusses her experience putting up Tipis,

Figure 3. Tipis (photo by P6)

> I helped put together some tipis. The struggle was real, because those things are so tall, and heavy. I really like this because this was a great chance for me one, to meet people and also like, like-minded people, people who identified like me.

> And it was a surreal experience because you see these films or you see them on people's I know Facebook, like you see it on Google, and to be able to be in the moment and like work with people and just do the whole like just being there was amazing. But also, being able to step back and see what I accomplished was pretty, pretty special to me. One moment I, I am. I'm really grateful for.

As we look at Participants 6 and 7, they both discussed some ideas about community building and the challenges that lie within doing the groundwork to provide spaces for other youth to get connected to one another. P6 has been involved with her school district's Title VI programming as a student member of the parent committee and her involvement with her high school's Native American Student Union (NASU) gives her a unique perspective on community,

> I wish there was more though, you know, yeah, we are open. We have like the graduation ceremonies and we only have like three people show up, and it's like sure I understand that there may not be that many people who either identify or they don't want to come out or whatever, but it's sad because it's like, we get this grand, long list of people and then one person shows up, or maybe we have those three kids and I only know one of them.

P6 grapples with a desire to have more youth involved in what she sees as a very beneficial piece of education as it brings together Indigenous Youth in a school and their own community and allows them to get to know each other in order to build relationships. Much like the picture and text in figure 3 we see that there is a struggle that is taking place while she is trying to promote and create a community, much the same as I am sure she struggled with raising the individual tipi poles. Once this happens and they are all in their place, the tent or canvas can be put over the poles, a process that takes time and learning in order to make sure things line up correctly. Some of these understandings can be worked in here as we see P6 goes on to discuss these positive aspects of the work that is being done with Indigenous Youth by Indigenous educators (almost like framing the tipi-placing the poles correctly),

> …which is very good, but I think having just a good, good teachers slash mentor group like NASU is very helpful. Plus, it brings people who, At

> least identify similarly. We did have a couple other people who don't identify but they're just there, which is cool too. But I think just bringing that awareness and almost like community together is very helpful because it's helped me find a group of people that like may understand similar things I'm going through.

P6 discussion also provides us with a sense of relief from the struggle of trying to get others involved in the NASU organization. P7 goes on here to further illuminate some potential reasons for why it is hard to get students who are Indigenous to participate at school for outreach and community building activities,

> How people feel, about, is not feeling Native enough. So, a lot of times kids that are Native at the school won't show up because they don't feel like they're brown enough or that they know enough or that they are even connected to their culture, traditions enough to like say that they are Native or like even be like a part of the group.

P7 clearly discusses how identity is a part of this struggle for building this community up in the school. A sense of belonging through a shared identity and community is brought out here in both P6's previous statement as well as P7's statement. There is both a positive feeling that P6 wishes to share with her Indigenous peers and negative association with belonging that P7 is implicating with her analysis of the organization. Shifting the focus from school-based community to the impacts that COVID-19 had on P7's community, and them being able to gather and have the ability to connect in meaningful ways,

> Um, well I'd say it's pretty significant because, like from a Native aspect I feel like, like the social parts and like being together is like one of the one thing, like it's like the main thing I feel like it just brings us together and it like helps us all help each other and make sure that everyone's doing okay and figure out what we can do to help those who aren't doing their best.

P7 was also concerned with the ability to get families together and be a "full working community" again. The piece that is evident in these two participants' statements are that (a) youth are thinking very much about community as they recognize and even reflect on the

importance of community and are actively providing support to their community, and, (b) have a need to connect with other Indigenous youth to observe all the good that is happening in-spite of the pandemic. With these notions of healing through connections from community and families being interrupted, Indigenous youth are persistently creating community and spaces to provide benefits to families, their peers and the spaces that they occupy during those happenings.

The theme of community was also evident in some participants' frustration with some members of their community during the Covid-19 pandemic. For example, P1 stated,

> A lot of the kids that go to my school just hang out with everyone. Like this whole thing isn't even happening. And uh it's kind of dumb cause like now a lot of younger people are getting it the corona-virus. And uh yeah that kind of sucks.

This frustration does not seem to be created out of spite, but rather out of concern as P1 was concerned with her population of peers becoming more susceptible to COVID. P1's care was centered around a need to be vigilant and responsible community member, something that from this statement seems to not have been adhered to by some of her peers. In essence, P1 is seeing that we all need to be mindful, to be good relatives to one another and that sometimes there is frustration that comes along with that.

P7 also discussed the act of being a "good relative" through taking responsibility,

> …[W]e had to like, be mindful of, like, where we're going, what we're doing, and like, just how to be safe when we do those things. And like seeing family members is like, it's a lot less often than it used to be. So, I feel like, yeah. And it's like it's also, you have to be mindful about like, Oh, am I, am I feeling okay today or like am I gonna get this person in my family sick or that person or who's at risk of all these other things, there's just a lot more of those like aspects that we have to think about now.

Still other changes had impacts on aspirations of youth participants as P2 talks about her responsibility and some negative outcomes on her opportunities due to change in a pandemic,

> Not the same. Different. I wear a mask to protect you know my people

> and stuff. Now it's not just the same as it was. Yes, different, like the way it's affected me is like I was going into, or I'm going into my freshman year and, like first year of high school ball and different kinds of things like that and I'll never get to experience that again.

The shutdown also played a part in disrupting cultural and healing practices that the P3 was involved in as he stated,

> Family cultural traditions. You know culture camp was a big thing. Powwow, it was supposed to be this August and I was really looking forward to that. And also feather dance, summer solstice dance and I was really, I was really looking forward to that. Because it would be, it would have been my first dance in two years. Because I stopped dancing because my father's passing. And it would have been my first-time dancing in two years, so I was really excited about that and then it just got shutdown. And um, like with the pandemic with everything got cutoff. Like I was really looking forward to culture camp, powwow, feather dance. And just all like, just like that, like, you know, just so quickly to be shut down, there's a sickness going around here.

P3's ability to complete a healing process and restore some balance to his life was overshadowed by the shutdown. In this statement there were a lot of hopes of being able to go through with some of these traditional practices, practices that allow a person to be done with their loss, in a very public-social way. We do not know what P3 has done since and if he has had an opportunity to go back to the dance arena again. Thus, the statements by Participants 1, 2, 3 and 7 show the level of care they have as well as the experiences of change that these youth had during the pandemic while they maintain connections to their communities.

Participants' statements around community were also reflected in statements about "normal" or "pre-shutdown" as described by P1 below,

> I'm part of the Klamath youth council….. And we still have zoom meetings and stuff. And it's nice to like, because it's like, we have an agenda so it's nice to like have at least something normal. Cuz it's like pretty normal. And I usually can't be in the meetings in person because I'm in Eugene and they're in Klamath Falls. So, I usually have to like call in anyways so I guess it's not that different for

> me. Um, but yeah, it's nice to have like, it's nice to still have a connection to my people, like where I used to live.

The connection that P1 maintains to her people while living away from her home community during a pandemic, shows the commitment that she has for her people and homelands. This connection to community is also a reciprocal relationship and provides more to be thought about in regards to how youth are making cultural connections within popular culture.

We see this understanding of reciprocity not only from P1, but also P5 when he talks about his experience with plant medicine and the process his family takes to procure that plant,

> I guess but yeah, we go cedar picking, picking. Cedar is like, it was like medicine to our family, and like our families come from so we go out, we make offerings to like the cedar tree, and then we pick some cedar and we take it home and like dry it and stuff, I think so, yeah.

P5 discussed a process here that seems to be family knowledge. The concept that this tree holds some healing concept to it, as he refers to it as a "medicine" and as such they are providing this offering to the plant in order to then be able to pick the cedar. P5 goes on to say,

> So, we make an offering, we don't want to like take something without like giving something back, or like giving something in return. So, like when we make an offering to the cedar tree and the cedar plant, or make or like it's usually like tobacco or some other form of like medicine.

Acknowledging the plant by placing high value on it of offering it tobacco, a practice that is often seen as something very precious to do that with (as you would for a relative). Again, as with other youth from the study, we are being shown how youth are maintaining cultural connections, that help maintain their connections to community.

Being a good relative in connection to community includes this process of reciprocity with plants, it includes the process with others and spaces while allowing for Indigenous youths' strengths to be shown. For example, strengths that stood out during interviews were the readiness

to provide guidance, advice and advocacy for peers. This advice comes from a place of care and concern for others who the participants felt as if they could relate to them about issues they may be facing or have faced. P1 provides advice for other Indigenous youth whom may be away from their families and homelands, living in cities,

> I know that I have, like, a connection to where I used to live and I still like talk to some people that are also, you know, Native or Indigenous so that's a nice connection to have. But if you're a Native youth living in an urban area, and you'd like never really had connections to begin with. I know there's like a lot of programs you can look at. So, you can get involved in some of that stuff, because I know there's a lot more of those these days, kind of like this. Yeah, so it's just like, nice to reach out to groups.

P1 provides some advice on both maintaining connections with the tribal community and also providing information about some programming that may be available. P3 describes his experiences in a middle school and what that looked like to navigate. He knew there were other Indigenous youth going to school there, but it was hard for him to make those connections during a school day as he states,

> I'm looking back at my own experiences I went to middle school in Salem, Oregon when I lived there. And there wasn't like a lot of Native kids maybe like five plus me, so like six Native students and like a whole middle school. Like it was kind of hard you know to get along with other people. Well not really hard but like I was like, like it was hard to connect with those Native people because you know, I never really saw them in the hallways or anything.

P3 goes on to reflect on what advice he would provide to other Indigenous youth facing similar circumstances relating to them and taking time to be a good relative,

> I feel like, like you know gatherings, you can see like a lot of other Native students are like living in an urban area like that like not really having a lot of other Indigenous people. Also, like, like, if you're struggling with that like I was too. Like, really going to a gathering helps. Also joining, there's, there's Native like youth stuffs in the school

P3's s experiences going to gatherings in the community and school (when available) provided an opportunity to connect with other Indigenous youth. While part of this statement seems to suggest opportunities to reflect on a certain experience while teetering on the benefit of going, he did affirm his participation in the student group in the following statement,

> I went to Willamette high school and there is a non-Native, there's other Native students there and it was a thing at lunch. Where you could go, and those are the like you know those other Native kids you know who participated in there. I'm not sure like that really helped a lot to really like to see who, like you know, is, you know, part of your race. Like seeing other Native kids to me is really cool.

Comparably, P4 remarks on ways in which Indigenous youth can get connected with other Indigenous youth while living in a city,

> For me, my advice is, yeah, just go to communities, go to powwows and when you at powwows just try and act normal, like, like everybody is just like there, you know to just have fun so just have fun.

This encouragement to be involved and to enjoy things is often missing from the narrative around Wellness for youth as we are concerned with protective factors. More specifically, cultural protective factors lend to an assumption that there will be some kind of stereotypic action that will aid Indigenous youth.

In summary, as we look to understand Indigenous youths' processes of wellness, they all expressed a desire to have genuine reciprocal connections to land, community and family. This sense of community is something that the participants all seem to navigate differently but still see as salient and is tied to a shared identity.

Theme 3: Identity

While all of these thematic units can be attributed to an Indigenous youth's identity and seem to be interconnected, there was some explicit discussions around identity that all of the participants discussed and thus this theme arose. Identity topics seem to be salient ideas that are

apparent in their thought processes. How they relate to and connect with other peers, their community, their school community amongst other components. Identity formation is a complicated study. However complicated identity formation is, all participants mentioned identity in different ways throughout this study. Participants seemed to understand the struggles and the concepts that youth have within their communities, and how they take ownership in their own identity.

Most of the participants introduced themselves and who they were "I am a tribal member of …", and there were also statements reaffirming Indigenous identity and things that individually comprised an identity of the participants. A sense of identity can be tied to all the themes that we have been discussing and themes yet to come in this section.

We will begin this section with P2's introduction. Of all the participants, she was able to provide her introduction in an Indigenous language and then share back to the group in English what she had said to introduce herself. (note that the XXXX are place holders for identifying information)

> Speaks Klamath language; Hello my name is XXXX. My mother's name is XXXX and I am from Chiloquin, Oregon. Um. …. I'm XXXX for Klamath Tribal Youth council. I'm Klamath, Modoc, and Pascua Yaqui.

This statement by P2 really provides a foundation for Identity, we see that her lineage and Home community is salient as it is included. We also, see other important aspects of how this Participant is in relation to her community by the work she does and the Nations that make up her lineage. This sense of self is important for Indigenous people as it helps us to get to know each other and how we may have kinship ties to one another. It is a component of Wellness because you need to know yourself and your relatives. By providing an introduction like this, P2 is actively maintaining those connections to community, family and relatives.

Other participants were able to articulate their Indigenous affiliations, and that is important as well to know and understand where you come from. There were also some struggles that participants had with having a varied background of Indigenous Nations and or parents who were not Indigenous. P6, seems to understand who she is and also seems to have a struggle with that when asked about her connections to her current community and family. She states,

> Okay, so when you say family do you mean like, like the Native side, like where are they okay. Um, so I'm Blackfeet and Cree, they say more Blackfeet, I identify more at the Blackfeet side so it's just like, minimal amount of Cree in me, all that rhymes. Anyways, they're from, like, almost, Montana, Canada border area.

She goes on to discuss how she identifies,

> Okay. But like my family. I identify as like half Native, but like, I feel like I'm fairly involved and like, I feel pretty darn white, my mom is white and Eugene is white and I think I kind of identify more with that but as I'm growing up I kind of learn, and connect with people. I kind of explored the Native side of me but. But yeah, we live in Eugene, born or raised here.

P6 continued to discuss the feelings of disconnect, and then how she herself has actively been involved in learning more about her people and where she comes from. This idea and concept of struggling with identity is a real concern for Indigenous youth as they must do this and navigate popular culture (and the two may not be mutually agreeable).

From our participants the ability to express your identity as an Indigenous youth does not always need to be centered around being Indigenous. As three of the participants explicitly discussed how they saw who they were through service, games, and emotions.

Participants 3, 4 and 5 talked about the admiration they have for different games that then lead into their own identity. For instance, P3 discussed a love for basketball and skateboarding,

> Playing basketball. I love, I love playing basketball and also skating. That's like my two favorite things to do and I don't really get the same feeling, but I do love.

This feeling was then discussed further as the participant talked specifically about his identity and how he saw himself in relation to others. P3 discussed his ability to compartmentalize his interactions,

> Um, you know with identity like I'm very respectful and nice to the elderly, I'm just a like really respectful and peaceful person in general, but like, like (laugh) you know if I'm playing with my friends in basketball. I'll try to show dominance. So, I feel like you know it's a different identity for that too, skating too. …And I like with elderly I love showing respect because you know the older have more knowledge, stronger people. Although I show them respect. You know with my friends playing basketball I try to show dominance to showing that I can hold better than them.

This ability to place importance on elders and to be respectful is a very important quality for P3. He also wants to make it clear that in a sport that he loves to play he will do his best to make sure his peers know that he is good at it. This dedication comes through in his statement and he talks about practicing over and over again and maintaining a "positive mindset".

In another focus group P5 talked about his link to sport and how that has been a part of who he is for a number of years,

> I, I do lacrosse. I've been doing lacrosse for like almost 10 years and it's been, it's traditionally a Haudenosaunee game from the East Coast, but I've been playing it for a while and so I kind of see that as like physical wellness and like who I am.

In this study we are also seeing that involvement in sport is providing youth with another sense of identity and expression. P4 talks about sports and gaming and how a connection to one did not equal the identity that the other did,

> When I used to have like private lessons for lacrosse I felt like, yeah, it is like I felt connection. But, well gaming it's more that's more me identity than culture, my cultural identity. I know that sounds weird but that's the best way I could like put it.

He talks about gaming and how he identifies more with that than his “cultural identity”. In response I asked if he feels like he has two separate identities based on that statement, he responded here,

> I don't think those are separate. I, it's all one thing. It's just like light switches like, oh, that this one's turned on. This one's turned off, and then two seconds later, ‘Oh, I gotta turn one off’ I was on and another one on, there was off. Yeah, like for me, my identity is like, is like I am a very respectful, respectful and like open person and stuff. And just, I pick up, like, if people want to talk to me I listen... So, with like people telling me like hey what was the difference between your Native and you're from Nordic side? And I go ‘eh’ same thing to me.

Very similar to P3, P4 has thoughts about compartmentalizing identity; keeping that his identity is one, just with multiple functioning parts. In figure 4, there are numerous gaming console controllers presented here, as P4 described how these were a salient part of his identity during the first round of focus groups.

Figure 4. Gaming Identity (photo by P4)

P4 stated this about the picture,

> I got to insert this one from like immediately after our first video session, because me and P3 said that both. Video games are important to us.

We see that through these statements, again themes are dynamically interconnected from identity there are aspects of physical and social Wellness. As we continue in this theme we look into the social implications of identity for Indigenous youth in k-12 public schools.

The next part of this theme has a lot to do with the spaces that are provided for youth to create a positive sense of self and from their identity. Being that most of the participants (6 of the 7) were located in a city and not one bordering their Indigenous Nation's land and that all of the participants (7 of the 7) are attending public schools, we start to see the implications that having spaces for Indigenous youth in k-12 schools is important.

Some of the participants had similar experiences with an affinity group facilitated through their high schools. As we will hear from these participants the space that was created has given these youth a chance to explore and create identity within a shared space with individuals who possibly share similar experiences. P7 mentioned her student organization in as a community,

> NASU at high school is the Native, Native, Native American Student Union, there we go, at Willamette and I haven't been to a meeting last, last two weeks…I think it's a good, it's a good start to a sense of a sense of community at the school because it not only shows like who was around you, and like how *diverse* being Native can be and look like and like feel like. But it also, I feel like it does bring like those kids together and it's like oh I see these kids in the hall and me waving like hi, like I know them from this or that

As P7 talks about bringing students together and providing a space for them to recognize and acknowledge each other, another element of identity surfaces here. "How diverse being Native can be" the 'look and feel", within this statement there is a lot to understand about the damaging impacts of stereotypes (phenotype and dress), mascots, and persistent microaggressions geared at Indigenous people (youth included) can place a hierarchical ordering of perceived identity onto youth. All of this while they are trying to very much to understand other typical development during this time period of their life's. P6 discussed this underlying idea that seems to be coming out in this statement,

> Yeah, so definitely more, more, as I've gotten older in high school. I've joined NASU, the Native American Student Union… I've been part of the

> parent committee. I've been like a lot of youth Equity Council stuff. And so, I am that *diversity* piece that they are use me for. Yeah, I don't know I just I feel, I feel fairly white, and it's sad because I, I want to find that place of involvement, and I know people like who share the same. No, no, who are Native like me but it's just like, I don't feel like I quite belong I don't, you're like Native enough I guess I'm because I'm like really white. I feel white and I was more white than anything.

This participant is definitely feeling a burden to perform as she put it "I am that *Diversity* piece that they use me for." A burden that is all too real for a lot of us and how we navigate that is incredibly difficult and can lead to these feelings of not belonging to which again she clearly discusses, "I feel white" and "I was more white than anything." P6 has a desire to find connection and involvement with other youth who feel like her. All the while there are youth in student organizations who feel this sense of longing to make those reciprocal relationships with connections and involvement at the very base level of need. In this process of P6's feelings of performativity for diversity and a desire in belonging, P7 is also expressing an interpretation of diversity from within this same student organization,

> So, I feel like the *diversity* there is, there are kids from different ages, different skin tones different backgrounds that know a lot of various different parts of their, their traditions and their culture like there could be a really like a, like a there gonna be a darker skinned kid who doesn't know that much. And there's a lighter skinned kid who does know a lot and it's just, it's, that's just, I don't know. It's different and it's not in a bad way, It's always in a good way.

The wealth in these two participants experiences within their high school student organization (affinity group) provides some important considerations for this study. The idea that P7 sees the diversity in skin tone as good to be varied, (as we go on to hear more from her we learn why she feels this is a positive thing) and her peer is struggling with how to understand where she fits in within that span of diversity. Within these spaces that are created for the youth we see that while these feelings and experiences are circulating that the youth still maintain a connection to this group. P6 has shown a great deal of dedication and connection to the efforts of her school

community only to feel a need to fit in, but not realizing in the moment she fits. How is it that youth can have these complications within their own identity development and how can we support this to a greater degree (if possible) at a k-12 public school? P7 summarizes her thoughts about the diversity of Indigenous identity through her lens and makes some empowering re-affirming statements for her peers,

> There is a diversity that people don't like always like, think about. Where they're like oh when they think of Natives, they think of someone who has like darker hair, darker skin, darker eyes, but it's just like, it's not a matter of like what you look like. It's where you come from and who you are and like, no matter how, how Native you are. You still are Native and like it's, it is, it's a good community. I feel like and it gives a good support to the kids who do feel like they aren't Native enough and it really reassures them that like, there's no such thing as being Native enough like being Native is enough. And that's really all you have to do.

Some of the youth in this study also had some very affirming comments on identity that go into making connections, empowering one another, providing recognition, and extending a value of being good to each other. They spoke of knowing your worth, pride, taking ownership in education, and staying positive. Here we have an Indigenous youth empowering their peers with the statement, and goes on to provide more positive messages,

> My net play net, is don't let anything, bring you down with like negative, like if, if some bullies…but don't, don't let them bring you down like it. For me it was a slippery slope. So, so like be fine like you *are* a Native, that is a good thing.

This message seems to be affirming his peers that being *you* is good, and that is all you need to do is be *you*. P4 is speaking from a place of concern and kindness that again reflects a reciprocal relationship to his Indigenous peers. P4 is practicing cultural connectedness with other youth by affirming and recognizing one another, and being a good relative.

The messaging that is provided to other Indigenous youth came from a question asking what kind of advice would they give to other Indigenous youth who may be going through

similar circumstances to theirs? Participants really reflected by addressing the things they felt were important to them, thus providing that information to other youth as we will read the following from P4,

> And, and I would also…Now, be proud of, like, but tread carefully because there will be some people who will try to bring you down but, and just avoid them. And go to people who are like oh you're Native?

In this example, P4 is re-enforcing taking pride with humility. He also seems to be concerned with letting other youth know that you can choose who you want to be around, and trying to provide them strategies to tell what type of person may be better at hanging out with. Re-enforcing values of determination and identity P7 strives to motivate and empower other Indigenous youth coming from a place of care and sense of knowing she said,

> Um, I feel like as a youth that has had struggles that like a feeling like they're not native enough or not knowing what is the right thing to say when schools and communities talk about issues revolving around natives, is just to like, if you feel like something is wrong, or you like, if you feel like you disagree with a conversation or a topic, revolving around who you are as a person that you should say something…I just feel like, as a youth, that has had those struggles like not knowing what to say or what to do in situations, revolving around being Native and like learning about being Native in school that it is always okay to not know. Like 100%. If you, what you know is right or wrong, but it is always okay to speak up and say something about it. If you are not okay with how things are being portrayed about natives and native youth, and if you feel like there should be more done to help the Native youth in your community, then you should always try and do your best to speak out on that and find a solution, or find other people that can help you.

This statement is a reflective piece of evidence that shows participants in this study understand their identity and want to share their experiences with others. This process of sharing similar experiences leads to a centering and connection that bridges folks much in the same way that our first example in this section grounded hers in relations. Finally, P3 shares some strength with other youth and may be based on his own experiences as he discussed previously, going to school where he was one of 6 “Native” students,

> …you know like, don't ever let yourself get down like, like be proud to be Native. Like that's also a big thing, like I learned taking pride in being Native you know? It's like don't ever let your guard down like take pride in, you know, Native Pride, you know, just, you know, being proud of who you are.

These statements from the participants in relation to the "Identity" theme have provided an insight for what this theme mean for each of them. We see the importance that cultural similarities, schools, peers, sports, games and family all due to provide an aspect of development identity. This development for each participant is varied and it does not mean that the variance is hierarchical for these participants.

Theme 4: Family, Friends, Land

Connections to land, family, animals and extended relationships transpired throughout each of the focus groups and Photovoice activities. These values are captured within each of the participants that completed this study, and provide an awareness realized or not, that there is an importance placed on Family or kinships that extends to land and other relatives (either inanimate or animate) this connection to culture was illuminated throughout the study. During the focus groups and after going over the data it showed that these young people were being in relation with one another, their families and in spaces and places that were important to them. These spaces and places also directly connect participants to their values at times reaffirming them as well. This theme of Family, Friends, Land provides evidence of these accounts. Of course, the participants to some degree were impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic as P2 talks about her friends,

> I miss hanging out with my friends I see my family quite a bit. Now, which is really good. I enjoy spending time with them. And, yeah.

During this time of the pandemic, more and more immediate family and extended families were spending a greater amount of time with one another. For some youth this created a void in the

life, where their socializing with friends had always been. Other voids during this time directly impacted some of the participants ability to maintain familial ties and connections are apparent in P1's response. She was finishing up with middle school when the shutdown occurred and her family (which is pretty usual) was planning a celebration throughout the year for her 8th grade promotion. This unfortunately was canceled and extended family connections for her were put on pause,

> Um, my family was going to come down for my graduation thing, cause the um middle school has a big graduation for eighth graders, and they were going to come down from California and I haven't seen them in like, probably a year or so. And they weren't able to come down, they like reserved a house and stuff to stay at, but they weren't able to come down.

This type of disruption during the first part of Pandemic shutdown was common, but does not mean that it wasn't detrimental to the participants. If we think about all that kinship and family relational connections mean for youth this was a big issue. Some of the ways that Indigenous people were able to connect still and make meaningful social/cultural exchanges was through what was being termed a "Social-Distanced" Pow Wow. These started to occur after the shutdown and as really big national pow wows were starting to get canceled. P3 commented about his knowledge of this adaptation to the current pandemic,

> I've seen the social distanced powwows before. I've seen people singing, the powwow songs. Personally, I haven't like tried to participate in it, but I've heard you know I listen to the songs because I love hearing people singing, I personally just made a drum recently.

Continuing a social gathering to make it a virtual event, shows a level of persistence and carrying on that occurred out of a need this time. It is not known specifically if the youth in this study understood the enormity and positive impacts that these socially, distanced powwows had on Indigenous people across the US and Canada. What we do know from this study is that youth were impacted by the pandemic and have been able to still create connections with others while

also maintaining familial connections.

Some those familial connections included land as a part of where the connections occur. The significance of Land/Place in this theme illustrates an acknowledgement to plants, nature, and water that these participants have. P3 felt that his connection to his reservation held a special place in his heart, something he had no words to explain. His involvement there and in his cultural dancing and singing has definitely provided sources of strength for him to access as he stated,

> Personally, for me you know I love participating in and practicing dancing, and I love to do all that, dancing, you know, singing. Um, like I just love to participate and all that makes me feel good. Like even going like to the powwows. And after dances and I just feel like I feel more connected to my culture, I feel more involved. And also, just being on the reservation in Siletz I feel like it just makes me, it just has a special place in my heart, which it feels good to be up there.

P3 is actively involved in some practices that his people have used to think about Wellness. In this excerpt we can see how different portions of his are interconnected. He discusses the love he has for cultural dancing and singing, that love makes him feel good when he participates in those activities and that in turn makes him feel more connected. All of this seems to happening on his reservation, which increases his awareness of place and creates for him a precious connection to that place. These pieces of Wellness which were discussed previously are readily apparent from P3's communication. He continues to discuss not only his enjoyment of being on his reservation, but all that he can accomplish while he is there as well,

> Going to Siletz you know there's like there's a lot of activities. Up until that we have like you know a lot of events. I feel like, to me something that really supports wellness is; this might sound a bit weird but I like to help the elderly, especially you know at events I feel like, you know I love to do so. Like when in culture camp, I work there you know and I'm always going around to tables asking, you know, the elderly if they you know if they're taken care of. If they need water, or coffee I can get food and also like you know recently I just went up with my Grandma, just up to

> Siletz and we just sat by the river, and that was like. To me that was you know, it felt good to do that.

Further detailing his appreciation for his tribal community, P3 illustrates a special place on the Siletz river it is seen here in figure 5.

Figure 5. Siletz River (photo by P3)

P3 talks about this picture,

> And I took a picture because I love the reservation has a lot of meaning to me. And we went down to the river just to look at it and I had snapped a few pictures of it because you know I love how like, like rivers like, you know, flowing in like you can see all the trees and stuff. I'm like, don't know I'm just a big nature lover so I love seeing like going back and looking at all these pictures, bringing me happiness because you know it was a very fun time with me and my grandma and my mom. And, yeah, just like you know water is a big spiritual relief for me too.

This connection to family, land and waterways is very deep for P3. In both the examples above he has shown that he prioritizes service to elders and community. His analysis of Wellness includes this act of helping out his old people. Getting things to eat or drink for them, but also with his own grandmother and appreciating that relationship they share, and connection with the water there at Siletz. Throughout the focus group P3 mentioned that connection to water, and his reservation. He places his peoples land in a high status and seeks opportunities to be there as he has mentioned within this text. Opportunities to make connection with Land for some of our

participants were more readily available and for others the opportunities to make connections were a matter of daily routine. These opportunities for some of the participants featured the family all connected together to garden and grow traditional foods. As P5 talked about his family's involvement in gardening,

> We garden over the past summer, so that was fun. We got to grow corn, beans, we tried to go squash, but that didn't go so well. yeah, we, it's like the three sisters. And so, you grow the corn and then the bean grows around the corn, going up and then the squash grows down at the bottom and keeps the water wet and moist. So, the plants stay healthy. So, they all kind of work in harmony together.

For P5, talks about this act of connecting with garden fondly with a sense that there is a deeper meaning to the garden for him. His use of healthy regarding the plants and the understanding of how the plants can work together "in harmony" as he articulates in this response provides a glimpse into his knowledge and skills. We see in figure 6, a connection to community being made by use of land, and connection to Tribal gardening practices. This process of learning to care for the garden and "looking after" the plants is again a reciprocal practice that P5 describes,

Figure 6. Traditional gardening practice (Photo by P5)

> Yeah, that's the garden, me and my family grow over the summer. I like going to the garden to like water it, and make sure, like the plants are going well… Because this whole, this whole plot that we use it. It was all grass before we started, we prayed and like I guess hand plow and go over the whole area take out

> the grass and then we grow blue corn, beans and squash traditional foods for my tribe so we learned how to grow those plants… I just enjoyed growing the plants, and I it was kind of like nice for me to just have that opportunity to do like grow traditional foods and plants.

These connections to place for sustenance purposes or physical, social, or emotional healing are just some examples of how maintaining a connection to Land and Family provide access points for Indigenous youth's own Wellness.

Thinking about how Indigenous youth have places in and around the city that they can connect with Family, Friends, and Land, we understand that there is more to this than just making a connection. This telling by P7 reflects the way that she is not only able to access place, but relies on this place as a way to decompress and acknowledge the parts of nature that are seemingly around, however they are not always acknowledged. She states,

> … the spot is a lake and you can see the water from like a few feet in front of you, it's like, it's just really nice. It's also quiet and it's always like really cool and calm to like be there and it just feels like there's no, like there's no, there's no other things happening really fast around you to make you feel like oh, I have to go do this next step to do that, it's really just like the time to like take a minute and breathe, and like really acknowledge, oh, there's birds in the trees or there's the water moving in the creek or. That's really nice cloud in the sky.

Taking moments to acknowledge nature, being a good relative by acting in this way gives P7 the time needed to slow down. The descriptions of this place seem to reflect a sanctuary of sorts for this Participant as the use of calm, breath, water movement, provide the researcher with a perception of this place as being a healing location for them. In figure 7, P7 gives us a glimpse at this place she has found to connect with and provides more detail about it,

Figure 7. Sunrise (photo by P7)

> This was one of my mornings that I got up really early to go watch the sunrise, and I had just gone on a run and I feel like running and being able to watch this and come up is very therapeutic in a way, and it's just like re-centers my mind and helps me process, my day or the day before and like what I want out of the rest of the day."

P7's reflective and centering process is illuminated here and provides an account into her process of being, her lived experience in Wellness. Each one of the participants discussed how their interactions family, friends and land has created a unique experience through their lifetime and up into this COVID-19 pandemic.

Theme 5: Prayerful Ways

With the Prayerful ways, thematic unit, most of the participants (6 out of 7) described this idea that was overarching throughout the focus groups. This theme came into view during this process of thoughtful clustering; emerging theme elements connected these pieces of data as a way to connect through prayer, reflection and self-care. Additionally, clustered into this data set was knowledge of ceremonies continuing on during the time of the pandemic, and what those changes or adaptations looked like as well due to Covid-19 pandemic. The ability to have some continuity of ceremony and prayer for these youth to use as de-stressing strategies, to dance to be connected to your family home place, through dance, through prayer, through things like

drumming, singing and isolating. All with the intention to have and promote a good feeling in self.

While analyzing this data from participants they were some shared experiences with prayerful activities that these youth participate in. Smudging as a reflective and prayerful practice for participants seemed to resonate with 4 out of the 7. Some participants discussed this act more in depth than others while others mentioned this as a way providing examples of their practices they rely on. As we begin with this acknowledgement of smudging, P6 who is making more connections with her Indigenous identity describes her first interaction with smudging. Initially, she cannot remember the word "Smudge" to talk about this act,

> Yep. I actually did for the first time which it was a little strange because
> I… I don't know if so I'm not quite, I didn't ever connect to that side as much,

She is discussing her connection to her Indigenous people through her father's side of the family and it is clear she is struggling to put into words to help her process that. She then goes on to describe smudging,

> … but we actually ended up like doing. Oh, my goodness. Why am I
> blanking on the word. When you like with the smoke.
> (reply from researcher-"smudging? "). Yes, oh my gosh, yeah so
> we ended up doing that like when we get in and then we leave.
> I've had a parent at the program do that a couple times before but I was like, awkwardly
> watching people. Yeah, but it was a cool class because they like the speaker.
> He kind of broke it down I was like okay this is what it is. This is why we do it.

This detail of her actually coming to an understanding of the process of smudging shares an aspect that is critical for our youth. So many times, we may participate in acts that may seem as simple as smudging, and not provide explanation for the reasons as to why we do them, or even proper protocols with the smoke that we use over our bodies. This youth has been involved in her community and been around to see people smudging and using this as a way to open up different events, but until this occurrence at a local youth outreach camp she had never been given an

explanation. The stories that belong to our peoples about why we do certain things are important to share when we are providing space for these things to happen (ie smudging), it is especially important for our youth to be able to ask about this to either a positive adult connection or a family member to seek out some guidance.

When asked more broadly about any culturally or tribal specific activities that connect them to their culture P7 stated discussed the guidance that she gets from preparing herself in a good way for her upcoming day. A time and activity that she uses to be reflective,

> A tribal activity that I feel really connects me is smudging, and like praying in the morning to like cleanse with like just like regroup and ground myself and figure out what I want to do for the day. I did that today, and I feel like it is. It's an activity I really enjoy, because it not only makes me feel like I have something that I can like, like it's a good way to start my day I feel like it is like a good way to learn not only about like, what I want to do what I'm grateful for, but like also like where I'm at with myself, like, just personally. So, I feel like it's a, that's a good tradition and like activity that I like.

This quality that came out in the theme really fascinated me the researcher. A quality of young people staying connected through prayer. To be clear this is not a huge ceremony, nor should it be minimized either as this act of cleansing yourself is a big part of many larger ceremonies. This act of reflection that P7 introduces to us as a way to ready themselves for the day is a wonderful example of how youth are using tools to help them in their day to day happenings.

Combined with other protective factors P3 discussed the use of prayer and "lighting sage" as a way of just being connected.

> Drumming I love doing that, Praying, Lightning sage and just like is being connected. Also, like going to see family helps a lot with my stress like personally I get a lot of anxiety, really doing anything that's not within my household, like I just get an anxiety just going outside… just really doing anything can occupy me takes away my stress. And just being at home with my mom also is big source of strength for me, I love being with my mom.

He also tells of a number of strategies that help him being able to deal with anxiety. The identification of strategies that can assist P3 with some stressors, include relying on his family (mother specifically). Youth have their own ways of making connections to this spiritual mindedness than adults do, however, their values are seen as reflections of their families as this deep connection to prayer is instilled from family and community participation by this participant.

Each of these examples of smudging have created an indication of Indigenous youth's own realization and use of prayerful ways to connect. That connection was shown to be more impactful when story was provided to give examples and meaning to this act of smudging. The daily use of prayer with that smudge and reliance on family create routes to Wellness for Indigenous youth that was also discussed with these data points.

In figure 8 we see a drum owned by P4, he wanted to share this picture of his hand drum with us

Figure 8. Hand-Drum (photo by P4)

> Because drumming makes me feel better. I haven't done it recently
> but I remember just wrapping up and drumming it. Just, to just to drum.
> I just feel better just to have fun, or just drum.

A simple statement about the enjoyment of engaging in a particular activity is all we need at times. P7's discussion in this study about drumming and singing is shared throughout and this

picture brings all of that together with simplicity. Showing his connection to us and being able to talk about it is important for youth to develop their identity.

Community and family processes of celebrating and reflection are seen throughout the data as we see from P2, she discussed the loss of powwows at the height of the pandemic, this troubled her as she was missing out on a piece of life enjoyment that she would typically participate in. She goes on to discuss traditional activities not really being disrupted during this time,

> Okay, well, I miss going to like powwows and stuff. Because I can be like going to competitions right now and stuff like that having a good time but you know I can't because of all this stuff going around. How its, it hasn't really affected like real traditional stuff like, like um ceremonies or sweat lodge or anything like that. As long as it's not like, just as long as we keep it with close family and friends, close friends. But yeah, yeah, I miss powwows.

The telling of how things are missed here is important, P2 discussed the desire to go to Pow Wow and dance, hang out have a good time. This was also discussed later on when we were talking about things that help them get through the stress of the pandemic and she said,

> So, I still go to sweat lodge and I still listen to the music. So, that's, that's kind of normal, I still, still dance around in my room. Just not at Pow-wows. I'm trying to check out those virtual Pow-Wow's though but can never find out. That's what I'm still involved in.

This statement echoes that in a time when youth were in need your people will be there for you. P2 discussed having ceremonies still be pretty consistent to what they were before the shutdown. I think about how if anything were to be adjusted due to COVID restrictions and if youth had any encounters with this and it so happened that P5 discussed this aspect of adapting to change.

> Yeah, like Native American church sometimes on my dad side. And yeah, we don't really, I don't really see many traditions carried over or that I can think of at the moment. It's been, like, it's been both because it's going to be disrupted because of the pandemic but you know if you want to continue, you kind of have to

> adapt, so that people can continue to come and be able to pray and share the medicine. But yeah, it's just, it's been a bit of both. People still gotta you have like, like they got to be vaccinated and stuff…I know one of my dad's friends is making people show their negative COVID test before they came to a meeting.

This participant actually provides detail into the kinds of changes that are occurring live during his lifetime within a ceremony that his family attends. The tone of this young person is not resistant to that change, rather accepting so that processes of prayer can continue with others. P5 showed that he is thinking responsibly and trying to maintain the ability to keep that connection and fellowship with his relatives.

Relatives that are there for you and can provide you guidance on anything, and it does not have to be in a special circumstance (ie like a ceremony). Relatives can take many forms as P3 discusses his thought process for seeking guidance. It shows the people who he holds highly, relatives like a grandpa and grandma, uncles and aunties people that he can literally and figuratively lean on.

> And sometimes I do seek guidance from my grandpa. He's not with, he's not physically with me anymore but I look like I some, I think to myself, what he would do in some situations. And I feel like that really helps me cope with stress too, and talking to family members, like my uncles and aunts you know, like my grandma.

The emotional intelligence that these participants showed in relation to prayerful ways of being is incredible. For any young person to be connected to that process of reflection and learning and to seek out guidance and understanding shows the value in their family and tribal cultures. It also in our Relational Worldview Model is an aspect of Wellness that we are focused on understanding more about this connection that Indigenous youth have.

Theme 6: Emotions

The focus groups were full of emotions throughout and even into the photovoice telling of pictures, segments. There were majority of the participants who talked about the sadness that they were facing, optimism and how they were processing and dealing things. Whether those things brought them encouragement and happiness during this time of a pandemic or grief. It is also important to understand how participants were utilizing, these points of cultural connectedness and were able to articulate their emotions in a time where an idea and concept wasn't being discussed.

We start this section with a picture presented by P5 her in figure 9,

Figure 9. Northern California Coast (photo by P5)

> I thought the thought process of taking the picture was like it was just like, the sun was out only, and then I get it actually the water nice and the sun reflecting off of it. There's a few rocks in the background, the water is a little misty so it's nice. It's kind of like calming to look at. And so, I kind of just took the picture because I like the scene that was going on and kind of where we were at.

P5 took this picture and presented it to the group for reflection because he enjoyed the process of taking the photograph, and the calmness of the scenery here. This process of taking pictures for two individuals (P5 and P2) were seen as points of enjoyment and provide a deeper connection than just here is a picture and I can tell what is in it. They are very much processing their emotional connection to a place but a fuller enjoyment with the process of taking a picture. As P5 noted "calming to look at" scene, and the process may well be calming too. Now we see P4 moves through this process of discussing things that helped him along when he was stressed or anxious. His understanding of why he felt better after participating in the cultural activities was not readily available to him. As we have discussed and this data supports the notion that Wellness is not a singular time and location nor are the actions to becoming more balanced singular. P4 states,

> …when I'm like drumming or dancing here (at his family's farm) or at powwows, something is like somewhere where it like on (unintelligible word) here, I just feel better. If I, I don't really know what, what about it but I just feel a lot better coming out of it.

In this example P4 understands that when he participates in dancing and drumming he, "just feels" better, and that is good he is accessing and staying connected with his culture in a multiple format (Song-Drumming and Dancing). I would like to demystify this notion about the connection and provide some explanation here as a researcher with experience and knowledge in this data point. If we look at these activities just as a way of meditation through a concerted effort to dance and focus just on that alone; P4 is getting physically exhausted through dance, he is mentally focused on the song and beat through dance and he is encapsulated in that moment. All of these components are happening simultaneously for this participant, ending in him feeling good, this participant may also feel exceptionally good knowing that this is connecting him to his

people, ancestors and culture.

I think that we can start to understand from this that a "good" emotional feeling from this activity comes from multiple points and may be the reason for this participant to not be able to fully say why he feels this way. This expression and ability to be a part of dancing in social gatherings was halted during the COVID-19 pandemic we see that those closures caused some grief for our participants. Where the void that was created what youth did to fill that void, as P3 discussed creating a new routine providing some optimism,

> I was looking forward to that (culture camp) With this whole thing. Everything happened and they got shut down and that made me really *sad* that going to culture camp every year it's like you know it's a part of me. It almost feels like for it to be shut down there, was almost like *heartbreaking*. And with school and everything like…It just happened out of nowhere so it just kind of like shut down like, just like that and like we just stopped going to school, and it was kind of like I was excited about it until like, like maybe a few months in, and it just got really boring to sit in the household. And so, I just started the routine and I got on a bike and just started riding that around. So, but I feel like, you know, with culture camp being canceled and school being canceled. I feel like it, kind of made me *sad*. And at the same time, I was kind of excited for school to be shut down. The culture camp was really a big part of why I'm so *sad* about that.

The sense of loss that P3 feels in this statement is evident of how hard the COVID-19 shutdowns were on our youth and how the loss of pretty reliable activities of school and camps impacted their mental health. It is amazing that he is able to tell us the relief he had in this time was to start a new routine. Creating a healthy routine to resist the impacts of loss is a great thing that this participant did. Conversely, P4 had a similar disposition to the necessary need to fill a void after learning of his Nation's culture camp being shut down as well,

> Yeah, I was disappointed when I heard culture camp, Powwows, and other like other events like those were canceled. And I, at first, I kind of felt like, there's nothing to do but then I went *I will* pick up some hobbies. During the pandemic. And, and that's what I did.

These two participants provided examples of how youth were able to focus on other things in this time. They also let us know of the importance that they placed on Tribally generated outreach activities like “Culture Camp”. The connections and learning that they benefitted from at this camp can be seen in the emotional attachment that these participants had for it.

Still other participants realized the importance of education and the loss that they felt from all the school related socializing that they perceived to have lost from the COVID shutdown as P6 explains,

> Oh well COVID Just kind of sucks. Yeah, but now I think I jumped from being a sophomore all the way to being a senior and I've missed out on like these, like big important. Not like milestones of my life, but definitely some things that I wanted to do and then I just never got the opportunity to. Or I'm like quickly trying to get them done. The small window. Yeah. I tried to get more involved, I'm trying to do more things, and almost like buyback that time that I lost.

She has a sense of urgency to do things or complete things, more with the NASU organization that she has relied heavily on. This sense of pressing time limits she further details,

> So, I feel like, just as we were getting all of like the clubs and organizations and like programs going. It was like halted and that kind of that put a little damper in my life because I really wanted to do some things I thought we could definitely, like, I feel like there's so much more we could have done.

P6 is a very service oriented individual as we can gather from her passion and quest to grow her community. She is bound by that connection to her community at school and feels obligated to do her best to do her best with the amount of time that she has left in school. This was also something that resonated with others and the loss of time in school due to COVID as P3 talks about his friend and the sense of the loss that happened throughout his city for students and business’ in general,

> To me, I feel like living in Eugene, a lot of places. However, I, you know, shut down and, like, even schools shut down for the last part of the year, and I feel like I have a girlfriend as a senior and she graduated during the pandemic

> and she was very upset that she couldn't go to school to finish her, her senior year off so I feel like that was a big part of all the seniors graduating high school and even graduating from the U of O. I feel like it just affected. You know, schools and businesses and everything

These feelings of loss should not overshadow the fact that these were and are normal feelings to have and create individual development and learning while processing through them.

There was still hope and optimism throughout this period of time as well, as we have heard from participants already about creating new routines and picking up hobbies. We also hear from P2 about how her ability to stay connected to ceremony during this time made her feel,

> Yeah, um, and makes you feel better about what's going on everywhere in the world. And for me that was like the normal for me. So, that makes me feel a little bit better about what's going on. Oh yeah, it's basically just like a piece of normal that I still have. Something that hasn't really changed. And so, when I'm participating in these things and feeling happy and really good.

Having a family that is dedicated to providing positive places for their members to pray and connect to their culture is also a known protective factor for youth. P2 discussed how she felt but also allows us to understand how her family cared and felt for her during this time period, keeping a positive connection there for her. We see this with other participants as well as they have all discussed their parents fondly as reliable sources of strength. P1 discusses this as well as she mentions the ebbs and flows of the shutdown,

> Um, it kinda sucks, because like sometimes there’s nothing to do and you can’t see your friends as much. But um, I got to see some of them. I’ve been trying to like go on a lot of walks. Just to like to do stuff. Uh, spending a lot of time with my mom and stuff. That usually helps through the quarantine.

P1, talks about the process of managing her time during a national quarantine and how she was able to maneuver that time. There mention of her connection to her mother, and how that helps her through this time is an excellent thing for us to think about referent to this current study. We think about all the aspects of Wellness and look at them in a formulaic way, not realizing at

times that the Family (parent/guardian) are the ones that truly have influence here with their children, the youth of this study. Positive adult interactions are critical for youth to conceptualize Wellness and as we shift our thoughts to the next theme, we will look at the evidence that youth provided for this notion.

Theme 7: Positive Adults

While this theme may seem better placed within family, friends and land, there are some differences about not just being family but about having connections to positive adults within your community, within others communities within your home and so the need here was to understand essentially what those connections to positive adults were. And how youth seek guidance from their parents, understand elders and then make connections within a school setting with Native and non-Native positive adults and what the implications of those connections for youth mean? Conversely, we know from research that a significant protective factor in a child's life is a positive relationship with positive adults and a sense of positive family connectedness. Additionally, 4 of the 7 participants loaded on this theme, which shows there is some significance to this theme.

Participants in this study showed a concern and care for connection with positive adults from family origins to community members to educators taking on that role of a positive adult. We begin this section with this very explicit statement about the importance of these roles,

> And, yeah, I feel like. Also, another thing that helps with stress is having, like, different adult figures in my life that I can come to and talk to and be like hey I'm kind of struggling with this part of life, or this thing, or like homework or work or school or some social issues. Just like, stuff like that.

This statement coming from P7 is very telling of her emotional intelligence and where she places importance in the connections she makes. Additionally, P6 takes us to a very specific and special adult in her family; P6 said,

> …so, my grandma's in town with us. Finally! She lived in Nevada for a long time, but she's living next to us, which is awesome. She, I would say, yeah, I feel a lot I feel more connected to that that part of me when I'm with her… but she yeah, she makes me very happy about and more like interested in… I want to know and I want to see because she lived on the rez.

Her connection to a positive member of her family, who happens to be an elder and provides a core connection to her Indigenous people is a wonderful connection to have for P6. P6's excitement about being able to make those connections with her *Grandma* is apparent throughout this statement. This connection coupled with all of the other pieces of evidence that we have heard from P6 help to bolster her Wellness and interactions within her community. As this analysis continues through the use of key terms to provide evidence that Indigenous youth are staying connected to aspects of Wellness we see even more connections to positive adult family members as P7 discusses hers,

> Yeah, I definitely have my mom and my older sister, are probably one of the first two people I go to if I have an issue or if I need advice. I just I like talking to them, they make it like it's really easy sometimes and depending on that topic, they are really reassuring.

In her household, it is clear that there are two positive adults that P7 really feels a strong connection to and are reassuring to her to talk out any issue with. We see this same aspect for P5 as he discussed his options when he is stressed out,

> Yeah, I usually like, actually, usually when I'm stressed out, like I say… I don't know, I don't really like when I'm stressed out like say something. I guess, but like, yeah, I don't know how to explain it. Like it's like when I'm stressed out, I'll just like start talking, like start talking about it to my mom or dad, I guess, both are good.

P5 seems to rely on both his parents in his time of need and this aspect of he feels is reliable to talk with agrees with the statement of P2. P2 is providing a very thoughtful piece of advice, that seems to come from a place of deep understanding. She states,

> If I were giving advice to any Native youth living in a place with not so many other Natives, I'd advise them to talk to their parents, about anything that's going on, and to just ask as many questions as possible. And just seek guidance with their parents and stuff. I think that would help a lot.

As we have discussed in this study, deep connections to family adults seems to provide a centering and balance for our participants. This balance of finding folks to turn to, for some means looking to the community to provide support with positive adults. P5 talks about his involvement in an Indigenous youth empowerment group online. He is able to access key pieces of cultural knowledge from this group, with one of those being access to positive adults. This example here shows that connection,

> I do, Konaway or 'All my Relations', which is like a... Right now, it's on a Zoom call and so we get on every other like Wednesday night. And we're able to hear elders, talk from different tribes and tell stories and share like crafts and how to do… I've never met like any elders, I feel like locally that I can stay in touch with. Um, yeah, we just we just get to do all types of cool, traditional, like activities.

While P5 did intimate a strong connection to his parents and connecting with them, he discussed here that his connection to Elders in his community have been limited or non-existent. Through the use of this now popular culture way of meeting with people, he has been able to express his desire in connecting with Elders. These instances of positive adult interactions can come in many different modalities now, especially after all we have learned from adapting during the pandemic. P7 also discusses her ability to make a positive adult connection,

> then outside of school... Another one is my boss, my boss is really nice and she will like listen and then be like, Oh, have you tried this or have you tried that?

Again, youth participants are providing answers to the research query with examples that I did not fully have on my radar. To have a truly mentoring and concerned boss at any job is great thing, but for this young person to make that connection with a supervisor shows a level of support that I was not expecting. Are these same levels of support being provided from other places within our communities?

In this final section of the positive adults we look at all the statements that are made about positive educators. P7 delivers a powerful statement about one of her teacher's ability to teach with integrity and a culturally responsive pedagogy. The ideas of being a "warm-demander" and finding ways to use your connections with youth to provide a reciprocal understanding is illuminated here,

> I feel like the like the main adult that really stresses or puts emphasis on relieving stress and activities that can help with that, is my teaching theory, teacher. She always starts the day off with like asking us like though, how are we doing today. Take a few minutes to yourself debrief. We're going to start class and a few and then we'll do our mindful minute, and she should like state things like, Oh, if you are stressed you know you can you can come in my class and you can take a few minutes yourself and if you're feeling behind in the school we can figure out a plan to get you up and up, and she'll just like she really does work with kids like, I feel like when we first met. We weren't on the best page that we just did it wasn't the best interaction, but I feel like as I get to know people, and I hear what they have to say that they, they actually do have a lot of good points like. She will. She will always be there for the kids and be like oh well, it's okay if you're, if you have a missing assignment, just as long as you're not feeling too overwhelmed I rather you be calm and get that in late, then have you stress and get it in on time.

As we see in this next statement as well P7 has other teachers that she can connect with and really provide her with multiple access points of positive adults. Also important in this statement is the type of teacher, her "NASU" is an Indigenous educator.

> then at school, I have my NASU teacher, and my other teacher I think she's my, she's my English teacher. She's really nice. and I feel like they're both like, they're always there and they're like, they listen, if I say I have an issue with something or if I ask them if I can talk to them or if they have a minute, I feel like they always have their door open, and that they can help

me whatever with whatever issue I have, they will do their best.

P7 has really mapped out all of her positive adult resources for us here and given us a rare view into what support for Indigenous youth looks like for her at school. This same support is also being accessed by P6, as they both attend the same high school. P6 was specifically asked about what it feels like to have these two Indigenous women leaders at school, this was her response,

> They're awesome ladies! They are definitely, do not mess with them, they know what they want, they know what they want their students to do. They have definitely a path set out for us if we don't have one, they're like, 'Okay you know what? You're going to go to college, if you're not going to college, you're gonna go do this.' And they definitely have like a pathway for everyone. Yeah, they're... For me I think they've really encouraged me to kind of open up, and I don't know. They've shown me just so many different things. They're the reason I've gotten involved in, like, Sapsikwała, and the LCC bridge, summer program that big long title. Oh, and then we've also done like cultural events. Just got a lot of different, I don't know leadership qualities and just a ton of different experiences that I wouldn't have gotten otherwise, if I wouldn't have met them. They kind of helped me because I came in freshman year and there was no like beforehand, there was no NASU there was no... Yeah, there was no groups or anything no clubs. And so, kind of finding like my people. I get to go do things and experiences that I've never done. Like I've learned how to make earrings and I'm working on, I believe she called it like a medallion or something. I'm working on it. It's not looking good, but it'll get there.

There is so much in this statement that we can discuss, and I think that the overarching piece here is this wonderful positive adult connection that P6 has. Where she has been able to experience mentorship, guidance and encouragement and leadership. This is all coming from a connection to Indigenous women who work at her high school and work it seems tirelessly to provide these experiences to the Indigenous youth at the school.

In figure 10, P6 took a picture of Fry Bread,

Figure 10. Fry Bread (photo by P6)

This picture was taken after an afternoon in which this Indigenous educator sked the group if they wanted to learn how to make it. While fry bread is not a traditional food, and it is a food that a lot of Nations eat and take pride in knowing how to make it well. P6's statement,

> If you can't tell that's frybread. That I kind of live by and saying that 'Food is life'. And I just remember this moment specifically being so much fun it was after school one day and she offered she says hey you guys want to make some fry bread, learn how to make it, you know? So, it's a recipe from scratch, and we spent, like, maybe like hour, hour to two hours just sitting there, making it, and it was so good. And I think that kind of, I don't know it. It made me have a lot. It really grounded me it made me feel really special that I could do something like this, especially like bond and get to know some of the people. And, yeah, it's quite tasty.

This again is another opportunity that these Indigenous educators are providing for the youth they are working with. Truly, we know that positive adult connections have a tremendously positive impact on youth and that educators do as well. For these adults to be from a common background and mentoring gives these youth a way to express and maintain their connectedness experiences at school and in their community as well.

Summary

These seven participants each showed some similarities and commonalities in their thinking about how they were able to express their understandings of what we perceive to be

cultural connections, what those experiences look like that contribute those connections and the modern modalities they use to convey their cultural connections.

The participants spoke of their desires to speak their Indigenous languages, relatives and community, struggles with COVID-19 shutdowns and the ongoing pandemic, elders, feelings of identity, spirituality and positive contributions from important adults. Their identities as Indigenous Youth are varied and the experiences that they have with Wellness is not as cut as this researcher thought that it would be. For instance, these youth showed that despite where they reside they are heavily influenced by the ability to connect with their culture in a prayerful manner and reciprocate kindness with others. These lived experiences that the participants showed during the study support the concepts of Wellness from the previous chapter's literature review.

Participants clarified an Indigenous youth's perspective on cultural connectedness, grappled with identity and looked to positive adults for guidance, as well as showing caring reciprocal relationships with animals, waterways, plants and their families and peers. Their connection to Wellness and Culture is strong because they set the terms for how they define those.

CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION

The purpose of this Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was to understand the meaning Indigenous youth and they make sense for Wellness. The phenomenon of Wellness through cultural connections can be defined as being in balance with your whole self (Social, Physical, Emotional and Spiritual), it is a process of "being" not a static or dichotomous position (either or not). The use of the IPA methods for this qualitative approach gave the researcher an opportunity to interview the seven Indigenous youth, record their responses through transcription, analyze commonalities through theme making, and interpret their sense-making of this phenomenon. This study focused on the contributions of Indigenous youth who ranged in ages 14-17 and their responses to Wellness. Using IPA and multiple sources of data such as focus group and Photovoice allowed the researcher to get a fuller understanding through the multiple data collection and analyzing of the participants common experience of being Indigenous youth today.

Overall, the findings indicated that Indigenous youth in this study were engaging in Wellness related activities and showed the use of multiple protective factors throughout the study. Youth in general were able to articulate and reason with their desires to build a healthy Indigenous identity, promote coming together in community and their connections to positive adults. The health and Wellness related activities gave way to findings that were positive and regarded cultural connections as a central understanding to these activities. From these findings seven themes related to Wellness emerged.

The first theme appeared to reflect Indigenous language use and the importance of language learning, for the transfer of cultural knowledge and histories. The second theme (Community/ Being a Good Relative) focuses on community and building a capacity to be a

good relative, this theme provides us a way to look into the actions of youth as they seek to build something good. The third theme (Identity), illustrates how youth are thinking about and forming their identity. The fourth theme (Family, Friends, Land) reflected connections to land, family, animals and extended relationships. This showed me how they, the youth were using spaces within their community. The fifth theme (Prayerful Ways) indicates the use of reflection and self-care strategies. The sixth theme (Emotions) appeared to reflect a general use of optimism and routine building among other strategies to navigate the feelings of loss during the COVID-19 shutdown. The seventh and last theme (Positive Adults) appeared to illuminate the connections that some of the participants had with an adult, inside the home or within the community. Finally, I will now discuss each theme and its implications below.

Indigenous Language

The beliefs and feelings the participants shared about speaking an Indigenous language was varied across the participants, some seemed indifferent initially about the use of language, meaning that they had minimal use of it and did not want to share anything beyond that. Still others used language either in small phrases or actualization of Indigenous language use. However, findings in this study suggest that even for youth who do not know their language, it is still important to them to be able to learn it. Three findings from this theme emerged (a) a desire to learn tribal languages (b) strategies to learn away from tribal communities and (c) knowledge of stories, and traditions in language.

Desire to learn. A majority of the participants (6 out of 7) did not use an Indigenous language during the either the focus groups or photovoice groups. This is something that was also reflected in the data that was gathered from the photovoice groups, in that none of the data remarked on any Indigenous language use. Despite these examples of varied exposure and use of

an Indigenous language, those 6 of the 7 participants' who did not speak an Indigenous language during the focus groups, provided one finding. That finding was that participants who did not speak their Indigenous language had a strong *desire* to learn more. These youth saw the value in learning their Indigenous languages, which they expressed would help them explore their ties to place and family. An example of this is from P6 talking about her grandmother, "*I'm like, I would love to take a trip back there (Blackfeet reservation) and like go do this with her and experience it because the story she has to tell. I almost like live through her a little bit, but it definitely makes me more interested and I would and I would totally love to learn the language."* Youth are clearly stating this is of value and importance to them. That desire to learn has to become realized and within the context of place, as Simpson 2014 makes clear that Indigenous peoples need have close and strong ties to our homelands and, languages.

As we understand that these youth are in a process of learning more about their languages, several factors may still help or inhibit participants' Indigenous language learning, yet still provide similar results of a greater understanding of their own Nation than previously held before. The research illuminates that in order for language proficiency to occur there needs to be sure footing for that journey. As in a 2011 study of te reo Māori as a second language to acquire, Ratima and May indicate that for learning to proficiency to occur it is crucial "a family-home-neighborhood-community environment" where the language is spoken as a living language (Ratima & May, 2011). Given that the youth in this study 6 of 7 were living in cities, of which were not relatively close to their tribal communities this process of having a "family-home-neighborhood-community"(Ratima & May, 2011) where their Indigenous language is spoken will be a challenge for these youth. If the spaces that youth are in (i.e. public schools) do not adequately place importance on these youth's Indigenous intelligence and success. We think

about what are the values at work here in this community as language is definitely being placed as a need a desire by these youth? What and where are the valuing of Indigenous pedagogies placed in context to western mainstream, standards driven education (Sabzalian,2019; Simpson, 2014)? Are youth able to make travels to their home communities as a valued means to education and wellness centered approach to learning language?

Strategies to learn. However, youth in this study showed they were able access different modalities to learn language such as language learning apps (Duolingo), Tribal language learning programs (with different focuses; e.g. reading Indigenous language and also embedded within cultural learning classes), to learning from parents and peers. This brings us to a second finding within this theme; youth are accessing many different modalities for learning and staying connected to their Indigenous languages from, apps, use of school resources, parents/ family members, knowledgeable peers to application of language in everyday context. A unique piece of data also came from the participants and that was, the expression of seeing a peer as an accessible knowledgeable language teacher. These findings seem to be in line with what Indigenous scholar, Jacob discussed as language revitalization efforts; these activities and programs take many forms-from informal family and community- based efforts to formal instructional programs located in schools (Jacob, 2013).

Knowledge of stories. Given what I know from the data of this group we can see that some of the effects of a variety of settler-state policies are being expressed, whether that be Indigenous youth having no connection to their homelands due to relocation efforts, or oppression of Indigenous languages through official policies and social pressures (Oster et al., 2014; Whalen et al., 2016). It is important to think about all the ways that Indigenous youth have been affected by assimilationist and cultural genocide. In doing so, it is also important to

remember that "The identity and identification as 'Indian' or as a tribe is created through the process of colonization. Natives hold their own identities within their communities and cultures" (Champagne, 2005, p. 8). Language is a crucial piece of identity as well as a way to deepen their understandings to their cultures. As these youth have expressed the *desire* and need to understand their own identities through Indigenous languages, while at the same time being beginning language learners is an expression of Indigenous Wellness. P7 discussed her desire to learn language and the accompanying reasons, *"I'd had a better understanding of like not only just like my language like my tribe in itself and like all the traditions and like stories that come from it that I would like feel a lot more empowered."* Michael Yellow Bird an Indigenous Scholar (Arikara/Hidatsa) 1995, discussed the importance of stories as he reminisced on his people's *genesis story*, "…which helps to create a sense of purpose, belonging, and relatedness among our peoples and all other life" (p. 71). Additionally, research shows that language use is critical for cultural understandings and identity formation (Hallett. et al.,2007; Whalen et al., 2016). As McCarty and colleagues indicated, passing on crucial cultural knowledge through language is critical to maintaining those knowledges (T. L. McCarty et al., 2010). Here we see youth understanding that as critical link to their Identity, it is important to learn your tribal language.

The Indigenous Language theme assists in answering a component of the research question 1) How youth express their understanding of cultural connectedness (e.g. values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality)? That is, youth are expressing an understanding of the importance of Indigenous language learning, while not being fluent. This importance is also placed on ideas about community and relations as we transition into the next thematic finding, it should be noted that within community, language was not explicit in the findings,

however, a sense of shared identity can be seen in the next set of findings, identity was also tied to this section.

Community/ being a good relative

Participants found it fulfilling to be a part of a community in their school and within the larger urban area. Also providing examples of the realities of being in a community, and the efforts of some to have a space to connect with other like-minded peers who share in a similar identity. Youth also demonstrated that maintaining connections to their tribal communities and creating a community were salient features to them. The participants also showed that there are many ways to support community and peers all while in the process building community. In this next section youth participants discussed that (a) community building is important (b) need to connect with other Indigenous youth, (c) maintaining connections to tribal communities (d) a desire to have genuine reciprocal connections to land, community and family.

Importance of community. During the COVID-19 shutdown, the ability to connect with others was a struggle, there were bubbles that popped, unworn masks, efforts to maintain distance and all for taking care of your community. The youth in this study were definitely impacted by the pandemic and shutdown. In the community aspect of this theme a couple of findings were that (a) youth are thinking very much about community as they recognize and even reflect on the importance of community and are actively providing support to their community, and, (b) have a need to connect with other Indigenous youth to observe all the good that is happening in-spite of the pandemic. When discussing the Native American Student Union (NASU). at their local area high school P7 provides us with a positive outlook as to why other students should essentially show up and join NASU, *"I think having just a good, good teachers slash mentor group like NASU is very helpful."* She goes on to discuss, the importance of

bringing youth together, *"Plus, it brings people who, At least identify similarly. We did have a couple other people who don't identify but they're just there, which is cool too. But I think just bringing that awareness and almost like community together is very helpful because it's helped me find a group of people that like may understand similar things I'm going through."*

These findings are consistent with an understanding of community level support, in that is serves a number of emotional, developmental, and connectedness functions. Specifically, support received from an Indigenous community may facilitate a sense of shared community, success and connectedness (Cross et al., 2011). Youth participants really thought about community building, community happenings, outreach, cultural practices and kindness. This study's inquiry into Indigenous youth's processes of Wellness, illuminates their experiences in a genuine accounting of community, reciprocal connections to land, and people during a very trying time in our history.

Maintaining connections. Another finding was maintaining a connection with Tribal communities during the pandemic, some of the participants were able to participate in virtual spaces in order to maintain that connection while others discussed the responsibility that they had in their communities and to family during this time. P1 describes for us her understanding of connections to tribal community, *"I know that I have, like, a connection to where I used to live and I still like talk to some people that are also, you know, Native or Indigenous so that's a nice connection to have."* This participant is also involved remotely with their Tribal Youth Council, and maintaining that connection, as a remote member during the pandemic provided her with a sense of "normalcy". From the literature we can see this is consistent as "A major resource for promoting wellbeing, however, is that urban AIs are able to sustain their cultures and identities by maintaining deep connections to reservation homelands or tribal communities" (Kulis et al.,

2015, p. 216). This finding was that connections to Tribal and Family communities brought a sense of relief in the otherwise "Not normal" time of the pandemic. Research from cultural connectedness would agree with these findings as well, in that promoting Wellness through strengthening ties to community has long been held as a salient ingredient in Wellness (Gould, MacQuarrie, O'Connell, & Bourassa, 2021; Jennings & Lowe, 2013; Kirmayer, Simpson, & Cargo, 2003; MacDonald, Ford, Willox, & Ross, 2013).

Reciprocity. The reciprocal processes that participants shared in relation to their ideas about Wellness. These reciprocal relationships were not just expressed with people but, also with plants and community. The idea if being a good relative was seen throughout and in the context of building community within a school setting, and advising peers. This sense that youth are starting to formulate about their connections within the community to both human and non-human relatives shows how they are practicing cultural connections. Here we have an example from P5 about his interaction with a tree, *"Cedar is like, it was like medicine to our family, and like our families come from so we go out, we make offerings to like the cedar tree, and then we pick some cedar."* P5 went on to discuss the process in his experience of what making an offering entail, creating a learning pathway for his cultural practices while participating in this family action. These practices by P5 parallels Mohatt and colleagues findings about culturally grounded protective factors, as they are important for understanding the interactions between the individual, community, and holistic wellness (Mohatt, Fok et al., 2011). The use of cultural understandings are emerging across both education and health research as an integral part for Indigenous youth success and Wellbeing (Lee & Cerecer, 2010; T. L. McCarty, 2003; T. McCarty & Lee, 2015; Mohatt et al., 2011; Rasmus et al., 2016). These interactions appear across a range of activities from virtual, in person to in nature, that are allowing for youth to

express their own ways of being and expressing a determination to community. Formulating a broader sense of self and ultimately creating an awareness of relations.

Identity

Placing all pieces that are attributable to Indigenous youth's identity, solely in this Identity theme is not possible and as we have seen there are interconnections within the themes that build identity. This section was filled with some explicit discussions about identity, in fact, all of the youth discussed their identity; some to a greater degree and understanding than others. However, each of these pieces that contributed to this theme helped show how youth see themselves within their larger community, with other peers and within their school community.

Participants in various ways talked about identity throughout this study and these salient ideas emerged that are apparent in their thought processes for understanding their own makeup. We think often times of a struggle and growth when we think of identity and in this study, there were definitely places where youth seemed to grapple with identity. Some participants in their statements were conflicted or struggled with their Indigenous identity, however they were still actively involved in learning more about their people. *"Okay. But like my family. I identify as like half Native, but like, I feel like I'm fairly involved,"* at this point we see that P6 is facing a very real predicament that youth in general go through. She continues, *"and, I feel pretty darn white, my mom is white and Eugene is white and I think I kind of identify more with that but as I'm growing up I kind of learn, and connect with people. I kind of explored the Native side of me."* As research suggests this statement by P6 is concerned with "macro-level" stereotyping as she intimated that *Eugene is white,* meaning as in most of the U.S. there are few Indigenous people in this community (Davis-Delano et al., 2021; Lichte et al., 2007; Wilkes, 2003). Further details of this finding are the intentional process of learning more; this youth is providing for

herself a quest of leaning her identity as an Indigenous youth and it is important to think about the ways in which her view of herself will be derived from this community that she suggests is *white*. The literature supports identity and healthy identity development as a protective factor, as it is one of the most critical aspects of Indigenous youth's ability to handle ongoing challenges that seek to erase and redefine who they are. (Bombay et al., 2010; Chavous et al., 2008; Gaylord-Harden et al.,2007; Newman et al., 2006).

Still other youth were making a connection to sports, gaming, and physical activities, creating an expression of identity other than being an Indigenous youth. The importance of forming an identity that truly reflects who a young person is, as these participants have provided examples for, is a critical piece of development. Scholars in physical activity, leisure, and sport studies assert that beyond the physical health benefits; sports and physical activities can provide spaces for Indigenous youth to and challenge perceptions (Bruner et al., 2016; C. Mason & Koehli, 2012; C. W. Mason, 2008; McHugh, 2011; McHugh, Coppola et al., 2015). An interesting component of this data was that two participants discussed the ability to compartmentalize identity, one actually discussed it as "turning on and off" a switch.

The dynamic processes of being able to discuss identity and development of an understanding of self when these youth are formulating their own trajectories of how they determine their own Indigenous identity is powerful. This is what Indigenous scholars discuss in relation to identity, "the power to name, reveal, and define one's people (i.e., the right to self-determination) is arguably the truest expression of sovereignty"(Grande et al., 2015, p.107). Moreover, as we heard from participants in this study, there are positives and reflective scenarios arising from public school's space, as creating the place for youth to bring forth some of these concerns and desires around identity and community. This is reflective with what Deer discussed

in 2016, that is in order to have an understanding about positive impacts on Indigenous youth educational success and self-esteem, schools needed to provide youth with opportunities to explore their culture and identity in a safe and celebratory way (Deer, 2016). The last finding in this theme was the ability of these youth to connect with their peers as advocates and in affirming narratives. This practice of reflexive kindness and acknowledgement of other Indigenous peers represents strengths that youth are reciprocating across cultures. Indigenous scholars discuss this ability in a study on holistic Wellness, as unique concepts of this project included acknowledgement and respect for, "shared and tribal-specific teachings, practices and understandings"(Bigfoot & Schmidt, 2010, p. 849) illuminating some of these strengths that are critical to understanding self in relation to Indigenous Knowledges frameworks and were seen in youth in this project.

Also, to note, not all the participants in this study are identical in age, complexion, cultural connections, Nations or gender identity, thus their feelings and thoughts about identity will vary and at points converge with each other. The evidence provided here by the participants helps to resolve of this study's three research questions.

Family, Friends, Land

All of the participants provided in their reporting connections to land, family, animals and extended relationships showing that these young people were being in relation with one another, their families and in spaces and places that were important to them. Spaces and places that directly connect participants to their values at times reaffirming them as well. This theme of Family, Friends, Land provides evidence of these varied accounts of a relational-reliance with their community as Family, Friends, Land in the sincerest of terms as an extension to relatives. In this way it provides a path for youth to connect on different level with nature, non-human

relatives and reflection to reorient them to strengths. That said, youth in this study showed through photovoice and focus group data a great care for their homelands, waterways and the agency that these places have created within the thought processes of these youth.

P3 discusses a photograph he took of his homelands, *"I took a picture because I love the reservation has a lot of meaning to me. And we went down to the river just to look at it."* He then discusses the enjoyment of watching the river with his grandmother and mom, being out in his tribal community with different generations within his family. Then to finish this discussion he says, *"yeah, just like you know water is a big spiritual relief for me too."* Reflecting on this picture P3 was brought happiness because of the significance of the (a) the land and waterways and (b) Family (who were not in the picture). This finding is especially important as, when we think about teachings that some Indigenous peoples have relative to water, the implications for youth is immense.

Mindfulness. As water is very much a spiritual/cultural value that spans through different Tribal Nations. In addition to water being almost a healing part of these youth's lives, was the ability in taking time to understand and acknowledge nature was another finding. Youth talked about deep appreciations to access natural places to just *be there* and to experience that feeling within that reflective moment. This, aspect of meditative process that youth are using to be mindful is considered a destressing activity. This type of activity Indigenous Scholar Michael Yellow Bird (2013) describes as "Neurodecolonization", he provides a scientific rationale:

> Neurodecolonization is a conceptual framework, which uses mindfulness research to facilitate an examination of ways in which the human brain is affected by the colonial situation and an exploration of mind–brain activities that change neural networks and enable individuals to overcome the myriad effects of trauma and oppression inherent in colonialism.

(Bird, 2013, p. 294). This process of having an ability to be mindful was discussed by participants and is reflected in an Indigenous scholar's work to understanding the ways to provide positive pathways in thinking to combat the effects of colonialism. These interactions referent to participants involvement in land and strategies in which youth discussed how these connections centered them to who they are, providing an "Indigenous Mindfulness" (Bird, 2013, p. 302) A process that reflects an understanding of Indigenous Knowledges.

Connecting through land to create meaning and develop your relations is reflective of the literature as Hatala et al., (2019) study that involved Indigenous Youth in an urban center in Canada showed that despite the disconnection with rural landscapes youth were still able to make reciprocal and meaningful relationships with the land/place that they were in. Furthermore, the process, is connected to some level and thinking in regards to the next theme "Prayerful Ways" as we stay on this interconnected understanding of the way's participants have shared and expressed a realization of their cultural connections. I am also reminded of that even with all the enjoyment of land, waterways, non-human relatives that we must always remain vigilant of the US settler state, as Wolfe (2007) declares, "Land is life or, at least, land is necessary for life. Thus contests for land can be indeed, often are contests for life" (Wolfe, 2007, p. 387) and access to place is critical for Indigenous youth as participants in this study have intimated the importance of place. How youth accessed these places is important as well, and once they are in these places how are they are able to maintain connections without disruption?

Prayerful ways

Entering in from reflection of self, to think about how situations are handled, to thoughtfulness about the day and interactions with others, are some of the explicit pieces that are involved in Prayerful Ways. In this theme area we see the beginnings of understanding to some

pieces “Native spirituality”, and youth show how their relationship as human beings’ is a unique connection with the creation around them. “By definition, (Native spirituality) spirituality is everywhere, imbued in all life (Earth’s beings, rocks, trees, animals, wind)”(King & Trimble, 2013, p. 570).

Some of the participants’ levels of mindfulness and how they access relevant proactive mental health strategies to assist them with their daily endeavors can be interpreted by some as a protective factor (Henson et al., 2017). Youth in this study were very clear about their use of a blessing/cleansing ceremony of prayer. This act, of which they are involved in, familiarizes these participants with a foundation to other social, cultural and ceremonial proceedings. To go further in realizing what community members of an Indigenous community in the city of Portland, Oregon illuminated in research to be known; that their beliefs about success needed to include “knowledge of appropriate cultural protocols”(Cross et al., 2011). Still research has shown that cultural connectedness has been shown to have a strong association with mental health factors such as self-efficacy, sense of self, life satisfaction and perceived discrimination (Bombay et al., 2010; Snowshoe et al., 2017), as well as school connectedness and school success (Crooks et al., 2015; T. McCarty & Lee, 2015; Snowshoe et al., 2017; Snowshoe & Starblanket, 2016). Having a connection to any spiritual way knowing is a good thing for a young person to have and access, as we think about what this connection means for youth and their Wellness, “Participation in traditional spiritual practices serves not only to heal but also to maintain and sustain health, thus becoming a critical protective factor in dealing with adversity and other stressors.”(Walters, Simoni, & Evans-Campbell, 2002, p. 112).

Emotions

Participants discussed sadness that they were facing, there were also hints of optimism in dealing with the realities of a COVID era pandemic. More than talks of sadness, we were provided with indications of some participants enjoyment of the process of taking a picture, and how just the right angle provided him with a picture that was calming. Still others did discuss being sadden by the cancelation of salient Tribal camps, and losing out on milestones during the COVID shutdown. Some participants also talked of an increased amount of time with adult family members and how this was *helpful*, creating new routines and learning new hobbies to deal with loss of everything social during this time.

Participants loss and ways of dealing with through both traditional practices and pop culture ways of processing are consistent with the literature, as Indigenous communities, Nations, and the Indigenous people that make these places and spaces have embedded within their stories and Knowledges routes to reconnect the disconnected (Cajete, 1999; Hall et al., 2015). P3 in general had discussed his feelings pretty openly stating that, *"you know, with culture camp being canceled and school being canceled. I feel like it, kind of made me sad… culture camp was really a big part of why I'm so sad about that."* Conversely, another tribal member P4 discussed that initial *disappointment* with *culture camp* being cancelled but optimistically proclaimed he started new hobbies. Again, this finding of youth optimism in a time of a pandemic was expressed with P3 as he discussed creating new routines to deal with the increased amount of time he had at home.

Each of our participants while Indigenous, come from different tribes, families and places; therefore, the way in which they express and deal with loss will differ as we have seen with the range of strategies. Likewise, by working from an Indigenous understanding of Wellness and Cultural Connections that prioritizes "interconnectedness" in the physical, mental,

emotional, and spiritual aspects of individuals human and non-human we start to understand the need for relationships.

Positive Adults

While four of the seven participants mentioned the connection with a positive adult not all members had this as something they discussed. Another, piece of this theme is that a connection to a positive adult could be the mention of a strong connection to a parent or caregiver, but the focus here extends past family and into the other areas of life where youth are interacting with adults. These are important data to examine, as youth described (a) positive family member connections, (b) community members and (c) school staff. In addition, we know that two of the participants discussed in this section had some very empowering connections to Indigenous educators.

Positive Family. Participants in this study talked about positive adult family member connections on a variety of instances and provided this finding. 4 out of the 7 youth discussed a positive relationship with seeking guidance from adult family members. Grandparents (alive and not), parents and older siblings were discussed as reliable sources to seek counsel for these youth. This is an important as family and community support are critical connections that create a protective factor for successful transitions to adulthood (Boden et al., 2016).

Community connection. Positive adult connections were a part of the individual participants' community as well. These were adults who were not directly related to the youth but still influential in how the youth recounted their interactions with them. An example is given here from P7, *"Another one is my boss, my boss is really nice and she will like listen and then be like, Oh, have you tried this or have you tried that?"*. This finding again aligns with research on the positive impacts of having supporting positive adults in your life (Allen et al., 2014;

Goldston et al., 2008; Gone & Alcántara, 2007). Other participants had virtual experiences with connecting with Elders and listening to their stories.

This home-to-school linkage is important for all students, however in these statements there are some really critical pieces that make these examples exceptionally important as we proceed to think about our Indigenous youth's Wellness. Youth that indicated they had connections to positive adults also mentioned the links to educators that played a role (a) in school engagement with relevant teaching practices and (b) positive mentorship, encouragement and leadership.

Indigenous Educators. Indigenous teachers have a positive impact on Indigenous students for reasons such fostering and nurturing learning of Indigenous languages, providing students with an Indigenous pedagogy, as role models and understanding unique experiences of Indigenous students (Garcia et al., 2021; Jacob et al., 2019). This research follows with the experience that students involved with this study and a NASU organization. P6 mentions in her telling about two Indigenous women educators at her school, that they have provided and shown her so many different things. The relevant activities that they interacted with youth in ranged from educational focus (financial aid, career/ college planning) to community happenings for Indigenous youth. In addition to these activities these educators recognize the need for space to be provided for Indigenous youth to have a voice and create.

Space. Youth participants two of which attended the same local area high school provided some really powerful statements about their comfort, connection and mentorship stemming from Indigenous educators. Spaces were created on behalf of Indigenous students to create and build community, learn about culturally relevant things, guidance and leadership.

We also know from research that a significant protective factor in a child's life is a positive relationship with positive adults and a sense of positive family connectedness (Allen et al., 2014; Goldston et al., 2008; Gone & Alcántara, 2007; Hawkins et al., 2004; LaFromboise et al., 2006). That is why the finding from this section on Positive Adults connection is critical to understand here.

Recommendations

Implications for practice. Before making recommendations from this study with these Indigenous youth participants, I would like to make it clear that as we look at the evidentiary findings; I need to also provide space to address the ways in which this research and findings may be providing harm to Indigenous youth and their knowledges. As was stated previously at the beginning of this research project and based on Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck' s (Tuck, 2009) work, I do not want to be another well intended researcher ascribing to the advancements of academia only to marginalize and further perpetuate macro and micro level stereotypes (Davis-Delano, Strother, & Gone, 2021). Culture and all the misconceptions and underpinnings that different levels of having a true understanding of your own culture, can provide opportunities here for harm to youth. So, I say to you if you are looking for recommendations merely to try in hopes that you will find a new exotic way of working with youth, please do not.

Some scholars have started to think about how to best use cultural connectedness and Wellness more in depth. Placing value not in the actions of adapting or decolonizing current Wellness models, but rather in the approach to Wellness (Sutherland et al., 2017).Wellness as we have been discussing it for the purposes of this project has very much been centered around a Relational Worldview (RWV) (Cross, 1997; Cross et al., 2011) and cultural connectedness (Crooks et al., 2015; Goodman, Snyder, Wilson, & Whitford, 2019; Snowshoe, Crooks,

Tremblay, Craig, & Hinson, 2015). I have discussed the areas of Wellness that youth were perceived to be involved in and participated in research with youth to garner their perceptions. The selection of the RWV model was intentional as it more accurately incorporates interdependent relationships across four different domains, that were seen within these participants Wellness narratives. As data produced themes and themes provided us with finding in this process I was able to see the workings of youth's capacity for cultural connectedness in this Wellness project. This process of investigating Wellness by providing a space for youth to elevate their voices, and demonstrate the importance of their values; aligns with research from Snowshoe and Starblanket (2016) as they discuss their findings in healing and the process of getting there. They identified four healing protective factors that are effective when applied as principles decolonized approaches to well-being: (a) trauma-informed, (b) strengths-based, (c) community engaged, and (d) spiritually grounded. How these concepts and ideas blend together is where this project was concerned, that is Wellness and the recognition of Wellness as an ongoing process. So, strategies to get there such as decolonizing the approach seem to be applicable to the findings.

How do we begin to decolonize the approach and get to the important messages that youth have provided in this study? A message that tells us "this what makes me well", such as P4 in his sharing of drumming, "Because drumming makes me feel better." Throughout this study the youth participants have told us that they know the things that make them feel good such as; to be connected to your family/home place, through dance, through prayer, through things like speaking Indigenous language, drumming and singing. All with the intention to have and promote a good feeling in self. These are place-based activities, outside of Western educational spaces and center around an understanding that youth need to be in the land as a means of

Indigenous intelligence development (Jacob, 2021; Simpson, 2014). An understanding that there is a need for Indigenous youth to come to their full potential does not always need to be centered on public schools and standards driven education as that is not and Indigenous education at all (Deloria et al., 2001; Jacob, 2021; Simpson, 2014).

Communities are usually the vehicles for change for Indigenous people; creating multiple or placed based entry points for youth to engage in Wellness programming. Programs that could provide a level of mentoring, elder connections, and support for language learning as we have heard from youth-voice in this study. From the findings in this study, and despite all the obstacles with a worldwide pandemic, youth being removed from some of the very aspects that create identity (i.e. social gatherings), provided findings that are important to Wellness. Such as P1 discussed being at home with family as helpful during this time, conversely youth did not say *I need to be at school learning standards-based curriculum*. In fact, we have seen from the findings that these youth were refusing settler-colonial logics (Jacob, 2021; Simpson, 2014) and valuing that real knowledge to them come from places that include a history and connection to their people and families.

Findings from this study have been discussed at length previously and some of those findings I have selected here to discuss further, with recommendations as I make the connection from my original quest of understanding Youth voice as being central to Wellness. This concept of Wellness is also influenced by my own understandings of where I come from in this narrative as not only a researcher but an Indigenous researcher/educator, a human being, a son, father, a husband, a community member and school administrator. With that I think that the implications for practice are some that I believe will challenge us in education to think strongly about and are in no way an exhaustive list or meant to be a *Pan-Indian* way to approach practices. Challenges

to current practices at public schools are something we need to take considerable movement on for Indigenous youth. As the participants in this study will become future elders, leaders, knowledge holders, educators, community members, parents and the values of their Nations that are not being upheld in our current school systems (Blackhorn, 2020; Jacob, 2021; Simpson, 2014).

Data from youth participants, have provided a clear insight, first that youth know what they need to be in relationship with the movement of Wellness, second that their knowledge of what they need is not heeded in current public schools' operations and third youth are refusing settler-colonial notions about their existence in multiple aspects. The role that cultural connections to Land, Family, Relations, Positive Adults and Identity have played major roles in the lived experiences told by these youth. Those experiences in Wellness and community building showed efforts of youth at a *localized* community level and allowed for youth to tell us how they have been successful navigating systems of education and Wellness while also maintaining ties to an Indigenous identity.

The youth's own accountings of what makes them *Well* is critical information for educators of Indigenous youth, and can be used to build meaningful experiences for Indigenous youth. As youth participants in this project had discussed the salience of Community and Indigenous language, therefore these findings will be discussed in the recommendations (a) Community building is important (connections with other Indigenous youth), (b) maintaining connections to tribal communities (a desire to have genuine reciprocal connections to land, community and family) (c) a desire to learn tribal languages (strategies to learn Indigenous languages away from tribal communities and knowledge of stories, and traditions in language).

Indigenous Educators, Indigenous Community and Indigenous Spaces at School.

In limited spaces and capacities at schools we see Indigenous educators are working with the expectations of settler-colonial curricular standards (i.e. this is the knowledge to impart), however and to varying degrees Indigenous educators have their own knowledges that are beyond those of the standardized education of public schools. The valuing of Indigenous Knowledges and Intelligences are not co-occurring in public schools' curriculum. In addition, by simply creating spaces at schools for Indigenous students to have the ability to build community and interact with other Indigenous peers in order to promote success is not going to be a way to attend to valuing Indigenous Knowledges. Valuing and placing Indigenous Knowledges at the forefront of Wellness and Indigenous education means that we cannot hold true to federal and state levels prioritization of Western standards education, high stakes testing and curricula that seek to only promote those standards and testing of them (while also attempting to indoctrinate and assimilate Indigenous youth). This means that White-settler educators and education must give up privilege that is inherent in the current public schools' structure. As the harm that has been done on behalf of Indigenous youth through this type of education contributes to ongoing harm of our future leaders (Jacob, 2017; Lomawaima & McCarty, 2002; Sabzalian, 2019; Simpson 2014).

During this last year as the pandemic shutdowns and reopening's occurred, we saw at many district levels resource allocation to *mental health/ care and connection.* As recently as November of 2021 the US department of Education approved the State of Washington's plan to use and distribute the remaining funds form the "American Rescue Plan". This plan has specific language to support AI/AN children, youth and families using an integrated approach (USDOE, 2021). Building upon this example and thinking about how support at the district level can make these moves to allocate resources differently for Indian Education. Starting at the state and

district level of leadership, districts should be intentional and thoughtful about the supports they provide to (a) Indigenous educators (b) Indigenous students and (c) Indigenous Knowledge Valuing.

An allocation to make a permanent fulltime role for Indian Education that is not dependent on federal funding for a grant. Making a shift to value Indigenous professionals that are brought in to educate Indigenous Youth within a school district. Often times salaries for Title VI/Indian Education specialists are not commensurate with certified teaching staff. Allocation of resources can also be provided to make Indian Education within public schools, Indian Education as the youth in this study have described means being connected to their homelands, families, stories and languages these are the desires of youth. In that regard shouldn't our planning and programming reflect these priorities for Indigenous youth? As Sabzalian wrote in 2019, "Some districts, recognizing the limited funds of Indian Education programs, offset costs by providing FTE to support additional personnel" (p. 221). She goes on to discuss the importance of districts shifting from being "in relationship" with to "providing sufficient support" of programs (Sabzalian, 202, p. 221). Creating meaningful positions that show districts value their students and community, with something like an elder in residence. As Jacob (2017), discusses the need to prioritize Indigenous Elders' priorities for education.

These types of position cannot just simply be created and then left to flourish in a structure that is in sharp contrast and seemingly fraught with individualism and standardization. Creating positions or spaces without the commitments to them only provides for a situation of add *Indians and stir,* one in which assimilation and conformity would be rife. True commitments to valuing Indigenous Knowledges would need to explicitly understand what Jacob 2017 articulated, "that we acknowledge we all have value as spiritual beings, and that our spirits

matter for the work we are doing in education, and all institutions" (p.6). Bringing this back again to youth in this study and their quest for these very real connections to place-based understandings and pedagogies. Districts commitments need to be flexible with a reality that while Indian Education will be provided through public school spaces it does not need to be dedicated to the same standards.

Another priority at the district level, would be to understand and develop a plan to create courses of study in which Indigenous youth be provided school credits for experiential learning in the land. Youth in this study created their own spaces in their communities, schools, and homes for learning to occur. I believe as an administrator, districts can partner with community members and current Indigenous staff to allow for Indigenous models of teaching and learning to occur thus creating an example of decolonization and resistance to the values of Western culture (Simpson, 2014; Ward & Braudt, 2015). Creating spaces that reflect Indigenous pedagogies and praxis is important for Wellness. The work that youth engage in needs to hold value to them and their own Indigenous communities, creating pathways for youth to be in absentia of a physical school building but still being accounted for as "in-school" while they are learning from elders in remote places. Again, this type of work is not a one person work around and needs to be created with the foundation of an "Indigenous educational framework" (Jacob, 2017, p.7) In school districts across the nation there is capacity to build relationships with the sovereign Nations that have historical and current ties to the land in which those districts now occupy. Shifting the focus away from settler-colonial logics in education to what scholars critical of our current US educational system call for a major change in education (Collins, 2009;Jacob, 2017) to as Jacob (2017) states "…education should teach us to be *real human beings*" (pg. 5).

At the school level support for Indigenous Educators has to come from district, building and community levels. Participants in this study discussed their connections with Indigenous educators and the role that they play in "Indigenous cultural survivance" (Jacob et al., 2019; Sabzalian, 2019). Listening to what the youth from this study stated as a guide, it is critical to understand that there needs to be some very tangible actionable moves made to support Indigenous Educators in public schools. In some of the instances it was clear that there was a multitude of roles that were played by the Indigenous Educators that youth in this study discussed. Supports that are provided to Indigenous Educators needs to be relevant to their specific needs in supporting Indigenous children, youth and families. Supports to Indigenous should be provided at multiple levels of district leadership from district office supports, to inbuilding supports and voice of Indigenous Educators as to the support they need should be the starting point.

Teaching and learning should be a reciprocal endeavor and youth in this study highlighted that as connections to positive adults in schools and community were important. As adults provided opportunities for disruption of the everyday dichotomous teacher imparts knowledge to the student (who is an empty vessel) scenarios at public school. This Wellness interaction piece provided moments in which adults listened and learned from the youth participants. Prioritizing this reflexive teaching and learning process would benefit youth and create true connections to schooling that is not predicated on standards based quick paced instruction. Instruction would be centered on "being a human being" re-centering the commitments to youth that education and Wellness is truly for them. Utilizing a strengths-based/ desire-based (Tuck, 2009)

The participants of this study also showed that there are many ways to support community and peers all while in the process building community. One of those core aspects was the utilization of the NASU organization which provides a place for youth in school to come together and rely on each other, and provides Indigenous youth with cultural opportunities and school-based ones. While working within a typical school day are there opportunities for Wellness and healing related activities to occur in which Indigenous youth are provided with Indigenous Education and not made to choose between Western academic values (individualism, standardization and acculturalization) and Indigenous learning? Indigenous youth from this study were constantly thinking about community and wanting to build community that would provide a sense of belonging within a school building. From this we can hear youth again refusing the settler logics and wanting to be welcomed with one another. Youth know that the spaces that are created for them are disingenuous to Indigenous education, but are still looking for ways to create that connection. Findings indicated that while youth struggled to create community in these students run organizations that there were still tremendous benefits in going especially in regard to identity building. The identity that is being built in these spaces should have at its core the values of not only Indigenous youth but also their communities creating ties to elders and families.

This strengthening of ties in your school community or any community is Wellness (Gould et al., 2021; Jennings & Lowe, 2013; Kirmayer et al., 2003; MacDonald et al., 2013) These acts of refusal (Simpson, 2014) and survivance (Sabzalian, 2019) will create powerful momentum for Indigenous youth with an opportunities to engage in self-determination, empowerment, re-connection in Indian Education that is meaningful to them as they become

nation builders and future leaders. The actionable processes need to occur for these spaces not to simply be an "additive" space for youth and call it good.

Implications for research. This study was done with a small ample size in one region, I do think that future research should examine this issue with a broader number of youths from different communities to better understand how Wellness and cultural connectedness are exemplars for Indigenous youth success in a community driven context. This means that while the youth in this study have provided examples throughout this study of what they need, it may not be reflective of other communities. In the future it might also be interesting to understand how these regional differences are seen throughout varying levels of settler-colonial logics (Davis-Delano et al., 2021; Dickerson et al., 2019). Research is often driven by larger numbers to replicate studies and their findings; however, I think that future research should be concerned with the representations that arise from regional areas rather than looking for a generalizable replication of youth's voice.

Another really valuable thing from this research was youth voice. Hearing directly from youth, would benefit other researchers to use techniques to illicit youth voice. Further understandings from youth and in regional areas such as the Pacific Northwest can assist research, inform policy, and teaching and learning practices. Youth voice is not a novel area of research in general, however considerable attention can be applied when in particular research agendas continue to marginalize and frame Indigenous youth as damaged (Tuck, 2009). From this study we see the desires and strengths of individual youth tribal members, as the strengths and desires of the Indigenous Nations, communities and families they come from.
Finally, participants in this study also discussed the possibility of an Indigenous language being taught at their school, while this need is important, spaces need to be created for this to occur.

Spaces within public schools are critical, however, research should also think about where and with who Indigenous youth are comfortable learning Indigenous languages. A placed-based "Land is pedagogy" (Simpson, 2014) learning setting would provide optimal learning of language rather than a classroom where again settler logics could unintentionally seep into the learning (i.e. rather than learning about the importance of medicinal plants and the teachings in the Land, student might be relegated to learning this is a pen or a whiteboard in their languages) of Indigenous youth.

Limitations

The study limitations that are important to recognize here are the small sample size, as it will not reflect all Indigenous youth's perspective on the phenomena in whole as a homogenous group as the US has 576 Federally Recognized Nations. These youth made up a total of 5 of those Nations. A purposeful selection of participants (a tenant of IPA) were selected to share their "lived experiences" with the phenomena (ie Wellness of Indigenous youth who live in a city), it can be assumed that findings youth shared in this study do not include an expansive, inclusive range of voices from youth who may not be as into culture and language, and who would have their own lived experiences with within Wellness, their community and with their families. Second, this study was also conducted with youth mostly from Western Oregon urban areas. These places have fairly small populations of Indigenous community members that work and live with a greater community that is heavily white and in Eugene more liberal than other parts of the state or the US. This would again be another reason as to why these results would not be reflective of a national level of inquiry. A third limitation came from the findings in that none of these youth provided examples of Indigenous language in their photovoice projects, that is to say that youth did not describe their photos with their language, did not mention tribal

community place with an Indigenous place name, and did not discuss any significant understanding of their photos with Indigenous language. This limitation could have been due to the question prompts provided to the youth for their Photovoice projects as the questions for the focus groups di ask explicitly about Indigenous language use.

Conclusion

This section provided a dialogue of the findings, recommendations, limitations, and conclusion. Findings in this dissertation show the lived experiences of seven Indigenous youth living in Western Oregon. This study offers an account of what Indigenous youth understand about their cultural connections and Wellness. Youth provided many accounts of refusal to current processes of settler-colonial processes of erasure.

Furthermore, this research offers a possibility of extending and developing RWV and Cultural Connectedness as a frame for working towards Wellness with youth within public schools. Focusing on desires of youth and utilizing Indigenous possibilities and frameworks to education (Jacob, 2017) work can be done in schools and communities that prioritize Indigenous Knowledges and Intelligence (Simpson, 2014). Focusing on the approach to Wellness as opposed to framework, therefore using decolonizing and Indigenous Pedagogies to work within schools and community.

As the youth provided examples of this in their openness about living with intersecting identities of social and racial lines. The purpose of this study was s to understand cultural connectedness as an influence on the resiliency or protective factors of AI/ AN youth who live in urban areas and public schools. The encounters that these participants had along with the role that culture played in providing successful and healthy ways for them to be involved in their communities. The findings in this study support important implications for creating spaces and

support within schools to allow for nation building and mentorship to occur. This is just one study with Indigenous youth and efforts were made to truly capture what they were saying, this is important to hear youth voices and responds accordingly. It is imperative to generate more research to understand the social and economic factors affecting the success of the Indigenous populations in other settings. By studying the values associated within different Indigenous communities, there may be implications that can assist educators and community members to work cohesively to address the often inadequate educational and health outcomes for Indigenous youth. This research suggests that Indigenous youth have a holistic and encompassing understanding of Wellness, and are aware of the benefits of being a culturally connected youth.

APPENDIX A

PARENT INFORMED CONSENT/ YOUTH INFORMED ASSENT

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Informed Consent: Parent/ Guardian Permission Form; What is Indigenous Wellness? Perspectives from Indigenous Youth

Introduction

- The purpose of this research study is to gain an in depth understanding of the experiences of Indigenous youth in high school to better understand access to Wellness. The term Wellness that is used in this study should be understood as not a static place, rather a movement towards being well, multidimensional with an emphasis on a balance of four aspects of a person's being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (Peltier, et al. 2019). These four aspects are often represented as quadrants of a Medicine Wheel (Pond, 1996) or the Relational Worldview (Cross. 1999) and have been used as a guide for understanding wellness (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Peltier, 2015) through Indigenous ways of healing through culture, ceremony, body-centered, and land-based approaches.
- Your child is being asked to be in a research study of how Indigenous Youth understand their Wellness (a holistic view of health). We will be discussing specifically, (a) How youth express their understanding of Wellness through cultural connectedness (e.g. values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality); (b) What experiences do Indigenous Youth have that they believe contribute to their own cultural connections (e.g. values, beliefs, ways of knowing, language, spirituality); and (c) How do Indigenous youth express their Wellness through cultural connectedness in terms of popular culture?
- Your child was selected as a possible participant because they were known to be a potential participant from a local school program.

Description of the Study Procedures:

- If your child participates, they will attend two online focus groups and complete a photo taking activity. I anticipate it will take approximately 60 minutes but could potentially go to 90 minutes in duration for each online focus group. The photo taking activity can be completed within two weeks of the first focus group and can be done at the leisure of your child.
- If you and your child indicate on this form that I may contact your child if I have questions about their responses, I may contact them. This follow up would take approximately 10-20 minutes.
- Your child, with your permission, has the option of being fully acknowledged by name for their contribution to materials that will come from this project. If they choose to not to be acknowledged by name, their name will not be associated or stored with collected materials or used in any resulting publications.

Risks/Discomforts of Being in the Study:

- The study has the following risks: First, there are risks related to loss of privacy. Some of the information collected in the focus group may be sufficient to identify your child to others who know them or about their experiences. I will take efforts to minimize risk by removing names from project materials prior to analyzing the data and by securing all project materials in locked areas and/or password protected computers and server.
- Second, if they become tired or uncomfortable, your child may stop at any time, as participation is entirely voluntary at any point of the research.
- Last, there is always a possibility of confidentiality being breached due to the nature of being in a focus group. This may occur if other participants disclose information that is shared in the group. I will take efforts to minimize this risk during the first part of the focus group, by asking participants to honor each other's confidentiality.
- There are no additional reasonably expected risks. This study may include risks that are unknown at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

- The project may benefit our broader society in that it is intended to inform educational policy and practice, address inequality in health and education, and positively impact the social and educational experiences, classrooms and schools of students.
- A benefit to your child may be that they learn about the research process and the results, which will be shared. They may feel a benefit in being able to contribute to a study that could improve health and educational policy and practice.

Compensation and costs:

- Participants will be compensated for your participation ($30 online gift card).
- Compensation will not be prorated and only provided at the completion of both online focus groups.
- There is no cost to you to participate in this research study.

Confidentiality:

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report, I may publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a participant, unless you give me permission below to use your child's name, and your child also gives assent. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- I may quote your child directly in publications and presentations.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password protected file.
- Access to the records will be limited to the researcher; however, please note that the Institutional Review Board and internal University of Oregon auditors may review the research records.

What will happen to the focus group responses?

- All records of the interview (i.e., video/audio recordings, field notes, photographs) will be destroyed after the project is completed. During the project the files with focus group responses will be coded and secured using a password protected file.
- I will use this data to for completion of my dissertation requirements, presentations and articles that will be publicly shared. I may use results in teaching or classroom contexts.
- Data may be deidentified from private information and after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.

Voluntary Participation/Withdrawal:

- Your child's participation is voluntary. If they choose not to participate, or if you do not give your permissions, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- Your child is free to withdraw at any time, for whatever reason.

We will protect your confidentiality to the best of our ability and will not share any information collected with any other organization not involved with this research. Access to the records will be limited to the researchers in this study. The only exception to this is if we suspect imminent harm to your child or others. The research team includes individuals who are mandatory reporters. If the research team has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a child or adult, a report may be required under Oregon State Law. In such a case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information

Contacts and Questions:
If you have any questions regarding this project, you may contact Hobie Blackhorn (541) 214-6232 or via email at hobieb@uoregon.edu at the University of Oregon. If you have any questions about your rights to participate in the study, call the Human Subjects Compliance Office at the University of Oregon, (541) 346-2510. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.
By signing this form, you indicate that you have read and understand the information provided above, that you willingly agree to your child's participation, that you may withdraw your consent at any time and discontinue participation without penalty, that you have received a copy of this form, and that you are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies.

Being identified by Name:
- If my child also assents, I would like my child to be acknowledged by name in any publication that results from this project.
  __yes

  __no

Print Parent/Guardian Name_____

Parent/Guardian Signature_____

Date_____ Child's Name _____

UNIVERSITY OF OREGON

Informed Assent: Student Focus Group Form; What is Indigenous Wellness? Perspectives from Indigenous Youth.

The purpose of this research study is to gain an in depth understanding of the experiences of Indigenous youth in high school to better understand access to Wellness. The term "Wellness" that is used in this study should be understood as not a static place, rather a movement towards being well, multidimensional with an emphasis on a balance of four aspects of a person's being: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual (Peltier, et al. 2019). These four aspects are often represented as quadrants of a Medicine Wheel (Pond, 1996) or the Relational Worldview (Cross. 1999) and have been used as a guide for understanding wellness (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009; Peltier, 2015) through Indigenous ways of healing through culture, ceremony, body-centered, and land-based approaches.

You were selected as a possible participant because you have identified as an Indigenous person to a school personnel or local organization. I would like you to participate in an online focus group to learn about your experiences in high school identifying as an Indigenous person and how you realize Wellness. The questions I will ask will be about your identity and your experiences in culture, community, Indigenous language use, or any other relevant values that you know contributes to health and Wellness. Additionally, you will be asked to use your own camera (digital) you to take photos of things in that represent your experiences with Wellness.

- Your participation is voluntary. You can choose to participate in this study or not. You are also free to stop your involvement in the project at any time.
- There are minimal risks for participating. Some of the questions we will ask are of a personal nature. You do not have to answer any questions that make you uncomfortable.
- I will interview you in an online focus group, two times over 3 weeks. Expected to last 60 minutes but may last as long as 90 minutes for a total time of 180 minutes.
- I will video/audio record our online focus group sessions. You will be asked not to use your name (unless you give consent to use) or to use a pseudonym to safeguard confidentiality.
- All records of the interview (i.e., video/audio recordings, field notes, photographs) will be destroyed after the project is completed. Therefore, there is a minimal risk of a loss of confidentiality.
- When I write up what we learn from talking with you, I will remove your real name to keep your identity private. If you decide to give permission to use your name and tribal affiliation I will use them in the write up.
- Data from this study will be deidentified from private information and after such removal, the information could be used for future research studies or distributed to another investigator for future research studies without additional informed consent from the subject or the legally authorized representative.
- There is always the possibility that information could be lost or stolen and confidentiality could be breached, which could pose social risks (e.g. social stigma, chance of being ostracized or rejected).

- There is always a possibility of confidentiality being breached due to the nature of being in a focus group. This may occur if other participants disclose information that is shared in the group. I will take efforts to minimize this risk during the first part of the focus group, by asking participants to honor each other's confidentiality.
- Participation in the study may raise a minimal psychological or emotional risk related to answering questions in the interviews (e.g., you could feel embarrassment, stress talking about yourself, triggering of past emotional experiences).
- Your relationship with the UO and /or organization you were recruited from will not be impacted by your choice to participate or not.
- There are no anticipated costs to participate in this study and no alternatives to participation.
- While you may not benefit individually from participating in this study, it is important that you know you are providing input that will potentially have educational impacts for other youth who also identify as being Indigenous.
- You will be provided with compensation in the form of a $30.00 online gift card for participating in the two online focus groups. All online focus groups must be completed to receive payment. Compensation will not be prorated and only provided at the completion of both online focus groups.
- You will be provided with a copy of this form.

Being identified by Name:

- Would you like to be acknowledged by name in any publication that results from this project?

__yes

__no

We will protect your confidentiality to the best of our ability and will not share any information collected with your parents or any organization involved with this research. Access to the records will be limited to the researchers in this study. The only exception to this is if we suspect imminent harm to yourself or others. The research team includes individuals who are mandatory reporters. If the research team has reasonable cause to suspect abuse or neglect of a child or adult, a report may be required under Oregon State Law. In such a case, the research team may be obligated to breach confidentiality and may be required to disclose personal information.

If you have any questions regarding this project, you may contact Hobie Blackhorn (541) 214-6232 or via email at hobieb@uoregon.edu at the University of Oregon. If you have any questions about your rights to participate in the study, call the Human Subjects Compliance Office at the University of Oregon, (541) 346-2510. You will be given a copy of this form to keep.

By signing this form, you indicate that you (a) have read and understand all of these points, (b) are willing to participate, (c) understand that your participation is voluntary, (d) can choose to stop your participation at any time, (e) have received a copy of this form, and (f) are not giving up any legal rights or claims.

_____ _____

Name (Please print) Signature

_____

Date

APPENDIX B

FOCUS GROUP GUIDE

Focus Group Guide
Date_____/_____/_____Location: _____
Script

Welcome and thank you for your participation today.
My name is Hobie Blackhorn,
I will be leading the online focus group.

What: We are here today to talk about experiences with health, healing, Wellness as a Native American Indigenous youth and what are your cultural values.

Why: If we are to increase health and education equity along with well-being in all communities, we must elevate and amplify the voices of Native American / Indigenous Youth. The purpose of these sessions is to gain an understanding of your perceptions on Wellness and your values in order to increase Wellness in Native American communities. The information gathered from these sessions will be used to better understand an Indigenous Youth's culturally responsive perceptions about health, healing, Wellness and better understand how Indigenous cultural values are important in doing so.

How: We will start the group Q and A after that we will discuss next steps in the study, photovoice activity and the final online focus group. It should take about 60-90 minutes.

Then we will close the circle, pass out a photovoice protocol, and ask that we set a date for the second session, to be held in about 2 weeks (DATES TBD). The second session will be to discuss your photographs and hear from *you individually* but as a group.
Last, we would like to keep in contact with you to share out what we will potentially write up about our focus groups, in order to make sure we captured your experiences and thoughts accurately, and to share as a community once again.

Focus Group

Let's start with a few ground rules that will help this be a safe space to share.

Ground Rules: (Facilitator: _____)
1. If at any time you wish to stop your involvement, please let us know. All of your responses are confidential. And, there are no right or wrong answers; we are just looking for your experiences and ideas about the topics to be covered in this focus group.

2. I pledge to you that your information will be kept private. Your name will not be used in any of the analyzing or reporting of the information shared, unless you want your name or Tribal affiliation shared.

3. As a participant each of you agree to keep the information shared today within this circle and this space. We all agree to not talk about what each other has shared.

4. Do you have any questions or concerns before we begin? Then with your permission we will begin the focus group session.

Focus Group Questions

We will now move into the questions for the listening session, I would like to hear from as many people as possible and have about 60 minutes. I know there is no way to accurately capture all your experiences in this time; I will try our best. Think about, "What are some of the important ways these principles and values shape you as a Native American person?"

Relational Worldview Quadrant	**Wellness Related Questions for Focus Group**
Context **-Community/Place** **-Culture** **-Language**	(1) Tell me something about your family and where you grew up? (a) Have you always lived in this community? (b) Did you move here/there from another urban community or your home-reservation community? *Trying to figure out where they come from and how they know where they come from…* (2) How has the current pandemic (Covid-19) affected your communities that you represent?
Mind **-Intellect** **-Knowledges and judgement** **-Language**	(3) What are some family Cultural traditions that you do? (a)Have these family traditions been disrupted or adapted due to the pandemic (Covid-19) (3) How does your family speak or use your Tribal language? (a) Are any people in your family fluent in your tribal language? (4) What are the connections to your language/ or ability to learn it that you access? (a) What are some Native language activities that connect you to your community?
Body **-Nutrition** **-Healthy living (activity)** **-Sustenance hunting/ harvesting** **-Language**	(5) Let's talk about involvement in specific cultural activities that you are active in, can you describe to us how you feel when you are connected to these activities? (Activities can range from Physical domain: Hunting, fishing, to running; to the Spiritual domain, etc)

(a) What locally, are community-chosen activities that culturally supports Wellness?

Spirit
-Protecting factors
-Spiritual teachings
-Language

(6) What are some of your current sources of strength when you have to deal with stress?

(a) Do these sources of strength help to enhance or increase traditional knowledge that supports traditional and contemporary physical activities at home, school and within your community?

(7) How do you cope with stress? (Do seek guidance from elders, family members, or others?) (a) Are you able to do any of these things right now due to the current pandemic?

(8) Are you able to make connections to place in an urban area? (a) Do you, your family, friends or community members go and gather, raise, harvest, produce, or preserve traditional healthy foods (or items for traditional makings)?

(9) Looking back on your own experiences, how would you advise youth who may be struggling with living in an urban area without a lot of other Indigenous people around them at once?

Looking at the list of principles or values, what are the feelings you would attach to them?

Is there a way that we can take these principles and values and as a group create an image or diagram that represents their importance, vs. a list of bulleted words?

Open and Final Questions: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Close: To close, what is a word of gratitude you would like to share with the group?

Direct specific questions regarding the research project, to Hobie Blackhorn (hobieb@uoregon.edu)

APPENDIX C

WHAT DO I TAKE PICTURE OF?

WHAT DO I TAKE PICTURES OF?

Photovoice is your chance to share your ideas about where you live and how you live.

Let's get started:

- Use your phone camera or another digital camera to take pictures of things you associate with Wellness in your community or around your house.
- Take pictures of what is important to you, big parts of your life, take pictures of objects, possessions, services and places.

- Do not take pictures of individual or groups of people, as we would like to focus the pictures on non-human items (community or spiritual places, physical activities, etc).

- Please take 10 photographs.
  -Once you have taken pictures with your phone or other digital camera please email or text the pictures to me.

- Please know, that if any of the photographs contain any inappropriate images, they will be destroyed immediately.

- If you have any questions, please ask.

APPENDIX D

PHOTOVOICE REFLECTION

PhotoVoice Group Reflection

At the start of our focus groups I asked each of you to take photos of things in your community that showed your understanding of Wellness. Today we are going to look at the photographs you took and ask you to reflect on them. You are encouraged to talk freely and openly about the pictures you took.

Probes (in no specific order):

- Tell me more about this photograph.
- You took a photograph of _____ tell me how this connects to your identity or experiences?
- I am interested to know more about this photograph of _____ can you tell me what you were thinking/feeling when you took this photograph?
- Does this photograph connect with some values or cultural teachings? (ie. Indigenous language, important/ sacred place)
- Does this photograph connect with Wellness?

End of photo reflection Debriefing:

Now, I will describe to the group what I think I have heard about your photo reflections and perspectives, and I want you to tell me what you think of my interpretation.

1. This is how I heard what you said:
2. What do you think about my interpretation of your experiences and perspectives?
3. Would you like to elaborate on your previous comments?
4. Is there anything that you think I have missed that would be important?

Thank you so much for participating in this photo reflection and the focus groups. Your contributions have been very helpful. Please keep a copy of the informed consent so you have my contact information. Let me know if you have any more questions or comments.

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