Off the Rez: Witnessing Indigenous Knowledges Through Social-Media

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Off the Rez: Witnessing Indigenous Knowledges Through Social Media

by

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Abstract

Historically, there has been a lot of research conducted on Indigenous populations, by non-Indigenous researchers. These researchers have not asked what research and causes are relevant or would be helpful for Indigenous peoples. Instead, many researchers have conducted research that they thought was important. The term “Off the Rez” is used, in the title, to mean research that is not done on a reservation or even in urban areas. In fact, this research takes place online. This study aims to discover if social media can be used as an innovative option for non-Indigenous allies to conduct respectful research.

Through participant observation, surveys, and interviews, this research sought to discover what Indigenous people think about non-Indigenous research allies, and also to see if Indigenous knowledges could be viewed. This research asks if it’s possible for researchers to use social media to study a people group, without the researcher inserting themselves in the research environment. This study is the first of this kind, that I know of. Additionally, the research will specifically ask if social media can be used, by Indigenous allies, to ethically conduct Indigenous research. If this kind of research proves viable, it could change the way in which research is conducted by researchers who are researching groups they are not members of. The study

research questions were, (1) can social media be used as a research tool, to witness Indigenous Knowledges? (2) Can social media be used as research, by non-Indigenous research allies, in order to have the least impact on Indigenous communities?

This research was conducted using social media, with selected Indigenous participants who were 18, identified as Indigenous, were social media content creators, and who displayed their Indigeneity in some way. During the data collection phase, five themes emerged (1) how to (do something), (2) teaching videos, (3) setting the record straight, (4) humor videos, and (5) instances of culture or Indigeneity. There were 30 Indigenous social media content creators who were observed, for the participant observation portion of this research. There were eleven (11) creators who took the survey, and one (1) Indigenous creator who partook in an interview, and agreed to be part of and named as an example of the TikTokers observed in this study.

The results of the survey found that Indigenous social media content creators believe it either might be or is possible, for allies to lessen their impact on Tribal communities, by using social media. Through Participant observation, I was able to witness Indigenous knowledges. Participant observation gives the researcher just a hint of the worlds our participants circumnavigate. It also gives the researcher an insider's point of view. Social media can transport the researcher into the research environment, with the touch of a button.

Indigenous people everywhere need allies, their call for justice, should be everyone's. Until we decolonize educational spaces, until Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory is used as a basis for the need to disrupt, dismantle, reimagine, and create a new system, Online communities are where trailblazers will set the record straight, display examples of Indigeneity, and pass down teachings. Social media research, especially participant observation, has the potential to change the face of participant research, as we know it.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

There has been a long history of non-Indigenous researchers conducting research on Indigenous peoples. The Native American Center for Excellence suggests that "Native Americans have suffered a long history of abuse from outside researchers conducting evaluations in their Native communities" (SAMHSA). These non-Indigenous researchers have studied the phenomenon they felt was attributed to Tribes. How the research was conducted had a further colonizing impact on Tribal people (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999, p. 101). Meaning, that research scientists conducted research ON Indigenous peoples, without collaborating WITH them. Literature suggests that these researchers didn't seem to consider the needs of the Native People in any relevant way, didn't often seek their consent, may not have included them in the process, or shown how the research was a benefit to their Tribe. This is due, in part, because the research was largely based on Western worldviews. "Many Western researchers unwittingly imposed their worldview, forcing research on and by Indigenous people to fit within Western paradigms" (Walker, 2003, p. 37). Some of these people conducting research were either knowingly, or unknowingly, data mining and extracting knowledge. Many of these things were done without the consent, consultation, partnership/collaboration, or benefit of Indigenous peoples. In a future world, the best-case scenario is for Indigenous peoples to be the only ones conducting research, in their own communities. This doesn't mean that non-Indigenous researchers are not needed or wanted, in fact, they are needed until there are enough Indigenous researchers to do the work. However, allies need to be trusted, in some form, by the community they are researching. Researchers need to understand the lived experiences of participants and recognize how their own experiences might be different from that of the researcher's experiences.

Researcher's Positionality

As a non-Indigenous researcher, I had to take an introspective look at my identity, and how I can best do this work authentically and respectfully. When I think about identity, I think of all of the roles that I fill, I think of the lifelong construction of experiences and lessons learned along the way. For example, I am a mother, a daughter, a sister, a friend, and a leader, rooted in the soil of my lineage. The different identities that make up who I am, have helped form the world around me, in that I have a set of very specific perspectives with which I make sense of things. For example, I am a woman and view myself as such. Yet, even though I am a woman and counted as a minority when compared to White men, I still have instances of privilege that women and men of color do not share. "Currently, privilege communicates how economic and class politics, complicated by intersections of various identities, especially race, gender, class, sexuality, can precipitate forms of social exclusion and limitations" (Harris, 2016, p. 100). Furthermore, "privilege is used to interrogate the ways in which structural and systemic inequality operates. This newer usage does not displace the word's traditional positive meanings that allude to a groups or individual's rights, honours, and advantages" (Harris, 2016, p. 100). I benefit from the privilege of being white, even if I'm not always counted as such. In fact, there have been times in my life that I have been lumped together with the racial group by which I am associated, this is called being raced. I do not often face most types of discrimination because of the color of my skin, and often receive advantages because of it. However, when I am in a group of people that have been classified as "other," I am never singled out, as if to say except for you. What seems to matter most, when it comes to being raced, is the physical proximity to a people group. Individuals get lumped together, as a group, in order to simplify and even dehumanize them, as "You people" or "other." Non-Indigenous researcher allies should always partner with

Indigenous peoples, to conduct research in a manner that is respectful and equitable. As a non-Indigenous ally, I was compelled to find a way to do this work. I wanted to find a way to conduct research, but also attempt not to leave a negative impact on an Indigenous community, at the same time.

When looking introspectively at racism and privilege, many people do not get past more than the surface level of self-examination. When responding to suggestions of privilege or racism, they simply tell themselves they are friends with people of color, or they haven't been given any handouts in life. These people who believe this seem to be thinking of a different definition of privilege. This definition of having privilege is not about getting handouts or living an affluent lifestyle. It's about having the kinds of privileges where you never have to think about the color of your skin. For example, it is a privilege not to have to teach your child what to do when police pull them over, to ensure that they come home alive. Furthermore, most white people that have relationships with people of color, do not spend time in groupings where people of color are in the majority. Many white people do not experience noticeable cultural differences, so they believe everyone is just like them. They are so focused on the things that make us all the same that it negates the differences, including the struggles that people of color face every day. Even though it seems like this might unite all groups of people, it really is another form of erasure. When we focus only on the things that make us the same, or the things that we agree on, we leave out the things that make us beautifully unique and the stories of our differences. We also mistakenly believe that everyone's experiences are the same as our own, even when we knowingly or unknowingly race people, by lumping them together.

Statement of Problem

When we think about or interact with groups of people, our assumptions about the social norms of a group, (what they look, act, and think like) become the social parameters for how we understand, respond to, and interact with individuals we think may belong to these groups (Williams, 1997, p. 61). When lumped into a group, most people do not take the time to differentiate by individual, so the group can be generalized instead of humanized. "Being viewed, treated, and labeled as belonging to various racial and ethnic groups all have their consequences, both positive and negative" (Williams, 1997, p. 61). For example, I have mistakenly been considered a Lower Elwha Tribal member, even by most of the members who are a decade younger than I am. I am a community member of the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, but I am not a tribal member and would never claim to be. By community member, I mean I am considered a part of the Tribal community, expected to take part in cultural events, some ceremonies, and I am considered family by many people. However, I am not claiming to be Native American, I am an Indigenous ally, and one day hope to be a White abolitionist.

Reciprocity Statement

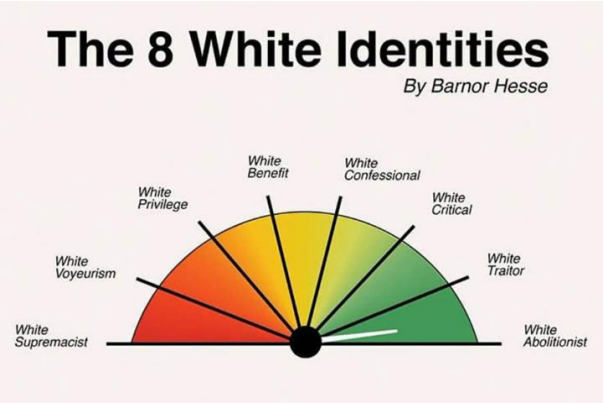

Figure 1: The 8 white Identities color wheel, by Barnor Hesse (Mackenzie, 2021).

According to Barnor Hesse's 8 White Identities, White abolitionists are those who are "changing institutions, dismantling whiteness, and not allowing whiteness to reassert itself" (Mackenzie, 2021). I always make sure to correct anyone who mistakenly thinks I'm a Tribal member. I do this because I would never want to be disrespectful, by letting anyone think I'd claim something that is not my birthright. I represented Lower Elwha in both my personal and professional life, for over 11 years, but not as a tribal member. I've been included by so many in the community, they have become my family. Many of the children in the LEKT community have considered me an auntie; their mothers call me sister. This has been one of the great joys of my life, in that I have been given the extraordinary honor and respect to be called Auntie. Being deemed an Auntie in the LEKT community is a sign of respect, honor, and love. My daughter calls many of these women auntie and their mother's grandma. This experience of Auntieship, in a matriarchal community, allowed me to establish my leadership. My leadership style is community-minded, with auntie leadership set as the framework. As an educator in the Elwha community, as well as an Indigenous ally, it is my job to help in the disruption and dismantling of systemic racism, White privilege, and colonization in all its forms. This is why it's so important to me to do this work.

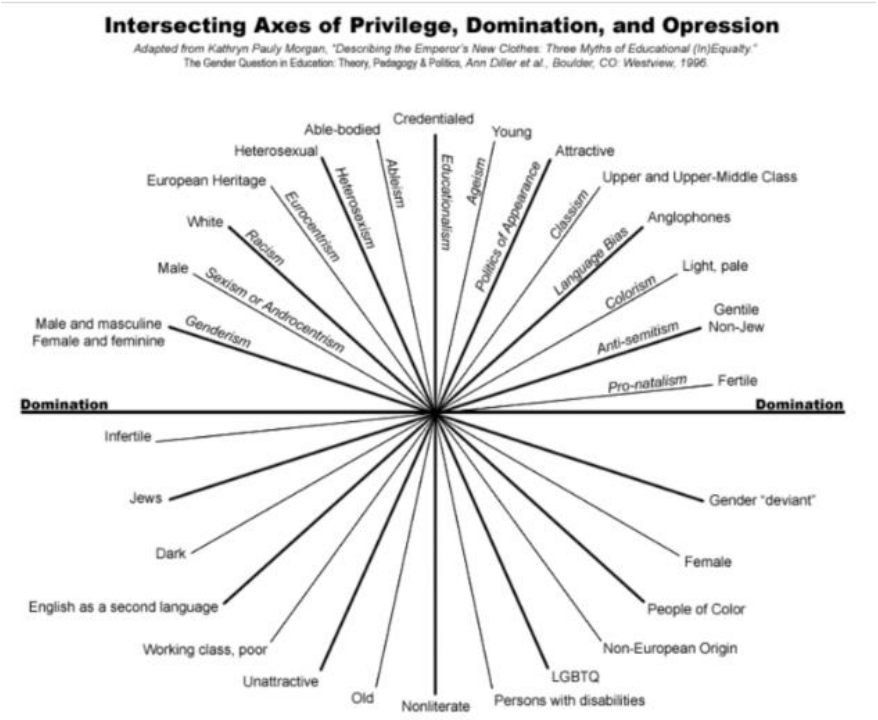

Figure 2: Intersecting axes of Privilege, domination, and oppression wheel (Roberts et al., 2019, p. 3).

Significance of the Study

The kind of privilege that defines white privilege and white supremacy, draws a line between the haves and the have-nots. "White privilege refers to the special advantages or benefits afforded to White persons and withheld from certain others or all others in societies characterized by White supremacy (Jensen, 2005)" (Zuberi & Bonilla-Silva, 2008). For one group to be in a position of privilege, another group must be in a position of subservience. "The claim is not, of course, that all whites are better off than all nonwhites, but that, as a statistical generalization, the objective life chances of whites are significantly better" (Mills, 2022, p. 37). Systemic racism abounds when society is set up to favor the group in privilege, so that they are the ones accumulate wealth and power. In order to change our racist systems of governance, white people have to acknowledge white privilege and power hoarding. I am very aware that I have instances of privilege, where the color of my skin determines how I am treated. For

example, when I have been stopped at the store, and am asked to show my receipt, I can say no and walk away without anyone trying to, unlawfully, detain me. My Indigenous friends, on the other hand, cannot always say the same. My daughter is Indigenous, and at the age of 15, she is already beginning to see the differences in privilege. My daughter, and the Lower Elwha children I was blessed to work with, are the very reason privilege must be abolished, and power must be shared.

I have spent much of my career working toward the betterment of the education of Lower Elwha Klallam Tribal children. As a non-Indigenous ally, who lived on the Lower Elwha reservation for twenty-eight years, I know that I cannot repeat the atrocities of so many non-Indigenous allies before me. I also know that when it comes to Indigenous research, I am still an outsider. An outsider is someone that doesn't have the same rights and benefits that a member of the group has. Tribal members are made up of individuals with a specific set of criteria to belong. For many Tribes, it comes down to the amount of Tribal blood that is required for membership. Community members are made up of individuals that may have been excluded from Tribal membership because they do not have enough Tribal blood to be a member. The requirements to be both a Tribal and community member is different for each Tribe. However, blood and relational ties, proximity to the Tribal community, and the intentions of the person are all common types of criteria for community membership. As a community member, I have the responsibility to respect the membership hierarchy. I must understand that I've been granted special access to participate in the community, as a trusted witness, because there has been a reciprocal relationship of love and care shown to one another. This status, as a community member, very much impacts how I think about conducting my research.

I had to decide what kind of researcher I wanted to be, and how I could find a way not to leave a negative impact on a Tribal community. This reflection led me back to Brené Brown's TED Talk about the power of vulnerability. In this video, Brown says that someone scheduled to introduce her, was having trouble deciding what to call her, so Brown told the lady to describe her as a researcher storyteller (Brown, 2011). I listened to the Ted talk a few times before, and I remember thinking I want to be like Brené Brown. Last week was the first time I listened to the Power of Vulnerability, since starting my doctorate. This time when I listened, I realized that I'm a researcher storyteller, too. As such, I had to figure out how I was going to approach my research. I had to find a way to gather these stories, using a method that would not continue to have a colonizing impact on Indigenous peoples. Thinking about how to not repeat the many mistakes of non-Indigenous allies, I decided to utilize content that has already been created. Researching people groups without the researcher inserting themselves directly in the research, by way of participant observation, is an innovative concept.

Purpose of the Study

The study will attempt to discover if social media is the means by which, non-Indigenous research allies can have the least impact on Indigenous communities while conducting research. This is important because it may allow research to be conducted in ways that prevent undue hardship on participants. In addition, it would highlight the content that Indigenous people are willing and even want to share with the world. This neutralizes power, in that non-Indigenous allies are only privy to the content that Indigenous creators are already willing to share. I will also use social media to study content created by Indigenous social media creators, to discover if social media can be used as a research tool in this way. This research will contribute to the knowledge base in that Indigenous peoples have a platform and voice to share their history, their

stories, and thus are storying through social media. Knowing that there is a way for researchers to obtain content that is published for the public, should help give non-Indigenous research allies more choices in how they conduct their research.

Research Study Questions

- Can social media be used as research, by non-Indigenous research allies, in order to have the least impact on Indigenous communities?
- Can social media be used as a research tool, to witness Indigenous Knowledges?

Definition of Key Terms

Auntie- A woman who may or may not be related by blood, but is a person who gives you guidance and strength to help you find the best version of yourself. She then offers you the courageous chance to become the version of yourself she always knew was there (Jacob, 2020, p. 1-2). She is someone to be respected, who can have fun with you, but will discipline you too. An Auntie is someone that is respected, honored, and loved in the community. “She reflects back to us the best in ourselves” (Jacob, 2020, p. 59).

Auntieship- Is the leadership style that I established using the concepts of putting Auntie-ing into practice in the workplace. The verb Auntie-ing was coined by Michelle Jacob in her book *The auntie way: Stories celebrating kindness, fierceness, and creativity*.

Community member- Community members are made up of individuals that may have been excluded from Tribal membership, because they do not meet all the criteria to be an enrolled Tribal member. A community member may also be someone who has become part of the community by participating in community events and being accepted by the community.

Critical Race Theory/CRT- Critical Race Theory is the science that studies the way in which society is set up to perpetuate the normalization of racism. “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p. 3).

Doctrine of Discovery- a legal concept that gave the Catholic church’s blessing to European explorers to discover and conquer uninhabited lands.

Grammar- There is, also, an unconventional use of grammar, when it comes to capitalization, throughout this paper. Some of the capitalized words do not follow the accepted rules for punctuation. However, the capital is meant as a sign of the importance of the word, and the respect I am showing. For example, the word Tribal is always capitalized.

Internet Troll- “An Internet troll is someone who comes into a discussion and posts comments designed to upset or disrupt the conversation. […] Trolls will lie, exaggerate, and offend to get a response” (Golbeck, 2014, para. 1).

Native American- in this paper includes enrolled Tribal members, descendants, and those not necessarily enrolled in any federally recognized Tribe.

SMW- Social Media Website.

SNS- Social Networking Site.

Pretendian- Short for pretend Indian, which is someone who claims to be of Native American heritage and may take the spaces, money, and platforms that are intended for Indigenous peoples.

Two-Spirit- “Two-spirit” refers to a person who identifies as having both a masculine and a feminine spirit, and is used by some Indigenous people to describe their sexual, gender and/or spiritual identity” (Fewster, n.d., para. 1).

Tribal Critical Race Theory/TribalCRT - Tribal Critical Race Theory is a lens through which one can view the lives of Native Americans, now and since the first European contact. “TribalCrit emerges from Critical Race Theory (CRT) and is rooted in the multiple, nuanced, and historically- and geographically-located epistemologies and ontologies found in Indigenous communities” (Brayboy, 2005, p. 427).

Tribal Member- a person enrolled in a federally recognized Tribe. “Tribal enrollment criteria are set forth in tribal constitutions, articles of incorporation or ordinances. The criterion varies from tribe to tribe” (Treetop, 2020, para. 2).

Viral Video-A video that becomes so popular that it spreads exponentially across the internet.

Overview of Methodology

People in places of privilege and power have benefited off the backs of the marginalized for centuries. Those same people that benefit from privilege, do not want to admit that privilege and power come from systemic racism. Moreover, our systems of governance are perpetuating that privileged mindset, based on a framework of discrimination. We will not admit to operating, as a nation, on a system built on stolen privilege. Those in power are so much in denial that states are banning the teaching of Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the halls of schools and colleges. CRT is the science that studies the way in which society is set up, to perpetuate the normalization of racism. "Governor Kevin Stitt, a Republican, signed H.B. 1775 in May [2021]. The law bans Oklahoma educators from promoting the idea that "an individual, by virtue of his

or her race or sex, is inherently racist, sexist or oppressive, whether consciously or unconsciously" (Dutton, 2021, para. 2). Many people, who only have a surface level understanding of CRT, will tell you that it's a theory used and created for law students and lawyers. Which often suggests that CRT is too sophisticated to be taught in primary or secondary school settings. However, CRT has been a part of education for over twenty years. The tenants of CRT suggest it is what is necessary to combat the marginalization of people who are considered 'other.' In fact, "education policies and practices in the United States often contributed to inequitable educational outcomes for students of color" (Dixson, 2018, p. 233). To counter these inequalities, Critical Race Theory was introduced. What's more, "twenty years after Ladson-Billings and Tate's initial publication on CRT and education, CRT has emerged as a full-fledged subfield in education" (Dixson, 2018, p. 233). CRT scrutinizes the way the dominant race sees racism, and "tries not only to understand our social situation but to change it, setting out not only to ascertain how society organizes itself along racial lines and hierarchies but to transform it for the better" (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p, 33).

Critical race theory is the foundation for the fight for equity and social justice reform. "Struggles for equality (and equity) have always included the fight for education" (Dixson, 2018, p. 232). Additionally, "Related to this fight for educational equity are the fights for safe and affordable housing, gainful employment with a livable wage, access to health care, and rather ironically, considering the rhetoric of racial progress by many conservative pundits, protection from police violence" (Dixson, 2018, p. 232). One avenue for educational equity may be the use of social media platforms, so this is an important lens for viewing my research. My social media research, through the lens of CRT, will identify the Indigenous voices of those who are actively contributing to the fight of disrupting and dismantling systemic racism. This lens acknowledges

that recognizing racism is no longer enough, instead, we must identify the systems of privilege that dominate our society and dismantle them. One way to do this is by utilizing CRT which scrutinizes the way the privileged see racism, as if it were not a commonplace experience for most people of color (Delgado & Stefancic, 2017, p, 33). Accordingly, "critical race theory seeks to determine how racism is perpetuated, for the purposes of undermining racial bias within systems and institutions" (Martin, 2013, p. 246).

More specifically, Tribal Critical Race Theory (TribalCRT), is a lens of CRT with which data, posted by Indigenous social media content creators, can be studied. TribalCRT is important to Indigenous research because "Tribal philosophies, beliefs, customs, traditions, and visions for the future are central to understanding the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, but they also illustrate the differences and adaptability among individuals and groups (Brayboy, 2005, p. 429). Social media may be the very tool needed to gather these philosophies, beliefs, customs, and traditions, while transcending distance. "The goal of CRT is to construct an alternative reality by naming one's reality through storytelling and counterstorytelling; thus, the advantage of CRT is the voice that it provides people of color" (Writer, 2008, p. 3). It's about illuminating the whitewashing of history that sweeps the racism of colonization under the rug. It's been portrayed as something unavoidable that happened in the past, done for the greater good, in order to civilize the "savages" in the new world.

Consequently, the "process of colonization and its debilitating influences are at the heart of TribalCrit" (Brayboy, 2005, p. 431). Therefore, the banning of CRT is way more than what the headlines want us to believe, which makes its use in Indigenous research essential. Additionally, "CRT allows for the contestation, deconstruction, and reshaping of the master narrative by enlisting multiple perspectives and experiences as sources of valid knowledge which

serve as catalysts for transformation" (Writer, 2008, p. 3). CRT addresses the suppression of history, it tells the true history, no matter how brutally honest it is. The current political tension with CRT is such because it has become a hot-button topic in politics, as of late. However, it is not a new theory or framework. The real history of the United States needs to be taught so that history does not repeat itself. It will give the next generation a chance to build brand new systems, abolish privilege, and share power. We, as a Nation, must admit how power has been leveraged, making it so that those in places of privilege have the most power. Those places need to be torn down and dismantled. We also must acknowledge that our systems were built on a foundation of colonization and segregation. The best way to eradicate privilege and power is for those in privilege to share power with those who are marginalized, until power equalizes us.

Until the equalization of power materializes, I will use my voice to echo those of the marginalized and continue to raise awareness. Thus, if CRT and TribalCRT cannot be taught in schools, there had to be another place where it is being taught or could be. It seems that social media is the platform that people of color are using to educate the masses, themselves. They are setting misconceptions straight, sharing Indigenous teachings, and/or sharing their passion and voice.

Limitations of the Study

There are distinct limitations of this study, one being that the research is limited to content that’s already publicly available online, and by the algorithm of each social media platform. This study may also be limited in that there’s the potential for data to be incomplete, due to the search terms and parameters of the research. Thus, the study may unknowingly fail to collect all available data. In an effort to collect as much relevant data, from as many sources as

possible, the search terms and parameters have been carefully chosen. Participants will also be recruited from multiple social media platforms, in several ways.

One clear limitation of any study is the researcher. Researchers, including all of their experiences, preconceived notions, and biases, can be thought of as a limitation of any study. Their perspective could impact the entire research process, including the handling of data. Having to recruit participants to take the survey, and conduct interviews, and observe participants, within an academic timeframe, may be another limitation. If this study had not been conducted with a set time limit, the data and findings may have been strengthened, by ongoing participation. Add that I am a non-Indigenous ally, conducting Indigenous research, and it may seem like a bigger limitation. This study is, indeed, limited by those who are willing to participate with me. If people do not believe in my research, or they do not trust me, I could be missing a section of people. This means there is a possibility that someone with a negative view of non-Indigenous allies, might let their voice go unheard.

While there are certainly limitations to my being a non-Indigenous researcher, there are also benefits. I have the opportunity to present myself and my research, to participants, in a way that gives reverence to Indigenous research. I may be the first non-Indigenous researcher ally that potential participants come across. This means that I could set the tone, for how some Indigenous social media content creators see non-Indigenous research allies. I gave potential participants a link to my University of Washington website, where they could verify information about me, the cohort, and my faculty advisor. Potential participants could also access advertisements to my survey, and interview. I did this so that potential participants were informed, upfront, about me and that I was non-Indigenous. This was to provide transparency regarding myself and my research. I hope I am a good example of what non-Indigenous allies

can be. A continued review of the literature should also provide a vantage point to spot supplementary limitations.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Most people will use social media, in one way or another, during their lives. According to the statistics reported by We Are Social, “the number of active users of social media on a global level amounts to 3.28 billion” (Sot, 2020, p. 1493). The average person will use social media to “take photos or videos and post them on social media to remember and retrospect special happenings and occasions in their lifetime” (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 125). However, many of us have recently become what is termed content creators. These creators post content to their social media platform, specifically to draw in viewers. In fact, social media “content creators take part in specific techniques to show themselves, draw in people's attention and cultivate supportive connections” (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 125).

Social media is being used for various reasons. Some people use social media to keep up with family and friends, stay current on what is happening with their favorite celebrity, or even to raise awareness for a specific cause. Similarly, “social media Websites (SMWs) are increasingly popular research tools. These sites provide new opportunities for researchers” (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 708). The reason for this new frontier is because there are many different ways to utilize social media with regards to conducting research. “Social media Websites (SMWs) provide opportunities for user participation in the creation and display of multimedia data. These popular Websites are increasingly emerging as valuable research tools” (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 708).

Social Media’s Current Use in Research

Social media research "encompasses any form of research that uses data derived from social media sources. Research in this environment can be classified into two types: using social

media as a research tool (such as the use of surveys on social media platforms) and research on the activity and content of social media itself" (Staff et al., 2016, p. 6). This study focuses on the later. Social media, as a means of research, is just another way that research is evolving. Social media has gone beyond providing tools to communicate with important people in our lives. It has become a critical source of "news around the world and a significant medium for self-expression" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). As an increase of people use social media, it is the natural progression of social research to study all of the ways in which humans live and interact. "Social media is a medium that is simultaneously intimate and powerfully public" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). The literature on the use of social media as research, includes social media's current use in research, and underscores the themes of participant observation, interviews, the ethics of using publicly posted data for research, informed consent requirements when using public data, virtual communities as sources for research, social media as a tool for education, and social media's impact on Indigenous peoples.

The reason social media is a vital investigation tool is that it provides a new and exciting ways to analyze online data. These platforms "present innovative opportunities to examine the displayed online behaviors and beliefs in a context that is naturalistic, as it is part of the participants' daily lives" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 708). Moreover, they "allow a researcher to reach out and conduct studies within the populations that may be hard to reach in traditional research, such as underserved populations" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 708). This untraditional method of research has both benefits and drawbacks. Studying an online community, separated by distance but united for a common reason, may be something that is not possible using traditional research methods. "Social media, such as social network sites and blogs, are increasingly being used as core or ancillary components of

educational research, from recruitment to observation and interaction with researchers" (Henderson, Johnson & Auld, 2013, p. 546). In fact, social media can be used "as a source of data in the pursuit of independent, academic research. Used in this way, social media allows researchers to connect with a study population virtually in the pursuit of their research." (Quinn, 2020, p. 4). Researchers are concluding that "social media is a potentially powerful tool in the conduct of academic research, especially for reaching groups solely bound by virtual bonds" (Quinn, 2020, p. 7). Consequently, the researcher may get a glimpse into a community that only exists online. One way that research is being conducted, using social media, is through participant observation.

Participant Observation

We know that social media in research has mostly been used as a tool for things like recruitment for medical studies, and online surveys. One area with the most ambiguity is the use of social media for participant observations. "Participant observation is a method that begs many of these ethical challenges that emerge when using social media" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). Specifically, "social media platforms that enable users to create and share online content with others are used increasingly in social research" (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 473). Nevertheless, "in evaluating any research involving human subjects, assessing the risks to subjects is a primary consideration" (Parsi & Elster, 2014, p. 64). Social media often contains publicly posted data, which can blur "the boundaries between the public and private domains, thus creating challenges around the level of ethical regulation required for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of data gathered from different online contexts" (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 476). One way in which independent research can be conducted using social media platforms, is through participant observation. "Through participant observation we sing with the congregation at a

church service, sit on the bus with immigrant workers, slay virtual dragons, play hide-and-seek in a virtual garden, and attend a steampunk dance in Victorian attire, we become directly involved in the activities of daily life" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 65). Participant observation offers us a glimpse "into shared worlds with our participants, at the same time pragmatic and conceptual concerns dictate a range of appropriate and feasible levels of participation for any given project. For instance, it is not necessary to become a brain surgeon to study brain surgeons" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 65). One benefit of participant observation is that it offers researchers "practical knowledge, such as how to behave appropriately within a particular social group or culture, or realization of some of the challenges faced by a culture or group" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 66). It helps if the researcher already knows how to navigate the world. "Specialized knowledge, such as language skills or familiarity with a religious tradition, can be leveraged move effectively in a field setting" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 66). Therefore, it is the researchers "responsibility to get up to speed regarding the basics of everyday life in the virtual world we wish to study" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 73). There are some challenges with using virtual participant observation as research. For example, "participant observation is built on the alignments between engaging in everyday activities, on one hand, and recording and analyzing those activities, on the other" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 69).

It can sometimes be difficult attempting to engage in virtual communities, at the same time as trying to document field notes and be accepted into the community. Hence, "an important component in becoming familiar with a world is documenting and reflecting on our own process of socialization into it" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 74). An important concept of participant observation is that researchers should openly share their purpose when communicating with participants. "If we explain our research clearly, participants can share in our enthusiasm to

better understand their culture, becoming supportive partners in inquiry" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 77-78). When trying to understand the culture of the population being observed, it is not unlike learning another language, it takes time and a lot of patience to gain clear insight and understanding (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 88).

Interviews

It can be helpful when participant observation is paired with conducting interviews, as, "asking questions of other participants can be a useful way to learn about cultural norms" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 74). This can be done "by reaching out to influential members of a group. For virtual worlds, this might happen via forums, by email (or private messages), or inworld (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 74). Interviews can be important to furthering the understanding of the researcher, as it is "through interviews we learn about secret histories, internal power struggles, and unofficial customs. Interviews allow researchers to study social dynamics and cultural conventions from a range of perspectives that may not always see the light of day in group interactions" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 93). Moreover, "Interviews provide opportunities to learn about people's elicited narratives and representations of their social worlds, including beliefs, ideologies, justifications, motivations, and aspirations. These are part of any culture." (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 92-93).

In the last few years, social media has been targeted as a source of data, both publicly and privately. Social media is rife with new content and information by the nanosecond, and the use of publicly posted social media content is relatively new to research, so there is not yet a lot of guidance on virtual participant observation. In lieu of guidance, researchers must rely on their ethical judgment to decipher and apply policies meant for offline research. When conducting

participant observation using social media, as well as conducting interviews and focus groups, there are ethical issues that must also be considered. One such area of ethical debate in research is the use of publicly posted data.

Ethics of Using Publicly Posted Data for Research

Offline research suggests that public data does not typically require special ethical considerations. However, what constitutes public data is a matter of perspective, especially online. For example, some social media platforms conduct research by changing the algorithms for what content users see, and record how users respond to those changes. Facebook is a social media platform that uses its popular social media site for research, and users consent to it. When first agreeing to the terms and conditions of Facebook, users might not have noticed anything about research. Yet, "when Facebook altered the news feeds of approximately 700,000 of their users in 2012 to see whether reducing either positive or negative content would impact the "emotions" of their subsequent posts, some accused the company of deception" (Lee, 2017, p. 1), Facebook has since updated their terms and conditions to include research. Moreover, as researchers are finding new ways to conduct research, technology is being utilized for things like recognizing vocal differences, and facial recognition software development (Hu, 2019, para. 2). These types of technological advances mean a great deal to researchers, as it has many benefits, not the least of which is the speed at which research could be increased. For example, it appears that no one had to give consent for google to use YouTube videos to make a data set for research. This data set has been used in multiple research projects, which probably sped up the timeline of the projects, significantly. The argument is that when you consented to the terms and conditions of posting a video to YouTube, you understood it was public, and that the video falls under fair use (Hu, 2019, para. 4). Just because it is easier or makes your research faster, does not

necessarily make it better or appropriate. Regulations are in place to protect participants, so they are always informed of the risk of their participation, in both online and offline spaces. Nevertheless, when something falls under fair use, some people believe there is no need for consent. When it comes to using YouTube, and other social media, there are no universally accepted standards, as of this publication date.

Even if most people understand that their posts are public, some people might not consider a public post, something that could be used for research. Having the ability to post to hundreds of "friends" with a click of a button has altered how we think about the distribution of information and social networks" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). Some suggest that the typical social media user doesn't understand all of the ethical and legal ramifications of what posting something publicly means, with regards to research data. Some of those same people believe that it's the researchers' job to work around the ignorance of social media users. Others suggest that maybe we shouldn't be looking at using social media as research, unless it's appropriate for the research. Ashley Patterson, an assistant professor of language and literacy at Penn State University, says, "It's not a matter of whether it makes my life easier, or whether it's 'just data out there' that would otherwise go to waste. The nature of my question and the response I was looking for made this an appropriate piece [for my work]" (Hu, 2019, para. 7).

Some might wonder what is considered public content and when there should be an expectation of privacy. “A reasonable expectation of privacy for a SMW user is comprised of a combination of the intent of the Website as well as the Website’s explicit statement of privacy rules (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). Twitter’s privacy policy seems to be the clearest, as it unmistakably states, ‘‘our services are primarily designed to help you share information with the world. Our default is almost always to make the information you provide

public but we generally give you settings to make the information more private if you want. Your public information is broadly and instantly disseminated'' (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). Because of social media privacy policies like Twitter's, some researches argue there's "a clear expectation that the responsibility of the content of displayed information and its protection lies with the profile owner" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). Correspondingly, if the content is displayed publicly, there is no legal expectation of privacy. Furthermore, both federal and state courts agree that when it comes to what users post on Facebook, individuals have no reasonable expectation of privacy. In Romano v. Steelcase (2010), "the court noted that Facebook privacy policies plainly state that information users' post may be shared with others, and that information sharing is the very nature and purpose of these SNSs" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). Likewise, "Courts have concluded that a person has no reasonable expectation of privacy in writings that the person posts on a social networking website and makes available to the public" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). While legally there may not be an expectation of privacy to publicly posted content, in terms of research ethics, it comes down to whether it requires informed consent.

Informed Consent Requirements When Using Public Data

Even when a social media user posts something as public, they may not quite agree that using publicly posted data negates the need for informed consent. Informed consent is a term used in research with human subjects. It is defined as "A person's voluntary agreement, based upon adequate knowledge and understanding of relevant information, to participate in research" (Informed Consent, n.d.). This means that participants need a clear understanding of the risk involved, in their participation, before research begins. There is some discourse regarding if

informed consent transfers to the online sphere, or not. "Increasingly, social science researchers are turning to the internet to study forms of 'virtual' culture. In tandem there has been a degree of trepidation and innovation in the application of research methodology to the online arena" (Williams, 2007, p. 61). Some believe that people do not understand what they are consenting to when they publicly post something. On the flip side of the coin, others believe when you consent to the terms and conditions of posting anything to social media, you understand it will be public, and public content falls under fair use.

When research includes human subjects, special considerations must be made to protect people, as they should always be safeguarded. One common failsafe most research proposals go through is something called an Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. One of the things that the IRB process is concerned with is permitting researchers to conduct human subject research. In other words, IRBs ensure that the rights of humans are not violated. Nevertheless, "Current regulations have not kept pace with the diverse ways in which research can occur through social media" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). The perspective of much of the literature is that social media, and its potential uses, is rapidly expanding at such a rate that ethic committees and IRBs are possibly light speeds away from providing contemporary governance on the ethical aspect of online research.

The use of social media platforms for research, including ethical considerations of what is public and what requires informed consent, has increased faster than research policies can keep up. "Casey Fiesler, assistant professor of information science at the University of Colorado Boulder, says she's never seen a copyright holder challenge researchers who used their internet posts as data" (Hu, 2019, para. 4). Just because there might not be a precedence set for the use of social media posts in research, doesn't mean it's been deemed ethical. "That doesn't mean it's

necessarily *un*ethical, either, but it's worth asking questions about how and why researchers use social media posts, and whether those uses could be harmful" (Hu, 2019, para. 5). When Fiesler and her team asked people what they felt after learning that their tweet had been used in research, "not everyone was necessarily super upset, but most people were surprised. They also seemed curious; 85 percent of participants said that if their tweet were included in research, they'd want to read the resulting paper" (Hu, 2019, para. 9). Human subject research typically requires informed consent, and approval by some form of IRB.

When attempting to understand the research ethics of using social media content, we must acknowledge that “the research community has yet to identify the key bases upon which social media users and other stakeholders judge the ethics of the research undertaken on these platforms (Michaelidou, Micevski & Cadogan, 2021, p. 685). One reason is “that research studies undertaken within an online context is multifaceted, is continually changing, and is often outside the traditional expertise of institutional ethics committee, requiring ethical processes that are flexible and adaptable” (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 486). Within traditional research contexts, “a number of ethical tenets guide the collection and use of personal data. While these tenets should be followed, when working with social media data, the use of digital data presents a number of challenges to traditional research ethics. (Nicholas & Larsen, 2020, p. 84). For instance, “it remains difficult to determine what risks and privacy expectations are unique to the SMW realm, and what challenges can be addressed by modifications of known and understood risks inherent in research” (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 708). Instead, some researchers will illustrate this point, “it is often argued that individuals consent to their data being used in a range of ways, including for research purposes or by third parties, when accepting the terms and conditions of social media platforms [24]” (Nicholas & Larsen,

2020, p. 84). Some might even suggest that this next generation of social media users and content creators aren't worried about their privacy, at all. Sixty percent of teens surveyed in a study, conducted by the Pew Research Project, indicated "they were not concerned about third-party access to their online information, reflecting the idea that privacy may have a different meaning for this next generation" (Parsi & Elster, 2014, p. 63). However, "a general distinction has been made in the literature between social media data that are publicly accessible (and potentially therefore ethical for research use), and social media accounts that make use of restricted permissions" (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 476).

One of the things that researchers need to do, is find out what social media users think about the difference between public and private data. "We must be diligent about how the people we study define the distinction between "private" and "public" with reference to particular communities and activities" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 135). As previously discussed, both technology and social media are expanding at such an exponential rate, ethics and Institutional review boards have a hard time keeping up. In leu of concrete policies, a "key issue in considering observational research using social media is whether the proposed project meets the criteria as human subjects research" (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). A human subject is defined "by federal regulations as a living individual about whom an investigator obtains data through interaction with the individual or identifiable private information." (Moreno, Goniu, Moreno & Diekema, 2013, p. 709). Yet, "there is little information available that directly addresses how to conduct independent and primary research of an academic nature utilizing social media" (Quinn, 2020, p. 4). One might say that since "the data have already been "collected" by the platform, there is no natural direct contact between the researcher and data subject at which informed consent for participation may be sought" (Sloan,

Baghal & Williams, 2020, p. 65). Therefore, if there's no direct contact between researcher and data subject, informed consent is not required, thus this type of research doesn't qualify as human subject research.

However, ethics aren't that simple, "we suggest that researchers draw on Whiteman's (2012) notion of contextuality where the actions of the researcher are informed by the specific nature of their research and research settings rather than the general ethical principles such as informed consent (Henderson, 2013, p. 551). It is more about the spirit of the law than the letter of the law, when it comes to ethics. Ashley Patterson, assistant professor of language and literacy at Penn State University, chose to use YouTube videos in her dissertation work. Patterson said, "I had to set my own levels of ethical standards and hold myself to it, because I knew no one else would" (Hu, 2019, para. 7). One of the first things Patterson did was to ask herself what YouTube videos would add to the work she was trying to do, and whether there were any better ways to collect the data (Hu, 2019, para. 7). We must go back to the principle of intending not to cause harm. Until there is further direction, social media research ethics "should focus on ethical principles rather than ethical regulation, enabling a move to a more situational/reflexive ethics approach" (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 486). As more of us spend time in online spaces, research in this area is becoming more relevant, important, and popular. Therefore, "it is important that the research community engage in robust debate about the particular challenges of undertaking ethical research when using social media data" (Hennell, Limmer & Piacentini, 2020, p. 486).

Virtual Community

Using social media as sources of data for research is something that is becoming increasingly popular. “Recently, social scientists have begun studying Facebook, examining demographic characteristics of users; motivations for use, self-presentation, and social interactions” (see Wilson, Gosling, & Graham, 2012). Social media research has shown that “Facebook allows users to fulfill belonging needs through communicating with and learning about others” (Seidman, 2013, p.402). As more and more people form and/or find community online, there will be researchers that desire to study these communities. The same study also found that “Facebook can be a useful technique for managing feelings of social disconnection, as it permits peer acceptance and relationship development, increasing self-esteem (Seidman, 2013, p.402). Another social media application that is credited with building belonging is TikTok. “Due to the app’s wide-reaching influence, with over 800 million users worldwide and an average use of 52 minutes a day, it is an ideal platform to disseminate information to a large group of people” (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 1). In fact, users of all ages and background seem to utilize the app. Users “participate in TikTok in order to express themselves, interact with others, and escape from day to day pressure. The motivation to produce TikTok videos, on the other hand, derive from the desire to fulfill their self-expression and archiving need” (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 130). What is more, “it is common at present for hundreds of millions of internet users to be self-publishing consumers” (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 122). Actually, “social media platforms represent some of the most recent community oriented applications” (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 1).

The reason that TikTok creates a sense of connection is because TikTok "provides a sense of community by allowing users to respond to videos and follow others with similar interests. (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 2). TikTok users "can view a stream of content, but the application also empowers people to comment and post response videos on a specific topic thereby allowing a more fluid discussion" (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 3). This leads to a back and forth, or conversational like, exchange between viewers and content creators. Sometimes this exchange can result in a viewer becoming a content creator in response to an original post. Sometimes that can be how a video and/or post goes viral. This can be important because the "viral videos on TikTok attract thousands of comments and millions of views, likes and dislikes, thereby promoting further engagement" (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 122). A viral video is frequently seen as a measure of social media success and can impact "the size of the fan base or the offline social capital" (Omar & Dequan, 2020, p. 122). Online communities have the unique ability to transcend time and place. "These virtual communities allow for users to develop, retrieve, and explore content generated by others at their convenience irrespective of time or place" (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 1). This need to connect and form a community is what draws users to social media. Indeed, with "72% of the public participating in at least one social media platform, technology has become influential in allowing online communities to interact and share information surrounding similar problems, solutions, and insights" (Comp, Gottlieb & Delorio, 2021, p. 1). Access to virtual communities for research purposes is why there needs to be future research conducted with online communities.

As a Tool for Education

TikTok has been used for educational purposes, in many ways and situations. One such way has been to teach the public information, clearing up misconceptions and inconsistencies, on a given topic. One reason that the popular social media platform is used is because of the appeal to a younger population. “TikTok® is one of the most popular global social media technologies with people aged under 25 and therefore has strong appeal for students” (Middleton, 2022, p. 226). The social media platform gives users the ability to seek out information when it’s convenient for them. It also allows information to be obtained by individuals who may not, otherwise, have access to education. Furthermore, “TikTok offers digital tools that incorporate interactivity and flexibility suited to different learning styles (Francessucci et al., 2021; Su et al., 2020)” (Middleton, 2022, p. 227). Professors, teachers, health care workers, doctors, and others are using social media to teach and educate. “The app has subsequently emerged as a teaching tool across educational settings” (Middleton, 2022, p. 227).

One way for educators to organize their content is by hashtag, or topic. This can make it easier for viewers to search for topics or content that is interesting or relevant to them. “Courtesy of an algorithm that curates content from across its entire user population, popular TikTok teacher videos can reach thousands or even millions of views” (Middleton, 2022, p. 227). Some of the ways that TikTok has been used was “to complement lectures and flipped classroom exercises in teaching the application of key strategic frameworks” (Middleton, 2022, p. 227). Educators, “also incorporated TikTok to teach theories on generic business-level strategies, as well as more abstract and unfamiliar concepts such as the construction of stories around entrepreneurial success and failure” (Middleton, 2022, p. 228). Other social media platforms are also being used to educate the public.

Teachers and educators are not the only ones utilize social media to share accurate information with the public. “Professional organizations, public health agencies (e.g., the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC] and the World Health Organization), and hospitals routinely use social media for science and health messaging” (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1890). This might mean that science will move towards embracing social media, in the future, for things like sharing research with the public. If researchers used social media to discuss their research and findings, they may be able to reach more people. For instance, “Posting links to scientific articles or media pieces on social media can expand readership to a wider audience” (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1890). One study, comparing views of two journal articles and one blog post, showed that “the blog post was viewed approximately 30,000 times, which equated to more than 10 times as many views as either journal article” (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1890). This shows the reach and potential use of social media, in education and research. However, the size of each user’s audience may limit how many people a single user is able to reach. For instance, “if few people follow a social media account, reach may be limited. However, once a follower shares information, that follower’s audience can share it with others” (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1890). Thus, even if a user has a small number of followers, each follower can, in turn, share the information with the followers they do have.

One thing social media can do is shift the momentum and bring about change. In healthcare, “social media provides a way to share evidence for or against health policies with the public, policymakers, and other key stakeholders” (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1891). If professionals and educators, on diverse topics, were more widely available online, the public could interact with and learn from the experts on a given topic. “The increasing presence of academics, clinicians, industry professionals, public health departments, and health care systems on social

media provides many opportunities for professional connection outside traditional settings" (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1891). If experts of topics, like Critical Race Theory and TribalCRT, were available on social media, they might be able to interact with the public, clearing up common misconceptions on the topic. Nevertheless, as with anything open to the public, social media is open to public opinion and public mention on social media sites. "Even with highly professional feeds, the public nature of social media means that users may receive unwanted comments. In such cases, it can be helpful to disengage and use platform features to block or report inappropriate users or comments" (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1891). Even with having to combat negativity and haters, "social media can be an important tool for public health researchers to disseminate their work, affect policy, conduct research, and engage in professional networking" (Breland et al., 2017, p. 1891). Social media may have the possibility to be used for other types of research, as an avenue to educate, and to impact laws and policy.

There are several different research studies employing the use of social media platforms, many of which are medical in nature. There was one study that used social media to teach caregivers information about their child. A 2021 study, attempted to teach caregivers about ADHD using TikTok. The researchers wanted to know "how different ways of teaching and storytelling can have an impact on the effective delivery of knowledge in a culturally sensitive manner" (Yan, 2021, p. S79). Social media being used as a teaching and storytelling tool, is one way that education can be Indigenized. One aspect of Indigenous education involves teaching through learning and storying. The researchers of the ADHD study held, "due to professional and ethical concerns of most clinicians, talking to the general public on platforms such as TikTok has not been a natural choice, thus missing an opportunity to reach more people via these new educational channels" (Yan, 2021, p. S79).

These new platforms for education should be looked at as a viable way for experts to educate the public, in a more culturally receptive manner. “Utilizing TikTok as an educational tool can reach a wide variety of populations to create a mutual communication platform of sharing” (Yan, 2021, p. S79). The ADHD study suggested that the key to educating through social media is to share and interact with viewers. “Interaction with the viewers of the video can enhance public understanding and support for ADHD patients and their caregivers, as well as provide professionals the opportunity to view ADHD from a cultural context” (Yan, 2021, p. S79). The varied audience, on different social media platforms, may have the ability to reach viewers that have limited access to educational resources, or wouldn’t go looking for them. “Professionals teaching and sharing knowledge of ADHD in low resourced regions through platforms that attract young users and caregivers, such as TikTok, may help to reach people who otherwise may not have access to mental health resources” (Yan, 2021, p. S79).

Using publicly posted videos to educate the public, is not typically how educating the masses takes place. In general, things like Critical Race Theory are taught in educational settings. If any educating is done online, it tends to be for those who are enrolled in a class, webinar, or lecture. Currently, the teaching of Critical Race Theory is banned from being taught in schools and universities, in seven states, while sixteen more states are currently in the process of banning CRT. As the ADHD study expressed, “TikTok can be an effective means of conveying mental health knowledge to lower-resourced regions, as well as a platform of acknowledging different opinions and misconceptions of the general public toward mental health issue” (Yan, 2021, P. S79). The possibility of social media being a successful method of educating the public on things like Critical Race Theory, to lower common misconceptions, needs further review.

There is one social media platform that is making room for content made by and for People of color. “Head of Video, Fidgi Simo (2019), announced the much-anticipated success of Facebook Watch as place where people could not only view video content, but also build communities” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 4). It also allows for “Black creators to express joy as resilience and counter the negative depictions often ascribed to their community” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 4). This provided a community for viewers, because “unlike traditional media, comments, shares, and emotion-based reactions on Facebook provide more nuanced information about viewers than other platforms” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 4). Not only is Facebook Watch offering content that is more representative of the lived experiences of Black women, but they are offering it free of charge. Therefore, viewers do not have to have the privilege of subscribing to a service, to view content. Facebook Watch is “freely accessible to all viewers via an Internet connection. Other streaming services (e.g., Hulu, Amazon Prime, and Netflix, Disney Plus) thrive on paid subscriptions, with some including commercial content as an additional revenue model” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16). This can have the public asking if one service can be free, why aren’t the others? This could lead to the public “ultimately demanding similar content on paid services and disrupting media structures that silenced or erased Black women” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16). This may also be true for Indigenous content, which would bring Indigenous representation to the forefront.

Similar to how Facebook Watch has provided a platform for Black people to speak out against injustices, the platform could be of similar use to Indigenous people. “Taking into account the increased social media usage of Black people to protest ongoing social injustices, Facebook’s Watch platform creates an opportunity to center itself at the midpoint of accessibility, cultural relevance and inclusive framing” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16). If other

platforms do not fall in line with offering culturally relevant topics, while making them accessible to all, they may face backlash. “The detriment of not recognizing cultural relevance is a costly endeavor. Furthermore, in order to counter assumptions in media that influence policies and practices of institutionalized racism, the industry can provide more opportunities for people of color to control the narrative” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16).

One content source available on Facebook Watch, is called Red Table Talk (RTT). RTT is a program that is hosted by Jada Pinkett Smith, her mother (Adrienne Banfield-Jones), and daughter (Willow Smith). It takes a multigenerational approach to topics that impact the lives of Black women (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16). “RTT positions Black women as the mediator, influencer, and expert in bringing critical conversations to the table, a space often regarded in homes as the point of intimate conversation and reconciliation” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 16). This is like what social media platforms, TikTok and Instagram, have done for Indigenous content creators. These platforms have allowed Indigenous creators to tell their own story, the ones they are willing to share with the world. Just as Facebook Watch allowed Black women to “position their own narratives that frame critical, cultural conversations from their viewpoint, allowing viewers to gain more complexity in Black storytelling” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 17). This is like the way Indigenous social media content creators are breaking the stereotype that often portrays Indigenous people as one dimensional. When you look at the analytics, “audiences show that they are receptive to Black women as leads in critical conversations, backed by both survey data and Nielsen reports of changing demographic preferences for media” (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 17). When platforms, like Facebook Watch, collect data that shows that Black and Indigenous content is, in fact, needed and wanted, it disrupts the narrative that these voices, points of view, and counter storytelling are insignificant. “New access to this information not

only disrupts intact power structures but also opens opportunities for policies that may fundamentally shift access to resources" (Sadler & LaPan, 2022, p. 17).

Social Media's Impact on Indigenous Peoples

Social media has both positive and negative impacts on the lives of those who use it. Indigenous peoples benefit from the use of social media in many ways, "such as ways to establish and navigate identity, build and maintain strong connections to family and community, and seek and offer mutual support" (Kennedy, 2021, para.1). Other advantages social media presents Indigenous users, include "finding friends and family lost through past policies of forced removal (Carlson, 2013); [and] participating in significant cultural practices, including language regeneration practices" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 3). In a recent study at Macquarie University, "83% of respondents confirmed they had positive experiences on social media on a daily basis. In fact, every respondent in the study noted they had positive experiences at least weekly" (Kennedy, 2021, para. 2). The participants listed the following as positive aspects of social media use, "accessing creative arts, Indigenous storytelling, and making contact with community members and services" (Kennedy, 2021, para. 2).

Social media provides platforms "through which multiple expressions of the self can be made" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 3). This ability of self-expression allows Indigenous users to present their authentic selves and to control the narrative with which they are viewed. One significant impact of this ability of expressiveness is that "relations between Indigenous and settler colonizer populations are reproduced and reimagined through the connections made possible through social media" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 3). When Indigenous people share their Indigeneity with the world, it pushes back against racist stereotypes in history books, and displays by the media. "This is particularly significant for marginalized groups such as

Indigenous peoples. Since colonization, racist stereotypes of Indigenous people have worked to sustain and legitimize the settler colonial state" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 3). When social media is used, by indigenous content creators, it empowers positive representations of Indigenous identity and culture. Furthermore, these platforms can be used as tools, by Indigenous peoples, to challenge colonizing ideas of what defines Indigeneity (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 4). While there are, indeed, positive aspects of social media, it is not without its drawbacks.

Social media apps "have become home to more or less organized hate groups, facilitating what Matamoros-Fernández (2017) has called "platformed racism" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 1). This can have negative impacts on the individual user as well as "ongoing marginalization at the level of whole social groups" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 1). When looking at the research, "Indigenous people disproportionately bear the brunt of practices of trolling, cyberbullying, and other forms of digital violence" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, P. 1). The research conducted at Macquarie University, through the Department of Indigenous Studies, looked at what types of harmful content Indigenous people encounter on social media. "These include references to white supremacy, Indigenous identity being challenged, and conflicts within Indigenous communities (also known as lateral violence) in which people attack or undermine each other, often based on colonial ideas about legitimate Indigenous identities (Kennedy, 2021, para. 1). This type of hate can negatively impact Indigenous communities.

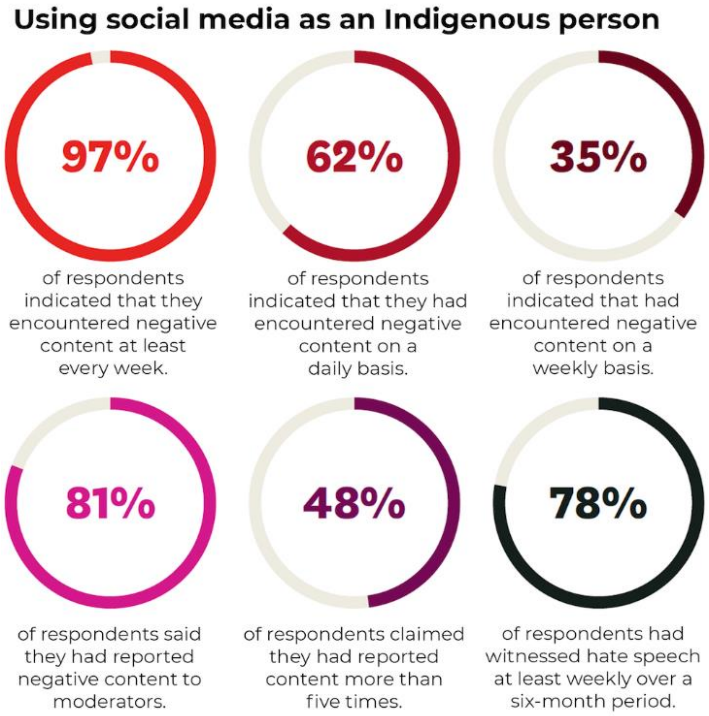

Figure 3: Results of a Macquarie University study (Kennedy, 2021, para. 2).

To combat these negative aspects of social media use, “Indigenous perspectives and voices, which for too long have been silenced or ignored, need to be heard in these settings. (Kennedy, 2021, para. 3). Participants of the research at Macquarie University, “identified a need to employ more Indigenous peoples in society generally – particularly in government, policy making institutions and education” (Kennedy, 2021, para. 3). They also suggested that social media needs to adopt the same idea of employing more Indigenous people, to learn how to identify the cultural subtleties of harmful digital content (Kennedy, 2021, para. 3).

Further Consideration

There needs to be more discourse concerning research ethics and the use of social media platforms used as research. "Innovative approaches that safeguard the research relationship will be critical and it will depend on addressing shifting online subjectivities" (Lee, 2017, p. 1). It

might be difficult for researchers, ethics committees, review boards, and academia to keep up with the everchanging landscape of social media, but some updated guidelines, on social media and human subject research, will go a long way in addressing the current gap. However, it is the researcher who must ultimately decide what ethics to live by, when choosing to use social media as research. "Fiesler and others are calling for their colleagues to be more mindful about any work that uses publicly available data" (Hu, 2019, para. 7). There is no surefire way for researchers to decide if using social media data, deemed public, is appropriate or not, but there must be more discussion on the topic. I do not doubt that there will be more conversations, but what I do not know is how long social media data will be able to be included in future research, in that future research ethics may not allow it.

When conducting social media research, it is important to “discuss the limitations of this research in terms of the solicitation of study participants. For example, how might bias be unintentionally introduced into your findings (such as participant location, strength of opinion, compensated participation, or interest in the study topic)” (Quinn, 2020, p. 8). Also, social media may be limited by the way in which we search for the data. For instance, it is significant to note that in some social media research, the “study data were limited to results for videos queried and returned by TikTok’s internal search function, which may further limit generalizability” (Purushothaman et., 2022, p. 5). There seems to still be room for further study of social media as research, including future research. “Future research can explore further analysis of characteristics of videos including hashtags, trending sounds, and video duration” (Purushothaman et., 2022, p. 6).

Chapter 3: Methods

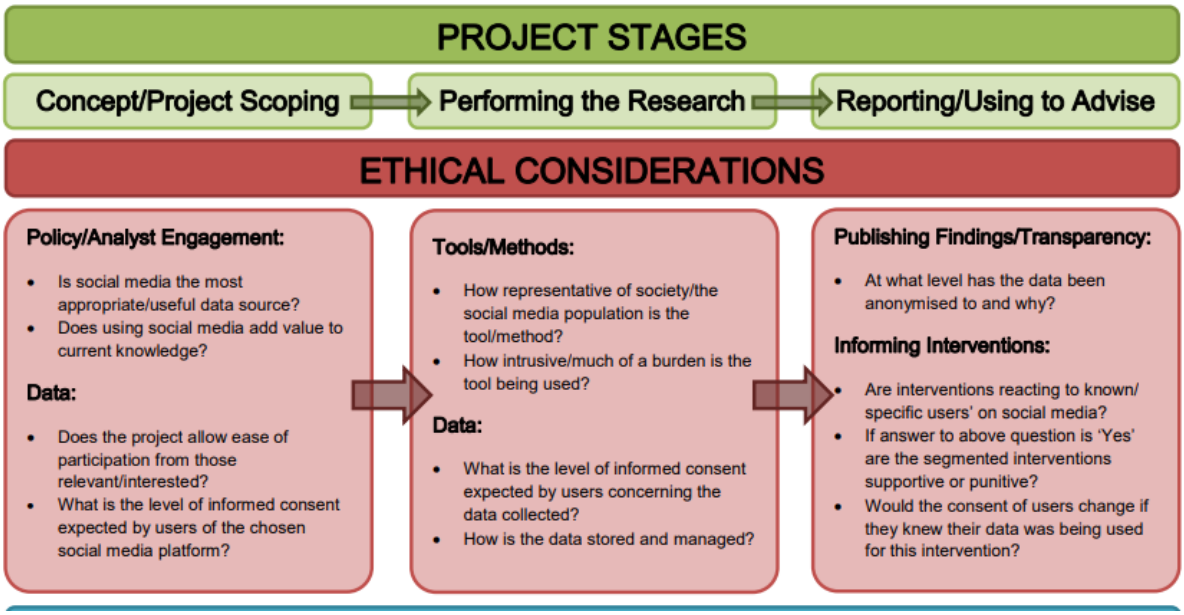

Figure 4: Social media research planning tool (Staff et al., 2016, p. 19).

Researchers ask questions when they are attempting to understand new concepts, and they conduct interviews when they want to understand why people behave the way that they do. Maxwell suggests that "methods are the means to answering your research questions" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 100).

Focus of the Research

The focus of this study is an attempt to discover if social media is the means by which, non-Indigenous, research allies can have the least impact on Indigenous communities while conducting research. Additionally, this research aims to discover if social media can be used as a tool to witness Indigenous knowledges.

Research Design

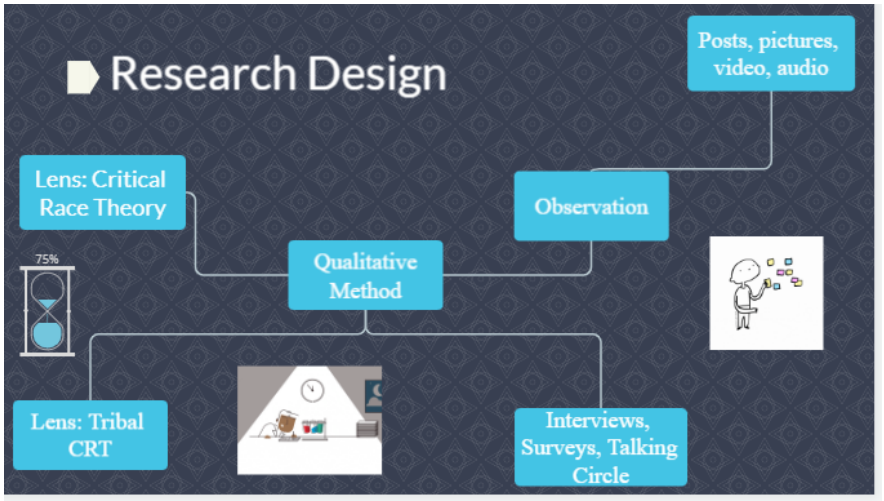

Figure 5: The design for this research project

There are two lenses with which this research design was established, Critical Race Theory and TribalCRT. A qualitative method was used, which included participant observation via posts, pictures, and videos. Even while using participant observation in research, there needs to be a firm understanding of the cultural norms and expectations of the research population, to proficiently and effectually synthesize the data collected. As "research questions formulate what you want to understand; your interview questions are what you ask people to gain that understanding" (Maxwell, 2013, p. 100). The other part of the design is that I also used interviews and surveys.

Research Participants

One "important part of participant observation is defining who your population is. Who is the part of the group that I want to study, and how do I distinguish them from people outside of that group?" (Friesen, 2017). The target population that I studied, for this project, was Indigenous social media content creators. I used both TikTok and Instagram to collect data, as they each had a way to search for Indigenous content creators. There were three criteria that participants needed to have to be included in this study. The conditions that needed to be met for inclusion in this study were that the individual must, in some aspect, be a social media content creator, they must define themselves as Indigenous, and they must share their Indigeneity, knowledge, and/or ways of knowing and being in an observable way.

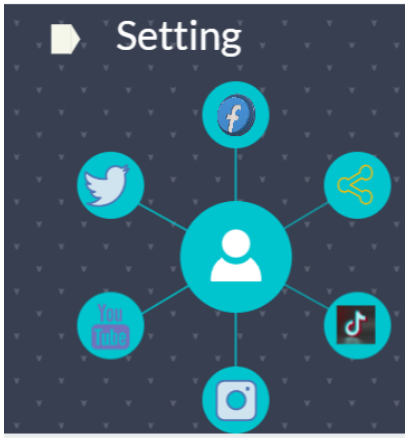

Figure 6: Social media as the research setting

Setting

The settings I utilized were TikTok and Instagram. Both social media platforms work in harmony and allow Indigenous peoples the ability to share their Indigeneity with the world. I elected to use data and knowledge that Indigenous content creators have already chosen to publicly share.

Portrait of Participants

Figure 7: Participants were indigenous TikTokers, like Tia Wood (Wood, 2022), and James Jones (Jones, 2022).

The participants for this study are Indigenous content creators, over the age of eighteen. Some shared a how-to video, which shows viewers how to make or do something. Some will share traditional teachings, like a hair teaching. After finding a platform and their voice, some will speak their truth to the world. One way of passing down knowledges is by learning through doing. I have recently noticed that since the beginning of the covid19 pandemic, more and more people were isolated in their homes, so more and more people took to social media. Thus, we saw an increase in social media content creators. As I navigated through different social media platforms, I kept seeing an increase in Indigenous content. What I noticed about these creators, was that there seemed to be ones that would share Indigenous ways of knowing with their viewers. I also noticed the teaching of Indigenous history, by Indigenous creators. It was then that I began to notice that these Indigenous social media content creators, are storytellers, doing their modern-day story work.

Data Collection

I conducted my research by scanning social media for Indigenous content creators and applying a systematic content analysis. First, I attempted to identified Indigenous creators by searching via hashtag. The first hash tag I used was #TribalCrit. Unfortunately, this hashtag did not turn up very many results. Both Instagram and TikTok came back with less than 100 results. However, I did find a few Indigenous content creators this way. I examined their posts, videos, pictures, and audio, to decide which ones to add as friends, as well as who to invite to participate in my research. I also looked at the accounts of those following and followed by the content creators. I did this to include more people in my invitations to participate, and content creators to observe.

- Individual participants are deidentified in this study, unless consent is granted for identifiers to be published. That means that this document will exclude “public identifiers, handles, and usernames” (Nicholas & Larsen, 2020, p. 84). When reporting social media findings, public handles or usernames will be removed, if participants haven’t given their consent to include their name, image, or likeness in my findings.
- All data and information regarding this study, including identifiable data, was collected and saved on an external hard drive and flash drive, as well as a password protected laptop, and/or in notebooks. All storage devices and notebooks are stored in a double combination lockbox.
- Data was restricted to the researcher.
- I used the following codes for participant observation on TikTok: (1) Indigenous teachings (2) Setting the record straight (3) Humor (4) Culture or displays of Indigeneity and (5) How to do something.
- I sorted the data into two main themes for participant observation on Instagram. I counted the number of regalia phones and the number of modeling pictures. To ensure accuracy, I did not count videos on Instagram that are cross posted on TikTok.
- To looked for content creators and invited them to participate in my research, I used hashtags. Hashtags were searched by using newly created social media accounts, with no personal search history or prior analytics (Purushothaman et., 2022, p. 3).
- Hashtags were selected for use, based on popular terms in Indigenous research, including experiences, and topics associated with Indigeneity (Purushothaman et., 2022, p 3).

- The hashtags used for performing preliminary manual searches were also popular keywords and terms that were seen in different books, movies, television, and on social media.
- The way I used hashtags was to enter a hashtag into the to search social bar on different social media platforms. I did this both to invite Indigenous content creators to participate in my research, but also to find participants to observe.

Figure 8: Advertisement used on social media for this study.

    - To invite Indigenous content creators to my study, I sent private/direct messages to each individual. I did not feel that posting my research link all over social media would be wise, it would be too hard to ensure that those who identify as Indigenous participated.
        - I looked for people who publicly indicated their Tribal affiliation on their social media profile.

Data Analysis

Content analysis of different Indigenous social media creators was conducted. The videos were manually calculated according to the code for conducting participant research. In interviews, I aimed to build trust by starting with "a non-judgmental attitude, reassuring informants that our aim is to gain a fuller understanding of their life worlds and experiences" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 95). My objective was to listen to their words and experiences without opinion, or interruption. I also encouraged open ended conversation, informing participants that "there is no right answer" (Marcus et al., 2012, p. 95). I asked about things specific to the individual, as well as group interactions, in general. I looked for themes in the data and sorted the data into categories.

Ethics

Before conducting any research, this study went through the University of Washington's Institutional Review Board (IRB) process. The purpose of the IRB was to evaluate my research and the potential impact on human subjects. I submitted the informed consent forms for my survey and one-on-one interviews. During the recruitment process, I gave each participant a link to my university website. This website included information about my research. When a potential participant decided they'd like to take my survey, for example, they would click on the ad for the survey. The link would go to the google forms survey, which included the informed consent information. In order to move forward with the survey, participants were required to complete the informed consent portion of the form. The consent form outlined the study, the information being used, and the expectation of confidentiality for the participant. It also disclosed that participants could choose to discontinue the study, at any time. In an effort to protect participant confidentiality, I kept all data, including notes, in a box with double locks. I used an external hard drive to back up the data, and a flash drive. Notebooks, recording devices, and a cell phone were also kept in the locked box. No one, other than me, had access to the data collected, or the password to the box.

Validity

There is one factor affecting the validity of my study. I am a non-Indigenous research ally, conducting Indigenous research. I am a non-Indigenous researcher, asking Indigenous content creators what they think about non-Indigenous researchers, conducting Indigenous research. It was clear to participants that I believe it may be possible for non-Indigenous research allies to conduct this research, as it is what I was attempting to do. I also asked questions about non-Indigenous allies, conducting research. The fact that I'm a non-Indigenous, could have

played a factor in who participated and how they participated. This is one reason I used several methods to collect data, and not just one. I used the anonymous survey, in an effort to provide the most anonymity and confidentiality. This strategy should help participants feel as if they can answer questions honestly, without interacting with the me. Additionally, all research methods were documented and disclosed, so readers could make conclusions about the validity and objectivity of the research methods.

Trustworthiness

Since the beginning of this research process, I wanted to follow the data. I didn't want to have any preconceived ideas of where this project would take me. I started with a review of the literature on social media as research, in general, and found that there had been many studies done. There is a smaller amount of literature on social media being used for observational research, for which the literature clearly outlines several patterns. I attempted to be a neutral person, in my interactions with participants. I did not want to influence the participants' opinions or answers in any way.

Figure 9: # Bird with #hashtags

The methods involved in interviews consisted of transcribing what each participant said, sending the transcript to each participant, and giving them a chance to make any corrections or edits. This affirms the accuracy of the data collected. By using multiple ways to col lect data, via interviews, surveys, and participant observation, I have strengthened the trustworthiness of my results. I stayed away from assumptions that were not backed up by data and relied on literature from experts on the subject for guidance.

Chapter 4: Analysis of Witnessing Indigenous Knowledges

Themes in the Social Media posts of Indigenous Content Creators

How To Video*:* The viewer is shown how to do something, like how to make frybread.

Setting the record straight*:* The viewer is told the correct information about something, like history of Indigenous people.

Teaching*:* The viewer is taught something, like the importance of the cedar tree.

Humor*:* The viewer is shown something funny.

Instances of culture/Indigeneity*:* the viewer is shown displays of culture and Indigeneity. This could be singing, dancing, regalia videos, and instances of ceremony that are acceptable to post. It can also be other instances of practicing culture that doesn't fall under one of the other categories. It was clear that culture and Indigeneity was woven throughout all of the videos I observed. When it's a way of life, you can hardly separate it.

There were 30 Indigenous social media content creators who were observed, for the participant observation portion of this research. There were eleven (11) participants who completed the survey, and one (1) person who participated in an interview and consented to be part of and named in a case study.

Figure 10: Research study questions

Participant Observations

In order to discover if it was possible to use social media, as a tool, to view Indigenous knowledges, I used participant observation. Participant observation gives us a taste of the world participants traverse and gives the researcher the feeling of shared experiences or insider knowledge. Participant observation has the potential to be used by researchers, to gain real-world knowledge, when it comes to things like how to behave in an exclusive situation or social group. I used participant observation to conduct independent research, via social media, specifically Instagram and TikTok. Social media apps, like TikTok, can transport the researcher into the research environment without leaving the house. Social media enables the viewer to participate with the content creator, through watching posted videos, interacting with the video, and allows users to comment and establish a dialogue with the content creator and their followers. This permits the researcher to quite literally be a part of the virtual community, which requires norms and etiquette, just as much as if it was happening in person.

Most of us have rooted for our favorite team, cheered at a concert, applauded for something together, or found a source of community, even among strangers. Many of us still sing and tell stories around the campfire. This storytelling, signing, sharing, learning, and communion has been happening in Indigenous communities since time immemorial. It is no wonder that Indigenous peoples are forming and finding community online. The way that social media has progressed, has allowed users the platforms with which to create and publish content for the world. With the advancement of the smartphone, there are also a lot more users viewing and creating content. To create content, you need a device that has the capability to get on the internet and download necessary apps, access to data or the internet, and an app or five. You also need continued access to these things if you intend to post more than once. That is why it is

social media apps, like TikTok that are giving Indigenous creators the access to share their content. It also has created a sense of community among users from all over the world. This sense of community only increased during the pandemic, when most of the Nation was isolated in lockdown.

The Indigenous content creators I observed were from either the United States or different regions of Canada. The main Tribes that these TikTokers represented were Cree and Navajo or Dine. Many are in, or seem to be in, the 18- to 30-year-old age range, with a few being a bit older than that. Lots of content creators do not list their age, so one thing I chose to do was look for evidence that the content creator graduated from high school, or mentioned things like going to college, or posted about a birthday. There seem to be just as many males as there are females, but there are also two spirit people, as well. The place where there seemed to be the most interaction, sharing, and feeling of community was on TikTok, which works in synchrony with Instagram. By searching for hashtags using TikTok, I was able to easily find many Indigenous content creators. When looking for hashtag results, TikTok videos are also what commonly shows up when using search engines to find creators.

TikTok Videos

I watched thousands of videos, discovering hundreds of Indigenous content creators. I selected and observed thirty (30) Indigenous social media content creators. I used the code for the TikTok videos, and separated the videos into the five themes, culture, teaching, how to, setting it straight, and humor. I watched every TikTok video, for each participant that I observed, and sorted each video into one of the five categories. The category with the most videos, overall, was the humor videos (68%). Indigenous teachings (12%) is the category with the second highest count. Culture or displays of Indigeneity (9%), how to (6%), and setting it straight (5%)

comprise the bottom three categories. I also counted the number of likes and viral videos for every participant I observed. There were 1,487 viral videos and over 19 million likes, among all the thirty (30) participants. It can be helpful if the researcher already has some familiarity with the situation, event, or group, so they can readily navigate the environment, and be clued in by the innerworkings of both Tribal and online communities. Inside jokes or knowledge may be lost on some researchers without prior knowledge of the group. For example, there were many humor videos where the Indigenous creators used the sound from the movie Smoke Signals, by Sherman Alexie, to recreate the scene where Thomas tells the story of the magic frybread (Alexie et al., 2000). If you have not watched Smoke Signals and/or haven't been around Tribal communities, you may not understand or "get" the reference or joke, or even know what frybread is.

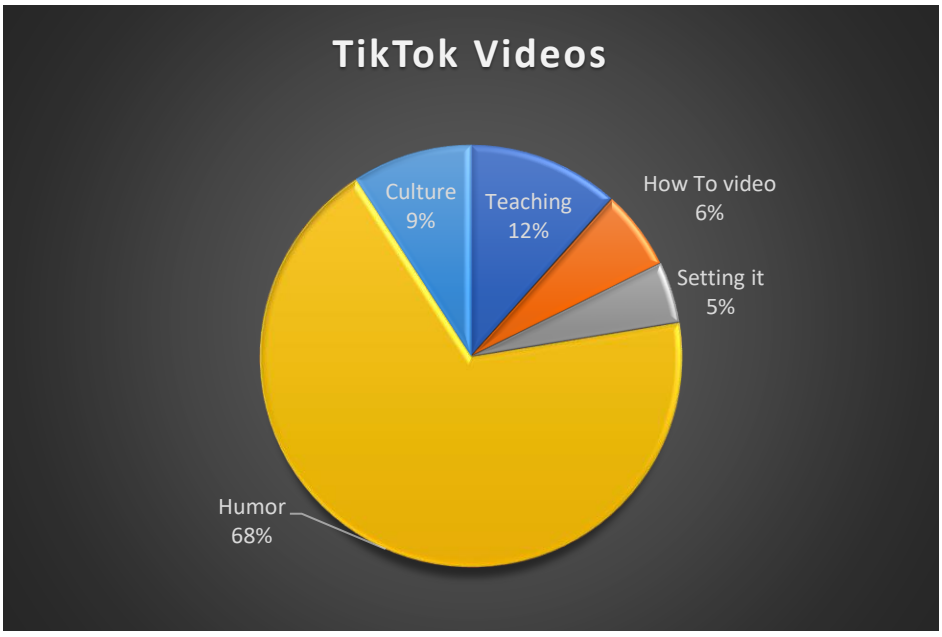

Figure 11: TikTok video pie chart

Teaching

Through this participant observation, I've witnessed different Indigenous teachings, such as hair teachings. Many Indigenous content creators explain why Native hair, including the way it is taken care of, is so important. One content creator says that they have never cut their hair, only trimmed it, in keeping with their traditions. These teachings can be similar or different among different Tribes and even families. These creators share the teachings that have been passed down to them. Many content creators will have the same type of teaching video. For example, one of the more popular content creators, has a word of the day that he shares in his Tribal language. There are many creators who do the same. I have also heard traditional stories, and had lessons, explained, and taught to me.

How To

I have seen videos that taught viewers how to bead, how to do specific dance moves, and even how to weave. I have viewed hundreds of powwows, listened to the singers sing and heard the jingle dresses, as dancers dance.

Displays of Culture

I've witnessing men and women dance, both traditional and fancy. Some Tribes do not even, traditionally, have powwows. For instance, numerous coastal (sometimes referred to as Coast Salish) Tribes hold potlatches and participate in Tribal Canoe Journeys. There are thousands and thousands of Indigenous content creators. You can lose time, just watching the different creators share their lives.

Displays of Indigeneity

One type of video that I kept watching really displayed the lives of the creators in a unique way. The type of video is when an Indigenous creator will show their 3 lives. For example, one person posted a video of the three sides of their life. They shared that they are a professional dancer, are in college, and are a powwow dancer. Those three lives take up so much time, it is a wonder they can do all three things. Often, this type of video will illustrate how Indigenous people have to walk in more than one world. They must walk in the western world and the Indigenous world, but they so often must navigate the land of academia or other types of worlds, as well.

Setting it Straight

There are also videos where Indigenous content creators are setting the record straight, about false narratives that have been perpetuated since colonization. Creators are telling the accurate history of Indigenous people, like the truth about Thanksgiving. Other videos that set it straight, include why many First Nations people of Canada do not celebrate Canada day. Additional videos set straight topics like, residential schools, the 60's scoop, Federal U.S. Indian boarding schools, and other parts of whitewashed history. Countless Indigenous content creators mention and share that there are different Tribes and many ways to participate in Indigenous culture. Another thing I saw being set straight, was letting non-Indigenous viewers know that they need to educate themselves, and not just expect knowledge for free.

Humor

The most common theme in the videos I coded was humor. Some of the more popular humor videos were Indigenized versions of trends that have already been sweeping the internet.

For instance, there is a trend that asks viewers to hold up all 10 fingers, and only put a finger down if they've done whatever is described. One video tells you that 'you might be an auntie if,' or 'you might be Indigenous if.' Each of the videos will list off ten, or more, funny things that you would do if you were an auntie or Indigenous.

These humor videos are remarkably like the way some standup comedians use humor. For example, Filipino Comedian, Jo Koy, uses humor around his Filipino culture. Those who are either Filipino or familiar with the culture, relate to his jokes because they are 'in the know.' Those unfamiliar, are educated about what it was like growing up or being Filipino, but in a humorous and relatable way (Koy, 2021). Jo also doesn't shy away from telling it like it is when it comes to racism, plus he uses his platform as a comedian to do it. His style is similar to other comedians who use humor to talk about their culture. Using humor, the way Jo Koy does, is similar to how Indigenous TikTok creators are using humor to unpack and clap back against stereotypes. TikTok creators aren't the first ones to create Native humor for an audience. In fact, the first Native humor video I ever saw, was an Indigenous standup comedian, on YouTube. In 2009, A YouTuber posted The Five Ways Native Women Laugh, by Don Burnstick. Burnstick, who says in the video he's Native, is describing the diverse ways people laugh. When he gets to Native people, he says, "Native people, we laugh, it's a beautiful thing [..]. The best laughter I've seen, and I've travelled across North America, Native women." (YouTube, 2009). Don goes on describe the five ways that Native women laugh. In 13 years, this video has had 1.5 million views. Popular TikTokers can get that many views in a day. Prior to the popularity of apps like TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, it was not as easy to get user generated content out to the masses.

Creating community

TikTok uses something called stitching, as a unique aspect that helps form virtual communities. Stitching your video to other content creators is one way to interact with users on TikTok. The stich feature is where one user can connect their video to one or more videos, made by other content creators. You can collaborate with any TikTok creator, even if you do not know them, or have not ever spoken. Often, creators will make a video and request that other TikTokers stitch a video with the one they have just posted. This trend can help viewers discover other content creators that they may be unaware of, it also strengths community. One humor video featured a person who stitched their video to other Indigenous content creator's videos. The sound on the video says, "Everybody thinks Indigenous people all look the same, but that's not true, right cousins?" To which a chorus of voices reply, mm hmm. When they all say mm hmm, all the Indigenous TikTokers, who look vastly different, move their mouths to agree.

This same sound has been used over and over, by Indigenous TikTokers, to make different videos like the one I described. It is humor, but it sets the record straight and fights back against colonization and erasure. Being able to share the same sounds means being able to make the same stance, together, as one. When viewers see all these Indigenous TikTokers posting in unison, it creates a community that even with humor, echoes we are still here. I, personally, enjoyed seeing different Indigenous content creators that I follow, team up with one another. You start to feel like you have gotten to know them. I had the sense that they worked together, so they liked each other, too. It felt more like finding out that two people your friends with are already friends with one another. It should not be a surprise that humor videos are the number one video that I found.

Indigenous TikTokers are funny and have learned to use humor as a weapon. Humor is being used to combat stereotypes and racism, as well as used as laughter to heal from trauma. There was not one TikTok content creator that I observed, who did not have at least a few humor videos. One TikToker's video had a comment about Indigenous humor being unmatched. To which the creator responded in an amused tone, that humor was a way of inappropriately coping with historical trauma. Many TikTok creators making humor videos said that if they do not laugh, they will cry and they're choosing laughter.

Instagram Pictures

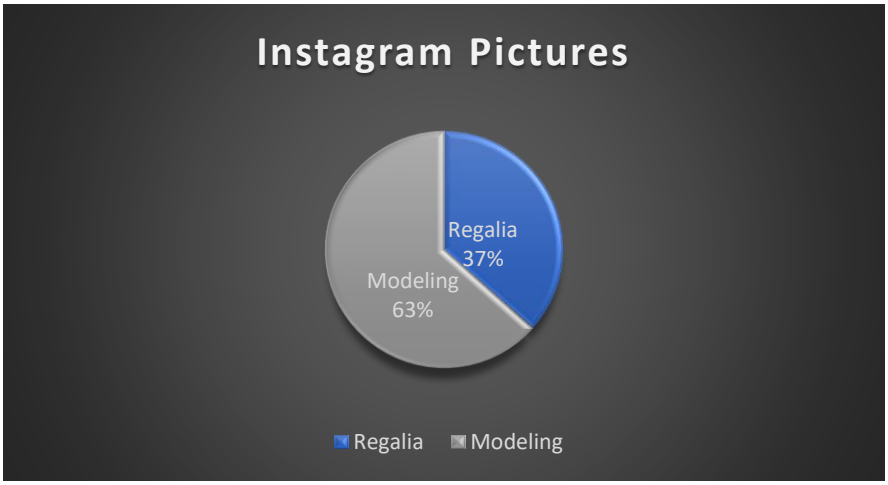

Figure 12: Pictures on Instagram pie chart

Regalia and Modeling Photos

Instagram is a place where Indigenous content creators post pictures of themselves in regalia, and where many have posted modeling or professional pictures. Some content creators had one or the other, but several had both. Lots of the creators, I observed, had accounts that were pretty professional looking. Although, if you went far enough back in their posts, you would find some of them started as personal accounts. I only counted photos that were from the

professional portion of the Instagram account, because these photos were posted with the intention of the public viewing them.

The videos that were on many of the participant accounts I observed, were reposted from TikTok. Therefore, I only counted the pictures I found on Instagram. I viewed every post, by each participant, and sorted them into either regalia or modeling pictures. There was more modeling (63%) than regalia (37%) pictures. Some of the modeling pictures were used in actual ads for billboards, magazines, and television. Other modeling pictures looked like they were for content creators to have a professional looking account.

I was able to use participant observation to witness Indigenous knowledges, right from my phone. While conducting participant observations, I added users to my friends list, so I could invite creators to participate in my survey.

Survey

I would privately message individuals that I thought might be interested in participating in my research. They received a short message and a link to my university website that contained a bit of information about, the researcher (me), my program, my facility advisor, and links to my informed consent, for my survey and one-on-one interview. I did not post these links to the social media accounts I'd made as a researcher, as I wanted to be careful about who was receiving the invitation to participate. I wanted to ensure that each participant met the eligibility requirements for the study. I verified that each person identified as Indigenous, in some way, and were at least 18 years of age, before sending the invitation. There were twelve (12) people who took the survey, however, one indicated that they were not yet 18 years of age. Since being eighteen or

older is a requirement for participating in the survey, those responses were not counted in the data. Therefore, there were eleven (11) participants who were counted in the survey data.

When participants were asked, if they considered themselves Indigenous, 100% of the participants answered yes.

Figure 13: Survey question #1

Participants were asked if they were associated with an American Indian Alaskan Native Tribe, and 91.7% confirmed that they were. 8.3% said that they were not. Yet, when asked to list the Tribal Nation they were associated with, 100% listed either a Tribe or First Nation. Perhaps a definition of American Indian/Alaskan Native would have made the survey question clearer. There could have been an option to select First Nations, instead of just asking participants to list their Tribe or Tribal Nation.

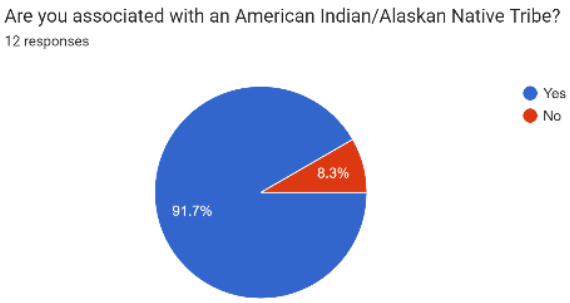

Figure 15: Survey question #2

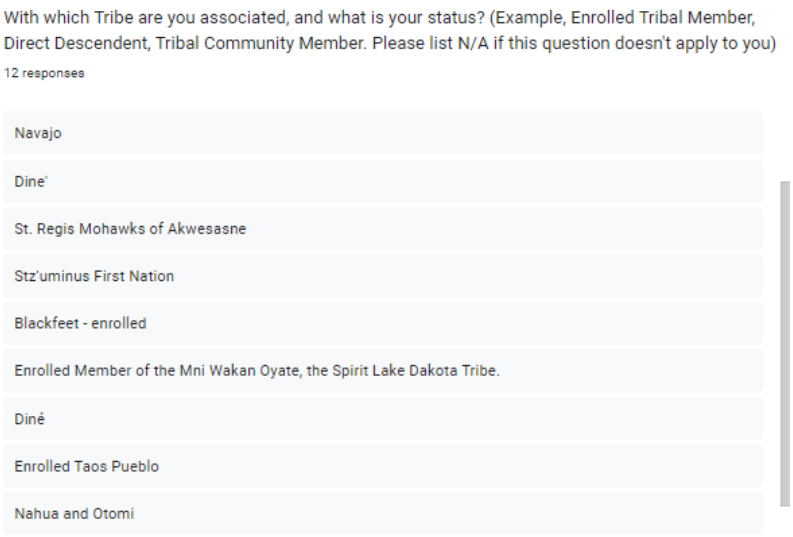

Figure 15: Survey question #3

When asked what inspired them to be a social media content creator, participants had varying answers. They listed things like work, themselves, connecting, storytelling, and things like working with cameras. One person said that the reason they created social media content was "for Indigenous people to have a place where each voice can be heard."

The majority of these participants have been creating social media content between 7 to 10 years, with a few who have been creating for about 3 years. When asked about their most popular video or post, participants reported a range from a video with 6.7 million views, to a video with 1,744 views. Most participants, though, indicated that their highest views were in the hundreds of thousands. When asked if they consider themselves Indigenous content creators, specifically making Indigenous content, 44% said yes. Many of the Indigenous content creators are just living, recording, and posting things from their everyday life. There are content creators that are intentionally trying to advance their causes and careers by being internet famous. However, for the majority of Indigenous content creators, they are living and documenting their

everyday lives, sometimes just as proof that they are still here, and they exist. They are living their truth, displaying their lives which includes their Indignity, and sharing with the world.

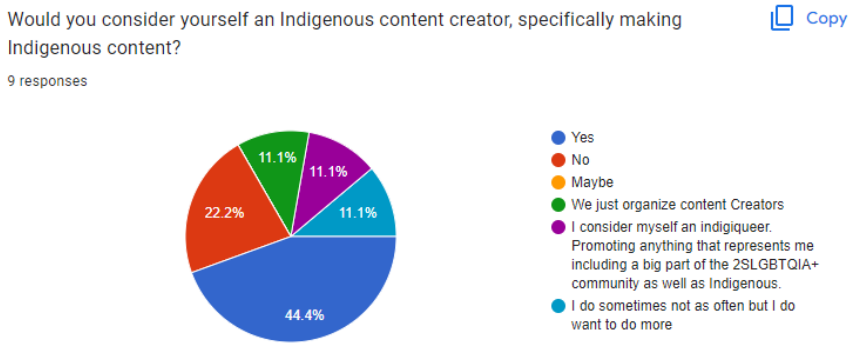

Figure 16: Survey question #7

The data shows that 77.8% of participants are out there making or organizing content that is Indigenous based. Out of all the participants, 22.2% said they were not specifically creating Indigenous content to share with their followers. When asked what inspires them to share this Indigeneity with the world, participants said it was just part of their lifestyle, it was for other Indigenous people, or to show the world Indigenous people are still here.

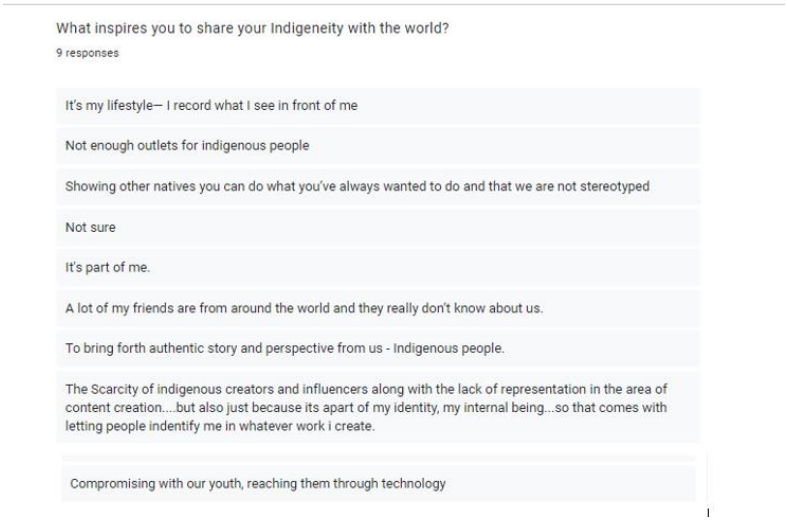

Figure 17: Survey question #4

Nearly half (44.4%) of the participants said they'd experienced racist backlash or hate speech, for creating their content. The following are some of the examples shared by participants. The racist backlash or hate speech comes from ignorant people, other Indigenous people talking negatively, non-Indigenous people demanding answers to their questions, colorism in the comments, non-Indigenous people calling us liars and racist, and nasty negative comments. One participant illuminated, "when you shine, you'll stand out, even to those who don't like you." Participants were asked if they had experienced haters or internet trolls, with 33% affirming that they do. Those participants that have haters said that they immediately block the account of any users that troll their accounts. A participant noted, "I have taken the time to try to educate, but I learned it never works." Interestingly, the majority of the participants have never really thought about whether or not the likes they get impact them more than the dislikes.

Participants were asked if there was a way to make sure that content creators identifying as Indigenous, are in fact Indigenous, and not just profiting off false Indigeneity. Some people felt that there are ways to recognize if someone is real or not, or that they should have ties to a Tribal community. Yet, most participants mentioned and/or discussed pretendians profiting off of traditions and cultural knowledge that is not theirs to offer.

Figure 18: Survey question #8

Those who took the survey, had mixed feelings or were unsure when it came to the ethics of using publicly posted social media content as research.

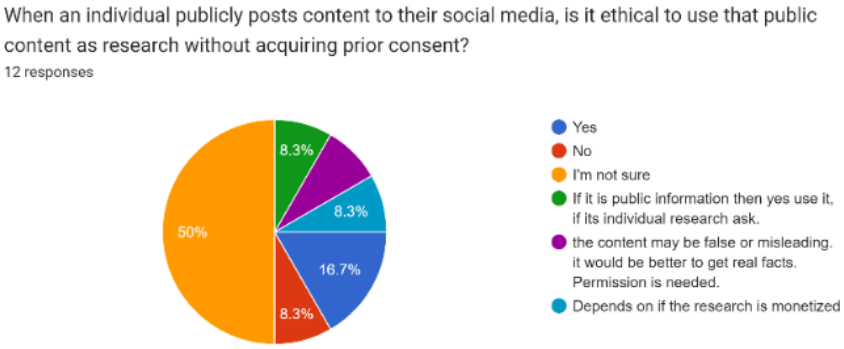

Figure 19: Survey question #9

Half said they felt unsure, while just 8.3% thought it wasn't ethical. Intriguingly, 77.8% of those who took part in the survey, said they'd like to read the research, if their publicly posted content was ever used in part of a study. 22.2% said they would maybe want to read the study, but no one said they wouldn't want to read it, at all.

When asked their thoughts on non-Indigenous researcher allies conducting Indigenous research in Indigenous communities, many thought that it was o.k., fine, or even great. At the same time, some felt that non-Indgenous research allies may never really get it, but it's o.k. as long as Indgenous people look it over, and the truth is being shared.

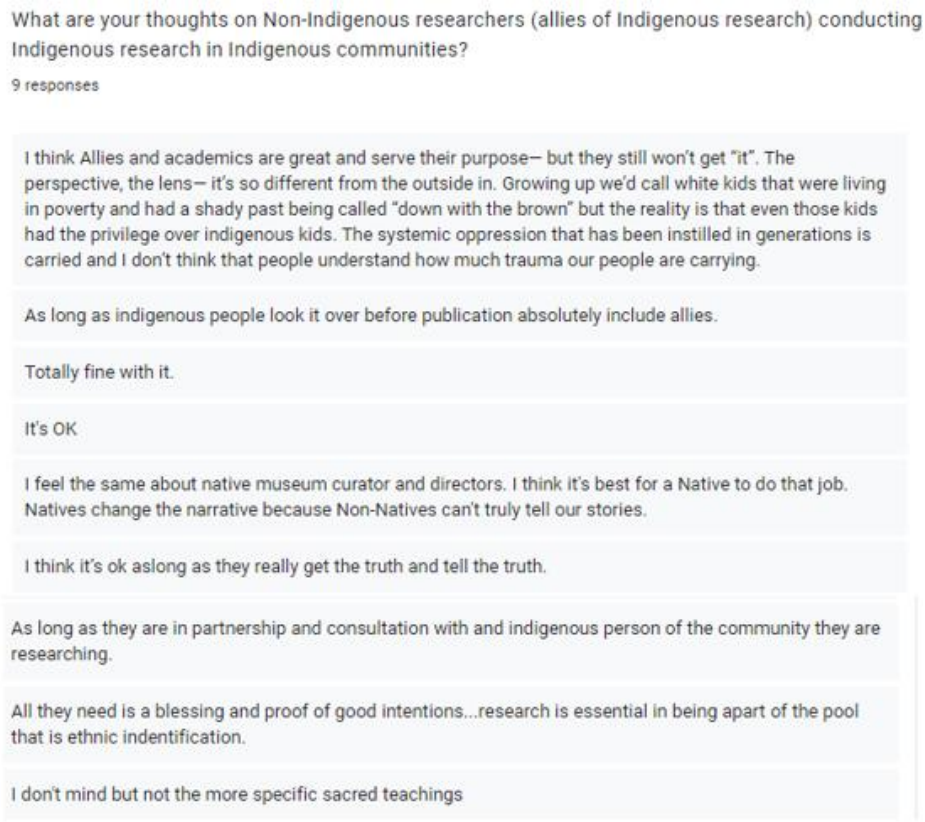

Figure 20: Survey question #11

When participants were asked whether or not they thought that social media could be used by non-Indgenous researchers, to lessen the way those researchers impact communities, most said maybe. Yet, many said yes, while noting that no one, outright, said no. This means that it's possible that Indigenous communities may be open to social media being used as a way to conduct research. This could mean that social media, as tool for non-Indigenous allies, has the potential to be accepted, by Tribal people, as a way to cause less harm to Indigenous peoples and communities.

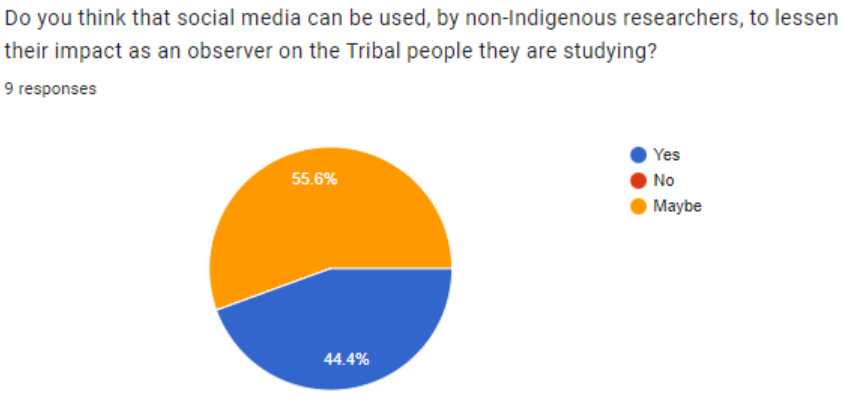

Figure 21: Survey question #13

Case Study

Figure 22 Avatar of Desirae Desnomie

To further establish an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous content creators, this study highlights one particular creator, as an example. Desirae Desnomie is an Indigenous content creator, traveler, mother, wife, singer, taste tester, cook and advocate. Desirae is from the Peepeekisis Cree Nation, Treaty 4 Territory, in Southern Saskatchewan, Canada. She has content on the following social media platforms; Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, and TikTok. She is also the social media administrator for her son, Baby Opie's, Instagram account. She has had her

YouTube account since January 2012, where she is posted 57 videos and has 327 subscribers. On Facebook she has 9,800 followers. On Instagram, Desirae currently has 1,734 posts and 9,566 followers. On TikTok, she has 171,000 followers and 3.6 million likes. Her most liked video is on TikTok, has 6.2 million views and 1.2 million likes. TikTok is currently where she is finding the most interaction and followers. She is not unlike other Indigenous TikTok content creators, who are finding a spotlight due to displaying their everyday Indigeneity. Yet, her followers and viewers are interested in her content for various reasons.

Figure 23 Desirae Desnomie with Her Son

Some of Desirae's viewers start following her because they are interested in cooking and some of the recipes she shares. Other fans follow her because she features taste testing for things like Starbucks coffee, or reviews food, for sale, at the Powwows she takes part in. Yet, others are interested in the drumming and dancing, she captures and shares with the world. Desirae has expressed that it is o.k. for non-Indigenous people to be curious or to view her content, but when it comes to asking questions, she believes there is an appropriate protocol. She believes that there are appropriate and inappropriate ways to ask questions about culture and teachings. She shares that "the culturally appropriate way to ask questions, is to ask with tobacco. The appropriate way to ask a question, is to do an exchange with something that the person asking, feels is significant, in exchange for that teaching." In fact, she has had experiences where people have just demanded answers to their questions, and notes that it is not the Indigenous way. "You shouldn't be just coming in and expecting answers, it is never appropriate in our doings and our circles. What we do is we stand by, we watch and learn, never speaking on behalf of people outwardly."

Desirae is talented at getting a good angle or vantage point for her camera, and sharing things that her followers are interested in seeing. This is partly because she has a background in broadcast journalism, and in her twenties, she was also a freelance journalist. She says, “I’ve been involved in post-secondary education, to some extent, throughout my adult life. I love to learn, but I do not consider myself an academic, at all, because I like to learn in the way of storytelling.” Desirae says she has always been interested in story. “I’m interested in storytelling because that’s how I learn. I feel as if as Indigenous people that’s how we learn, by connecting through sharing, comparing and figuring out the teachings from storytelling.” It is also because she has been using social media, largely, since it was available. Desirae has been using her social media to educate others, and share her storywork, for some time. She was involved with social media prior to the pandemic, but like most Indigenous content creators, during the pandemic she saw an increase in her followers and views. Even prior to the pandemic, she has been interviewed for things like her singing, which often involved collaborative interviews, with her husband and children. Desirae and her husband Opie Day Sr. are part of the well-known Powwow singing group Midnite Express, which Desirae’s husband founded. Together, they spend part of their lives on the Powwow trail, teaching their children the ways of their people.

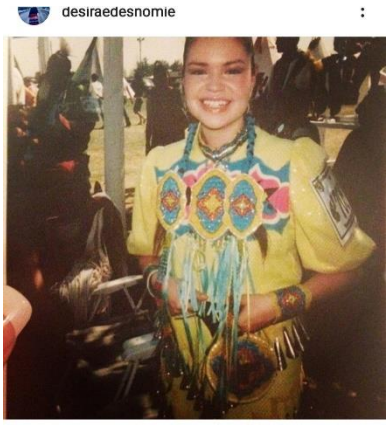

Figure 24 Desirae Desnomie in Regalia

Figure 25 Midnite Express Singers

Figure 26 Desirae Desnomie with Her late father

Desirae started singing with her late father, who needed help as the keeper of their lodge. “My Dad always needed help, as a lodge keeper, so I would gladly sing those songs. I started singing them, and then I started being a little more comfortable singing at round dances” (Peterson, 2020). Desirae always enjoyed singing, and

believes "singing is prayer, it's a way to connect. When signing, we call upon not just the people that are around us in the community, but also our ancestors that are here waiting to connect with us and to be here" (Peterson, 2020). Desirae says that she gained confidence in her own signing, by singing with others who were confident in their voice and sang loud and strong. "I would be able to stand beside them and find my voice, beside someone who is confident in their singing. That way I could sort of figure out my own pitch and see how much I can go" (Peterson, 2020). She was also part of a group called the Pretty Indian Girls. In 2016, the "five friends were on their way to a round dance in North Dakota, singing songs in the van, when they decided to post a video online" (Monkman, 2016, para. 1). These videos received a lot of attention, and the girls started singing together. There are videos and posts available featuring the Pretty Indian Girls singing at different events. She says she was also encouraged, by her husband, to sing backup behind the big drum, as part of the Midnite Express singers. Desirae describes it as being intimidating, initially. "At first, I was really nervous because obviously singing behind a drum group, as well known as Midnite Express was a very daunting task. I know that I have songs in my heart. I love to sing, I love to connect in that way" (Gowder, 2022). In fact, she describes "my passion for singing, is to sing with my family, just to offset [my husband's] voice, and our son and our other children they are so connected in this way. It's really truly beautiful to be a part of and to witness" (Gowder, 2022).

Figure 27 Pretty Indian Girls (Peterson, 2020).

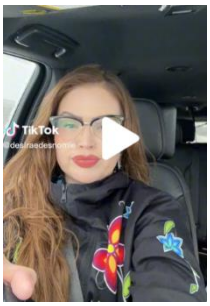

Figure 28 Desirae Desnomie's TikTok

Desirae is using her content to story through her social media. For example, she features her children or the Midnite Singers in her videos, but she also shows how she has decorated her house for things like Christmas or shares a cooking video. One point that her social media makes about her family, is that she has purposely chosen to raise her children in a drug and alcohol-free home. This contrasted with what she and so many other Indigenous children experienced, growing up. Yet, Desirae is quick to point that the root cause of this, is all the trauma Native people have suffered, as a direct result of colonization. Desirae shares, "I grew up in alcoholism, and I know the direct effects of what happens, as a result. You know, like sexual abuse, abandonment, food insecurity." She says, "my parents went to residential school, and both my grandparents, on both paternal and maternal side, all went to residential school" This colonizing act still has a significant impact on Tribal people today. She shares, "They took everybody, from that community, and then took their kids away. The kids were then institutionalized, so when they came back out, the parents were no longer parents. They never got a chance to be a parent, they grieved that whole time." She shares that the lived reality of "Indigenous people that are living in the trenches is that they are figuring out all of the things that are going on with their family system, the toxic relationships that they have to overcome." She explains that this can seem like a daunting task because "when people are oppressed, in that manner, they are not able to stand in their own light, in their own ability to realize the goals and things that they want to do, to step outside of themselves." Desirae shares how "trauma and hurts and addictions and all these things are at the foundation of colonization, oppression, and intergenerational trauma, and that is how is

Figure 29 Desnomie with Her family (Thompson, 2019).

it manifesting today. You see this on the spirits and the backs of our indigenous people." She credits doing a lot of work on herself, for making the choice to raise her children in a substance-free environment. She also chose to help her children learn the traditional ways of their culture, including singing and dancing, as a way of building their resilience. Together, as a family, they all attend Powwows, where they dance and/or sing. One of the questions listed on her TikTok Q&A is, "How much time/money goes into making of powwow outfits?" to which Desirae posts a response video, where she simply says, "all of it, all of your money and all of your time."

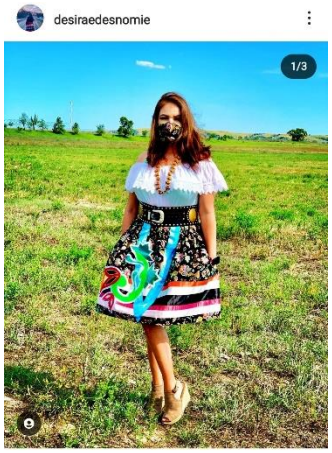

Figure 30 Desnomie Ribbon Skirt and Mask

She captures everyday instances of her family and posts them to her platforms. These moments are not staged for the camera and are not unlike many families that participate in Powwow life. "I travel to Powwows, round dances, different doings, different events, every single weekend and sometimes during the week. I'm recording when it's appropriate, I'm also highlighting my children or just the lifestyle that I'm naturally living." Desirae knows when it's appropriate to record content to post to her social media platforms, and when it's not. She says, "It's not performative, this is the lifestyle that I really lead, and the lifestyle that I raise my children in. I am at these events and doings, so I'm recording, when it's appropriate or getting those snippets, or things like that and sharing them." The things she posts are just from her daily life, but in so doing she has created a virtual community for and with her viewers. This virtual community is formed around common experiences of Indigenous culture. This virtual community took on a new meaning, during the pandemic, when many sources of in person community and ceremony were unable to be practiced. Desirae "and her partner have been going live on Facebook and sharing powwow and round dance videos because it makes them feel good to sing and forget about what's going on

during this pandemic" (Mandes, 2020). They used the virtual Social Distancing Powwow Facebook Page, to help others stay connected, during quarantine.

Figure 31 Indigenous Desnomie

If you google Desirae Desnomie, you will find several articles where she's been asked to be present, with her family, at different events and doings. For example, she along with her family and Midnite Express, were asked to take part in a land acknowledgement, at George Floyd Square, on the one-year anniversary of his murdered" (Arif, 2021, para. 2). She has also been asked, as an Indigenous influencer, to give her opinion on Indigenous issues, and been present at instances of disrupting and dismantling colonized monuments, like the destruction of the Christopher Columbus statue. Desirae shared in an article, "Recently, we were at the protest at the Capital, in St. Paul Minnesota where they brought the Christopher Columbus statue down. We had a calling to go there, and I said let's go there and let's sing" (Peterson, 2020). One of Desirae's main messages is that Native people still exist, and are still taking part in singing, dancing and ceremony, in their everyday lives. "It's important to just have people understand a little bit that we're still here, that we're still practicing our songs and our culture," said Desirae Desnomie, singer for Midnight Express" (News, 2021). She goes on to explain why it's so important for Indigenous peoples to reconnect and reclaim their culture, ""It's extremely important," Desnomie said, "our indigenous people's history has been through so much, and it's extremely important for us to reclaim our culture, our songs, our language and all of our teachings."" (McCarthy, 2022, para. 1).

Figure 32 Desirae Desnomie

Figure 33 Desirae in NY Tunnel

While analyzing Desirae's content, as data, the following themes emerge; Teaching videos, How To (do something), videos where she is setting the record straight, humor videos, videos of instances of culture or Indigeneity. Several of these videos have gone viral. She also has regalia photos, many of which are ribbon skirt pictures. These themes in her content, are also the common themes among many of the Indigenous social media content creators that were observed and analyzed during this study.

Desirae continues to further her career, by showcasing herself in a way that will bring her closer to her five-year goal, of supporting herself through the content she creates. For example, she will model for Lavender Kingbird at Native Fashion Week, in Minnesota, during April 2023. Both "Native Nations Fashion Night & Fashion Week MN are collaborating to bring a celebration of indigenous creative expression through fashion, designed to elevate and inspire the human spirit & connect across cultures" (White, 2023, para. 1). She is not unlike many of the Indigenous content creators that were observed for this study, or who took part in the anonymous survey. She's living her life, participating in her culture, raising her children to participate and practice their culture, and sharing her cultural knowledge and daily life with the world.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Recommendations

Beginning in 2007, one of the biggest class-action settlements in Canadian history, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement, took place. A stipulation of this settlement was the creation of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC report was conducted due to so many harrowing tales of survivors (Neuman, 2022, para. 2). The findings detailed the horrific physical and sexual abuse of Indigenous children, suffered in Canada's residential schools, which were mostly operated by the Catholic church. "The schools were designed "not to educate" the Indigenous children, "but primarily to break their link to their culture and identity" (Neuman, 2022, para. 2). The report concluded that the establishment and operation of the schools "can best be described as 'cultural genocide'"" (Neuman, 2022, para. 2).

Although the TRC published its full report in 2015, Pope Francis didn't come to Canada to apologize, until July of 2022. Pope Francis' visit brought an even bigger spotlight to news that was already at an international level. In July 2021, 215 unmarked graves of children were found on "the land once occupied by the Kamloops Indian Residential School" (Neuman, 2022. p. 2). The residential school was run by the Catholic church until 1969. The magnitude of the findings in the TRC report, coupled with so many mass graves at residential school sites, was proof to the world that the colonized narrative, which has been passed off as history, is a facade. This evidence echoes the outcries of residential school survivors, parents, and children of survivors, for so many years. In March, of this year, the Vatican made a statement regarding the Doctrine of Discovery. The Doctrine of Discovery is a legal concept that gave the Catholic "church's blessing to European explorers "discovering" and exploiting land in the New World and Africa […] it allows for a European nation to lay claim on any territory that the state discovers, as long as it is uninhabited" (Boyd, 2022, para 1). Since settlers exploited land that even colonized

history tells us was inhabited by Native Americans, it is clear that colonizers did not view Indigenous peoples as human. Therefore, the Doctrine of Discovery has caused a lot of suffering, and has been a symbol of erasure for Indigenous people. The statement from the Vatican regarding the Doctrine of Discovery, happened after Pope Francis' July 2022 visit to the First Nations Territory of Canada. ""When we hosted Pope Francis on our traditional territory in July, rescinding the Doctrine of Discovery was our survivors' most prominent request," said Lynne Groulx, (Babych, 2023, para 2). Joannie Suina, National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition treasurer, says "This truth-telling journey, has been about creating awareness around the Federal Indian Boarding School Policy that began in the late 1800's here in the United States. Last July Pope Francis set out to First Nations Territory" (2023, para. 1). Suina continues, "Fast forward to April 2023 and the recent announcement by Pope Francis which denounces the Doctrine of Discovery has continued the ongoing dialogue of addressing the mass genocide of Indigenous Peoples as well as the theft of land" (Suina, 2023, para. 2).

This is a start, not a finish, it is a good faith effort that there is more work, reparations, and reconciliation to be done. Because of the truth telling in things like the TRC report, Canada's Indigenous population is leading the way towards healing from historical trauma. Bringing to light the atrocities that really happened at residential schools, has given survivors the opportunity to set the record straight. Some of these survivors are taking to social media to share their stories, and they are finding an audience willing to listen to them, as they take back their own narratives. In fact, companies like TikTok and Proctor & Gamble are coming together to support and sponsor Indigenous content and creators. In June 2021, TikTok Canada said they reinforced their "commitment to showcasing and celebrating Indigenous creators and stories through year-round programming, campaigns and long-term programs focused on supporting Indigenous creators"

(TikTok, 2021). They announced that they partnered with The National Screen Institute (NSI) to create an Accelerator for Indigenous creators. The accelerator is an online training program that will help "up to 30 Indigenous content creators to grow their TikTok presence and learn the necessary skills for off-platform success" (TikTok, 2021). The hope is that by using this accelerator, "participants will learn the key elements of storytelling and essential building blocks for a successful digital career" (TikTok, 2021). The pandemic empowered many Indigenous content creators to put more focus on making and sharing their content with the world. Many of the most popular Indigenous social media creators, were getting a lot more views. With more of us under quarantine, worldwide, people were looking for something new to distract them from reality. Social media had just the thing, TikTok. Some of us were already using the app, so our usage increased, while others joined for the first time. Where TikTok had the videos, Instagram had the pictures. TikTok and Instagram are the top two apps where I found the most Indigenous creators and communities.

Many of us who already followed Indigenous content creators, noticed an increase in Indigenous content flooding our 'for you' pages, during the pandemic, and we weren't the only ones. In November of 2021, ABC aired a segment on Indigenous TikTokers. In the interview, one of the more popular Indigenous TikTok Creators, Michelle Chubb, also known as @Indigenous_baddie said, "Indigenous people across the globe have been left behind by history" (Alfonseca & Filardi, 2021, para. 3). This was in an effort to erase Indigenous people, and aid in colonization. She "began her TikTok page by showing off her jingle dress -- a gown adorned with metal accessories that ring when its wearer dances -- which symbolizes healing and strength" (Alfonseca & Filardi, 2021, para. 3). During the midst of the pandemic, the message of healing and strength is exactly what

Figure 34 ABC's Indigenous TikTockers (Alfonseca, 2021)

Indigenous people needed to hear. Michelle Chubb's popularity skyrocketed after she shared herself in her jingle dress, while telling the history or teaching behind the dress. Other Indigenous content "creators say these communities, which have been historically suppressed, are being humanized among non-native populations through this informative, creative and passion-driven content" (Alfonseca & Filardi, 2021, para 4). This popularity seems to stem from Indigenous people wanting to find community, a voice, and representation, they want to see people that are just like them. Others come from all walks of life wanting to know the real history, the true narrative, of Native American and First Nations peoples. Many people are tuning in or streaming Indigenous based entertainment, as well. Recently, there's been an increase in Indigenous based television shows and movies.

In the past decade, you could probably count on one hand, the positive Indigenous representation in the mainstream media. For the most part, "Americans' greatest exposure to Indigenous people in mass media was through racist sports mascots or Halloween costumes" (Horton, 2022, para. 7). This had a "particularly detrimental effect for the approximately 5.2 million Native American and Alaska Natives in the US" (Horton, 2022, para. 8). It also contributes to the colonizing mindset of erasure, as members of the U.S. non-Indigenous population do not seem to know that Tribal people have endured and are still here. This was by design and not by accident, as those controlling the narrative, taught in U.S. public schools, seem to whitewash history and antiquate Indigenous peoples and struggles. In fact, "There's a cumulative dehumanizing effect to erasure – "if you can't see someone, you can't empathize with them" (Horton, 2022, para. 8). The Reclaiming Native Truth Project found that in 2018,

Figure 35 Stills from Reservation Dogs, Dark Winds, Prey, Rutherford Falls (Horton, 2022).

"78% of Americans knew little to nothing about Indigenous people, and significant portions within that weren't even sure Indigenous Americans still existed" (Horton, 2022, para. 8).

Even just two short years ago, "there was not a single Indigenous lead character on US television" (Horton, 2022, para. 2). Yet, the summer of 2022 was a "watershed moment for Indigenous representation in US pop culture, which for decades has slighted or misrepresented Indigenous people, if it acknowledged their existence at all" (Horton, 2022, para 2). FX's Reservation Dogs, a comedy co-created by Muscogee and Seminole filmmaker Sterlin Harjo and Taika Waititi, is the first mainstream TV show with an all-Indigenous writer's room. Sierra Teller Ornelas became the first Indigenous showrunner, when Rutherford Falls premiered in 2021. Dark Winds, an AMC crime drama starring Zahn McClarnon, is filmed at the first Indigenous owned studio in New Mexico (Horton, 2022, para 3). Prey the prequel to the Predator franchise, "became the highest-rated premiere to date of all film and TV on Disney's Hulu" (Horton, 2022, para. 4), and is the first movie to be dubbed completely in Comanche. It is the first franchise movie to have a mostly Indigenous cast, backed by a production team that is predominantly Indigenous, including producer Jhane Myers (Horton, 2022, para. 4). "For years, invisibility has been the rule for Indigenous Americans in pop culture. Until the first-season premieres of Rutherford Falls and Reservation Dogs in 2021, Indigenous people had been virtually absent from television both in front of and behind the camera" (Horton, 2023, para. 5). This increase in Indigenous representation, in mainstream media, has opened the doors for more representation in social media. Indigenous people are looking for other people that look, act, participate in life and culture, like they do. As they are finding more and more representation, Indigenous people are connecting to one another on a deeper level, online, through story. Non-

Indigenous people are also looking to mainstream media, as well as to Indigenous social media content creators, for the Indigenous perspective.

Major Findings

Research Question #1: Can social media be used as a research tool, to witness Indigenous knowledges?

Through Participant observation, I was able to witness Indigenous knowledges. Participant observation gives the researcher just a hint of the worlds our participants circumnavigate. It also gives the researcher an insider's point of view. Social media can transport the researcher into the research environment, with the touch of a button. Using social media allows the researcher to be a part of an online community, much the same as if it was offline. Through this participant observation, I have witnessed different Indigenous teachings, I have seen videos that taught viewers how to complete different projects, such as beading. I have witnessed dancing, and some ceremonies that were allowed and appropriate to share online (many ceremonies aren't recorded out of respect). "Digital technology, especially the Internet and social media have transfigured the creation, performance, experience, storage, distribution, and reception of indigenous media" (Mpofu, 2021, p 1200). Indigenous people are seizing the moment, in order to weave together a tapestry, which they are using, to tell the world their truth and share their stories. With more and more Indigenous representation in the mainstream media and on social networking platforms, a narrative is forming that can be used by different people, organizations and movements to promote Indigenous voices and causes. This message tells the world that Indigenous people exist and thrive, every day, all around them, and in so doing are resisting the false narrative about Indigenous peoples. This storywork that is being done is

available for the world to see, including researchers. Researchers can view Indigenous knowledges like Indigenous teachings, setting the record straight, humor, how to's, and culture or displays of Indigeneity. A fantastic example of this storywork and representation of Indigeneity, in online spaces, was demonstrated in the case study.

Figure 36 Mother and Children Holding Canoe Paddles (Urness, 2022).

Figure 37 Mother Teaching Children to Sage (Urness, 2022).

Figure 38 Mother and Children Walking in the Forest (Urness, 2022).

The above pictures are an example of an Indigenous mother teaching her children how to smudge. They were taken by Indigenous photographer, Zoe Urness, as part of her Indigenous Motherhood Project. These photos were posted to social media by the mother (Teleshia Francis) and are an example of the types of Indigenous knowledges that can be found on social media. These are the types of knowledges that are viewable for many different types of audiences online, without even having to interact with anyone. Yet, there are ways that observers can select to interact, commune, and connect, if they so choose.

One of the main points of this study was to take as little as possible from Indigenous communities, while still using my privilege and power to amplify the voices of those who are being silenced. There are different ways in which power can be used and defined. Power, in this instance, is defined as the ability to use your opinion and say so, to create lasting change. Here power is seen as infinite and can therefore be maximized and shared. This means doing

everything possible to equalize the distribution of power. This does not render powerless those who have historically been treated by society as less than. It also doesn't mean that they cannot champion their own causes. "Indigenous peoples globally have leveraged social media technologies to their own ends—challenging dominant discourses, organizing feet-on-the-streets activism, and producing anti-colonial collectives" (Carlson & Frazer, 2020, p. 1). Therefore, it is no wonder that Indigenous content creators have taken to social media to be seen, heard, and raise awareness of Indigenous causes. Non-Indigenous allies who wish to conduct Indigenous research, need to ensure that they have good relationships with Tribal communities and/or Indigenous content creators. This means finding out what it means to be respectful in that community. It also means asking Indigenous peoples the needs, in their own communities, and letting that drive the research. Additionally, it means partnering with Indigenous peoples before, during, and after conducting research.

Research Question #2: Can social media be used as research, by non-Indigenous research allies, in order to have the least impact on Indigenous communities?

From the emergent literature on the subject, as well as the data collected from this study, it is clear that there are Indigenous people who are, at least, willing to consider the subject of allies using social media, to conduct Indigenous research. Every participant in this study believes it might be possible, or is possible, for allies to lessen their impact on Tribal communities, by researching through social media. This indicates that social media, used by non-Indigenous research allies, has the potential to be accepted by Tribal people. It is essential that Indigenous people support social media, as a research tool for non-Indigenous allies. If allies us social media without the endorsement of Indigenous people, it would be hard to be called an ally. This study

suggests that Indigenous research, conducted by allies, cannot be legitimized without Indigenous collaboration.

The way for non-Indigenous researchers to have the smallest impact on Indigenous communities, while conducting research, is for the researcher to leave the smallest footprint possible. This means allowing Indigenous researchers the ability to conduct Indigenous-based research, within their own communities whenever possible. It also means respecting the cultural practices, as well as evaluating the appropriateness of the researcher doing the research. In an effort to leave no negative impact, as a non-Indigenous researcher, I was able to use social media content as a research tool. I believe using social media for this research was possible because "multimedia forms a bridge between traditional and modern culture" (Mpofu, 2021, p. 1201). The researcher should also be sure that they are collaborating with Indigenous people on their research project. This study showed participants thought that at the very least, researchers should have their work reviewed by Indigenous knowledge keepers.

Social media gives researchers the ability to use participant observation, coupled with other forms of data collection (such as surveys), to conduct trustworthy research. The lives of the content creators are genuine, the way they display their Indigeneity and culture is authentic. This study shows that conducting research via social media is possible. Research allies, conducting research through social media, have the potential to help familiarize themselves with the people group they are preparing to research. If non-Indigenous researchers wish to take part in Indigenous research, they will need to take the time to familiarize themselves with the basic information about how to behave respectfully, while conducting research. This is regardless of whether or not the researcher is conduct online, or in a more traditional manner. Either way, it is

imperative that research allies collaborate with Indigenous partners, and also have others who are Indigenous look over their work.

Limitations

One limit of conducting research online is the fact that social media apps have barriers. For example, I had to wait three days to verify my Instagram account, and couldn't use it to conduct research, during that time. If I was unable to verify my account, my account would have been deleted. I had to use TikTok and Instagram, together, to conduct research. If I didn't get Instagram reinstated, I would not have been able to ask participants to join my survey or take part in an interview. To have my account restored, I had to verify my information. To prevent robots from spamming messages, sites like Instagram are having users verify their accounts. This could potentially create a barrier for social media research, if researchers are not able to do this. Another limitation is that when a researcher sends a private message to some of the more popular Indigenous content creators, they may not see it. Many of my messages had the status of unread, on Instagram. The content creators with a following, even if it is small, aren't always open to private messages from people they do not know. In spite of the limitations, this study suggests that social media can be used as a tool for research, to witness Indigenous knowledges. The implications of this, are that Tribal people, Indigenous content creators, Indigenous and non-Indigenous viewers, and research allies can all benefit from social media as research.

Future Recommendations

Practice

Something that could help social media research, is if some sort of account or app, worked by itself. Instead, I had to use two apps together (TikTok and Instagram). Social media

apps have the opportunity to play a role in shaping social media research, by making available special research accounts, but limiting users' private information. Social media researchers could be asked to verify their standing as a researcher and be given special status. These credentials could allow the researcher the ability to send direct messages to users, without the algorithm forcing the researcher to verify their account or kicking them out. This could also alert users to the fact that someone is a legitimate researcher, so users could choose to interact with them or not. As a part of informed consent, it is important that potential participants know when someone is a researcher attempting to conduct research. Additionally, it could allow the researchers to send special private messages letting creators, at every level, know that someone would like them take part in a study. Though, content creators should have the choice to opt out of having to receive these messages. The creators should also get to choose whether or not they wish to view the message or simply delete it. This way, they have the option to communicate with a researcher that has been verified as such.

Research

Social media, as research, can be an advantage to Indigenous research. Indigenous content creators are already out there, sharing their Indignity, teachings, showing how to do things (like dancing), and are controlling their own narratives. All of these things are available online, in an instant. Indigenous content creators are sharing content they want made known to the world. Social media research allies, can help spread the message that Indigenous peoples are still here, doing their present-day storying, through social media. Viewers of Indigenous content can observe Indigenous teachings, sources of Indigeneity and culture, witness how to do something, learn the unvarnished history from the Indigenous point of view, and create community. While, non-Indigenous viewers are welcome, they also have the responsibility to

educate themselves, and not exhaust the content creator with endless questions. They can watch, learn, and educate themselves with books by Indigenous authors. They should discover what causes are important to the content creators and Indigenous communities in general. Someone wishing to be an ally, needs to do the work of an ally, without calling themselves such. A true ally only calls themselves such, if they are told by an Indigenous person or group that they are an ally, or if they are introduced as an ally. Non-Indigenous allies need to educate one another on how to be an ally, on Indigenous history and causes, and on how to conduct Indigenous research as an ally. An ally is someone that uses their power, privilege, and voice, to amply the voices and causes that are important to Indigenous peoples. The first step to being an ally is educating yourself on those causes and voices. Research needs to reflect the causes and issues important to Native peoples. Additionally, articles, papers, and books should be authored in collaboration with Indigenous peoples who have the appropriate knowledge to assist on the subject. For example, knowledge keepers, language teachers, protectors of Indigenous history, Indigenous professors and other academics.

Social media, especially participant observation, has the potential to change the face of participant research, as we know it. Social media is changing faster than research ethics can keep up. Just as soon as ethical guidelines are published, technology changes. Yet, we do need some basic guidelines on the ethics of using social media for research. There needs to be continued research and ethical guidance, if research is going to continue to take place on the digital frontier. Using social media as a research tool for participation observation means that previously secluded populations and people groups can be observed. These groups may have been isolated due to geographic location or marginalized by society as not enough of the population to count. Nevertheless, thanks to technological advances like cellphones and the internet, their exposure is

growing rapidly, allowing people and places to be seen where researchers have previously lacked access. There needs to be additional, long-term, participant observation research conducted via social media, as a part of Indigenous social media research. This will help researchers get a better understanding of the potential benefits and pitfalls of conducting virtual participant observation.

One example of future participant observation comes from one of the Indigenous TikTokers, who is using her social media to educate the world about Indigenous life named "Maira Tatuyo, 22, better known as 'Cunhaporanga'" (McCoy, 2021, para. 1). In under 18 months, she has gathered more than six million TikTok followers, "simply by showing scenes from her everyday life" (McCoy, 2021, para. 1). Curious viewers ask Cunhaporanga, if she really eats larva? To which she replies "Of course, we eat them! Do you want to see?" […] and a new viral star was born, streaming from the most remote of locations," the Amazon rainforest. "Maria is one a member of the Tatuyo people. They paint their faces in bright red, wear elaborate feathered headdresses, live alongside squawking macaws that Cunhaporanga warns should not be mistaken for pets, and survive off whatever they can grow or catch" (McCoy, 2021, para. 2). The Amazon rainforest is being called one of social media's last frontiers. It is a "window into Indigenous life, clearing away the barriers once imposed by geography. For the first time, some of the planet's most isolated peoples are in daily communication with the outside world without the traditional filters of journalists, academics or advocates" (McCoy, 2021, para. 5). This is a glimpse into a world that few have had the opportunity to research.

Figure 39 Cunhaporanga (McCoy, 2021).

As social media expands throughout the Amazon rainforest, there will be ever more content creators sharing from remote locations. In this way, participant observation can enable non-Indigenous allies to conduct research that has traditionally been limited or nonexistent.

“Beto Marubo, a member of the Marubo people says, “the Brazilian people don’t know Indigenous people, and from this lack of information has come all sorts of terrible stereotypes, like Indigenous people are lazy or indolent or unhappy” (McCoy, 2021, para. 6). Research via social media, has the potential to uncover Indigenous Amazon rainforest content creators that are using their platforms to share their Indigeneity, to combat racist stereotypes and distribute their own narratives, showing their viewers parts of the world most have yet to see. Indigenous social media research needs further review with regards to things teaching Critical Racey Theory, preventing erasure, and disrupting/dismantling power, privilege and hate that is spread online.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was intended to find out if social media was a tool with which Indigenous knowledges could be witnessed, and to understand if social media could be used as a research tool, by Indigenous allies, in order to have the least impact on Indigenous communities. I, successfully, witnessed Indigenous knowledges through participant observation, surveys, and interviews. Using participant observation, I was able to bear witness to Indigenous knowledges, without interact with anyone. I could observe as many TikTokers as I had time to study. Their content was already readily avaible, and there were so many creators with various likes, videos, and views. This meant that there were endless videos clips for me to watch, sort, and code. It made me so excited for future research and researchers. For the survey and interview portion of this study, I did need Indigenous TikTokers to read my message and respond by interacting in either the survey or interview. The goal was to understand what Indigenous peoples view as my role, as an ally, in Indigenous research. This research will essentially impact and guide my future research. From this study, I’ve come to understand that my role as a research ally is important but needs to always be guided and reviewed by the Indigenous community. This research shows

that Indigenous peoples believe it might be possible for non-Indigenous allies to use social media to lessen their impact on Tribal communities. Thus, social media research is an avenue that I will continue to research and explore.

Indigenous people everywhere need allies, their call for justice, should be everyone's. Indigenous allies need to ensure that they are following the lead of Tribal communities and are in good standing with them, when it comes to participating in events, conducting research, or even taking up Indigenous causes. Until we decolonize educational spaces, until Critical Race Theory and Tribal Critical Race Theory are used as a basis of a new system, communities are where trailblazers will set the record straight, display examples of Indigeneity, and pass down teachings. I will continue to be an ally until my voice is no longer needed to magnify the outcry of those in danger of erasure. I will continue to use my voice because my brothers and sisters, who have been marginalized, are tired. Their voices have gone raw from yelling into the abyss for so long. I will help shout until our voices are heard. I will also help to educate other non-Indigenous allies, on how to be an ally. I will do this so the work will continue, "we do this because the world we live in is a house on fire and the people we love are burning" (Cisneros, 2009, p. xviii). I will continue to do this work because I must.

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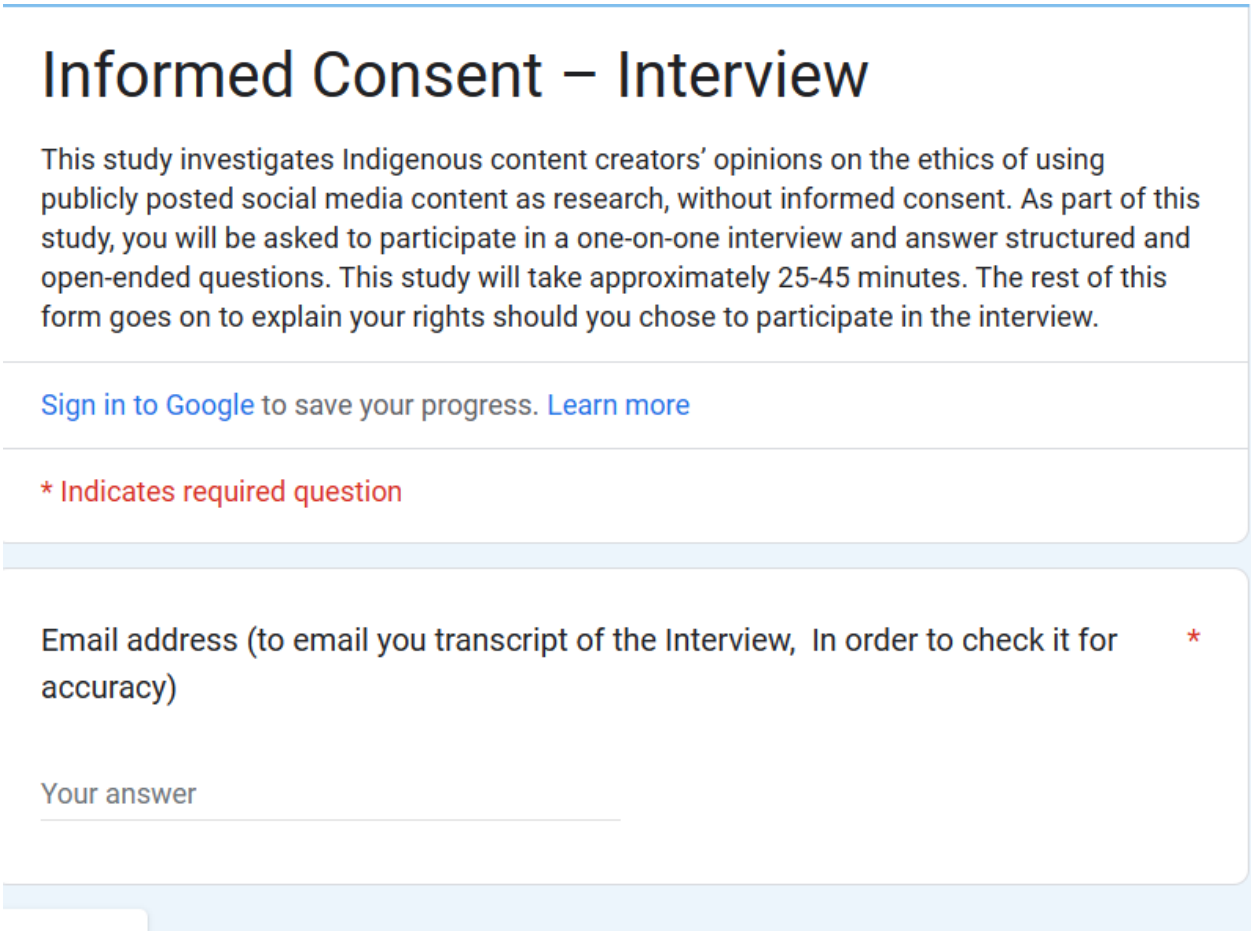
Appendix A

Interview Informed Consent



Informed Consent – Interview

This study investigates Indigenous content creators' opinions on the ethics of using publicly posted social media content as research, without informed consent. As part of this study, you will be asked to participate in a one-on-one interview and answer structured and open-ended questions. This study will take approximately 25-45 minutes. The rest of this form goes on to explain your rights should you chose to participate in the interview.

Sign in to Google to save your progress. Learn more

* Indicates required question

Email address (to email you transcript of the Interview, In order to check it for accuracy) *

Your answer

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Appendix B

Interview Questions

Interview Questions

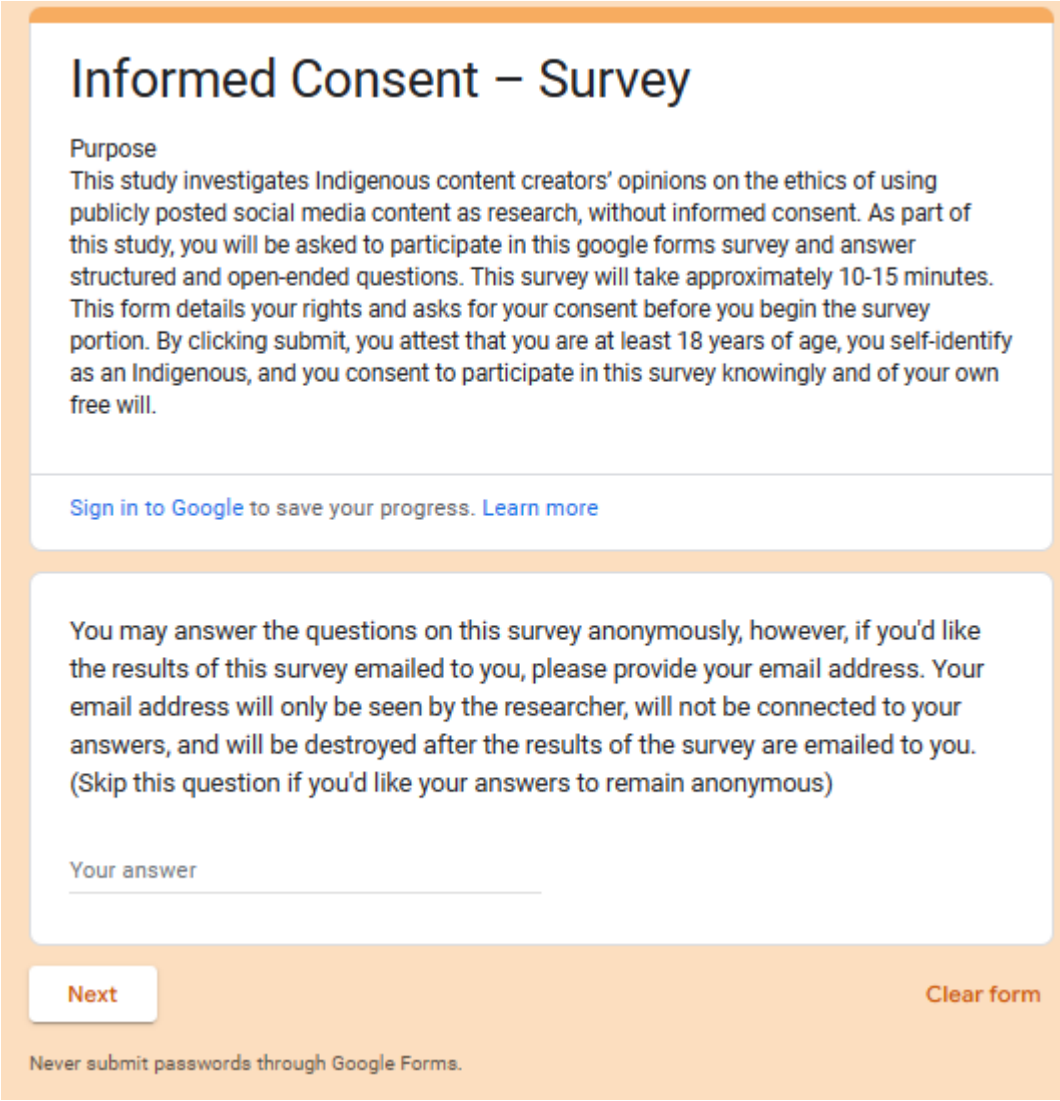
Introduction:

Thank you so much for taking the time out of your day to talk with me about your experience as an Indigenous Social Media Content creator. I want to reiterate that your participation in this interview is completely voluntary, and you are free to leave at any time. I will be emailing the transcript from today's interview to you. I will do this so that you can ask me to remove anything that you shared that you don't feel comfortable being included, or anything you want to clarify.

1. Please tell me your name, username, the name of your tribe, and your preferred pronouns
2. Can you tell me how you became a social media influencer?
3. Do you consider yourself a creator of Indigenous content?
4. If yes, was that a deliberate decision, or tell me about how that came about?
5. How many viewers do you have, and when did you feel like you were big?
6. Would you prefer to have only Indigenous viewers or who do you consider your target audience?
7. do you try to attract Indigenous viewers?
8. When did you start to feel like an influencer?
9. You seem to have a platform and a voice, what is it that you really want to say to the world?
10. What do you think about non-Indigenous researchers who are allies of Indigenous research, using Indigenous content on social media, to conduct Indigenous research until allies are no longer needed?
11. Do you think that content you publicly post should be used as research?
12. Do you know what informed consent is?
13. Do you think that you deserve credit for the content you create if it's used as research?
14. Some people think that once you post something publicly, there is no expectation of privacy, so it should be able to be used by any researcher so long as they site you as the source. What do you think about that?
15. If consent isn't required legally, are there still questions of ethics to consider? If yes, what other considerations should be made?
16. After answering all these questions, are there any questions that you feel are missing from this interview, or should be added?
17. Where do you see yourself in five years?
18. Do you have any comments or anything else you want to say?

Appendix C

Informed Consent Survey



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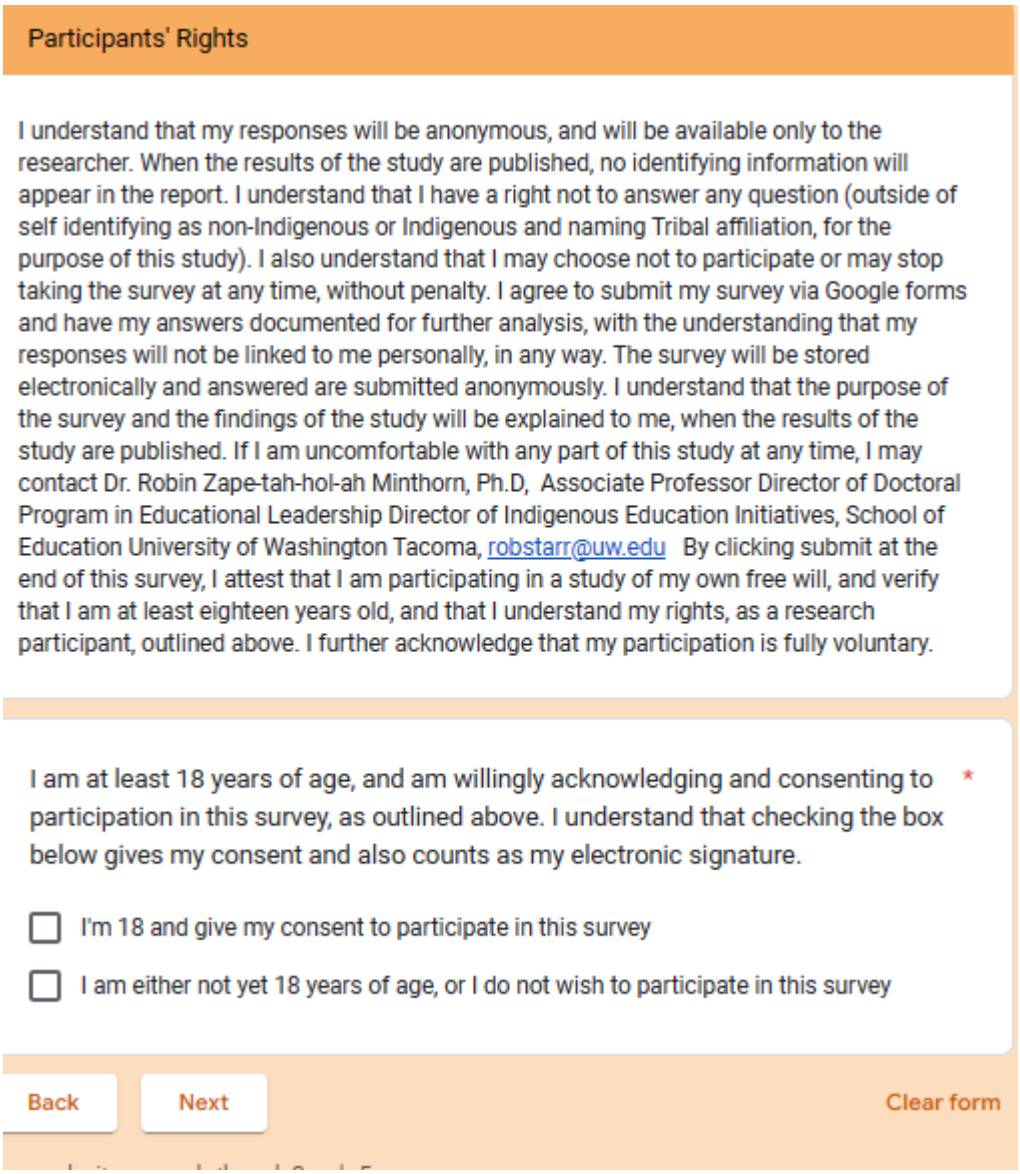

Participants' Rights

I understand that my responses will be anonymous, and will be available only to the researcher. When the results of the study are published, no identifying information will appear in the report. I understand that I have a right not to answer any question (outside of self identifying as non-Indigenous or Indigenous and naming Tribal affiliation, for the purpose of this study). I also understand that I may choose not to participate or may stop taking the survey at any time, without penalty. I agree to submit my survey via Google forms and have my answers documented for further analysis, with the understanding that my responses will not be linked to me personally, in any way. The survey will be stored electronically and answered are submitted anonymously. I understand that the purpose of the survey and the findings of the study will be explained to me, when the results of the study are published. If I am uncomfortable with any part of this study at any time, I may contact Dr. Robin Zape-tah-hol-ah Minthorn, Ph.D, Associate Professor Director of Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership Director of Indigenous Education Initiatives, School of Education University of Washington Tacoma, robstarr@uw.edu By clicking submit at the end of this survey, I attest that I am participating in a study of my own free will, and verify that I am at least eighteen years old, and that I understand my rights, as a research participant, outlined above. I further acknowledge that my participation is fully voluntary.

I am at least 18 years of age, and am willingly acknowledging and consenting to participation in this survey, as outlined above. I understand that checking the box below gives my consent and also counts as my electronic signature. *

- [ ] I'm 18 and give my consent to participate in this survey
- [ ] I am either not yet 18 years of age, or I do not wish to participate in this survey

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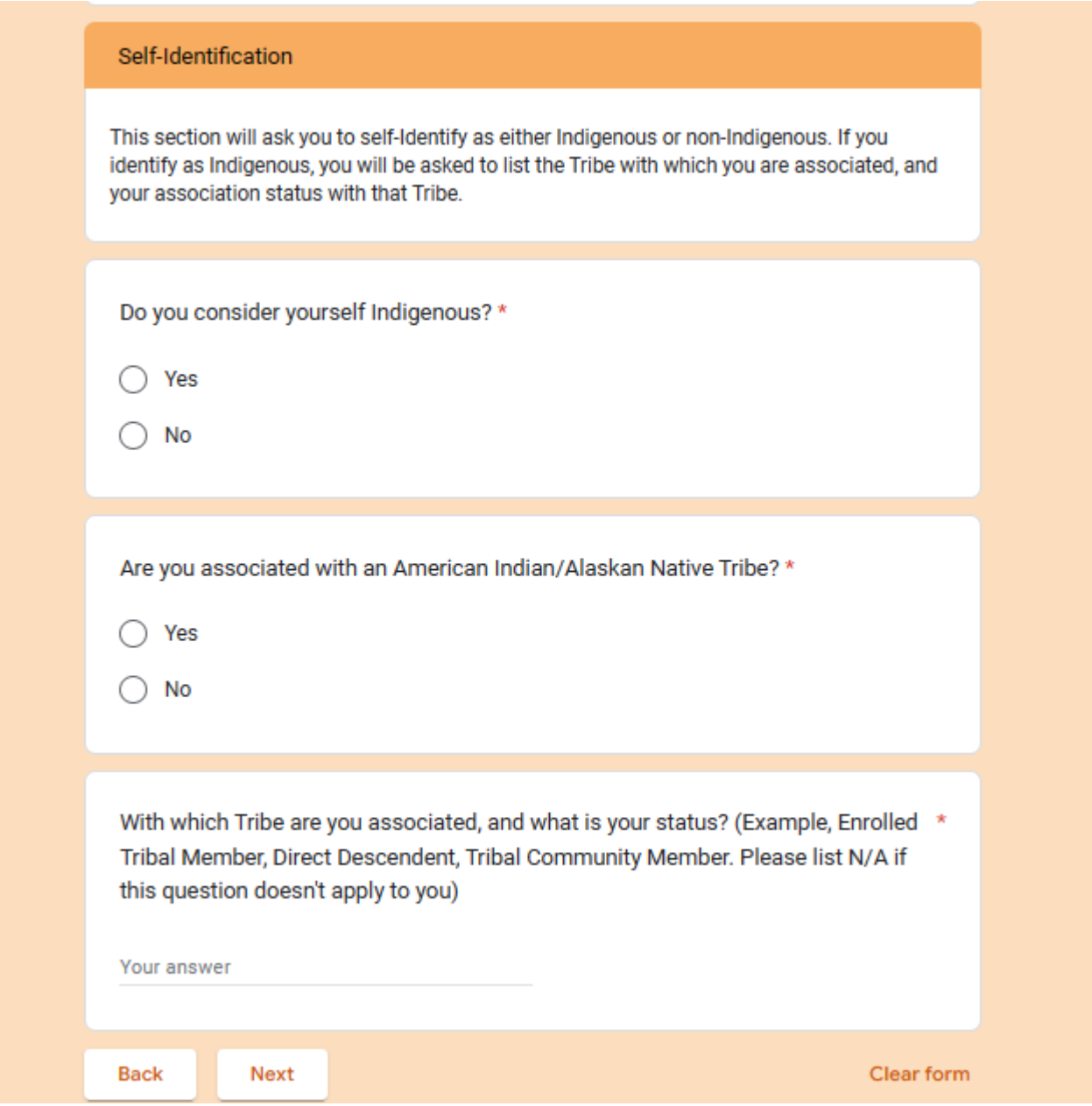
Appendix D

Survey Questions



Self-Identification

This section will ask you to self-Identify as either Indigenous or non-Indigenous. If you identify as Indigenous, you will be asked to list the Tribe with which you are associated, and your association status with that Tribe.

Do you consider yourself Indigenous? *

- Yes
- No

Are you associated with an American Indian/Alaskan Native Tribe? *

- Yes
- No

With which Tribe are you associated, and what is your status? (Example, Enrolled Tribal Member, Direct Descendent, Tribal Community Member. Please list N/A if this question doesn't apply to you) *

Your answer

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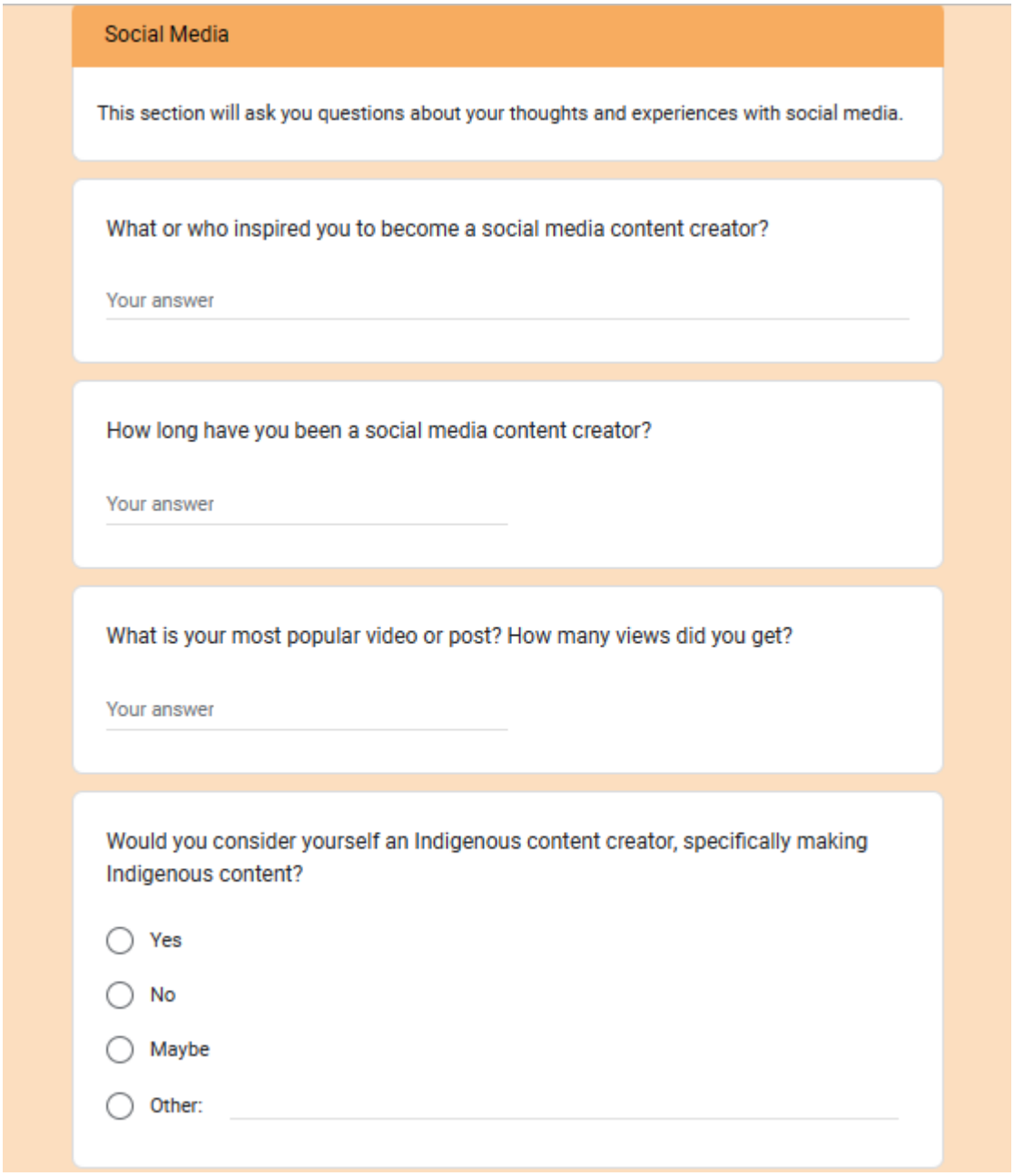

Social Media

This section will ask you questions about your thoughts and experiences with social media.

What or who inspired you to become a social media content creator?

Your answer

How long have you been a social media content creator?

Your answer

What is your most popular video or post? How many views did you get?

Your answer

Would you consider yourself an Indigenous content creator, specifically making Indigenous content?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe
- ◯ Other:

Ethics of social media

This section seeks to understand your views on the ethics of using social media as research

Is there a way to make sure that someone who identifies as an Indigenous content creator, is actually Indigenous and not simply trying to profit off of false Indigeneity?

Your answer

When an individual publicly posts content to their social media, is it ethical to use that public content as research without acquiring prior consent?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ I'm not sure
- ◯ Other:

If your publicly posted social media content was ever used as part of a research study, would you want to read the report that details the research study?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

What are your thoughts on Non-Indigenous researchers (allies of Indigenous research) conducting Indigenous research in Indigenous communities?

Your answer

What do you think about Non-Indigenous researchers (allies of Indigenous research who have a tie to an Indigenous community) conducting research using publicly posted Indigenous content?

Your answer

Do you think that social media can be used, by non-Indigenous researchers, to lessen their impact as an observer on the Tribal people they are studying?

- ◯ Yes
- ◯ No
- ◯ Maybe

Are there any other ethical questions that should be considered?

Your answer

Back Submit Clear form