Kijiikwewin aji:sweetgrass stories with traditional Indigenous women in Northern Ontario

Joey-Lynn Wabie [ziigwankwe], PhD, RSW

School of Indigenous Relations, Laurentian University

jl_wabie@laurentian.ca

Acknowledgements

I would like to acknowledge the Algonquin and Ojibwe women* who shared their stories: Bidaasa Kwe, Butterfly Rock Woman, Charlie, Elizabeth, Lightning Woman, Lokoduq (Inuit), Rose Woman, The One That Flies Above, and Whitecloud Woman. Without their stories, Elder Mary Elliott, and the oshkabewis kwe (woman helper), Lisa Osawamick I would not have been able to complete this research. Migwetc.

*These are pseudonyms chosen by the women themselves.

Follow the International Journal of Indigenous Health at:

<https://jps.library.utoronto.ca/index.php/ijih/index>

Recommended Citation

Wabie, J.L. (2019). Kijiikwewin aji:sweetgrass stories with traditional Indigenous women in Northern Ontario. *International Journal of Indigenous Health*, 14(2), 54-73. DOI 10.32799/ijih.v14i2.31677

Kijiikwewin aji: sweetgrass stories with traditional Indigenous women in northern Ontario

Abstract

Kijiikwewin-aji means ‘to become a woman now’ in Algonquin and describes the heart of the research. Sweetgrass stories are part of the research methodology used with Algonquin and Ojibwe women. I formed an Algonquin research methodology called sweetgrass story weaving which focuses on Algonquin and Ojibwe women as they share their moontime stories. I also share information relating to the historical roots and present state of rites of passage with Algonquin and Ojibwe women. You will read Algonquin and Ojibwe women’s voices as they look back through lived experiences; hope and determination when looking forward to the future, and the shared theme of wanting their cultural traditions and ceremonies to live on through future generations of Algonquin and Ojibwe girls and women, including young men. What is the current state of the Berry Fast, understanding the assimilative nature of colonization and the effects it has had on Algonquin and Ojibwe women? How can we continue to honour these rites of passage while living in a world both with Algonquin and Ojibwe worldviews and colonial constructs? Over time, the collective strength and wisdom of Algonquin and Ojibwe women will increase which is a step in the decolonized direction of preventative health care which promotes *mino bimaadiziwin* (the good life).

Keywords

Berry Fast, rites of passage, moontime, sweetgrass story weaving, Algonquin research methodology, Algonquin and Ojibwe women

Creative Commons License

This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-No Derivative Works 4.0 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

Introduction

This paper discusses rites of passage focusing on Algonquin and Ojibwe women's stories from the past, present, and what they want for future generations of Algonquin and Ojibwe women in the area of spiritual health. Although there are many types of rites of passage which occur all over the world, this paper focuses mostly on the Berry Fast which occurs when a young girl transitions to a young woman at her first moontime (menstruation cycle). I would first like to honour the Algonquin and Ojibwe women by sharing one of the stories about their Berry Fast. I provide a historical perspective of rites of passage, share the present significance, spiritual value, and importance of not only the revival of this time-honoured puberty rite, but also propose implementation in the contemporary world and its utility. I will then introduce an Algonquin sweetgrass storyweaving methodology and its usefulness within Indigenous research and community.

Storytelling

The purpose of storytelling can be multi-purposed; sometimes it is to entertain, other times it is to teach, and to pass knowledge to others. These are not the sole reasons for storytelling, but they are a few of the main ones. Stories can change with different audiences as the storyteller is able to modify the delivery, message, and reason behind what they are sharing. When stories are shared, the intent is to pass on teachings as well as to teach. This type of storytelling does not occur on a one-time basis; it occurs over time with reinforcement provided when asked or needed. It is imperative there are Algonquin and Ojibwe women available to pass women teachings down to the next generation of and to have ongoing support.

Butterfly Rock Woman shares her story about her Berry Fast when she was transitioning from a girl to a young woman. She was the oldest child in her biological family but the family she was raised in she was approximately the middle child. She was adopted from birth, but fortunate enough to stay in the same family due to her biological and adoptive mothers being sisters. Butterfly Rock Woman grew up understanding the culture and ways of living. She believes she was placed with her adoptive parents as it was customary for family members to assist with raising children. She attended college and university and is very proud to be Anishinaabe kwe today. Butterfly Rock Woman shares:

My aunts are spiritual people and knew the transition and about the Berry Fast and it was a year after I started, is when I did my Berry Fast. At that time when I did my Berry Fast I went to live with my biological mother that one year to have that connection with her and to develop that relationship. There was a lot of things that I could not do: I had to abstain from berries, you know I could not wear makeup, any men's belongings that may have been on the floor I had to pick it up and I

could not step over it. I guess that was to teach me about the power of us women especially when we are on our moontime and we could harm the men or harm people when we are on our moontime because we are so spiritual and powerful at that time. You know so I had to abstain from berries and I remember one of my fathers taking me out you know to pick sweetgrass and to pick those berries for when it was going to be my one year was complete because I had to prepare give away, and feast food and the strawberries, the berries.

Butterfly Rock Woman's story of her Berry Fast brings about the importance of Ojibwe knowledge and teachings within family and to ensure it is passed on to the next generation. It also provided Butterfly Rock Woman with experiential learning connecting to her body placed on the land and the cyclical nature of her moontime, mind through knowledge and teachings from her family, and spiritual through connection to cedar and her power as a woman.

Another powerful connection with Algonquin and Ojibwe women and their moontime is with the moon itself: Grandmother Moon. According to Anishnawbe Health Toronto (2000):

Grandmother Moon controls all female life. Much of the water life spawn according to the cycles of the moon. It is said that Grandmother Moon is especially close to women because she governs the woman's cleansing cycle, the natural cycle of menstruation known as the moon time. Just as Grandmother Moon watches over the waters of the Earth, it is said that women watch over the waters of the people. Water always comes before new life. It is said that the moon cycle is a gift to women. It is a time to cleanse herself mentally, physically, emotionally and spiritually. The moon time is considered a time of power, second only to the ability of the Great Spirit to give life. That is how strong that power is. (p.1)

In order for us to comprehensively look at the Berry Fast, which is a rite of passage for Algonquin and Ojibwe women when they begin their first moontime (menstruation) cycle, we should look at the historical perspective of rites of passage. This will provide us with important context in order to place contemporary rites of passage that some Algonquin and Ojibwe women practice presently.

Historical View of Rites of Passage

Historically, Indigenous societies in North America were characterized by relative equality between women and men. Although women and men had distinct roles and responsibilities in their societies evidenced by divided tasks among gender lines, both were valued, respected and exemplified a

sense of balance (Anderson, 2006; Native Women's Association of Canada [NWAC], 2007). As part of their defined role of Indigenous women in their communities, they worked collectively within their communities to ensure their survival, and also the passing down of culture and traditions to the next generation. A part of this is the rites of passage that young Algonquin and Ojibwe girls would experience when they began their first moontime.

Densmore (1979) shared that the puberty custom included a four-day seclusion in a small wigwam away from the family lodge for the young woman. She was to fast fully while she was in seclusion and only to return to her family lodge when her moontime stopped flowing. Hilger (1992) noted that the custom was for the young women to carry their own dishes for the full year which is marked by the start of their first moontime. The mother would visit her daughters and inform them of their new role as women and the work expected of them. After the seclusion, the young woman would wash and bathe herself as her female relatives prepared her father's hunt.

Child (2012) shares how young Ojibwe women were prepared for their ceremonies that took place at first menstruation: fasting, seclusion, and female mentoring. She believes "the suspension of normal activities and isolation that characterized this rite of passage was not regarded as penance or punishment; it was an occasion that affirmed, comforted, and empowered young women at a moment of change and insecurity" (pp. 6). After the seclusion was complete and the young woman returned to regular daily life there was social prohibitions placed upon them for a year which concluded with a short fast, followed by the ritual eating of strawberries.

From a historical perspective, rites of passages for Algonquin and Ojibwe women at their first moontime placed them in a secure and well-respected position within their family, community, and nation systems. When the family, community, and nations' systems and worldviews were encroached upon, deemed uncivilized, and subsequently forced to assimilate to the colonizer's worldview, the systems suffocated and parts within it become unhealthy. In Canada, Brascoupé and Waters (2009) share that Aboriginal people have experienced a history of colonization, and cultural and social assimilation through the residential schools' program and other policies, leading to historical trauma and the loss of cultural cohesion (pp. 7). North America was colonized, gender roles were redefined with the imposition of European laws (Boyer, 2006). The colonial constructs include, but are not limited to: eras of the *Indian Act* (Richmond & Cook, 2016), child welfare (Blackstock, Trocme & Bennett, 2004), residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Report, 2015), and the present crisis of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (Olsen Harper, 2006).

The Berry Fast is a rite of passage embarked upon by Algonquin and Ojibwe girls with the onset of menarche. Ojibwe Elder, Liza Mosher-bun, shares that a young woman fasts from strawberries and other berries for a full year when she gets her moontime. During this year, she spends time with

grandmothers who teach her about womanhood and how to bring life into the world. She also gathers berries, which she will present to her community when she finishes her fast. Hence, she learns how to care for and sustain her people (Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2012). Although there is not an abundance of scholarly literature of the rites of passage from a contemporary perspective, there are pioneers out there. Anderson (2000) describes a rite of passage, specifically the Berry Fast ceremony:

The ceremony starts out with a big feast in the spring, where girls come together with their female family friends as well as a number of women who are to play the traditional role of 'auntie' to them ... The girls then hear from each of the aunties who have assembled, who encourage and talk to them about some of the challenges they will face, both during the fast and as they enter the world as women ... Thus begins a thirteen moon (month) period during which the young women are expected to refrain from eating berries or berry products ... At the end of this period, they come back to the circle of aunties, and are sent out on to the land for twenty-four hours to do a fast. When they come off the fast, they are bathed in cedar-drenched water, dressed in their finest, and introduced as the new women of the community to the aunties and family members who are attending the ceremony." (pp. 386-387)

Decontie (2014) also shares information about the Berry Fast in the present day:

The Berry Fast duration is a full year (four seasons). A young girl lives a strict disciplined lifestyle to role model herself after Mother Earth, to prepare to be like her when she is a woman giving life in the future. There are a number of things they cannot do with the understanding that they are contributing to strengthening future life ... The Berry Fast is viewed as an honourable spiritual calling, a life stage journey. It is also a time for young girls to begin learning important lessons such as giving and receiving, and the different spiritual meanings of life, including passed down oral teachings of their ancestors. The choice the young girls make in giving up the berries for all of life creations and future generations remains important in continuing on Anishnabe culture. (pp. 8, 9)

As you can read, the focus of the present literature is not on the how-to-do-a-berry-fast, but more on how the Berry Fast impacts and affects the young women themselves, and the connection to family and community. You can see the shift in writing from the descriptive functions of rites of passage to the experience and value in more contemporary literature. The Berry Fast also enhances Algonquin and Ojibwe female adolescents' understanding of their role as Anishnaabe kweg (Aboriginal women), and culturally constructs a path upon which they follow, and strengthens their connection to Mother Earth and

Creator (Wabie, 2011, pp. i). Furthermore, Wabie (2011) believes: “With the Berry Fast ... there is a resurgence occurring that may swing the pendulum of knowledge back to total immersion of culture, then settling in the middle where Mino-Bimaadiziwin (Good Life) can be found” (p. 70).

Methods

Recruitment

Nine Algonquin and Ojibwe women were recruited within an urban setting in northern Ontario. Algonquin and Ojibwe people are separate nations although they share many commonalities, such as a language family, ceremonial knowledge, and are neighboring nations. Although there is a colonial constructed provincial border between many Algonquin and Ojibwe nations; there is crossover through migration with one Algonquin nation in Ontario itself: Pikwakanagan First Nation. These were self-identified Algonquin and Ojibwe women over the ages of 18 with no exclusionary criteria other than living in northern Ontario. The participants were recruited through flyers within the local university, and non-profit social service agencies. Through informal interviews at the participants’ convenience they were able to share their stories. Gray, Oré de Boehm, Farnsworth, & Wolf (2010) share that traditions, such as storytelling and traditional crafts are examples of methods of connecting with the past and maintaining cultural congruity and positive group identity. As part of the reciprocal relationship, the women gave their own personal stories that were shared within this research. The Algonquin and Ojibwe women were asked four questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are things you remember from your first moontime?
3. Did you do something special? If not, what would you have wanted to do?
4. What would you like to see for girls in your community for their first moontime?

There have been shifts in the way non-Indigenous researchers and academics have positioned themselves and their work in relation to the people for whom the research counts (Smith, 2012). Moeke-Pickering (2010) affirms that through the literature she reviewed on Indigenous methodologies, “emphasis on the contexts of Indigenous peoples, privileging their stories, honouring their cultural values, respecting their ways of being seem to be key threads coming through the literature” (pp. 89). It is imperative to note that Algonquin and Ojibwe botanical knowledge is not an unfounded area of knowledge that I have discovered. It has been used since time immemorial for First Peoples of the land in northern Ontario, and beyond, to utilize as part of their overall holistic health and survival. Kimmerer (2013) writes about Indigenous knowledge, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants as an Indigenous botanist. She

borrowed sweetgrass; its teachings and significance as the framework for sharing the stories of plants and Indigenous teachings.

Geniusz (2009) also examines the colonization of botanical anishinaabe-gikendaasowin [knowledge] and offers suggestions on how this information can be decolonized, reclaimed, and made useful to programs revitalizing anishinaabe language and culture. This paper has a focus on plants and other living beings: Algonquin and Ojibwe women. This paper incorporates Algonquin and Ojibwe teachings and stories similar to Kimmerer and Geniusz, though the difference is the focus; the focus of this paper is the use of a plant framework on the resilience and strength of Algonquin and Ojibwe women, their moontime, and future generations while introducing the plant framework as an Algonquin sweetgrass storyweaving research methodology.

The sweetgrass story weaving methodology comprises of the collection of stories weaving the Body, Mind and Spirit together to recreate a holistic framework. “All elements of a sweet grass braid are symbolic and have significance. The braid is said to be the hair of Mother Earth and the three sections of the braid represent Mind, Body and Spirit. The sweetgrass, once braided, is stronger than any one strand on its own, which symbolizes community and unity” (Lesyk, 2011, para. 10). Elder Mary Elliott from Atkikameksheng Anishnawbek in northern Ontario has shared teachings with me about the gentleness of sweetgrass with me, echoing Lesyk’s explanation of sweetgrass. I have learned many teachings I carry with respect from Mary Elliott who I have known since 2009. She also carries knowledge of the Berry Fast, placing many Algonquin and Ojibwe girls on theirs as they become young women.

The Body section of the braid involves physical actions and reactions which may be acted out by the person involved in the story, they may be the recipient of a physical action so their physical reactions can also be observed. Physical reactions fit well within the Body section of the braid because the reaction to it is important as it adds to the richness of the story. The collective story may include positive actions and reaction such as physical connections through touching, massaging, holding hands and the like; reactions could be the warmth felt within their body, their smiles, laughter, and being physically relaxed. In contrast, there may be negative actions and reactions which are shared such as unwanted or unintentional physical force such as abuse or a car accident; the physical reactions to this may be crying, screaming, pain, etc.

The Mind section of the braid involves mental actions and reactions similar to the Body section. These mental actions or reactions may be experienced by the person involved in the story, or they may be the recipient of a mental action so it is important to highlight the reactions to it for the collective story. The uniqueness of this section of the braid is that it happens within the mind so it is a lone action which means the action and reaction occur on their own. It is the act of sharing their mental actions and reactions which allow us a look into how their thoughts work. The collective story also may include positive mental

actions such as resilience, positive self-esteem, and problem solving which in turn will positively affect their reaction to their positive mental actions. On the other hand, those who actively have negative mental actions such as lower self-esteem, poor coping skills, and a negative self-image may find themselves in a self-fulfilling prophetic mindset.

The Spirit section of the braid includes spiritual actions and reactions which may be experienced by the person involved in the story or they may be on the receiving end of the action so their spiritual reactions are what should be highlighted. As the collective story is woven, the spiritual actions and reactions may include praying, being on the land and with nature, or participating in their respective cultural traditions and ceremonies; the spiritual reaction to these actions may include fulfilment, a sense of peace, and connection. Alternatively, there may be a negative spiritual action or reaction to a spiritual action which could include using spirituality haphazardly with disregard for proper training which may hurt others as it is not used in a good way.

The interconnectedness of Body, Mind, and Spirit is the strength of the sweetgrass storyweaving methodology. This strength or resilience denotes the holistic nature of an individual, family, community, and/or nation's view of the topic; in this case it is Algonquin and Ojibwe women's stories on their rites of passage at their first moontime. As part of the methodology and in order to create themes within the three sections, the questions were time related looking to the past, present, and future. After separating them accordingly, I categorized the Algonquin and Ojibwe women's words through body, mind, and spirit placing them in the corresponding section and counted them.

PAST What are things you remember from your first moontime?		PRESENT Did you do something special? If not, what would you have wanted to do?		FUTURE What would you like to see for girls in your community for their first moontime?	
Responses		Responses		Responses	
BODY	48	BODY	19	BODY	15
MIND	49	MIND	17	MIND	29
SPIRIT	16	SPIRIT	20	SPIRIT	36

Table 1. Coding Results

Although the three sections, Body, Mind and Spirit were explained and coded singularly they would not be able to exist without each other from a holistic Algonquin and Ojibwe perspective. The body reacts to an action or event, which is processed in the mind, and in order to situate how they are feeling both physically or mentally and emotionally the spiritual aspect would appear. Mawhiney and Nabigon

(2011) discuss spirituality as not being separate from everyday life and there is no sense of object and subject; all is one: “Mind, body, emotions, and spirit are not separate from the earth and everything on it; it is all interrelated” (pp. 17). Furthermore, according to Chartrand (2012), there is a responsibility to nurture all aspects of our being together as one, not as separate entities.

Results

Woven through their stories was resilience, knowledge from looking back through lived experiences; hope and determination when looking forward to the future, and the shared theme of wanting their cultural traditions and ceremonies to live on through future generations of Algonquin and Ojibwe girls and women. Each woman deserves to be introduced on an individual basis before proceeding to combine their stories as one. Each story, each word was an honour to hear and I would like to ensure they are not seen as an amalgamated being. The women in alphabetical order using their Anishnaabe or family names are: Bidaasa Kwe, Butterfly Rock Woman, Charlie, Elizabeth, Lightning Woman, Lokoduq, Rose Woman, The One That Flies Above, and Whitecloud Woman.

In order to share the results, I have constructed a wheel, based on the Medicine Wheel, with three research questions and added the Algonquin and Ojibwe women’s recommendations to the last quadrant. Bopp (1984) writes that the Medicine Wheel is an ancient symbol used by almost all the Native people of North and South America. The author refers to the Medicine Wheel being expressed in sets of four and that it is similar to a mirror, which can be used to see things that are not normally visible. Using the Medicine Wheel to present the findings can be seen as a symbolic tool to help us see or understand the presentation of findings because they are ideas and not physical objects (Bopp, 1994, p.9).

Figure 1. Results Wheel

Remembering

Within the East quadrant, Remembering, the Algonquin and Ojibwe women shared stories of their first moontime. The Algonquin and Ojibwe talked about their moontime from the Body perspective: preparation and education within the context of their first moontime. Their stories also highlighted themes from a Mind perspective, the theme: *fear and embrace the unknown*. The second theme within the Mind perspective which was shared was: *meaning/no meaning* of their moontime on their lives. The third

perspective is the Spirit which the women shared stories of *connection* and *disconnection* in varying degrees.

Looking Back in the Present

Within the South quadrant, Looking Back in the Present, the Algonquin and Ojibwe women shared from each perspective what they did or what they would have liked to do from a holistic perspective. From the Body perspective, the themes *acknowledgment*, and *experience* were highlighted; from the Mind perspective were *wistfulness*, *understanding*, and *gratefulness*. Lastly, the Spirit perspective was shared and brought forth the themes: *experience* and *longing*.

Looking Ahead

Within the West quadrant, Looking Ahead, the Algonquin and Ojibwe women shared what they would like for future generations had the lived experience of a young girl who experienced her first moontime. From the Body perspective, the themes delivery mechanism and growth were shared; from the Mind perspective were preparation, knowledge transfer, and self-respect. The Spirit perspective brought forth themes of sacredness and ceremony.

Weaving Recommendations

The North quadrant is from the Algonquin and Ojibwe women when they were asked what they would like to see done with the results from this research. Their recommendations were sharing knowledge, teachings, advisory circle, open access, network, young men, sweetgrass story weaving framework transference, and continue to do things in a good way.

Limitations

There is some question of whether the young women at such an early age will understand the profoundness of their first moontime and the impact it has on their life and will for the remainder of their moontime years. The results which were shared by the Algonquin and Ojibwe women speak to this area and believe it to be so, although they have the advantage of looking back as older women. Therefore, the young Algonquin and Ojibwe girls who are preparing for their first moontime may not understand the depth of what their moontime means but this is where support from other Algonquin and Ojibwe women is important.

Other limitations were geographical, scope of Algonquin and Ojibwe women, type of rite of passage, and gender. The geographical location of this research was completed within is Ojibwe territory. The lack of nation diversity within this research is recognized and acknowledged. There is also a limitation

in the scope of Indigenous women; if I were to expand the scope of Indigenous women to all then the outcome would most likely be different. If all Indigenous women were to participate, the importance may have been placed on other areas of young Indigenous girls' lives.

The final limitation I would like to highlight is gender. In order to have balance, which is a significant cultural Algonquin and Ojibwe teaching, the inclusion of men could have remedied this. The role of men's teachings is just that, the role of men. Another type of gender which was not addressed in this article was two-spirit Indigenous peoples; those who identify as the opposite sex or as fluid. This was a limitation due to the research recruitment of solely Algonquin and Ojibwe women, and the questions which were asked focused more on the heart of the Berry Fast, and not on the gender. Aboriginal people coined the term two-spirit and are use it to reflect their past, and the direction of their future (Cameron, 2005). This is a vital area of research which deserves to be completed as their roles in society are equal to others who identify with one spirit.

Discussion

The strong belief systems attached to rites of passage and teachings in general can help with those wanting to return to their original Indigenous teachings within a contemporary setting. There are characteristics associated with Algonquin and Ojibwe women's roles as life givers and keepers of the water which may affect positive change starting from the grassroots to the national and international level. Instead of waiting for policy changes to reach Indigenous women; they have within them the ability to improve or maintain individual, family, and community *mino bimaadiziwin* already. Although it is there for Algonquin and Ojibwe woman to use, we have to acknowledge possible barriers to accessing ceremony for women, in this context of course, but also for the non-binary individuals mentioned in the limitations section.

The rites of passage provided preparedness, meaning in their moontime, connection to spirit, support from women, and the realization of the importance of passing the knowledge on to the next generation. This validating experience may have the ability to shift the perspectives and realities of Algonquin and Ojibwe women since their collective nature has been evident in influencing their families, communities, and nations. To further explain, the strength and belonging before, during, and after their rites of passage experiences would solidify their role as life-givers, keepers of the water, and their belief that the health of Mother Earth is reflective in the health of their shared identity, and individual selves.

Due to cultural disruption via colonization and assimilative policies which occurred on Turtle Island, these traditions and ceremonies went underground only to resurface when legally able to do so. With the disruption, it may be some time before traditions are fully revived which is possible due to the knowledge holders taking the traditions and ceremonies underground for safekeeping. Another outcome

may be the adjustment of traditions and ceremonies through a mixture of original traditions and contemporary societal pressures. As we recognize this, we can more fully understand Algonquin and Ojibwe women as having the gift of time and wisdom when they share their stories with us. They are telling us their stories through lived experience and wisdom which can only be given through life's journey. With their wisdom and lived experience they can share with us now as they look back to their first moontime and tell us what they would have like to do, if they were unable to participate in any rite of passage. These are the stories of wise women which historically were shared through their grandmothers, mothers and other maternal figures at times of celebration, and ceremony through storytelling.

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women further shared they would like to see a delivery mechanism not only for the teachings in mainstream society, but also within a society that has embraced technology and its ability to have rapid information available to them via computers, cellular phones, and also social media sites. The delivery mechanism which was shared was to offer teachings, including moontime, through schools utilizing the services of Algonquin and Ojibwe knowledge keepers, Elders, and grandmothers. There could be a blending of the two systems; one being the education system, and the second being the knowledge and wisdom within Algonquin and Ojibwe peoples.

Within most education systems, students are separated by age, grade, and exceptionalities which Algonquin and Ojibwe peoples could use to tailor the content they share with which audience they are speaking with. Understanding the importance of pre-moontime education and preparation, the resource peoples would be able to prepare pre-pubescent Algonquin and Ojibwe girls with moontime teachings along with other important cultural teachings which would be age appropriate and specific.

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women also discussed the importance of women gathering and a support group to ensure the young girls have access to pre-moontime preparation. With pre-, mid-, and post-moontime preparation, they are able to access the knowledge needed to increase their self-respect, understand the sacredness of womanhood, and have access to and understand the profoundness of Algonquin and Ojibwe women ceremonies. There is a recurring theme between what these Algonquin and Ojibwe women shared from their first moontime, what they would have liked to do, and also what they would like to see for future generations: pre-moontime preparation and education and support from other women in order to fully understand the holistic impact their moontime would have on their lives.

Within the lived experience and wisdom each Algonquin and Ojibwe woman shared, they all desired or were given acknowledgement which affected the meaning they attributed to their moontime. They either embraced their moontime as they were prepared for it, or they were in fear of it because they did not understand or know what it was. This affected their ability to connect to their moontime on a spiritual level; those who understood their moontime teachings and were provided an opportunity to

participate in a rite of passage were connected spiritually compared to those who did not know their teachings may have been unable to connect spiritually. Within these opportunities to connect and be acknowledged is the variable of women gathering, support, and access to their moontime teachings.

Algonquin and Ojibwe Women's Recommendations

Sharing knowledge

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women would like to use the knowledge gathered to create something positive in the community. The women wanted to ensure the information from this research reached the community because that is where the young girls are who would be able to participate in their respective rite of passage at their first moontime. They also included the academic community so other Indigenous scholars would be able to use the sweetgrass story weaving methodology and be able to reference contemporary rites of passage information.

Advisory circle

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women further recommended that an advisory circle of women Elders and grandmothers be created to oversee and guide the creation of this proposed network for women and girls to access. These Algonquin and Ojibwe women would give counsel and direction to those involved in the creation, recruitment, and implementation of the network. The women who attended the sharing circle and feast were interested in participating in the formation of this advisory circle and shared names of women Elders and grandmothers who may be interested in this proposed idea.

Network

They further discussed what would be involved within the network and the Algonquin and Ojibwe women stated they would like to focus on rites of passages through teachings, create open access for young girls to Algonquin and Ojibwe women within the community who are well versed in this area, and involve young men and their rites of passage.

Teachings

The rites of passage and accompanying teachings for young Algonquin and Ojibwe women can be provided through different avenues. The Algonquin and Ojibwe women's recommendations included half day fasts to teach young girls about their Berry Fast before they begin their moontime. Pre-moontime preparation was highlighted within the results section when the women were asked what they would like to see for future generations of Algonquin and Ojibwe women and girls and further defined during their sharing circle and feast.

Open access

Another recommendation was creating open access to Algonquin and Ojibwe women within the community who are well versed with moontime teachings and rites of passage. There was no definitive framework created for this open access, although the women stressed the vital part of this network was remaining culturally viable with the advisory circle. The term culturally viable means that culture is alive within the network and a significant part of it. We can view cultural viability parallel to the heart of a person, without a heart a person cannot live; without authentic cultural traditions within this network, it will not be truly alive.

Young men

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women also recommended the inclusion on young men as part of the network. They explained the inclusion of young men as a balance and the paucity of supports available to them as well. Young men who enter puberty also experience a rite of passage also referred to as a puberty fast. There are similarities between the two fasts: seclusion and teachings, although the puberty fast has differences due to the role they are being taught as men. I mentioned the role of men and the balance they share with women. A part of Algonquin and Ojibwe women's roles is being keepers of the water, while men are keepers of the fire. There is a natural relationship between the two gender roles; the fire is started and tended by the male role while the female role is to ensure water is taken care of. There is a symbiotic relationship between fire and water; if the fire raises too high the water is there to ensure its purpose remains which is to burn strongly and with purpose. If the water begins to evaporate due to the fire burning too strong then it is adjusted so the water can survive and the two roles can work together as a pair. I do understand the fluidity of roles as not being binary which is the beauty of Algonquin and Ojibwe teachings; each person has their own role and wherever they feel they are serving a greater purpose then that is the role for them.

Sweetgrass story weaving framework transference

The Algonquin and Ojibwe women also recommended that the sweetgrass story weaving framework be taught to agencies so they are able to use it for their own practice. They can see the applicability of the framework for program development, implementation and evaluation. The Body, Mind, Spirit aspects are culturally applicable, holistic, and broad enough to apply in other ways. The women also shared that because the framework was created by an Algonquin woman who understands the history, culture, and past and present complexities that it should be used for and with Algonquin and Ojibwe peoples in a good way.

Continue to do things in a good way

Although I have listed this last in the recommendations from the Algonquin and Ojibwe women, I did so purposefully. I wanted the recommendations to leave a lasting impression and also to conclude in a similar fashion: in a good way. It was completed with Algonquin and Ojibwe women's contributions which came from years of developing relationship, rapport, and mutual respect. The Algonquin and Ojibwe women recommended that although the research will be completed that they want to ensure the future application of the results and recommendations are still completed in a good way.

The good way the Algonquin and Ojibwe women spoke of has to do with *mino bimaadiziwin*, which loosely translate to the good life. Bédard (2008) states that the Elders speak of the concept of *mino bimaadiziwin* which speaks of a 'good mind', a 'good way', or a 'good path' that an individual takes to live a healthy and well-rounded life as an Anishinaabe (pp. 190). If I strive to live by the concept of *mino bimaadiziwin* as an Algonquin woman myself, that can be evidenced by many different factors. From an individual level taking care of myself physically by not using mind-altering substances, mentally by always open to new ways of learning, emotionally by use of critical thinking and levity, and spiritually by participating in Algonquin ceremonies. From a family level, it may mean showing kindness and love to others on a physical level and not harming them, mentally being open to their knowledge and encouraging growth, emotionally it means being a role model to them on how to live and experience emotions, and spiritually being able to participate and providing access to them for Algonquin and Ojibwe culture, traditions, and ceremonies.

Conclusion

The full sweetgrass story weaving methodology has been braided and tied with three minuscule strands representing individual, family and community. It is a small braid but what it ties together is the critical and holistic reflection of women's moontime, and a framework for the increased accessibility and decreased degree of difficulty of the Berry Fast itself. I am now holding the sweetgrass-braided moontime stories of Algonquin and Ojibwe women from the past, present, and their desires for future generations of young Algonquin and Ojibwe girls. I am also holding scholarly work braided into the Algonquin and Ojibwe women's knowledge that is tied together with the critical and holistic reflection of women's moontime, and a flexible framework for knowledge transfer of the Berry Fast for future use.

It was an honour to work with these women's stories, and has been a rewarding journey with braiding literature, Algonquin and Ojibwe women's stories, and the start of a new Algonquin research methodology into this sweetgrass. I now take the sweetgrass braid and gift it to you: the reader. It is up to you to decide what to do with it; acknowledge it, respect it, take it apart, or pass it on to others. This is my gift to you. *Miigwetch*.

References

- Anderson, K. (2000). Honouring the blood of the people: berry fasting in the twenty-first century. In R.F. Laliberte, P. Settee, J. B. Waldram, R. Innes, B. Macdougall, L. McBain, & L. Barron (Eds.), *Expression in Native Studies* (374-394). Saskatoon, Saskatchewan: University Extension Press. (ISBN-13: 978-0888804; ISBN-10: 0888804113)
- Anderson, K. (2006). *A recognition of being: reconstructing Native womanhood*. Toronto, Ontario: Second Story Press. (Original work published 2000) (ISBN-13: 978-1894549127; ISBN-10: 1894549120)
- Anishnawbe Health Toronto. (2000). *Moontime*. [Brochure]
<https://www.aht.ca/images/stories/TEACHINGS/Moontime.pdf>
- Bédard, R. (2008). Role models: An Anishnaabe-kwe perspective. *Canadian Woman Studies*, 26 (3), 189-192. <https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/22130>
- Bédard, R. (2008). Keepers of the water: Nishnaabe-kwewag speaking for the water. In L. Simpson (Ed.), *Lighting the eighth fire: the liberation, resurgence, and protection of Indigenous Nations* (89-110). Winnipeg, Manitoba: Arbeiter Ring Publishing. (ISBN-13: 978-1894037334; ISBN-10: 1894037332)
- Blackstock, C., Trocme, N., & Bennett, M. (2004). Child maltreatment investigations among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families in Canada. *Violence against women*. 10 (8), 1-16
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1077801204266312>
- Bopp, J. (1989). *The Sacred tree* (3rd ed.). Wilmot, WI: Lotus Light. (ISBN-13: 978-0941524582; ISBN-10: 0941524582)
- Boyer, Y. (2006). *First Nations, Metis and Inuit women's health, discussion paper series in Aboriginal health: legal issues*. Ottawa, ON: National Aboriginal Health Organization. Doi:
<https://doi.org/10.29173/alr764>
- Brascoupé, S., & Waters, C. (2009). Cultural safety, exploring the applicability of the concept of cultural safety to Aboriginal health and community wellness. *Journal of Aboriginal Health*, 5(2), 6-41. doi: <https://doi.org/10.3138/ijih.v5i2.28981>

- Cameron, M. (2005). Two-spirited Aboriginal people continuing cultural appropriation by non Aboriginal society. *Canadian Women Studies*, 24 (2,3), 123-127.
<https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/6129>
- Chartrand, R. (2012). Anishinaabe pedagogy. *Canadian Journal of Native Education* 35(1), 144-162. (ISSN: 07101481)
- Child, B. J. (2012). *Holding our world together: Ojibwe women and the survival of community*. New York, NY: The Penguin Library of American Indian History. (ISBN-13: 978-0143121596; ISBN-10: 0143121596)
- Decontie, F. (2014). Honouring the memory of our ancestors; birch bark baskets. (Re)Negotiating Artifacts of Canadian Narratives of Identity, 4(1),
<https://capstoneseminarseries.files.wordpress.com/2014/04/faith-decontie-final-by-anne.pdf>
- Densmore, F. (1979). *Chippewa customs*. St. Paul: Minnesota Historical Society Press. (ISBN-13: 978-1330035405; ISBN-10: 1330035402)
- Gray, N., Oré de Boehm, C., Farnsworth, A., & Wolf, D. (2010). Integration of Creative expression into community based participatory research and health promotion with Native Americans. *Family Community Health*, 33(3), 186–192. doi: 10.1097/FCH.0b013e3181e4bbc6
- Hilger, M. I. (1992). *Chippewa child life and its cultural background*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Historical Society Press. (ISBN-13: 978-0873512718; ISBN-10: 0873512715)
- Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass, Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions. (ISBN-13: 978-1571313560; ISBN-10: 1571313567)
- Lesyk, A. (2011, October). Sacred medicine: sweetgrass harvest used to heal all year long. Winnipeg Health Region. Retrieved from <http://www.wrha.mb.ca/healthinfo/news/2011/111006-sacred-medicine.php>
- Mawhiney, A. M., & Nabigon, H. (2011). *Aboriginal theory: a Cree medicine wheel guide for healing First Nations*. In F.J. Turner (Ed.), *Social work treatment: interlocking theoretical approaches*. Don Mills, Ontario: Oxford University Press. (ISBN-13: 978-0195394658; ISBN-10: 0195394658)

- Moeke-Pickering, T. (2010). Decolonisation as a social change framework and its impact on the development of Indigenous-based curricula for helping professionals in mainstream tertiary education organisations. (Doctoral thesis, The University of Waikato, New Zealand). Retrieved from <http://researchcommons.waikato.ac.nz/bitstream/handle/10289/4148/thesis.pdf?sequence=3>
- Moeke-Pickering, T., Hardy, S., Manitowabi, S., Mawhiney, A., Faries, E., Gibson-van, K. et al. (2006). Keeping our fire alive: Towards decolonising research in the academic setting. *World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Journal*.
<http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.532.5368&rep=rep1&type=pdf>
- Native Women's Association of Canada. (2007). Social determinants of health and Canada's Aboriginal women. Ottawa: Ontario. <https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2015/05/2007-Social-Determinants-of-Health-and-Canada%E2%80%99s-Aboriginal-Women-NWAC-Submission-to-WHO-Commission.pdf>
- Olsen Harper, A. (2006). Is Canada peaceful and safe for Aboriginal women? *Canadian Women Studies*, 25(1,2), 33-38. <https://cws.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/cws/article/view/5954/5143>
- Richmond, C. A. M., & Cook, C. (2016) Creating conditions for Canadian Aboriginal health equity: the promise of healthy public policy. *Public Health Reviews*. 37 (2), 1-16.
<https://doi.org/10.1186/s40985-016-0016-5>
- Smith, L.T. (2012). Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples. London, UK: Zed Books Limited. (ISBN-13: 978-1848139510; ISBN-10: 1848139519)
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). Truth and reconciliation commission of Canada: calls to action. Ottawa, Ontario. http://trc.ca/assets/pdf/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf
- Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health. (2012). Strawberry teachings. [Brochure]
<http://www.wabano.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/Strawberry-Teachings.pdf>
- Wabie, J. (2011) Rites of passage for first nations female adolescents: the berry fast experience. Laurentian University: Sudbury
<https://zone.biblio.laurentian.ca/bitstream/10219/3290/1/Thesis%20JLWabie%20April%2016%202011%20FINALforprint.pdf>