
Do My Braids Look Different? Indigenous Identity in Archaeology

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ABSTRACT. This article is a narrative of the challenges I have experienced as a white-passing Indigenous scholar. I discuss my conscious decision to conceal my Indigenous heritage during my undergraduate education due to subtle and overt forms of marginalization. I also examine the role of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and some community engagement experiences that inspired me to proudly divulge my Indigenous identity during my graduate career. My personal narrative highlights some of the issues that exist for Indigenous peoples studying in a colonial setting. I share how I have coped with these challenges by engaging with my culture, and the Indigenous teachings I have received. It is my hope that my **Truth** will encourage fellow archaeologists to reflect on their own experiences of marginalization, complacency, and/or culpability so that we can work together and move toward **Reconciliation** in a *good way*.

RÉSUMÉ. Cet article est un récit des défis que j'ai rencontrés en tant qu'universitaire indigène pouvant passer pour une Caucasienne. Je discute de ma décision consciente de cacher mon héritage indigène pendant mes études de premier cycle en raison de formes subtiles et manifestes de marginalisation. J'examine également le rôle de la Commission de vérité et réconciliation et certaines expériences d'engagement communautaire qui m'ont inspiré à divulguer fièrement mon identité indigène pendant mes études aux cycles supérieurs. Mon récit personnel met en évidence certains des problèmes qui existent pour les peuples indigènes qui étudient dans un contexte colonial. Je partage

comment j'ai fait face à ces défis en m'engageant dans ma culture et les enseignements indigènes que j'ai reçus. J'espère que ma **vérité** encouragera mes collègues archéologues à réfléchir sur leurs propres expériences de marginalisation, de complaisance ou de culpabilité afin que nous puissions travailler ensemble et progresser vers la **réconciliation** de la *bonne façon*.

My Story

This is my story; my experiences as a white-passing Indigenous scholar studying and practising archaeology. I hope that sharing my experiences from this perspective will encourage other archaeologists to reflect on their own experiences and reconciliation efforts. Engaging with archaeology and speaking my truth is also part of my healing journey. So, while this narrative may not seem archaeologically relevant at times, I ask that you see these instances as bearing witness to build relationships (Wilson 2009), which is an important element of reconciliation. This article focuses on truthfulness, even if those truths are uncomfortable or unsettling and, in some cases, precisely because they are unsettling (upsetting or challenging) and un-settling (moves toward

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personal decolonization). It also focuses on practical utility by exploring how I approach Indigenizing archaeology, and I answer a question I am often asked: “What does Truth and Reconciliation mean to you?” I close with a series of suggestions for people wanting to know more about how they can help and/or be an ally to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis, in an archaeological setting or otherwise. Most importantly though, this article is about adding to the space that has been created for other Indigenous archaeologists (Nicholas 2010). I hope that by being open about my challenges, other Indigenous students of archaeology can feel less isolated and misunderstood, and more comfortable and confident with expressing their voice and their truths.

In February of 2017, I received an email from a friend and colleague who thought I may be interested in participating in the “Unsettling Archaeology” session organized by Dr. Lisa Hodgetts (University of Western Ontario) and Dr. Laura Kelvin (Memorial University) for the upcoming Canadian Archaeological Association Annual Meeting, and they were right. Participating in Truth and Reconciliation is an important focus of mine and speaking/writing my truth helps me to decolonize or un-settle my thoughts and actions. So, when I read the session abstract, I knew what I had to contribute, as I have been writing this paper since 2013. That is when, against my many fears, I decided to publicly acknowledge my Indigenous identity in academia. While a few close friends were aware, I never mentioned this part of my life in a professional setting.

To give you a little background, I am of mixed Indigenous and settler ancestry. While my skin is white, my maternal family represents the epitome of colonial

impacts on Indigenous families now struggling to cope with intergenerational trauma. While it is difficult to put together the whole story, my grandfather, Ammie Bernard Jost, was placed in an orphanage and/or residential school from infancy. When my grandfather tried to research his past, he found that the orphanage and/or school had burned down, and with it any clues as to his specific Nation affiliation. However, as a result of the systems of racism engrained in Canadian culture and government as a product of settler colonialism (Wolfe 2006), I was still able to experience the harassment that comes from looking Indigenous, or in my case, being related to people who do. It was not until I wrote this paper and received reviews that I understood the depths of my internalized colonization (David and Derthick 2014).

My Whiteness

Before I get further into my history though, I would first like to discuss my whiteness (Figure 1), as that has shaped a large part of my experience. By acknowledging my white-skin privilege, I honour and recognize the past and present struggles of my ancestors, communities, and family. While not all my privilege is derived from my fair skin, the most important privilege has involved not being discriminated against because of my skin colour. This means I have not been subjected to innumerable daily micro-aggressions as a result of my complexion. Security does not follow me as a thief in a store unless I project my Indigenous identity or appear poor that day, but I get to choose whether I look that way; my sister Debbie does not. It means that healthcare professionals do not assume I have come to the emergency room to try to get prescription narcotics. It also means that I do not have to insist



FIGURE 1. My school photo from grade two. I was the only person in my immediate family with blonde hair and hazel eyes.

that I am not Lebanese, Persian, Egyptian, Mexican, etc., on a regular basis.

My fair complexion has meant that I get to be an anonymous female citizen pretty much any time I want. This made it easier for me to get a high paying service job that enabled me to pay for a university education. This also meant that when an Indigenous topic was brought up in class, I was not the one that everybody looked to for a response. While it is uncomfortable at first to “check” or acknowledge your privilege, especially if you have had a challenging life, it gets easier with time. Doing so has afforded me the perspective needed to be grateful for all that I have been given. And while being the whitest or most European looking person in my family was a challenge, it was much more difficult for my sister who has the darkest

skin in my family and visibly presents as Indigenous. Growing up in a diverse city like Toronto made it easy to be colour-blind at a young age, and it was not until I was older and away from my family that I realized that life could be easier.

The Undergraduate Years

When I first went to college, I studied fashion techniques and design. It was at this point that I made a conscious decision to not refer to my Indigeneity at work or school. I rejected the designs and techniques that my mother exposed me to (specifically beading) for anything new and not traditional. Like many young people, I came to think of my family’s ways as dated and not relevant to life today. In college, it was easy to get lost in the work because now my background was finally anonymous, and I was no longer compelled to define or defend my cultural identity. I was going to achieve success with no labels attached and on the merits of my work. I had never heard of internalized oppression or internalized colonization, and I was not aware that this was causing me to be biased against my cultural expressions (David and Derthick 2014).

When I decided to go back to school for archaeology, I continued to conceal my background to some degree. While I never lied, I never shared much information about my past beyond artistic and academic accomplishments. At the time, my sister was living with me so I knew this concealment might be tricky. My sisters have long embraced our Indigenous heritage even without knowing our Nation, often expressing and exploring their roots through their art (Figures 2 and 3). So, when I would come home from class, I was careful not to discuss too much about the Canadian history I was learning. If I did, I would



FIGURE 2. My eldest sister Dawn Desmarais on the cover of her second album *Uprooted*.



FIGURE 3. My middle sister Debbie Desmarais posing with her painting of Chippewa Chief Ne-bah-quah-om which was part of her *Are You My Father?* art installation.

inevitably be greeted with an earful of the Canadian *counter*-history from my sister, which was actually the history she learned from oral teachings. I suspected there was truth in what she said, but it was not going to help me answer test questions in my “Intro to Anthropology” course. I also thought, “Does everything

have to be so political?” I had a taste of anonymous white identity and I loved how easy it was! “Besides, we’re not really Native ... are we?” I would say.

Once I completed the first year of school, my sister moved west to be with my other sister. I was now free to hide in my whiteness once again. “Just don’t wear braids,” I told myself, “and no one will notice.” I always thought that if I wore my braids people would know or suspect that I was Indigenous, and then the questions would start. However, being in anthropology and specifically archaeology, concealing my identity would prove to be fairly challenging. If I kept my mouth shut, I would be okay; a strategy that worked for my undergraduate years, but it was difficult.

One of the challenges I faced involved being in Hunter-Gatherer class and realizing that the discussion at hand related to me, to my history. This, in turn, led me to question whether this history was really mine, exacerbating my already ample anxieties over personal identity. By the time I was 28, I had moved 47 times in my life. I wondered,

Are most people really that lucky to stay in one place for so long? Am I the only one here who sees themselves in the definition of hunter-gatherer that is being discussed? Why do they assume people in the city don’t live like this?

I dared not share those thoughts back then, for fear of sounding like my sister and having no one take me seriously; something both of my sisters have struggled with enormously as strong, outspoken Indigenous women. They might have stated how assumptions about who is a hunter-gatherer can marginalize people in the classroom. At the time,

I saw their approach as a reflection of being “too sensitive”. Why could they not recognize that everyone has struggles, and learn to get along without making people uncomfortable? I have come to understand that they were further along with decolonizing themselves, had different experiences than me, and would no longer tolerate marginalization.

Another example is when I sat in the introductory class for archaeology and there was a young Anishinaabe man, Michael White, speaking up about the erasure of Native history from the textbooks. “Oh no here we go again,” I thought, and “I know he has a valid point but now is not the time. We’re trying to learn here!” I did not realize that *now* was the exact right time to learn these things. I later became friends with Michael, and we shared our first archaeological field experience together working at a few Tsimshian sites in Prince Rupert Harbour, British Columbia. It was the kind of summer fieldwork experience that brought the crew together like a family, and as happens among many families, Michael and I would passionately debate current events, and Indigenous issues, specifically. I would say,

Why not celebrate Canada Day?
We are all lucky to be part of this amazing country. Why does everything have to be so political? What do you mean I’m not really Indigenous if I don’t speak my language?

This last one really got me. How could I speak my language if I did not know who I was? These debates challenged my complacency on what was really happening in our society for centuries, something I was not ready for. I still believed that I would learn the truth about the past through archaeology. I still believed that

if I did not have proof of my heritage, if I did not know my Nation, or did not have a status card, I was not really Native. It did not matter that my sisters had a different experience, they were just too sensitive. I knew that I was going to deal with these things at some point, but not now. “I’ve got class,” I thought, and class was amazing!

For the second time in my life I could focus on learning instead of surviving. I had a great job serving rich people. My apartment was just off-campus so I could walk to class. And I lived in this home for six years, which far exceeded the duration of any previous address. I was one of the lucky ones. I also had a lot of support at school. The doors of my professors were always open. They encouraged creative approaches and experimentation with archaeology (Figure 4). As well, there were many student groups which I became part of, and I found a community where I could grow. I also received a great tip from Dr. Trevor Orchard, who was a graduate student at the time. He encouraged me to apply for any award I could, because they would help me get bigger awards in the future. So, I did. Well, I applied for most awards. I never applied for a single Indigenous award or scholarship because I was too afraid to associate myself with an Indigenous free education. I thought,

I want to get my awards and scholarships on my merits, not because someone pitied me or gave me a free ride. Plus, I have white skin, so I don’t count for these awards because they’re only for people who look Indigenous or have status cards.

I had heard how non-Indigenous people spoke about the myth of free education



FIGURE 4. The results of my first experimentation with Arctic skin clothing patterns and production for an undergraduate Arctic archaeology course.

and assumed Indigenous students only get their spot because of some form of affirmative action. I should emphasize here, this is not how I currently feel. Trust me, no one is giving an Indigenous person a free ride. Besides the added emotional labour involved with undertaking studies in a marginalizing and repressive colonial institution (Deloria 2004), there are also financial costs that are not covered, regardless of the myth of free Indigenous education (Usher 2009). If the government was successful in separating an Indigenous person or family from their culture, and they therefore do not have a status card, education costs are not covered at all. Even with a status card, only some people receive some funding from their band, because, in reality, there is not even close to enough money to cover the post-secondary education costs of all prospective

and current Indigenous students (Usher 2009). During my undergraduate career, I did not know any of this, and I thought, “I am one of the lucky ones to have white skin,” never realizing that what I gained with white skin was far out-weighted by what I lost in having my culture stolen from me.

I also avoided engaging with the Indigenous community on campus and nearby. I was too frightened to become part of these spaces, as I did not have the strength to assert an identity I was so unsure of; an identity that would surely be challenged without my family there to validate me. Most of this avoidance was related to my fears of not being accepted without knowing my Nation, and not my actual experiences of marginalization within the Indigenous community. In reality, I was welcomed at the few Indigenous community events I attended, but

my internalized colonialization would not let me see this (David and Derthick 2014). So, during the big drum socials on Thursdays, I would stand outside of the Native Canadian Centre of Toronto and listen to the drumming from the street, never venturing inside except to pay my membership. At the time, I did not know that I was trying to receive the medicine of the drum and that there were others on the street doing the same.

I learned a great deal over the course of my undergraduate degree, and had many great experiences, but there were also many moments of confusion over terminology that conflicted with my understanding of the world. Hearing and reading terms like “New World”, “precontact”, and “prehistory” privileged a European perspective even though we were being taught that the Victorian ladder approach was how we *used to* think of cultures (Kuper 1988). If the world was only new to Europeans then why is everyone expected to refer to it as new? Why are we not saying pre-European contact if that is what we are referring to? Why are only some recorded histories seen as history and everything before that time is prehistory, when that diminishes the value of other histories? Can people not see that these words are insulting and limiting? By the end of my undergraduate, I had a therapist to help me process the confusion and experiences of marginalization in the academy and the shock of being surrounded with so much privilege.

Grad School

Following my undergraduate degree, I moved west to be with my sisters and undertake a Master’s. I was excited to be in Alberta, connected to so many of my roots and close to where my grandfather was born and grew up. I suspected that I might learn more about my family’s

past and grow as a result of that knowledge. What I did not expect, or rather forgot about, was that I could no longer be anonymous. I also did not expect to experience so much overt racism. But I was back with my sisters again and I was once again privy to their experiences. It was a struggle to watch them be so sure and unapologetic of who they were (Figures 5 and 6). I think I was envious, but I was proud of them as well. I also struggled with my previous strategy of keeping my mouth shut at school.

While completing my course requirements, I sometimes found it difficult to understand who the professors were talking about. I would encounter explanations about human behaviour that made me confused and uncomfortable. I would hear, “So, just like how *we* do this, *they* do this.” I thought, “Who is this *we* you speak of? Was I supposed to have had this experience? Why did they assume I wasn’t First Nations?” But all that came out was “Who is this ‘we’ you are referring to?” The professor replied, “WASPs, us... well except Tanya.” Tanya (not her real name) was the only visible minority in the class. I wanted to say who I was, but my voice froze and I wrote down the word “WASPs” as though it was an important note. It was a small victory for me to ask who he was talking about in hopes that he would realize he was making assumptions, but I knew I could do better. The tide was starting to turn for me. I was indeed engaging with who I was; my sisters would not let me do otherwise.

After processing this experience for a few weeks, I resolved to be ready the next time assumptions were being placed on me. So, when discussions about other cultures seemed to dismiss alternate worldviews, I suggested that their own worldviews were limiting their understanding of the culture.



FIGURE 5. Debbie participating in the “I Matter” campaign of the Marsha Meadows Foundation which raises awareness and funding to aid and assist women and youth at risk.



FIGURE 6. Dawn resting between performance sets. The markings on her face are a tattoo she had done acknowledging her connection to our heritage and honouring our ancestors, her Elders’ teachings, and her vision quest.

While you may consider only organisms that exchange gas of some sort, or grow and reproduce as a “living being”, other cultures and people such as myself believe

differently. For example, I believe that everything that moves is alive; and since everything moves on some level, then everything is alive. The air, the water, this table and even my pencil are alive.

When I finished my point, I suddenly got the feeling that I had sprouted two new heads on my shoulders because the silence and looks from my colleagues seemed to be of confused shock. I was lucky class ended because I was not sure what to think or do. I immediately went home to try and stop shaking. I knew speaking up would be difficult, but I did not know it would make my body react so intensely. Still, I spoke up.

This was also a time of great pain for my family, in part because the abuse my grandfather experienced in the residential school and subsequently perpetrated later in life was coming to light. As the youngest granddaughter with a mother working two jobs to support her three daughters, I spent a lot of my youth at my grandparents’ home. There were many evenings with my grandfather pouring over photo albums (Figures 7, 8, and 9), listening to stories of his travels north and working for the Hudson’s Bay Company as a mechanic on the SS Distributor and other Mackenzie River boats. He took many pictures and would talk for hours. But when the alcohol flowed, so did the recollections of his abuse. I bore witness to his pain and grieving, and I tried to comfort him as best I could. I did not know at the time that I was the only one who would carry those stories for him. He did not tell anybody else. It was only through later conversations when family members were complaining about my grandfather being abusive, that I said, “Well what do you expect with all the abuse he went through?” They



FIGURE 7 Scanned image of a sheet from one of my grandfather Ammie's photo albums documenting his time in the north during the 1930s. Clockwise from upper left: One of the planes my grandfather flew in while working throughout the north; view of a burning coal mine from the Mackenzie River; a Mackenzie River steamboat, the S.S. Distributor, where my grandfather was a mechanic; and an aerial view of Fort McMurray looking east.



FIGURE 8. Scanned image of sheet from one of Ammie’s photo albums documenting his time in the north during the 1930s. Clockwise from upper left: Planes parked on the north shore of Lake Athabasca; gear and supplies in the harbour in Yellowknife, NWT; the view from Cracklingstone Point on Lake Athabasca; an image of my grandfather twice in the same shot (he achieved this by opening the shutter while in one position and then opened it again after he moved over a step); and Ammie and one of his friends.



FIGURE 9. Scanned image of sheet from one of Ammie's photo albums documenting his time in the north during the 1930s. Top to bottom: The Hudson's Bay Company in Aklavik, NWT; Ramparts from the Mackenzie River, near Fort Good Hope, NT; and an image of the midnight sun and the moon moving across the sky while my grandfather was on the coast of the Beaufort Sea. He opened the shutter at regular intervals to capture the movement in a single photo.

paused, clearly puzzled, and replied, “What are you talking about, his adoptive family?” I replied, “Well yes, them, but also at the orphanage, or the school... I don’t know, the nuns and the priest.” It was then that I realized they did not know this part of his life. My grandfather was quite a storyteller and all of us would listen to his stories, often many times over, so we all knew most of them. For whatever reason, this part of his story he only shared with me.

All of these experiences combined to take a toll on my health, and I was unable to complete my degree. As is common among North American Indigenous people, I live with the many symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder (Bassett et al. 2014; Corrado and Cohen 2003; Shore et al. 2009). For a few years, I spent all my time devoted to my health and survival. In addition to my sisters, I am also fortunate to have a compassionate and loving partner and a few very good friends who helped me recover from the more critical health issues I was facing.

By 2012, I had recovered significantly, and I started working in cultural resource management. Luckily, I spent most of my time in the lab, so I did not have to deal with issues between my employer and different First Nations groups when they arose. Though I did inform my boss that it would be best not to put me in the field, as I would not continue to work if the First Nations groups called for a halt. I thought I was taking a stand but really, I just could not face it. I would not have worked if that was what the First Nations groups decided. But telling my boss not to put me there was not taking a stand, it was running away. Looking back, I have no issue with that complacent behaviour, as I still needed to survive and get back on my feet. I was not ready for that confrontation.

It was around this time my partner started working on The Memory, Meaning Making and Collections Project, which was originally developed to mobilize a unique collection of objects under the care of First Story Toronto, to investigate the impact of museum collections on memory and a range of community-based heritage initiatives (Krpmotich et al. 2015). I had attended a few communal feasts with the research group, and before I knew it, I was partaking in the sessions with the seniors and became a volunteer for the group. Participating in these events was having an effect on me, as I connected with many people in the community who had very similar experiences to my own. This was also a time when I started hearing about the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and that my grandfather’s experiences were not unique but had happened everywhere in Canada.

These two factors would have an enormous impact on my identity as I realized that my roots were severed by a system of physical and cultural genocide, and it almost worked! Like so many of my peers, I had become a self-hating Indian, or worse, an Indigenous ghost; all through colonial conditioning (David and Derthick 2014:8–9). This realization provided me with the fuel to take a stand. So, when I returned to university to complete my Master’s degree, I would no longer be silent about who I am or what my experience has been. I would no longer cater to the “nice” history that denies my pain, my heritage, and the attempted erasure of my people. It was going to be scary, but I knew I had to honour my ancestors.

Questions and Answers

I often refer to this time as my “coming out” period. While I had already been

comfortable with my LGBTQS2+ identity and never tried to conceal it, my Indigenous identity was new to many colleagues and even some friends, and understandably they had some questions. This expression of my cultural identity also meant that I now had to deal with people looking to me to provide an Indigenous perspective. I would now have to face all the questions and statements that made me feel marginalized. Questions and statements that I avoided as an undergraduate, such as:

- But you're not really Native, are you?
- What part Native?
- Are you status?
- What Nation?
- Why does everything have to be so political?
- You know you're white, don't you?

It was not until I started writing this paper that I realized these were all the same things I had said to my sisters. I kept quiet for so long because I was afraid of people like me! But when the TRC executive summary with calls to action was released in 2015 (Truth and Reconciliation Canada 2015), I no longer had to keep my grandfather's experiences a secret. And I was ready to answer questions, but on my terms. It is to honour my ancestors and my truth that I share with you what my answers are today.

- But you're not really Native, are you? "Yes. Yes, I am Indigenous. I may not know *who* I am, but I *know* who I am."
- What part Native? This is a tricky one because many non-Indigenous do not realize how marginalizing blood quantum approaches to identity can be (Schmidt 2011). Some-

times I say "this part" and refer to my right gluteal muscles, but most often I say,

unfortunately I do not know my Nation as my grandfather was separated from his family and the orphanage and residential school that he attended has burned down and any records of who his family may have been have been destroyed.

I say all of this because this is me not catering to the "nice history" anymore, and because it is important to acknowledge the truth of my family's experience. I also say all of this because I used to be afraid to say it. I have had to work hard to have the confidence to be who I am, and where I am from, without shame. This is very hard work sometimes, overcoming internalized colonialism (David and Derthick 2014:16–22).

- Are you status? While not always the same, I usually reply,

What a loaded question ... and no I do not have status under the Canadian government's regulations, but I participate and try to contribute to the community here in Toronto and in the Inuvialuit Settlement Region where I work. Even if my grandfather did have his birth records my mother would have lost her status by marrying my French Canadian father.

- What Nation? I answer this question in the same way I answer "what

part Native?” but I also may say that my grandfather was born in Montana and that his mother went back to Alberta after his birth. That shortly afterwards he was taken to a residential school and/or orphanage and never reunited with his family. I could be Blackfoot, Dene, Cree, Métis, or Sioux, but I follow the teachings of the land where I live. Most of these teachings are Anishinaabe. It wasn't until after I presented this as a talk, that one of my colleagues pointed out that my grandfather may have been from more than one community.

- Why does everything have to be so political? For this I currently have a few responses:

Because some people do not have that choice. Because we live in a systemically oppressive colonial society that thinks it is post-colonial [Heiss 2003] but in reality, it is a settler colonial society [Wolfe 2006]. Because I choose to not ignore the influence this society has on my fellow humans who do not have white skin. I guess because I finally started to wake up.

- You know you're white, don't you? “Yes, I have white skin and I have a lot of a white or settler experience, but that is not all of me.” Sometimes I also include,

my whole life has been about assimilating with white society because I was supposedly a part of it. But how can you feel part of a society that

does not acknowledge your family? How can you leave your family behind to be part of that society?

I have never been able to answer those questions.

For Indigenous identity on Turtle Island, I have learned from many different communities that it is not about who I claim to be but who claims me (Hart 2016) and therefore, what are my responsibilities? I can still do some important things even without being recognized as having a specific Nation. I can and do, Indigenize my archaeological content and experiences in the classroom, lab, field, and with publications such as this, by providing another truth, an *other* truth.

In the classroom, I have various approaches depending on my responsibilities as a teaching assistant. If I am to present material that has already been prepared, I will either provide a teaching before class begins or dedicate a minute to providing an alternate perspective of the course content (Cavender Wilson 2004:72–73). I often personalize these teachings as I have been taught by my Elders—designated community Elders (see Stielgelbauer 1996 for a better understanding of an Elder's role in the community)—and elders (those who are older and more experienced than me), being mindful of how traumatizing my story can be (Thorpe 2019). For example, on Orange Shirt Day I explain why I am wearing an orange shirt, what the history of Orange Shirt Day is, how the residential school system and other settler colonial initiatives are the reason why I do not have direct access to my past; then I provide resources if they want to learn more, all in the few minutes before class.

In preparation for when I get to decide course content in the academy, I have designed a course that focuses on my approach to researching clothing production and highlighting the production of Indigenous clothing in the territory where the course would be taught. I structured the course to allow for experimental archaeology and experiential learning in an attempt to bridge Indigenous and scientific ways of knowing (Aikenhead and Michell 2011). I am careful to identify knowledge that I carry and bring in community members to teach on knowledge I do not carry or do not have the right to teach.

This is how I conduct my research as well. I have been taught by my Elders and elders that the best way to learn about something is to experience it. This means that I must learn about sewing from the descendants of the sewers that I am trying to understand from the past. However, I am also taught by my Elders that some things are not meant for me to talk about, let alone take written notes of. Therefore, my participation in some of these events is something that changed my perspectives, but I have no right to talk about the teachings. These teachings are not there for me to extract information from. They have been shared with me for my personal understanding, often through trust that I will not exploit or profit from what I have learned.

To decolonize myself, I no longer hide when I smudge in the field and at conferences, and make sure all who want to participate are welcome. As well, I make a point of beginning and maintaining relationships in the community where I work. I do this by spending time having tea and visiting with people I have met and people who welcome me into their home or cultural centre.

In keeping with the teachings I have received, I am also responsible for sharing any gifts or talents I have with the community. Since I have extensive experience using, maintaining, and even (to some extent) fixing sewing machines, I have partnered with the Inuvialuit Cultural Centre to provide the “Sewing Machine Maintenance and Minor Repairs Workshop” that I designed to empower community members to fix their own machines when problems arise. In the seven workshops I have offered in the last two years, we have managed to save over a dozen sewing machines from the dump, and once I complete my PhD, I plan on touring the Inuvialuit Settlement Region to offer the workshop in more remote locations. While these workshops do not directly tie in with my PhD research studying clothing production in the archaeological record, they are part of my relationship building approach to conducting research (Wilson 2009).

Teachings and Learning

To cope with the challenges of being a white-passing Indigenous/settler scholar, I have been able to rely on my Elders and elders in the Toronto Indigenous community; my sisters, partner, and friends; and the teachings I have received over my years of healing. My eldest sister taught me the Seven Grandfather Teachings of Humility, Honesty, Respect, Courage, Wisdom, Truth, and Love (also known as the Seven Sacred Teachings [Bouchard and Martin 2009]) when I was young, but I just thought of them as more rules. I did not know how to engage with them when I did not feel like I belonged anywhere. If we did not know who we were, how could we follow Anishinaabe teachings? With guidance, however, I have come to understand that

these teachings are important, particularly given that I currently find myself living in Anishinaabe territory.

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to hear Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux speak about the use of narrative for healing and working towards reconciliation, which greatly inspired me to start learning how to tell my story. I have subsequently been inspired by her writings on narrative (Wesley-Esquimaux 2010), the Seven Grandfather Teachings, and PTSD in Indigenous communities (Wesley-Esquimaux 2008; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004), as well as her work with Indigenous youth. I am grateful to have her words which speak so loudly to me, and have helped me so much. It is to honour this inspiration and her work that I briefly share what these teachings have done for me.

They have helped me to find strength in **humility**, and pride in the **honesty** of being who I am. They have energized me to treat everyone and everything with **respect**, even when I am raging mad at injustices or political figures. They have reminded me of my **courage** and my ancestors' **courage** to continue even when I do not want to or even think I can. The teachings of **wisdom** help me to step back and see where I can use my gifts and the teachings of **truth** help me to focus on peace and a way forward to benefit seven generations to come. And finally, I have come to know that **love** is expressed when I honour these teachings.

So, when I am challenged with a painful statement or a difficult ethnography, I turn to these teachings to help return balance. It is also the teaching of **truth** that has inspired this narrative, and all these teachings have helped me to offer a few suggestions archaeologists can consider if they want to be an ally and/or help other Indigenous students succeed.

This is not a comprehensive list and is only from my perspective. It is possible, and even likely, that other Indigenous archaeologists may disagree with these suggestions, but I can truthfully say these considerations would have, and still could help, *this* white-passing Indigenous scholar.

As mentioned in the beginning of this paper, I am often asked what truth and reconciliation means to me. The response is always changing as I learn more, experience more, and feel more, but I can honestly say that the truth part is not over yet, and reconciliation is nothing without witnessing truth first. This includes me learning the truth as well. I have a lot to read and listen to, and so do many other people. It is going to be a long time before much of the truth is known, as truth can be hard to recognize, and people come to their truths in their own time. As well, the acknowledgment of my privilege and that of others with white skin and able bodies needs to be included as a truth.

Reconciliation for me is the building and maintenance of relationships. Honouring treaties and relationships are paramount to reconciliation and that includes honouring the diverse relationships with the land and *all our relations*. The suggestions that follow may help others recognize ways that they can be part of building relationships.

Increased Sensitivity Surrounding Ethnographic Readings

For me, one of the most difficult aspects of being Indigenous in archaeology is reading ethnographies. I managed to avoid most of the discomfort by not reading the ethnographies of anyone I may be related to, until one day I decided to challenge myself to learn more about what could be my Dene

history. I was ill-prepared for the near month-long recovery I would need to stop hearing the words, “dirty Indian”, which haunted me in my youth. If there had been Indigenous archaeologists in my department, I may have been guided through the process with more support before I read, instead of the support I received after being traumatized from the reading. If my supervisor had known how it would affect me, I am sure they would have discussed with me a strategy or support resources. We both learned a lesson. I now consider the content of readings and other sources before recommending them to others, so that I can provide warnings about potentially difficult material. Following Atalay (2006), it is also important to acknowledge what these powerful words represent and produce, and

archaeologists might take a more reflexive approach and contextualize the present situation by tracing archaeologists’ (and physical anthropologists’) current position of power to both colonization and the historical reality of the egregious acts that led to the collections held by museums, universities, and historical societies internationally [Atalay 2006:282].

I am encouraged that progress has begun in this regard, with policies being developed that also acknowledge the potential emotional impact and lack of trauma support when people engage with recordings of the past (Thorpe 2019). Indigenous archivist Kirsten Thorpe notes,

Whilst I am enormously proud of the work I have achieved over the past two decades, I know that

much of the objectives achieved have required difficult dialogue: I have spent a long time working to convince people of why we needed to shift practice to respect Indigenous perspectives, histories and cultures, and to keep Indigenous people safe when engaging with library and archive spaces [Thorpe 2019].

In addition to trigger warnings, it could help to provide people with an opportunity to debrief or process difficult records.

Increased Sensitivity Surrounding Organized Western Religions

As with ethnographies, we need to be sensitive to the traumas brought about by colonial efforts to subjugate Indigenous lifeways through the forced imposition of Western religion. While there are certainly numerous Indigenous persons who faithfully engage with “Western” organized religious beliefs, the numerous and well documented traumas wrought by settler/colonial religious orders (Truth and Reconciliation Canada 2015) have also caused some to reject or otherwise avoid such concepts. When references to biblical passages instantly make a person feel unsafe, it is beneficial to have some way to process these complex and unwanted emotions and reactions. Even a trigger warning for religious content could help the affected person prepare for that part of the discussion or decide to leave if they are not up for it that day. I think considerations like these would make it easier for Indigenous students to stay enrolled in school.

Think

Take a moment to stop and think before you ask a question. Making an Indig-

enous person address questions that may be painful, to satisfy your curiosity, is not helpful. It is also important to remember that one Indigenous person does not reflect all Indigenous experiences. While we as anthropologists may know this, I still get asked regularly about my perspective as an Indigenous person. With over 600 Indigenous Nations on Turtle Island/North America today, I of course cannot speak for others, and generalizing from my experience erases the diversity of Indigenous cultures and experience. Questions can also place a lot of emotional and cognitive labour on the Indigenous person to educate the non-Indigenous, often without compensation or recognition.

Listen

It's hard to listen, but listen. Cause it's much harder living it than listening to the hardships. Still the heart's conditioned to condition the air. When they air their conditions, keep cool. But the more tears, sometimes the clearer the vision [Kabango 2016].

Listen and learn the truth of Canada's history in Indigenous words. Listening to what other family and community members were communicating to me, personally, or in their publications, was the start of an important transformation in my thinking. This allowed me to finally start to heal from internalized colonization and intergenerational trauma, and listening allowed me to engage with the different experiences of my sisters. As anthropologists, we usually appreciate the value of oral traditions that relate to our research, but we spend little time understanding our responsibilities to treaties and Indigenous relationships

in our own communities. Listening and learning the truths of this land takes effort and can shatter some people's views about their country and citizenship, but bearing witness can build relationships that can lead to substantial healing within Indigenous communities and between Indigenous and settler communities.

Feel, Even If It Doesn't Feel Good

When you are listening, try to take in the words. Sit with the discomfort and engage with what it is teaching you. I had to learn this one the hard way. By trying to ignore so many feelings for so long, I had no skills to cope when I could not ignore them anymore. If you do this right, it will not be easy and will likely feel unsettling, upsetting, or cause anger. If it is during a talk, try not to let the emotions you feel overshadow what is being said and who is saying it. Personally, I try to use this anger to fuel my work in the community.

Final Thought

When I consider **truth** and **archaeology** together, I am reminded of that line from Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade: "Archaeology is the search for fact, not truth" (Spielberg et al. 1989). But I have come to understand that we search for fact to try and speak truth and that truth is not separate from fact. We make choices every day on what facts to collect; choices based on our truths. I am proud to say that acknowledging my truths has been un-settling and unsettling for me, and I hope it will be for others too.

Chì miigwetch, thank you.

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