***Dedication***

Raoul Breton, Pauline Desgagnes, Ann Czinege, and Tammy Breton the voices of my maternal family are authoritative and not stringent to the current code of practice when it comes to research. Families hold the knowledge that takes us closer to healing.

***Introduction***

These traditions about to be discussed provide implications for future research based on lessons learned from Indigenous Peoples voices, through learning traditional healing, outside of a Western research approach of deductive qualitative analysis. The people involved in this research are the most easterly Mohawk tribe of the Haudenosaunee, or Iroquois Confederacy, Huron, Secwepmc, Cree, Ojibwaii, Maori, Cherokee and Metis people. We look at healing through traditional practices and share information, once a time ago there were battles between tribes and for why when we can all work together and share knowledge and work together to live in harmony and keep thriving in every way possible. For thousands of years our people have learned from our elder’s knowledge that has been passed down through oral relationships. These Indigenous ways of knowing were seldom written down. There's an absence of sources of published guidance for Indigenous research protocols, methodologies and processes, based on traditions that stringently conform to authoritative credible and reliable source criteria according to western research methods. Just as others, I also struggle with the disconnection between the demands of research through the western practice and the reality of my own Indigenous traditions through life's relationships. Decolonizing research is needed and requires consistent action and reflective attention. Indigenous knowledge may be generalizable in some tribes around traditional practices within vastly different Indigenous populations. There is a common theme that I see in my ménage of not having the knowledge and connection to our heritage through the loss or separation in our family ties, which bind our souls and fulfills our sense of belonging. My grandfather is my driving force for this research as he is the foundation of where my roots stem from. He was detached from his parents as a child after his father passed away. His daughter, my dear mother also experienced a disconnection. She was raised in and out of the hospital as a young child for years, as she battled rheumatic fever, today her health is still not in perfect balance, she suffers from physical ailments, along with mental in the form of an anxiety disorder. Anxiety is a mental health condition that I rapidly see in my family, this is a sign that the overall well-being is not in alignment with continuous interaction of the physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual realities. There is not a perfect circle as in the medicine wheel. The circular shape and equal balance represents the [interconnectivity](https://www.ictinc.ca/blog/what-does-indigenous-connectivity-mean) of all aspects of one’s being. Through my writing and research we will look at how we can balance our wheel through traditional practices and grow as a healthy tree by examining each of the branches in this research to help us heal. Firstly, we will start by an introduction to my grandfather, it is important for you to meet him because he is an authoritative figure in my research. Secondly, we look at Mother Nature and what she reveals as healing followed by shedding light on Body Work forms and finally Connecting with Spirituality. All of these branches are important because they are foundations in the healing process. I am inviting you to see all the branches to this tree as a beginning. Uncovering traditional healing practices and sharing knowledge offers help with the battle of an imbalance of well-being, and those that are searching for a deeper connection to their Indigenous culture to heal, physically, mentally and spiritually.

***My Grandfather and Background***

Raoul Breton was a bright old man; the sound of his voice is fading from my memory, which makes me very sad to think about. He passed away unexpectedly in the year 2000 from complications of a day surgery which caused him to have a heart attack because he was not stitched up properly, bringing on an infection with poison leaking out into his body, that brought on the fatal heart attack. It all happened very quickly and unexpectedly. Shortly after his death I swear, I saw him drive by as I walked down a busy street.

We called him Papa, he was raised by his grandmother who was half Indigenous and half French, her father was from the Huron tribe, also called Wyandot, a tribe who were originally from Quebec. His grandmother raised him because his father died from heart complications when he was a very young boy, leaving his mother with 11 children to raise on her own. My grandfather was the favorite of his grandmother, so she took him in to raise him because his mother struggled to raise all 11 children independently. Fitting to this research the name we called my grandfather “Papa” in the Maori creation mythology, is Mother Earth. My papa also had 6 children of his own, just as Papa did in the myth. Papa told us very little about his background, but he would share his traditional healing energy with us, which was passed down from his grandmother to him. I am not sure how I knew this because he never did tell me, but we believed he could read your mind if you allowed him to look into your eyes long enough. I never wanted him to read mine so I wouldn’t dare look too long, although when I did, I could feel him in me with his piercing sharp eyes, touching my soul and looking at my intentions. My grandparents had five daughters and one son. My grandfather told us that his grandmother was half Wyandot or Wendat, my grandfather never spoke of our ancestors to me but he shared information with my eldest aunt Lynn who was my godmother, she passed away from Leukemia 11 years ago, this last October. Emotions run through me as I think about the family that I lost and I know that I still need healing myself, and this is a reminder as I travel through this journey of trying to connect with my roots and culture. My aunt Lynn shared some of the information with my mom and other aunts so I started my digging there. Individual knowledge was handed down through the family. My aunt Ann now has the majority of the knowledge of my maternal family history; she shared generously what she knew with me. I needed to dig into my background and our family healing practices in hopes to help heal myself and others that I care about as well as those searching for answers to help them heal in the analogous ways that they need strength. Searching back to my Indigenous ancestry of the Huron People is important for me to uncover and learn more about my culture to help myself in this process of healing. I discovered that my family was from Quebec near the St. Lawrence River; the region where my family on the maternal side came from was,

Upon the arrival of [Samuel de Champlain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_de_Champlain) in Quebec in 1608, was the region that was once under the control of the [Mohawks](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mohawk_people), Iroquois tribe. Early theories placed Huron origin in the [St. Lawrence Valley](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence_Valley), with some arguing for a presence near present-day [Montreal](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Montreal) and former sites of the historic [St. Lawrence Iroquoian](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St._Lawrence_Iroquoian) people. Wendat is an Iroquoian language. Early 21st-century research in [linguistics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics) and [archaeology](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology) confirm an historical connection between the Huron and the St. Lawrence Iroquois. ([Steckley, John](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Steckley) (Autumn 2012).

The language of the Huron-Wendat is part of the Iroquoian linguistic family and the language of Wyandot is related to Iroquois language, however Huron’s were usually enemies of the Iroquois. I needed to understand where my great grandmother came from and to learn more about her. She was a spiritual Indigenous woman who passed along her special healing gift to my grandfather. This gift was an energy form of healing through the mind using strength to take away pain. My grandfather would hold his hand just over the affected area and concentrated while his hand hovered over the spot, you would feel warmth and he would continue to concentrate, as you would no longer feel the pain in the treated area. I never really understood this technique so I decided to do further research on this form of healing to learn more and see where this tradition came from, and if there has been any further study around it. I always felt like he was a very powerful man and knew what he was doing was powerful but didn’t have the background knowledge of it to know enough to use it for healing. Knowing more about these practices that I feel imprecise about can not only help my children and me but also succor my family, friends, community, all of my relations and all of their relations. I would like to explore alternative practices to healing through nature of indigenous traditions to help revive them and share the traditions with others that are seeking good overall health. We will explore this physical touch therapy as I now know through my research that there are a couple of names for this practice, some call it body work a tradition practiced by the Cherokee tribes and in my own heritage it’s known as shamanic. My grandfather’s practice was passed down to him from our ancestors and he may have personally modified it to fit him. I am still putting together the pieces to make sense of it.

I have always felt a strong connection to Mother Nature and research reveals that nature heals. I want to also acknowledge that I reside on TK’emlups territory and want to connect my research to this territory as well to offer a more universal approach and not base traditional healing on one specific area, we can use and share techniques inclusive of all indigenous cultures, from the land that mother earth provides us. Looking at nature and the plants that the environment offers us with what we need to take care of ourselves and our relationships with people, for our mental, physical and spiritual health.

*Healing-*

We gather our minds together to send greetings and thanks to all the Animal life in the world. They have many things to teach us as people. We see them near our homes and in the deep forests. We are glad they are still here and we hope that it will always be so. Now our minds are one. With one mind, we turn to honor and thank all the plant foods we harvest from the garden. Since the beginning of time, the grains, vegetables, beans, and berries have helped the people survive. Many other living things draw strength from them, too. We gather all the plant foods together as one and send them a greeting of thanks. Now our minds are one. From the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address (pg. 10 National Museum of the American Indian Education Office, 2009).

***Plants from Mother Nature***

First let us explore Mother Nature and some of the plants she provides us. Nature is something I have always felt a close connection too. I feel free walking through a forest, in a meadow and especially close to water of a beach. Being out in nature is something I have always enjoyed immensely. I feel a connection to the plants that come from the earth we walk on. The flowers, herbs, trees and even the weeds. I remember as a young child picking as many dandelions as I could pick and making a bouquet of the bright yellow coloured weeds, that always looked so good to me. My grandfather was connected to the land and plants as well. His entire backyard, which was a half an acre, was a giant garden of produce and herbs. He would even use the dandelions in his salads. Through millennia of trial and error, indigenous people have gained substantial knowledge of medicinal plants, which has been imparted from generation to generation as part of oral traditions (Marles RJ, Clavelle C, Monteleone L, Tays N, Burns D, 2000). Herbs such as dandelion, tobacco, ginseng, sage, sweetgrass and rosehip have been traditionally used as medicine. Let’s examine some of these traditional plants and what we Indigenous people believe they can offer us as a holistic approach that aims to treat physical and emotional health, as well as, the wellbeing of people.

*Canada's forests have long played an integral role in supporting the lives of Aboriginal people, meeting their physical, cultural, spiritual and material needs. Traditional knowledge related to medicinal plants has been instrumental in the survival and wellbeing of Aboriginal people for thousands of years (Turner NJ, 2009).*

The holistic approach of Aboriginal healing systems involves spirituality and intimate connection with the natural environment (Densmore F, 1974). Studies were reviewed and compiled by Meeker et al. who provided detailed information about 384 plants used by the Ojibwa. (Davidson-Hunt IJ, Jack P, Mandamin E, Wapioke B, 2005).

The most common plant parts used to prepare different remedies are: roots, rhizomes, stem, bark, leaves, flowers, fruits, young shoots, and whole plants. The most frequently used plant parts were roots, followed by leaves, whole plants, fruits, and rhizomes. A total of 28 major ailment categories were treated with medicinal plants. Gastro-intestinal disorders, musculoskeletal disorders, cold, cough and sore throat, injuries, respiratory system disorders, urinary system disorders, and dermatological infections were treated with the highest diversity of medicinal plant species (Uprety, Y., Asselin, H., Dhakal, A. *et al. 2012).*

Secwepemc elders share stories of the creation time. A time long ago when the animal spirit Coyote helped the Old One create the world and everything in it. Wild onions, carrots, strawberries are just some of the plants that the people harvested. Bulbs and roots were the most important plant food for the secwepemc. The traditional territories of the Secwepmc that I reside in now covering a large part of the Plateau region is filled with wild sage. Sage is an antiseptic, anti-bacterial medicine, conferring strength, wisdom and clarity of purpose. It is a powerful purifying medicine and believed to drive away negative energies. Sage tea is a tonic that aids in indigestion and menopausal problems. It has many physical uses and spiritual uses such as to smudge, it is recommended for smudging because all people can smudge with sage at anytime. While smudging it is particularly important for women who smudge when they are on their moon time and during this time, use their own individual sage and not share. Another powerful medicinal plant is Sweet grass, which is used by almost all First Nations people for spiritual cleansing. The braiding of sweet grass in itself honors the teachings of interconnection between mind, body and spirit.

When sweet grass is walked on, it bends but does not break. Hence, it has been associated with the virtue of kindness. If someone has suffered an injustice, that injustice can be returned with kindness, as does sweet grass, by bending and not breaking when walked upon (KiiskeeNtum, 2008).

Until the advent of pharmaceutical medicine during the start of the 19th century, healing in all cultures relied upon plants, which are still used in today's pharmaceuticals. Through my research I stumbled across the mackiki database which is an electronic searchable version of the list of medicinal plants first published in Uprety et al.31 and stemming from a review of 49 publications issued between 1881 and 2010 in scientific journals, books, theses, and reports. It is currently the most comprehensive database on medicinal plants used by indigenous people of the Canadian boreal forest and is named “mackiki” after the Algonquin word for medicine. This offers a wealth of information. Here is a small example of information from the database on Soapberry, buffalo-berry.

Uses: •Decoction applied externally to treat aching limbs, arthritis, and sore head and face [Cree: 95].•Whole plant :Tea used as a tonic [Dene 100].•Leaves and stem :Decoction drunk as a purgative and emetic [Cree 13, 96]. , to relieve constipation, tuberculosis [Métis 13]. , and used as a wash for cuts, swellings, and skin sores due to impetigo [Métis 13]. Shoots Tea from new shoots drunk to prevent miscarriages and used as a wash for arthritis [Cree 95; Métis 13]. (Uprety, Y., Asselin, H., Dhakal, A. & Julien, N. 2012)

Mother Earth bestows us with materials and plants to help take care of our wellbeing. We have a special relationship with the earth as did our ancestors, there's an understanding that we take only what we need, and must use great care when doing so and be aware of how we take, how much of it is withdrawn so that future generations will be considered and practice reciprocity. Our relationship is based on a spiritual connection with her that guides Indigenous peoples to reverence.

***Body Work and Physical Touch a Hands on Therapy***

Since the earliest times, our hands have been a natural response to emotional pain, with hugs and caresses to comfort. Physical touch has been used to treat minor ailments in a drug free way. The Cherokee people of North America, for example, were well versed in body therapies and energy healing. They developed a comprehensive, sophisticated bodywork system that encompassed a form of osteopathic massage and manipulation, breath, and energy work. This was a laborious and challenging area to research, as there is not a lot of research in this area. Dr. Lewis Mehl-Madrona & Barbara Mainguy, offer workshops on this practice, which is a rare teaching, Dr. Mehl-Madrona who is Cherokee himself, looks at his culture as well as the Cree traditions, and how they intersect with conventional medicine via a social constructionist model. He has been writing about the use of imagery and narrative in healing since the 1980s and is certified in psychiatry, geriatrics, and family medicine. His research collaborations include work on various psychological conditions, issues of psychology during birthing, nutritional approaches to autism and diabetes, and the use of healing circles to improve overall health outcomes. Dr. Mehl-Madrona says Individual knowledge was handed down through the family.

It’s definitely a more indigenous way of teaching. The Cherokee art of healing touch is rarely encountered today. It is a comprehensive, sophisticated bodywork system that encompassed a form of osteopathic massage and manipulation, breath to reanimate the body and “draw spirit” into affected tissues, and energy work. Central to this technique are the alternation of deep pressure and gentle rocking release. The practice Incorporates Cherokee breath work techniques, as a means of restoring spirit to all parts of the body and incorporation of imagery, dialogue and offers the importance of ceremony, ritual, Osteopathic or “manipulative” medicine as a means of dialogue with the body, the use of acupressure, energy meridians, crystals, and energy medicine and a closing ceremony ( Dr. Mehl-Madrona, 2014).

The Cherokee people also used this practice and also crystal scanning and healing for the channeling of spirits a form of energy medicine. Cherokee was at one point in time was connected to the Iroquois confederacy. I discovered that the technique my grandfather was taught from his grandmother, which was passed down from her father’s Huron traditions was connected to illness,

The Huron Wendat recognized three types of illness: Natural causes, cured by herbs, drugs, poultices or sweating, Un-natural social behaviour thought to be witchcraft, dealt with by a Shaman and Psycho-illness that manifested itself in dreams. The Huron Wendat considered dreams to be the language of the soul. If dreamed desires remained unfulfilled, harm or even death could befall a person. Dreams and desires had to be interpreted by a Shaman (The Life of the Huron Wendat. (n.d.).

***Spirituality and Energy is Life***

Learning about these traditional practices helps people, including myself to reclaim our Indigenous identity and make sense of the world around us, in our worlds and understanding the natural world as well as the spiritual world. This is an area that I have not been connected to my spiritual side. I have been searching for ways to connect myself with this side to help look at the spiritual side of healing and strengthen positive mental health. Losing people close and not having this outlet has made healing more difficult and embracing practices with these therapeutic tools and understanding that the spiritual world plays a part in balancing our overall well being. In my personal culture a Shaman person is regarded as having access to, and influence in, the world of good and evil spirits, especially among some peoples of northern Asia and North America. Typically such people enter a trance state during a ritual, and practice divination and healing. (Shaman: Definition of Shaman by Lexico. (n.d.)). There is a lot of discussion and debate around shamanism and it has been viewed in western science as a pseudoscience. A psy- choanalyst whose special professional research area is the psychological treatment of schizophrenia, a pursuit which has occupied twenty years of his life stated, “But the researchers who do take this position know relatively little, in terms of actual data, about the mind of the shaman, his world view, and the philosophical premises that form the basis of his healing activities ” (Boyer, 1969). Western view of this practice in particular throughout history in the eyes of the Catholic church viewed a Shaman as a daemoniac figure. In contrast to this view Boyer stated "I have stressed that shamans are usually not auto-cultural deviants and have even suggested that in some cultures, shamans are healthier psychologically than their societal mates." (Boyer, 1969). Within my culture of the Wendat a Shaman was a healer and there were four kinds:

Those in control of wind, rain and weather, Those able to predict the future, Those able to find lost objects, Those able to heal the sick. Men usually took the position of healer, while women dealt with witchcraft and sorcery. The Shaman used visions and dreams to tell which actions to take. To achieve these visions, the Shaman would fast and remain celibate until an answer was received. The Shaman worked with drugs and herbal remedies and mask or shell rattles. Shaman (men and women) were highly paid and highly respected. (The Life of the Huron Wendat. (n.d.).

In the past decades there are many reasons why shamans have gained credibility. Why people are attracted is because they are feeling that same disconnection that I’ve been feeling. There is a growing awareness and body of evidence about the efficacy of certain rituals such as the Sun Dance and Sweat Lodge ceremonies and creating a circle of healing and sharing our gifts. Practicing is about connecting with nature to deeply connect with the natural spirits, the elements and land, the spirits of the land through all the elements of water, and earth and connects our roots and branches and offers us to see our true essence and is irrefutable.

Looking at the evidence from literature, which suggests that the wellbeing of Indigenous people is enhanced when they maintain their ‘traditional’ culture. Positive associations with engagement with traditional cultures, research conducted by the centre for Labour Market Research, the link between Indigenous culture and wellbeing: Qualitative evidence for Australian Aboriginal people, the research is a formative stage in terms of theory and empirical analyses.

Greater attachment to, or engagement with traditional culture is seen to create a stronger sense of self-identity, promote resilience and positive sense of community, a number of studies have presented evidence that individuals from such minorities achieve better life outcomes if they maintain a stronger affinity with traditional culture, drawn primarily on studies of North American populations. Fleming and Ledogar review studies relating to ‘Indigenous spirituality’, but deem this concept of spirituality to be closely bound up with culture and ways of living in Indigenous communities’ (2008:47) The presence of interactive effects between cultural affinity and facts such as self-esteem, and self-efficacy have also been investigated. Some key themes that arise in testing and explaining such relationships are enculturation, self-identity, resilience and sense of community.

Another piece of evidence to support this idea is the Sweat Lodge ceremonies, which are now a common use in drug treatment programs across the United States, and the number of Sun Dance participant’s increases annually, as do the number of dances. Furthermore, modern physicists are beginning to link certain aspects of shamanism to recent findings from quantum mechanics (Lyon, William S., 1998).

***The Roots will Continue to Grow***

Stepping back to look at the tree and reviving our knowledge of traditional practices is important because it connects us to where we belong and helps us to self-identify and offers us guidance in life as well as perspectives of what is important to us. It empowers us and helps us to take back what is ours, our traditional ways. This is important for myself on making this knowledge available and bringing awareness to these practices that are not as commonly practiced today. My motivation is reviving traditional healing practice through speaking with family and hearing their stories to rebalance, rediscover, repair, redefine, and reclaim our cultural traditions for good overall health and a well-balanced circle as in the medicine wheel. As a mother, I want my children to be able to know these alternatives without having to put together the pieces, as I have had to do. This sharing of knowledge will help them in their wellbeing throughout their life journeys. Being healthy overall is all connected to these traditions and with one thing out of place it is not a balanced circle and is unable to turn in movement. If physical health is not in balance with mental and spiritual health then the circle does not turn, if spiritual well being is not satisfied it also affects mental health, which in turn affects physical health. They all need to be full in order for life to be successful and for movement to happen. All of these traditional alternatives to well being such as plants from mother nature, body work, and spirituality all offer healing potential when we are connected to them. Personally the more I learn about my background and the connections to these traditions the stronger I feel and the more pride I carry with me. One might use plants to go into an altered state of consciousness connecting to the whole well being and be more connected with the creator and use nature as a mirror to help heal and see that we are connected to the earth. I use the metaphor knowledge tree of healing as an ongoing lifelong journey with the roots inside Mother Nature that connects us all as a community and teaching that knowledge is to be shared. Maintaining their ‘traditional’ culture enhances the wellbeing of Indigenous people. We share to benefit all and thrive with a fully balanced wellbeing through continuous work of using these traditions. I invite you to research this space from family and elders and touch people’s lives through the belief that good things come from a small starting point. I welcome you now as my family network in expanding our understanding of healing outside the western view of research and expand on how we do research. I hope that what is written here provides space for further research. Healing is seen through all the leaves and branches of the tree as the branches grow and the leaves go through the seasons of change, this is only the beginning of my flourishing tree and perhaps yours of uncovering these traditional healing practices, that can help with the battle of imbalance wellbeing, and a deeper connection to Indigenous culture, physically, mentally and spiritually as our trees grow and heal.

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