

Running Head: A JOURNEY TO **kiscâyâwin Pⁿł̓ł̓Δ·ᑦ**

A Journey to **kiscâyâwin Pⁿł̓ł̓Δ·ᑦ**: Belonging Within us, Around us and Between us
A Co-Created Exploration into Cultivating Collective Belonging for Young People

by

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Personal Prologue

kiscâyâwin PⁿłłΔ·³. While the political and social context for this research is foundational, its roots are deeply personal. I am a proud urban Métis Iskwew with homelands rooted in Fort Chipewyan from the Fraser family, and have had the privilege to be born and grow up on the unceded, ancestral, sacred, and continually occupied lands of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples in what is now known as Vancouver, British Columbia (BC). As a mixed heritage Métis woman, born into and growing up in an urban centre, I grew up disconnected from the homelands of my Métis family as well as the stories of my ancestors, my culture, what it meant to be Indigenous, what it meant to be mixed. My experience of belonging nowhere was more than a personal feeling but rather a result of intergenerational colonial dispossession of identity, culture, language, and land. My journey to understand who I am as an Indigenous **Iskwew** (woman in Cree), who I am as a settler woman, and how I experience the daily tensions of the distinctive worldviews that respectively shape each of these identities and challenged my positionality. As a young Indigenous researcher, I must acknowledge who I am, what has brought me here, and what intentions I come with in order to honour doing things in a good way. Throughout the process, I have had countless struggles of worthiness, of doubt, of anger, of fear, of joy, of concern, of pride and of freedom. This process has undoubtedly been one of the hardest things I have done.

I acknowledge my whole being and all the ancestors that have informed and formed who I am today. Being mixed, I intentionally choose to privilege my Indigenous worldview, teachings and ways of being; I do this as an act of reclamation to nation building for a connected, thriving, and alive future. Recognizing the diverse tapestry of who I am, where I come from, and how I belong, I came to understand through this research process was that our world needs to

remember and reclaim our sacred interconnected relationality, and our deep connection and belonging to one another, and the land. As a young Indigenous **Iskwew** researcher, I choose to acknowledge my positionality, my worldview, my understanding of my identity (Smith, Tuck, & Wang, 2019), my struggles, and my deep interconnected motivations to explore the concept of belonging amongst and alongside young people. I must acknowledge my ways of seeing and being in the world that are connected with the land, the wisdom of my ancestors, and to the deep responsibility that I carry for current and future generations of young people.

My choice to work with and alongside young people is rooted in what I believe is possible when we nurture and cultivate spaces for young people to take their rightful roles as leaders, as storytellers, and as changemakers in our communities. This exploration of collective belonging for young people comes at a time of immense transformation, one of great discomfort and one of unprecedented growth. Young people all over the world are rising, are leading, are fierce; yet grounded and are demonstrating to us more than ever what it means to belong.

I see a world where every young person across these lands belongs without bounds. A world where all young people don't have to journey back to **kiscâyâwin P^ol̥ʔΔ·ʔ**, but instead experience it from their first indrawn breath, like sweetgrass - rooted, boundless, and free.

Despite the limited meaningful engagement, young people across the globe are rising to action. Young people are rejecting the slow roll of conventional politics, feeling like they have no voice, are ignored, restricted, or denied the resources to engage politically and generally feel as though conventional political engagement is ineffective in bringing about genuine change (Lemyre, 2016). Young people's engagement and commitment to climate action is a beautiful example. In March 2019, more than 1.4 million young people in over 133 countries around the world took part in school strikes on climate action (Laville, Taylor, & Hurst, 2019) reclaiming and utilizing their voices to speak truth to power. Thousands gathered across these lands here in Canada to organize in solidarity from coast to coast to coast and continue to gather to confirm and support the rights of Indigenous people and the sacredness of the land.

Even with young people collectively rising up around important issues like climate action, questions remain about young people's current capacity to be civic leaders in their communities. For example, a study by Policy Research Group of the Government of Canada indicated that 70% of Canadians feel young people are not prepared to be active civic community leaders, suggesting that young people are ill-prepared to vote, become active in the community, and engage with political and community leaders (Lemyre, 2016). Our research sought to unearth how Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people, aged 19-29 in Vancouver, BC can claim or reclaim their rightful place in civic action. Specifically, it sought to understand how civic belonging is defined and described because belonging for youth increases the likelihood of their engagement in civic action (Lemyre, 2016). This research explores how collective belonging for young people can be nurtured and cultivated as we navigate the unprecedented challenges of today and generations to come. The study engages youth participatory action research (YPAR) and is rooted in a decolonizing methodology. The

objectives of this study are to (1) discover how young people define and describe belonging and civic action; (2) explore how young people co-create collective meanings of civic belonging; (3) support participating young people in reclaiming their roles as storytellers, leaders, knowledge holders, and changemakers; and (4) consider how civic belonging can be cultivated and nurtured to inspire civic action today and in the future.

The following principle research question originally guided the study:

1. How can civic belonging for young people ignite civic action?

This question was supported by the following sub-questions:

2. How do young people understand and experience civic belonging and civic action?
3. How do young people experience the relationship between civic belonging and civic action?
4. Why is civic belonging for young people important to ignite civic action today and in the future?
5. What actions can be taken by young people and communities to cultivate civic belonging for young people and inspire civic action?

It is important to acknowledge that initially this research sought to explore the concept of civic belonging leading to civic action; however, due to the participatory, reflexive, and youth-driven process of the study, during the research process it became clear the term ‘civic belonging’ did not resonate with participating young people. Therefore, after their recommendation and advocacy, we explored the concept of ‘collective belonging’, a term co-created by young people, and its role in collective action.

How the Journey Started

The context for this research is rooted in what I believe to be an ideal time to meaningfully explore belonging, collective belonging, and its role in connecting young people to each other and the land. Specifically, this research engaged young people from the unceded, sacred and continually occupied lands of the x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples now known as the City of Vancouver. The City of Vancouver is Canada's third largest major city where 68 % of youth aged 15 to 34 are immigrants or are second generation Canadian (Statistics Canada, 2018) while being home to the third largest urban Indigenous population after Winnipeg and Edmonton (Statistics Canada, 2018). In 2015, Reconciliation and building bridges between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples became a national conversation as the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) released its final report, detailing the disturbing truth of this country's history and how this has informed the current reality for Indigenous peoples across the nations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). In the same year, the federal government stated that Reconciliation and renewed relationships with Indigenous peoples was a top priority. While this research looks to explore the concept of collective belonging for Indigenous and non-Indigenous young peoples it is vitally important to acknowledge the present-day reality and context in which this research takes place. This research acknowledges the reality that in 2018 suicide rates are seven times higher for Indigenous youth than for non-Indigenous youth in this country, and suicide rates among Inuit youth come in at some of the highest in the world, at 11 times the national average (Government of Canada, n.d.). While there is documented variation in suicide rates between First Nations and Inuit youth, and there is currently no population health information on the status of Métis youth suicide rates (Ansloos,

Overview of the Thesis

Throughout this thesis I oscillate between using the pronouns “we” and “I”. I use “we” when describing the co-inquiry process and findings as this co-inquiry is the outcome of a collective - the three young people from the A(u)ntie Advisory Collective (the A(u)nties) and the 10 young people who contributed their stories, lived experiences, thoughts, and insights. In contrast, I use the term “I” to reflect my opinions, thoughts, and choices as these do not necessarily reflect the views of the collective. I have chosen to bring intentionality to both the collective and individual voice throughout this thesis, to decentralize the sharing of this knowledge. The core of this research is the voices of the young people, as Smith (2008) shares, the core of this research is the collective not the individual. Within Māori worldviews, the unit of the individual is foregone in Indigenous research methodologies for the “fundamental unit of whanau or extended family” (Smith, 2012, p. 279) as the “core social unit, rather than the individual” (Smith, 2012, p. 303). Throughout the thesis, I have chosen to **bold** words to highlight their importance and *italicize* words that are direct quotes from the young people to offer clarity in voice.

Chapter 1 provides some general context for the realities and times in which this research took place, an overview of my original primary research question and interrelated sub-questions, my research objectives, and the significance of the co-created inquiry.

Chapter 2 explores current literature on youth belonging, situating our inquiry within broader academic literature on belonging generally, young people and belonging, young people’s engagement in civic action and importance of belonging in civic action for young people. This chapter concludes with a summary of all academic scholarship explored within this thesis.

Chapter 3 outlines the methodological approaches, overview of our data harvest methods and a description of our overall research design. This chapter introduces and honours the advisory team and participating young people and concludes by sharing the ways in which we co-engaged throughout the research process in relational, ethical, and trustworthy manner.

Chapter 4 presents the findings of the study, specifically, presenting seven core themes that emerged from the wisdom of young people involved in this research.

Chapter 5 discusses relevant literature in relation to each of the three study conclusions and articulates the corresponding calls to action from this study. I highlight specific calls to action tailored for three population groups: (1) young people; (2) adult allies of young people; and (3) policymakers, change makers, and influencers.

Chapter 6 acknowledges the strengths and bounds of this inquiry, organizational implications, and implications for future inquiry. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of the study findings, conclusions, calls to action, and this research journey.

our gifts, to something greater, that makes meaning for our lives” (p. 15). In essence, the key dominator of belonging (and unbelonging) lies in connection, to self, others, and something greater (Brown, 2017; Ross, 2018; Turner, 2017). Brown (2017) also states that places themselves can hold those feelings of belonging and unbelonging because of the connections we have with people in a particular place. A similar line of thought resides in the idea that belonging lies in our ability to connect to people, places, and issues that matter, as well as their relationship to the times in which we now live (Cuervo, Barakat, & Turnbull, 2015). Ross (2018) takes the position that belonging is more closely related to an individual’s connection to shared identity, values, destiny, and interdependence, and that self is seen as a function of all our relationships, both past and present. We are an outcome of our relationships; we become self through other (Gergen & Gergen, 2000). On the other hand, Brown (2017) states belonging is deeply personal and our ability to belong to something greater or outside of ourselves requires us to be fully authentic and at times stand completely alone. From an Indigenous worldview, the concept of belonging is referred to using different language but captures the essence of connectedness in a different way. Thistle (2017) states that:

The key to understanding a healthy community, Indigenous or not, is appreciating that cultivation of the human spirit is grounded in emplaced networks of significance.

Grounded emplacement gives positive meaning to individual and collective life in social groups and society as a whole, and produces a healthy “sense of place,” as well as a healthy sense of identity (p. 6).

The importance of the cultivation of the human spirit in emplaced networks of significance is furthered by sharing that our sense of place can be cultivated by remembering our connection to *all my relations*, our sacred interconnectedness to all that is, an Indigenous teaching that reminds

of our relatedness to the land, to the water, to the creatures, to those that came before us, those that will come after - a teaching that travels across all time. Kovach (2010) furthers the notion of belonging in the context of the collective, stating that “Inherent in this understanding of life is reciprocity and accountability to each other, the community, clans and nations. It does not serve anonymity or rugged individualism well. It is a way of life that creates a sense of belonging, place and home.” (p. 55). Sanchez (2017) speaks to belonging and needing to belong as our deep desire not for more information, but instead to reconnect with ancestral wisdom that lies in all of us, one where we are all in a precious state of relatedness, one where we all belong - a belonging that is both individual and collective.

So with the understanding that connection is a requirement for belonging to exist (Brown, 2017; Cuervo et al., 2015; Gergen & Gergen, 2008; Kovach, 2010; Ross, 2018; Sanchez, 2017; Thistle, 2017; Turner, 2017), the question then becomes what is needed to support the collective cultivation of belonging to inspire action? How can it be nurtured and cultivated? Further, what does belonging mean for young people?

Belonging for Young People

Some scholars suggest that youth studies are not adapting rapidly enough to evolving and transformational dimension of youth (Stahl & Habib, 2017) resulting in the notion of belonging being “taken for granted” or siloed into merely a personal feeling (Youkhana, 2014). As a result, a lack of digging deeper into what it means when a young person affirms their sense of belonging leaves young people’s definition of belonging vague and undertheorized (Antonsich, 2010). In the last decade, there has been an emerging landscape of research on belonging and the politics of belonging, the majority of which has been quantitatively focused on the effects of belonging rather than the meanings that allow for a sense of belonging to exist (Bateman, 2002;

politicians or traditional media mediums less frequently than previous generations (i.e., newspapers); however, young people are more likely to volunteer and be most active in educational, community, or cultural groups (p. 51). In addition, studies have found that in Canada and around the globe, young people's intention to vote and their overall political participation is in decline compared to previous generations (Johnson, 2014; Myock & Tonge 2009; Turcotte, 2015; Wood, 2010). In contrast, Milan (2005) argued that younger generations are still politically engaged but are moving away from traditional arenas of engagement. Instead, young people are creating new modalities of civic and political participation to adapt to our changing world (Milan, 2005). For example, young people in Canada are more likely to research information and participate in a demonstration or march on a given political issue than previous generations (Lemyre, 2016). Furthermore, although 'traditional' civic participation for youth is less pervasive in the Canadian landscape, the methods young people are utilizing to participate and engage are more diverse and abundant than ever (Lemyre, 2016). Resistance, reclamation and action can come in many forms, creating highly visible moments (Tuck & Yang, 2012). "Deep participating doesn't always deliver a new policy, a new regime, a political victory. It might re/new an epistemology. Sometimes it can deliver a movement. Other times, it forms nodes and networks and pathways to be activated episodically for more explicit political participation" (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 14).

This phenomenon is also evident globally with the overwhelming engagement of young people using their voices to advocate for what matters, as highlighted in land protection movements and climate action strikes. Autumn Peltier, the Anishinabek Nation Chief Water Commissioner, who at 15 years of age has travelled across the globe speaking to peoples from all walks of life, including world leaders stated "[We have to] ...keep going, don't look back, and if

you have an idea, just do it; no one is going to wait for you or tell you what to do, use your voice and speak up for our planet” (Women of Influence, 2019). Another young person utilizing the power of their voice, Greta Thunberg - a 16-year old from Sweden - recently advocated for climate action on several international platforms. She and 46 other youth activists from around the world stated:

But to change everything, we need everyone. It is time for all of us to unleash mass resistance - we have shown that collective action does work. We need to escalate the pressure to make sure that change happens, and we must escalate together. So, this is our chance - join us on climate strike this September. People have risen up before to demand action and make change; if we do so in numbers, we have a chance. If we care, we must do more than say we do. We must act. This won't be the last day we need to take to the streets, but it will be a new beginning. We're counting on you (Guardian, 2019).

Thunberg's call to action inspired Rebecca Hamilton - a 16-year old from Vancouver, British Columbia (BC) - to bring together the first Vancouver students' climate strike in December of 2018 (Larsen, 2018). Together with tens of thousands of students, she says she's stepping out of her daily life to prioritize climate action (Larsen, 2018).

Traditionally, these types of actions are typically excluded from conversations and research about youth civic participation. I argue that this is a form of civic participation, however because the term has traditionally not included acts of protest and activism, for the purposes of this study we are using the term action to acknowledge the urgency to act, recognizing we must do more than engage and or participate we must act, our earth depends on it. “Once a person has engaged in deep participation, her bones will remember it and will expect it and set about creating it in other situations” (Tuck, 2013, p. 13).

Importance of Belonging in Civic Action for Young People

In the context of civic participation in Canada, scholars have recently suggested that a strong sense of belonging for youth increases the likelihood of their engagement in civic action by 91%, compared to only 27% for adults (Lemyre, 2016). As such, an inextricable and unparalleled link can be made between belonging and civic action for young people across the country. Specifically, young people are 50% more likely to be members of or participate in civic associations if they hold a strong sense of belonging to Canada (Lemyre, 2016). Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that space and opportunity must be provided for “Indigenous youth to determine what citizenship and civic identity means to them and their communities” because their identities should not be framed as “citizens of Canadian nation state but rather citizens of much older nations that predate federation and colonization” (Korteweg & Bissell, 2014, p. 21). With this said, what it means for young people to belong to Canada has yet to be explored (Woons, 2014). Although, there is clarity that a sense of belonging is critical for young people to engage in civic action, more research is needed to unearth how young people experience belonging and how it can be cultivated to promote meaningful participation (Lemyre, 2016; Woons, 2014). Holding this knowledge in mind on the deeply important and interconnected notions of belonging and civic action for young people, we must also acknowledge that in order to enact research on understanding how belonging can be cultivated, we must first create space to explore and unpack what belonging is for young people.

Summary

Essential to this research exploring collective belonging for young people is the suggestion that the concept of belonging is undertheorized in dialogues about place, space and young people (Cuervo & Wyn, 2017) and “researching young people’s experiences and

explanations of identities and belongings matters to young people as change-makers and are necessary in implementing a socially just future” (Habib & Ward, 2019; Hamid, 2017; Leistyna, 2009; Smyth & McInerney, 2007). The direct correlation between theories of places, spaces, and territories to belonging is deepened by the notion that places hold meaning that are far beyond their physical location (Stahl & Habib, 2017) and that young people’s sense of belonging is most closely tied to their social relations (Massey, 1994). Therefore, for the purpose of this thesis, we define and describe what belonging means to young people from their perspectives and the conditions that cultivate and nurture belonging in order to support young people in being actively engaged as leaders both day and in the future. This research nurtures the weaving together of connection, places and spaces, issues that matter to young people and connecting the present day and our collective future (Cuervo et al., 2015).

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter outlines the design of our Indigenous youth participatory action research (I-YPAR) project which draws on youth participatory action research (YPAR) and decolonizing methodologies. I begin by defining and describing YPAR and decolonizing methods that set the foundational reasoning for employing I-YPAR throughout our research process. I then provide an overview of our data harvest methods. A description of our overall research design follows. This includes a description of participant recruitment and selection, our engagement process, our gathering, and our process of analysis and validation of the research findings and recommendations to help ensure rigor and trustworthiness. The chapter concludes with an exploration of ethical responsibilities.

Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR)

Youth participatory action research (YPAR), as described by Cammarota and Fine (2010), “provides young people with opportunities to study social problems affecting their lives and then determine actions to rectify these problems” (p. 2). YPAR allows for a paradigmatic shift for young people by highlighting that “the conditions of injustice are produced, not natural; are designed to privilege and oppress but are ultimately challengeable and thus changeable” (Cammarota & Fine, 2010, p. 2). YPAR is rooted in inspiring and empowering the invaluable wisdom, creativity, innovation, and leadership that young people offer this world by ways of formal resistance to systems, institutions, and organizations that oppress their participation (Cammarota & Fine, 2010). Furthermore, YPAR can support and reveal youth’s sense of power, agency, and knowledge of collective action to garner material changes and redistributions, addressing, imperfectly, the complexities of youth realities (Ansloos & Wager, 2019). Lastly, YPAR can serve as an action-oriented form of reclamation to support walking alongside the

participants to promote a paradigmatic shift amongst individuals, communities, organizations, and systems that oppress the participation of youth (Camarota & Fine, 2010). In exploring belonging with young people, YPAR supports all involved in the research to think creatively about how we collectively co-create the conditions for collective belonging to enact meaningful change today and in the future.

Decolonizing Methodology

As an Indigenous researcher living in the era of unearthing truth, exploring meaningful reconciliation, and the belief in the power of leading differently in this country, it was both personally important and foundational that I employed a decolonizing methodology or approach to this research. Decolonizing research exists at the crux between political ideology (the beliefs that shape one's praxis), space/place (the surroundings that give life to such existence), and community (the group that enacts such work), each a dimension of decolonization as an expression of community self-determination (Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Zavala, 2013). Interpreting Tuck and Yang (2012), Ansloos and Wager (2019) write: "decolonization is not a metaphor, rather it is a complex and frequently chaotic practice of social change entangled with struggles for comprehensive Indigenous sovereignty, which centers land- and place-based relations". Employing decolonizing methodology is for me, a small act of reclamation of Indigenous worldview in the academy that honours my responsibility to *all my relations*. A decolonizing methodological approach to this work means challenging, reclaiming and at time refusing norms of Western research while synonymously weaving in ways of knowing and being consistent with Indigenous knowledge systems, recognizing there is rich diversity amongst communities, nations, knowledges and teachings. Wilson (2008) noted the principles underlying all Indigenous methodology as respect, reciprocity and relationality. If decolonization is not a

metaphor, as Tuck and Yang (2012) noted, I also recognize the ongoing nature of the work of decolonizing Western research, and that decolonizing methodology is not only about centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being from beginning to end of this research process, but also about decentralizing myself as the researcher and centering the non-human and the land in my research. Adhering to the centrality of relationality as an Indigenous way of knowing (Wilson 2008), this research employed of I-YPAR.

Indigenized Youth Participatory Action Research (I-YPAR)

Korteweg and Bissell (2016) introduced the notion of Indigenized youth participatory action research (I-YPAR) as a methodological framework that acts as an active enactment of decolonizing research methodologies (Battiste, 2013; Donald, 2012; Kovach, 2010; Smith, 2012; Wilson, 2008). "Indigenized", in the context of I-YPAR is a formal term used Korteweg and Bissell (2016), but it is critical to note that the concept of Indigenization is distinct for many, from the concept of decolonizing as outlined above. Indigenized in the context of I-YPAR, appears to be about transforming YPAR by infusing Indigenous ways of knowing and being into an established Western critical methodology--an example of 'Two-Eyed Seeing' "To see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous ways of knowing, and to see from the other eye with the strengths of Western ways of knowing, and to use both of these eyes together" (Bartlett, Marshall, & Marshall, 2012, p. 335). Consistent with our approach of engaging both Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people in this work, this approach engages both Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodological traditions. In this way, our work engages in and explores what Bartlett, Marshall & Marshall (2012) defined as Two-Eyed Seeing. Building on the examples of Cammarota and Fine (2008) and Tuck and Yang (2013), this methodological framework seeks to enact a pedagogy of resistance or refusal, a method to build solidarity and a collective

co-created knowledge and inspire action. Due to utilizing I-YPAR, research was ongoing and iterative, producing data/wisdom directly from young people as they participated with the research activities and informed the use of methods.

Project Participants

This study was conducted in three parts. For part one, I recruited three young people who formed a research advisory team named the A(u)ntie Advisory Collective. For part two, I recruited 10 young people (including the A(u)nties) who participated in a 1-day experiential gathering. All participants were between the ages of 19-29, who currently live in what is now called British Columbia, Canada. Participants identified as: (1) *born on unceded Coast Salish territory, and parents immigrated to Canada from Poland*; (2) *born in Ontario, living in Vancouver. Family is originally from Austria and Germany, and they were Jews who left during the Holocaust*; (3) *born in Burnaby, both parents grew up in Jamaica, dad in Montego Bay, and mom in Kingston*; (4) *Tsimshian on mother's side and French Canadian on dad's side*; (5) *born and raised in Burnaby on Coast Salish territories and is Italian*; (6) *born and raised in Vancouver and Burnaby Coast Salish territories, comes from two people who immigrated from the Philippines and lived in the Philippines for about four years*; (7) *born and raised here in Vancouver on Coast Salish territories mother's side is Gitksan from Northern BC, dad's side is Italian, super Roman Catholic, and step dad side is Jewish*; (8) *Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Ukrainian and Norwegian*; (9) *parents are from province in China, they migrated to Peru and was born and raised there moved to Vancouver on Coast Salish territory 10 years ago*; (10) *Mowachaht-Muchalaht First Nation and is of Nuuchah-nulth, Kwakwaka'wak and Tlingit ancestry*. Participants were both Indigenous and non-Indigenous and although not originally intended, all participants identified as women, using she/her pronouns.

created a space for connection, trust building, as well as, rooted us in the importance of our relational responsibilities to one another while journeying our co-created process (Lahman, Geist, Rodriguez, Graglia, & DeRoche, 2011). Building from connection, the young people then named their advisory team the A(u)ntie Advisory Collective, the name was intentionally chosen to reflect *feeling like we are 'anti' to the prescriptive and predefined ways of doing things and aunts to this research process* (cedar) further speaking to the role of being an aunts and the responsibility to *connect, love, nurture and care for this research process from beginning to end, like an auntie does* (cedar). The advisory chose the spelling of A(u)ntie to reflect the duality of their role and intentionality behind the stewardship of this co-created process. To start our relationship off in an intentional way, each traced our hands on a piece of paper and inside wrote what each person needed to engage meaningful and what each person could offer the collective in the outline of our hands. We then shared with the group and made commitments to one another to uphold these promises throughout the research process. From there, we each explored our role within the advisory collective and identified collective agreements of working together.

The A(u)nties were offered the opportunity to amend my original objectives based on their own understanding and lived experiences but through dialogue were aligned in the intent of our research. They then participated in the research design process that encouraged them to choose from different methods and activities of engagement. They were also encouraged to create their own or adapt existing methods. I and the A(u)nties met virtually using ZOOM twice after our in-person session and before part two of the research process to discuss roles, comfort, confirm agenda and check-in with the collective. The A(u)nties communicated over email, Facebook messenger and Google Docs to discuss research related questions and dialogues. Collectively, we co-designed a 1-day gathering to explore the concept of civic belonging for

young people. Methods collectively chosen for the 1-day gathering included: opening circle, hand tracing, sticky notes, body mapping, base mapping, free write, narrative métissage, and closing circle. These methods are described in detail in part two of the research process. After supporting the design of the research, The A(u)nties acted as both co-facilitators and active participants for part two of the research gathering, supporting both the process and the harvesting of the data.

Part two: Gathering with participants. Following the above process, ten young people engaged in a 1-day experiential gathering to explore a series of questions through creative process methods. The workshop began with relationship building activities to connect to one another and root us in our collective relational accountability to each other (Smith, 2012). As explored by Cammarota and Fine (2010), relationship building is important when working alongside young people in order to support agency and reclamation of voice and connection to each other and the greater community. Based on the research questions, process, and methods designed by the A(u)nties in part one, participants engaged in seven activities.

Welcome. The day began with a welcome from the A(u)nties to the land, grounding us in place and space, and sharing words of history, language and responsibility on the land on which we gathered. From there, I went through an overview of our day together and then moved into an opening circle to get everyone's voices in the room.

Opening circle. The opening circle was not necessarily used as a method to collect stories; but instead, served as a ritual to ground young people and facilitators to share their stories. Gathering in a circle is an act of ceremony and is of deep importance to my familial teachings. As I was taught, "each gathering begins by intentionally opening the circle and concludes by intentionally closing the circle" (T. Fraser, personal communication, March 27,

2018). Circles were an integral method to honour and create sacred space to bring all voices into the room. In the opening circle, participants were invited to share in a one way circle their name, who they are, where they come from, how they identify, and what drew them to be a part of this research gathering.

Sticky notes. Once connected, we put four huge pieces of paper around the room with the words: belonging is..., civic is..., action is..., civic belonging is... We then asked everyone to take a moment to reflect and write on a sticky note in response to the question: How do you define each of these terms? We went through the terms one-by-one. Once complete, we read the sticky notes from each word and engaged in a dialogue around how these terms were defined and described. Young people specifically found the term civic belonging challenging as their understanding of the terms ‘civic’ and ‘belonging’ were polar and disconnected and was not a term the participating young people identified with. Therefore, we put up a blank piece of paper and invited participants to choose a term that replaced the word ‘civic’ to align with the intent of our co-created exploration. Young people advocated for the term ‘collective’ and the term collective belonging then informed the rest of our exploration and the purpose of this research.

Body mapping. Body mapping is the process of creating body maps (life-sized human body images) using art-based techniques to visually represent aspects of lives (Gastaldo, Magalhaes, Carrasco, & Davy, 2012). Often, body mapping is used to tell stories and support participants to communicate creatively through a deeper, more reflexive process (Gastaldo et al., 2012). Typically, this method engages participants to create their own maps; however, in this study, one body map was created during the research gathering by all young people, where young people collectively created a body map with paint, markers, and magazine cut-outs. The body mapping method was used to explore the question: what does it look or feel like to belong?

Probes and prompts were used to create a deeper understanding of young people's insights and perspectives.

Participants were invited over to a huge life size piece of paper with paint, markers, magazine cut outs, pens and other forms of art supplies. They were then invited to trace a body on the paper. Participants worked collaboratively to select who would be traced and worked together to trace the body of the fellow participants, working on one collaborative map to better reflect the experience of the collective. Participants then reflected on a time where they experienced belonging and considered what it felt like in the body, what existed, and what was around. Participants used mixed materials to draw, dialogue and reflect upon these experiences. During this activity, participants expressed appreciation for the ability to articulate and translate feelings into a co-created story of belonging.

Base mapping. Base mapping is an arts-based method that draws on community-mapping and other mapping methods (Blanchet-Cohen & Cook, 2005; Currie & Heykoop, 2011; Morrow, 2001). Base mapping uses a satellite image of a specific landscape to encourage participants to reflect on the importance of place. For the research gathering, a base map of an image of the lower mainland in BC was explored. To begin the activity, all participating young people were asked to silently indicate with a dot sticker spaces and places on the map where they feel like they belong. Then, in groups of three to four, a facilitated conversation took place. Prompts for small group discussions included: what exists in those places? Why are those places important? And why does it matter? To bring the method to a close, all young people gathered and explored their learning through a thoughtfully facilitated discussion.

Since our exploration focused on the exploration of belonging on the unceded lands of the land of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and

Səl̓l̓wətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples, participating young people were invited to put stickers on a large printed aerial survey map of Metro Vancouver. Participants were invited to think of a time they felt a sense of belonging to a place or space and each participant took turns placing colourful stickers on areas they felt they belonged. If places were outside of the photographed area, participants were invited to put their stickers on the edge of the map. Participants were invited to do this silently in a circle and were then invited into small groups to debrief why they selected certain places and how they contributed to feelings of belonging.

Free write and narrative métissage. Free writing is a method that encourages participants to freely write from their stream of consciousness rather than following prescribed rules of grammar, sentence structure, (Hill, 2010; Reeves, 2010; Wagamese, 2016). Free writing lends itself to the creative process of narrative métissage by providing a written foundation for people to actively interweave their stories by moving from person and individual written reflection to sharing within a larger collective, then actively braiding unique pieces of individuality into one. Narrative métissage is creative engagement (Bishop, Etmanski, Page, Dominguez, & Heykoop, 2019; Donald, 2012; Etmanski, Weigler & Wong, 2013) and “a way of merging and blurring genres, texts and identities; an active literary stance, political strategy and pedagogical praxis” (Chambers, Donald, & Hasebe-Ludt, 2002, para. 1). We used both methods in the research gathering in tandem to explore the question: what actions can be taken by young people in communities to cultivate collective belonging for current and future generations?

Participants were first invited to free write for seven minutes to capture their individual reflections guided by the question above as their prompt. Once seven minutes concluded, young people were invited to review what they had written and select words, phrases or sections they were comfortable sharing with the collective. Once selected, each participant wrote their excerpts

on a piece of paper and read them aloud. From there, young people were invited to read the selected excerpts within the larger group and work together to weave their words into one through narrative métissage. The goal was to have one poem that could speak to actions that can be taken to cultivate collective belonging for current and future generations. The results of the narrative métissage collective poem can be found at both the beginning and end of this thesis. Participants then advocated to re-write the poem into a more collective, cohesive poem. This was then read aloud, with each person reading their unique contributions.

Closing circle. We chose to close the day the same way we started - in circle. In the closing circle, participants were invited to share their feelings about the day and one or two words to capture the essence of their feelings. Participants witnessed one another and each person shared their voice into the room before everyone continued on their unique journeys.

Part three: Post-gathering focus group. Following the gathering, I analyzed the data gathered and identified overarching themes. I shared these with the A(u)nties via Google Doc (A(u)nties, Personal Communication, February 22, 2020). The A(u)nties were invited to offer thoughts, comments, and guidance on the themes.

Focus group. Focus groups are often used to gather data in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). Focus groups can support the generation of knowledge from collective views and allows for the exploration of the meanings that lie behind those views (Gill et al., 2008). Specifically, for this research we gathered in a virtual focus group, using ZOOM, to discuss the themes to ensure they wholly captured their experiences and what they heard from the young people who participated. We also discussed any changes that should be made. This focus group took place a few weeks after the research gathering and also after the initial thematic analysis. As such, the focus group acted as a support to validate findings and build on or clarify when necessary.

In addition to validate findings, the focus group also served as a dialogue to explore potential ideas to identify participants in this thesis document in a way that supported anonymity but was also aligned with our overall methodology. It also provided an opportunity to discuss potential recommended calls to action as a result of our collective findings.

Data harvesting. With informed assent and consent, all parts of the study were audio and video recorded. I transcribed all audio files and reviewed the video files for non-verbal contributions and added them to the transcripts to ensure the transcripts reflect as accurately as possible to participants' intentions. Additionally, all creative products were digitally copied (photographed with participant permission), along with descriptions provided by participants. Copyright for all creative products remains with the participants, and I discussed with each participant if and how they would want their creative products to be shared. All data collected were securely stored in a password protected hard drive.

Data Analysis and Validity

Data analysis. As described above, the initial analysis of the data took place in phase two and three of the study, engaging participants to gather their own thoughts, experiences, and stories into themes (Connolly, 2003). Building from this knowledge, I took a 10-day intentional retreat on Treaty 7 territory, lands of the Stoney Nakoda, Blackfoot, and Tsuut'ina Nations, to sit with, honour and witness the stories, the wisdom, the data. In this time, I experienced growth as a researcher, questioned my own worthiness and felt a deep responsibility to produce good work, this in turn prioritized my sense of responsibility to ensure this data was honoured and analyzed with utmost rigor.

Specifically, I conducted a thematic analysis (Van Manen, 1990), where I coded and themed all data generated in the study including transcripts, creative products and personal field

notes. To conduct this analysis, I looked with intention for patterns within the data, while also looking for outliers (Marshall & Rossmann, 2014). Analysis was done manually and supported by Dedoose, a qualitative, cloud-based data analysis platform which facilitates the coding and analysis of qualitative data.

Rigor and trustworthiness. To hold space for the intentionality of rigor and trustworthiness of this research process, I worked closely alongside the A(u)ntie Advisory Collective and participating young people. As such, participating young people conducted the initial analysis, therefore, directly influencing whether or not their understandings of their experiences are appropriately and accurately articulated and allow for further knowledge co-creation within the analysis process (Wilson, 2008). Supplementary precautions included detailed field notes and recordings, verification with research participants, and data triangulation (i.e., findings generated by different methods were compared to help ensure accuracy and avoid misinterpretation and biases). Finally, as a researcher, I demonstrated an element of reflexivity in my practice (i.e., creative journaling) (Creswell, 2014).

Ethical Implications

Relational ethics. The teaching of *all my relations*, as I have been taught, highlights our deep and inextricable interconnectedness to all that is. *All my relations* is the deep individual and collective understanding that everything is in relationship with all that surrounds us. *All my relations* is expressed through the acknowledgement, honouring and responsibility of our interconnections – to each other, to land, to water and all living and non-living things, to the Ancestors, and to generations to come. *All my relations* acknowledges the full web of relationships of our ancestors, of our right now, as well of relationships that may not have come to pass (Turcotte & Schiffer, 2014). As an Indigenous researcher, my understanding of *all my*

journalled throughout the research process and identified a community to debrief with including my Supervisor and Research Committee.

Compliance with ethical guidelines. To ensure ethical considerations were respected, the research complied with the Royal Roads University, Request for Ethical Review for Research Involving Humans (2014) and the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (Canadian Institutes of Health Research, Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada, & Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, 2014). This research process honoured my ethical responsibilities to relational ethics and relational validity (Wilson, 2008) and integrated OCAP Principles and Chapter 9 of the TCPS2.

Do no harm. Indigenous researchers make research political simply by being who we are” (Kovach, 2010, p. 46). The very nature of conducting research within a decolonizing methodological framework, as an Indigenous researcher, alongside other Indigenous change makers within itself creates challenges of operating within Western academic institutions, norms and protocols. The largest challenge at the outset of my project lies within the complexity associated with the concept of research alongside Indigenous peoples due to a history lacking consent, imbalance of reciprocity and extraction that has resulted in harm. It is critical that this research process committed to improving existing conditions with action (Etmanski, Dawson & Hall, 2014) and took intentional precaution to do no harm. Cultural components were considered such as ceremonial practices, witnessing, circle protocols when gathering. As a mitigation strategy to ensure no harm was caused or triggers arose during the gathering, there was one Indigenous Focusing Oriented Therapy (IFOT) in Complex Trauma coach present to support if

needed. In addition, an elder was present for the duration of the day, guiding the process, sharing wisdom and holding in mind her active role as a witness.

Informed consent. At every phase of the project, ongoing consent was obtained to ensure that no concerns remain unaddressed. Consent for youth is critical to have their voices heard, acknowledged, and for them to understand more fully their participation in the research. We engaged in an oral consent process through meaningful dialogue and to build trust and center relational ways. Youth appropriate consent process was designed to ensure the practices and processes was authentic, appropriate, supportive, and respectful of protocols and practices for all young people involved in the research.

Confidentiality and anonymity. Given the participatory nature of the research, confidentiality was dependent upon the commitment of participants to respect confidentiality, and anonymity cannot be guaranteed. As a result, I discussed the concepts of confidentiality and anonymity with all participants in rich detail. In an aim to protect the privacy of the participants, names and other means of participant identification were removed from data and confidentiality of the data were maintained in the analysis and presentations of the study. To honour the wisdom shared by participating young people throughout the research, the A(u)ntie Advisory Collective gathered to discuss how participants could be identified. We explored using numbers, trees, flowers, languages and decided to name ten things that make up a community, to demonstrate the unique qualities and deep importance of each.

Building on this, we then identified each young person as a medicine to honour the medicine they brought to this process. These included: strawberry, water, eucalyptus, lavender, sweetgrass, fire, feather, cedar, sun and sage. Through the research process participants were developing creative products and they were given choice and a platform about how they want

their stories shared. Through the research process, I also reiterated that if participants share anything that compromises their safety, I have a duty to report it; although these instances did not occur.

Chapter 4: Learnings

In this chapter, I present seven core learnings that emerged from the analysis of the wisdom generated by the ten young people involved in this work:

1. Belonging is Connection to Self, to Place, To Freedom;
2. Belonging Exists Within Us, Around us and Between us;
3. Belonging is Relationship to Land;
4. Words Matter: Shifting from Civic to Collective;
5. Collective Belonging is Connectedness without Bounds;
6. Gathering: Relations through Food, Language and Culture;
7. Cultivating Collective Belonging for Current and Future Generations.

The seven learnings of this work unearth understandings of belonging that in some ways radicalize Western conceptions of belonging that are consistent with Indigenous thinkers in the realm of feminist and queer ways of knowing, such as Starblanket and Stark (2018) and Wilson and Laing (2019), the learnings generated from the young people in this work call for a radical shift of collectivity, resurgence and connection. All of these learnings were reviewed and further acknowledged and validated by the A(u)nties through a virtual focus group.

It is important to note that to meet the requirements of the thesis structure, the themes presented in this chapter are listed and organized in a linear and numeric format. That being said, it is equally as important to note that that the wisdom that emerged from the young people and correlating themes and subthemes are of a deeply interconnected and interrelated nature. As the process of identifying themes can feel reductionist in nature and counter some of my fundamental Indigenous teachings of a circular, interconnected and non-linear way of knowledge translation, I have woven pieces of a narrative métissage collective poem created by young

safety (sweetgrass). Other young people described connection as feeling respected, valued, safe, and accepted. They highlighted that being connected supports their learning, growing, and exploring without fear of scrutiny. One youth shared that *belonging feels like experiences or moments in time with people and environments* (sage). Others shared, *connection is gathering [...] at the dining table, or just whenever people gather [with] food, which then for me, there's a sense of belonging, or at least like opens the door feeling like I am connected and belong* (fire).

Through an exercise of mapping physical places where they belong on maps of Metro Vancouver, young people highlighted the importance of multiple means of connection that supported a sense of belonging. For example, connection within *it's like you have that connection and that that's a deep connection- we all come from a place of interconnectedness*, connection to place *sense of belonging, that sense of place is so important* (sage), or people *also thinking about when I say people, it's very special people really create that sense of belonging* (lavender). Connection with self, place, people, memories, land, food, and culture were found at the root of belonging through multiple activities, highlighting their inextricable role in how young people experience and understand belonging. A(u)nties validated that this theme was important supporting the notion that our many forms of connection is what can support us in the things that matter most.

Whole self. Young people also shared that a sense of belonging supports us to be our whole self and exist as a whole being. Young people expressed that being able to be authentic, imperfect, curious, and vulnerable are integral to be one's whole self and feel a sense of belonging. During the body mapping activity, young people (n=10) shared that places and spaces where they could learn, be curious, and question and explore their own beliefs, and ways of being in the world openly cultivated a sense of self and belonging. However, through dialogue,

young people (n=10) also shared the power and sometimes struggle of being true to self. One young person shared, *I just could be myself right and generally we don't capture authenticity a feeling that you can exist as exactly yourself being who you really are, we think of the concept of bringing your whole self and like the authenticity, the vulnerability-the real you (feather). In particular, they spoke to the clear distinction of fitting in and belonging. For instance, one youth shared, if I can fit in I belong, but is that really true if you're not true to yourself, but then [...] it's about cultivating spaces and fostering spaces where people feel like they can be themselves, not just fit in, because if you're just fitting in, you're not actually you in a place where you can belong. So even if you feel like other people accept you, it's not actually who you are (fire) and feeling free to be authentic in the place where you are while interacting in community (eucalyptus) is integral to experiencing or fostering belonging. Through dialogue, young people (n=10) shared the power, importance and struggles of being one's whole self, being authentic, being vulnerable, being yourself while interacting in community and navigating spaces to question, learn and explore beliefs, ways of being and your most authentic self.*

Freedom. In addition to being one's true self, young people also shared the importance of freedom to one's sense of belonging. Specifically, young people (n=10) highlighted how freedom, choice, autonomy, and power over their own decisions contributes to a sense of belonging. This subtheme of freedom is the embodiment and enactment of the agency established through the previous subthemes of connection and whole self. In the body mapping activity exploring how young people experience belonging in their/our bodies, two young people simultaneously drew fire at the feet (see Appendix B). To them, fire represented the importance of being grounded and free to be one's self: *A fire in your feet to move as well as the idea of when you feel grounded you can draw up energy from the earth and that kind of drawing up the*

freedom to move as well as this feeling of being grounded (lavender). They highlighted how *connecting to belonging, there's a real sense of ease, like there's no tension of like trying to add mold or, or like change yourself, you can be free* (strawberry). Young people (n=10) described that environments that support a sense of belonging also honour their personalities, beliefs, and modes of self-expression. Young people often made references to 'fitting in' conversely to being authentic. For instance, one youth described, *people are, just say what they want and, you know, just stay up and be loud here for example, you have to be a little bit more sterile, to fit in. And it's not as acceptable to be as expressive and to actually be yourself without bounds. So I feel like it's a really rare but true-the true being yourself without bounds* (eucalyptus). Young people (n=10) expressed how freedom to be, move, stay, express, believe and connect are integral to being one's whole self, being able to connect and thus being able to belong.

2. Belonging Exists Within Us, Around Us and Between Us

"Feel deeply. Love fiercely." (narrative *métissage* collective poem, 2020, section 14)

Young people experienced and expressed a tension of the dual reality of belonging; that it exists both within ourselves and is influenced by external factors. They explained that you can experience a sense of belonging within (self) and belonging can also be experienced through interactions within and between structures such as family, community, institution, and, systems (external). Our relationship with self and the structures within, around and between us can influence and/or impede our ability to feel a sense of belonging.

Internal and external belonging. In defining and describing the term belonging, young people (n=10) shared that *belonging can be a state of belonging within* (sweetgrass) something that can be achieved *regardless [of] your external environments* (strawberry). Young people shared that this state can be cultivated by spaces to explore self, relationship to self and *believing*

in [my]self (water). Young people went on to share that belonging also exists when they can *[feel] a connection that was bigger than [them]* (cedar). Further, young people distinguished that while a sense of belonging is cultivated within, *we live within systems [that] we can't really escape* (feather) highlighting that many systems in which young people interact with are *systems that make people feel like we don't or can't belong we're created for that reason and we live within those systems* (water). Young people spoke to both the internal and external factors, facets and realities of belonging- acknowledging and distinguishing the role that the internal (self) and external (outside of self) play in fostering a sense of belonging.

Tensions of navigating belonging and freedom. Although young people (n=10) acknowledged the tension between internal (self) and external (outside of self) factors that can foster and/or impede a sense of belonging, young people emphasized the tension of individuality, collectivity and the inevitability of both- that we cannot avoid ourselves nor can we avoid interacting within systems. Through dialogue, one young person highlighted *systems are lacking the ability to create the collectivity while also focusing on the individual is like you can be exactly who you need to be but you also need to work with other people because that's just how the world works* (feather). The tension of navigating belonging within self and within systems speaks to the tension of worthiness that young people describe as *the most extremes of belonging is never having to question your existence or your worthiness and the most opposite extreme is like constantly having to question whether you're worthy [...] whether your existence is worthy enough* (strawberry). Young people highlighted that the internal practice or cultivation of belonging is brought into question when around people, environments, structures and institutions that questions their worthiness. One youth capture this beautifully in sharing *often, you know... retired white male homeowners who like feels like they're worthy, like their voice is really worthy*

and they need to be heard. Whereas often communities that have been historically marginalized and oppressed, that have to fight to have a seat at the table and that, but there's something about definitely as we explored identity is so connected to belonging underneath here to think about it. In a broader system, like there's only so much that we can cultivate in ourselves until we start to run into those blockades (strawberry) of like, Yeah, really oppressive systems that have been around for centuries that dictate how and where we belong (water). Throughout, young people highlighted their lived experiences of this tension of internal (self) and external (outside of self) belonging. The reality of cultivating belonging within self brings about tension when the inevitability of needing to exist or interact within systems that question a young person's worthiness.

3. Belonging is Relationship to Land

"Above so much, future generations need the land. Belonging sits in the natural laws of the land. All my relations." (narrative métissage collective poem, 2020, section 2,3,8,18,)

Young people highlighted that connection to land/nature was inextricably connected to feelings of belonging. In particular, they shared that nature/land was the only physical space where young people experienced belonging that did not involve other people. They highlighted how feelings of disconnection with self were often a result of a disconnection from land.

Land/nature. In the activity mapping physical locations on the lands (now known as Vancouver), young people (n=10) overwhelmingly shared about the role of land or nature in their experiences, understandings, and reflections around belonging. Young people shared that *being connected to nature feels so much more at peace* (eucalyptus) and supports connection to self, their surroundings, and others. Linked to the previous theme of connection, young people shared the importance of land/nature to feel a sense of freedom, without judgment, to be their self, and

belong. For example, one young person shared how they felt a sense of *freedom in natural spaces* [...] *I think it actually connects a lot to what we were talking about earlier about the non-judgment, right like it's hard to exist in some places because people are judging or people have motives and there is none of that in nature, the land doesn't judge you or want you to be something different than what you are* (cedar). Throughout the activities, young people spoke to their similar, interconnected and unique relationships to land and nature, one youth highlighted how relationship to land and nature is integral to identity and is *interconnectedness with mother earth, water and the environment. So that that's where all our songs come from. That's where our regalia comes from. That's where all our teachings come from* (sage). It was evident through conversations with young people that land plays an inextricable role in experiencing a sense of belonging.

Water. In addition to the important relationship of land to young people's sense of belonging, young people highlighted the specific, important, and distinct role of water to belonging. One young person shared *the rivers and moving water in the sense that water starts at the glaciers and makes its way to the ocean and the movement of it and [...] kind of the vulnerability and the generosity it gives... an elder was once telling me that water never asks anything to move, like if there's rocks in the river, the water is going to move around and move beside it, it's never going to ask the rock to move .. it welcomes it in and holds it and keeps going* (cedar).

This quote highlights how the roles and teachings of water are different than those of land and groundedness, where water can model how to adapt and to how to exist alongside others without asking us or them to change. Through dialogue young people shared the following quotes about the importance of water: *I need to look by a body of water... there's something*

about the ocean that's is different... there's something more powerful (water). Another young person shared how in times of struggle, water can provide comfort sharing I got out of the car and like smelling the salt of the ocean, I immediately started crying because it just meant like the world to me to be out in, in nature and experiencing the place that I belong (lavender) or how it can demonstrate and model how to be fully yourself the ocean air like it, I don't know, it feels like kind of like the warm hug thing. You know, you can feel vulnerable and you can be in a place where you can be just be you (feather). In the body mapping exercise, young people shared how water is a reminder of our interconnection with ourselves and the land sharing there is something evolutionary, being near waters, humans need fresh water to survive and our body is like 70% water. I always think of how our body is like 70% water and how the earth is 70% water and our bodies are just like mini Earth's and how water is just reflections of ourselves (cedar).

Throughout our research young people expressed the distinct and powerful role of water in our experiences of belonging, where water symbolizes and mirrors our connection to earth.

4. Words Matter: Shifting from Civic to Collective

“Create communities. Uplift one another. Celebrate- together.” (narrative métissage collective poem, 2020, section 5,6, & 11)

The word ‘civic’ was mindfully chosen for this research, both as part of the original research topic (civic belonging), and as a term to explore through the original questions about notions of youth engagement (i.e. civic engagement, youth civic engagement etc.). The term civic was explored, defined, and discussed at length with participating young people in this research. Young people defined ‘civic’ as a distinct place or structure, disconnected and human-centered with the ability to exist in isolation. Further, they experienced ‘civic belonging’ as being accepted into systems, structures of communities but unnatural. Participating young people felt

Civic belonging. Recognizing the misalignment of the terms civic and belonging, young people then sought to define civic belonging. Specifically, they explored and defined civic belonging as unknown, *entrenched external forces* (eucalyptus); *very place based* (water) human-built or designed places. Young people highlighted that for them ‘civic belonging’ is for citizens of a specific place and *creating spaces where all citizens feel they belong, feel comfortable and in spaces or navigating spaces* (water) or *feeling supported and accepted within designated /official systems and structures* (lavender). Further, young people spoke to how the term felt narrow as it related solely to *shared power, opportunity, and responsibility* (eucalyptus) of humans stating how *the idea of civic belonging is kind of naive in the sense that it makes us think that as humans, we can live just with ourselves and with humans. But in reality, we need all the animals and we need all the plants that make up a community. Because like in my community, when we say we never just involves all the animals and plants like it's never just talking about human beings, involves everyone because the land is part of our community* (cedar). Through the exploration of the term ‘civic belonging’ young people found it formal, narrow and challenging to connect and define a term that had stark differences in nature, again highlighting the problematic idea of human-centered terms or notions in connection with belonging. Recognizing this, young people suggested that the term collective belonging would be more appropriate and reflective of context.

5. Collective Belonging is Connectedness Without Bounds

“Where are you trying to belong to? (narrative métissage collective poem, 2020, section 1)

Young people co-created the term collective belonging to exemplify the inherent interconnection, reciprocity, and action that can support both individuality and connectivity

without impeding their freedom. In particular, young people expressed that collective belonging is needed as a result of young people increasingly identifying as part of multiple communities.

Collective belonging. In moving away from the terms civic and civic belonging, young people (n=10) were guided through an activity to choose a new term that felt aligned with their understand of a more collective sense of belonging. Through the exercise, young people advocated for the concept of collective belonging. Young people shared that *communities are so structure based* (feather) and that young people *can belong to so many different communities* (sun) whether it be communities of culture, language, land, gender, sexuality or familial. Further, young people highlighted how ‘collective’ was not restrictive to the bounds of a specific place or ‘civic association’ speaking to how *reciprocity is kind of embedded within [the term] collective* (cedar). One young person described it as *lots of dots with lots of lines [that has] a lot of reciprocity embedded in it* (strawberry). Young people felt the term *collective belonging shows you have that responsibility for the circle* (cedar), a term young people felt was reflective of being rooted in action, shared and could *foster individuality with collectiveness* (feather). Lastly, they highlighted that collective belonging requires diversity of thought, positionality and way of being *not just having a dominant group designing everything [...] not just me or not just people like me, but this intentionality for a greater collective* (water).

Young people advocated for the term collective belonging in order to allow for a more fulsome, action-oriented, reciprocal, inclusive, diverse and boundless exploration, they expressed the need for a term that represented individuality with collectiveness in acknowledgement of how young people are increasingly belonging to a multitude of communities. A(u)nties suggested that perhaps this idea of ‘collective belonging’ could encourage further civic engagement if collective belonging was integrated into existing prescriptive or pre-defined civic

spaces. Although it is important to explore how we define, experience and understand collective belonging, young people also discussed the importance of exploring how we can act, cultivate, and nurture collective belonging for current and future generations.

6. Gathering: Relations through Food, Language, and Culture(s)

“Create new tables. Hold space for each other. Kapwa.” (narrative métissage collective poem, 2020, section 10,12 &16)

In moving from exploring how we define, experience and understand collective belonging, we then shifted our exploration into how we can act, cultivate and nurture collective belonging for current and future generations. Young people shared that gathering to share culture, language, and food is a means of bridge building to the larger collective. They expressed the importance of food as it draws us back to place and is inextricably connected to land- land you are on now, where you are from, where others are from or where your ancestors are from as a means of starting relations on how to cultivate collective belonging moving forward.

Culture(s). Through dialogue and a narrative métissage activity, young people explored the importance of culture to cultivate collective belonging for current and future generations. Specifically, young people shared about the important role of cultures in gathering, connecting and building bridges amongst themselves, each other and the greater collective. *sharing cultures plural because a lot of times we see very certain ideas of what culture is and how it should be represented... we need to sort of broaden to different cultures (water) a way to do this is to make sure that everyone's voice is heard [in my teachings] we make sure everyone is cared for and we make sure when people come and insert their own teachings on a territory, on a land that... holds its own teaching... it doesn't work in that same way. And so always keeping in mind that the environment and where this is happening, is happening on a place that has had really*

beautiful teachings that have been like stomped on...we're all trying to come back to this belonging place. And belonging has been here since the beginning of time (cedar). Another young person highlighted in a sense especially in our [dominant] culture, whereas like going back home to Jamaica, such a different culture, and people just say what they want ...just stay up and be loud...here for example, you have to be a little bit more sterile, to be to fit in and not it's not as acceptable to be as expressive and to actually be yourself without bounds (eucalyptus). In an activity of writing, self-reflection and group dialogue, young people (n=6) expressed how integral the role of culture is to fostering collective belonging. Through dialogue it was emphasized that cultural teachings and historical context play a role our ability to show up as our whole selves, to be authentic and to cultivate relational connection our uniqueness.

Food and language. In addition to culture, young people (n=6) spoke to the role and importance of food in building connections with themselves and others. Specifically, they highlighted how food is a way to build bridges, connections and good relations. Young people shared that food is a way to connect us to land where we are or where we come from, one young person shared *there's one celebration to celebrate Mother Earth, the Pachamama...we cook all the food in the earth, like we cover all the food, and it's a barbecue in the soil.. that sense of community and belonging, really celebrating mother earth... it's all rooted in love (sun). One young person shared the learning that can come from sharing a meal and learning the teachings of a place, space and people through food for my community we make sure that like everyone has eaten before we were fed, like all the guests, whoever travels, the furthest to come to our gathering is like eats first, you know, and it's like these teachings that we live by (cedar) or how in the Philippines you put all the food in the middle of the table and everyone just uses their hands and engages with each other (fire). Others shared the role of language and reclaiming*

language (cedar). One young person shared *how [their] grandmother has an Austrian accent and said the only place she feels like she really belongs in Austria... because people have the same accent there* (water). Another young person spoke to how young Indigenous leaders in her community, relearning and reclaiming their language asked *if you could time traveled at any point in time, what would you choose? And almost everyone in my class chose a time where everyone here was Squamish and spoke the language...everyone wishes we could go back to a time that everyone spoken language* (cedar). Young people highlighted the importance of food and exploration and/or reclamation of language can support us in gathering, learning, connecting and fostering spaces of collective belonging.

7. Cultivating Collective Belonging for Current and Future Generation

“Rise up. Reconnect. Learn & Educate. Action is in dialogue.” (narrative métissage collective poem, 2020, section 4, 13)

Young people shared learning and unlearning from one another, celebrating differences and intergenerational dialogue support the cultivation of belonging for current and future generations. They highlighted the importance of breaking down judgements, creating new narratives and supporting freedom, choice and agency as vital in our collective path forward.

Action. A large component of this research was to explore what actions can be taken to cultivate collective belonging for current and future generations. In addition to this important intent, through defining the term collective belonging young people (n=10) stated that action is inherent and foundational to collective belonging and cannot be viewed as something separate, disconnected or fractionated. Acknowledging and honouring the importance of action to the concept of belonging- young people defined action and explored how to cultivate and nurture collective belonging for current and future generations.

Through an activity of defining terms followed by group dialogue, young people (n=10) defined and described action as a movement, transformation, tangible *empowerment of thoughts affecting something (sun)*, *influencing people places policy (sweetgrass)* manifesting or as an *impactful expression of internal conscious or unconscious feeling wants and desires (eucalyptus)*. Through dialogue, young people (n=10) spoke to the cultivation of collective belonging, one participant described this as *always start[ing] within...personally and then it transforms into action within a bigger context in terms of action, right like transformation, it's within yourself before it transforms or it's before it's acted upon in a bigger setting...and I feel like that doesn't get talked about enough (cedar)*. Young people highlighted that the foundation of collective belonging has action, movement and reciprocity embedded within it and is not something separate but does begin first within ourselves.

Learning and unlearning. In discussing how collective belonging can be cultivated, young people (n=6) highlighted learning and unlearning as vital actions. Some shared that *learning and education is so important for individual and societal level of growth (eucalyptus) to build skills, knowledge and resilience and navigating difficult situations and conversations, especially intergenerationally because action is a dialogue (sun)*. Others highlighted the role of unlearning, changing, and moving away from current realities, standards, norms and systems. Through group dialogue, one young person shared that *chang[ing] rigid structures of conformity to openness and collectivity (eucalyptus)* and *empowering those voices that haven't historically felt like they belong at the table or have the ability to actually speak or make change and like creating sessions like this where people are [...] have something to say because [...] marginalized groups haven't historically had the same support to speak...so just creating spaces where other people are more empowered to join and influence those structures (water)*. Young

people spoke to the deep need for collective *understanding without understanding, there is no knowledge.... there are just cracks...so understanding as in...knowing the history and like just knowing the full picture* (eucalyptus). One young person shared *it's important to create new tables rather than bringing people to the table because diversity doesn't equal belonging* (eucalyptus) and that we cannot act from a place of *challenge or telling people they are wrong as there is power in the disagreement, which just means that we're talking to each other and that there's a need for dialogue intergenerationally to learning so holding space for each other as little as be done working in silos* (sun).

Through dialogue with young people, the need for learning and unlearning as a key action to cultivating collective belonging for current and future generations was reinforced, reiterating that learning is how we grow, unlearning is how we change existing systems and structures that have historically oppressed voices and transform

Remembering and celebrating. Finally, through group dialogue and the co-creation of the narrative métissage poem, young people (n=6) spoke to the power of remembering our role and responsibility as ancestors and celebration as core components to cultivating collective belonging for current and future generations. Young people shared the following comments related to this multigenerational focus *we cannot know how to be good ancestors without first understanding our own ancestors and their impact in their decisions and actions* (eucalyptus), *we need to hold space for each other* (feather), *create networks and uplift one another* (sage) and *to celebrate the ups and downs together* (feather). They spoke to ways of doing this by *talking through challenges without judgement* (feather), *being reminded to value other human beings* (cedar), and *practice mindfulness, appreciation, gratitude, kindness, encouragement, love and support* (sage). In the co-creation of how we cultivate collective belonging for current and future

generations, young people (n=6) highlighted how important it is to acknowledge past, present, future- how we have a responsibility to understand our ancestors and collective history while also holding in mind future generations. Young people also highlighted how vital celebration, kindness, gratitude, love, support and encouragement is part of what will help us achieve a sense of collective belonging- an equal understanding of our responsibilities for collective truth and for collective joy.

Chapter 5: Discussion of Conclusions and Calls to Action

I could hand you a braid of sweetgrass, as thick and shining as the plait that hung down my grandmothers back. But it is not mine to give, nor yours to take. *Wiingaashk* belongs to herself. So I offer, in its place, a braid of stories meant to heal our relationship with the world [...] It is an intertwining of science, spirit and story - old stories and new ones that can be medicine for our broken relationship with earth, a pharmacopoeia of healing stories that allow us to imagine a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other (Kimmerer, 2013).

In this chapter, much like my teachings of braiding sweetgrass, I aim to braid three distinct yet interconnected strands - perspectives and insights of young people, my own voice, and scholarship - into one. Specifically, I interweave the study findings, relevant literature, and my own insights and voice to discuss my study conclusions and articulate calls to action emerging from this study. It is important to acknowledge that initially this research set out to explore the concept of civic belonging leading to civic action; however, during the research process it became clear that the term ‘civic belonging’ did not resonate with participating young people. Therefore, after their recommendation and advocacy, we explored the concept of collective belonging, a term co-created by young people, and its role in collective action. Recognizing the shift in language used to align with what was most authentic, appropriate, and adaptable to the requests of the young we have opted to present overarching research conclusions rather than discussing each conclusion in direct response to particular sub-questions.

Reflecting on the wisdom that emerged through our research process and the relevant literature explored, this study presents three conclusions:

1. Conclusion 1: Create spaces for young people to be their authentic selves and connect with others;
2. Conclusion 2: Remember, recognize, and re-integrate connection to land; and
3. Conclusion 3: Cultivate collective belonging in youth civic spaces.

Each conclusion is followed by corresponding calls to action stemming from participant wisdom, suggestions, and ongoing conversations with the A(u)nties. I highlight specific calls to action tailored for young leaders, adults alongside young people and policy makers, changemakers, and influencers. This intentionally acknowledges interconnections between spheres of influence and is designed to support a multi-faceted approach to nurture and support collective belonging. The calls to action to young people are identified first as this research seeks to serve current and future generations of young leaders. “Resistance is always in context, in a place, between real people—even when some of those people embody the state. Resistance is always in real time too, and what is possible in one time and context is unthinkable in another time and context” (Tuck & Yang , 2012, p.8). I acknowledge that these calls to action are not easy or quick-fix solutions but rather intentional practices and processes that we cultivate and nourish over a lifetime.

Conclusion 1: Create spaces for young people to be their authentic selves and connect with others

Discussion. Literature on belonging suggests that for true belonging to exist, people have to feel like they can be their authentic selves (Brown, 2017; Ross, 2018; Turner, 2017). In overwhelming agreeance within our research, young people expressed that being authentic, imperfect, curious, and vulnerable is integral to them feeling a sense of belonging. Further, they shared that people, places, and spaces that invite them to exist as a whole being supports them in

feeling like they belong. In addition to authenticity, young people highlighted that freedom, choice, and movement without restrictions was undeniably important to how they experience and understand belonging. Young people shared the importance of exercising their autonomy and being able to move relatively freely between many different identities without foregoing a sense of cohesion (Kidman, 2012). This need for young people to connect with self and be whole and authentic is aligned with current research (Brown, 2017; Ross, 2018; Turner, 2017); conversely, their desire to be autonomous and free beings is a new concept to be further explored.

Not only is authenticity and freedom important for young people, but so is connection. Young people agreed and described close and intimate relationships as connection. Research describes connection as the root of belonging (Brown, 2017) and suggests that humans seek connection to self, others, and something greater (Brown, 2017; Ross, 2018; Turner, 2017). Specifically, literature identifies that people seek connection to people (Cuervo et al., 2015) and a collective (Chavis & Newbrough, 1986). As mentioned, young people in our study highlighted the importance of the acceptance to be their authentic self, they also found this to be important when connecting with others. Young people articulated distinct differences between fitting in and belonging, highlighting that being true to self and being accepted felt much different than being accepted for being someone they are not. Further, they described this as not truly belonging. In addition, what is present in the literature on belonging as it relates to connection, young people shared that connection to others offered them a feeling of being respected, valued, safe, and accepted.

Calls to action. In response to conclusion 1: Create spaces for young people to be their authentic selves and connect with others, we recommend the following calls to action:

Young people. This call to action is an invitation for young people to be their authentic self. Young people can support themselves in connecting to themselves by accepting who they are. Young people are called to advocate for their freedom, choice, and autonomy in all spaces and advocate for what they need that can support their existence as whole beings. Young people are invited to reflect on, request, and articulate what supports they need to continue to engage and lead conversations in spaces they feel they are needed, by young people for young people. In addition, young people can support their peers by accepting their peers, acknowledging and validating differences of opinions and beliefs, and intentionally acting without judgement. Young people are called to be vulnerable, uplift, and celebrate one another. In doing so, this can support young people in cultivating communities and networks of support. Young people can support one another by acknowledging and sharing who they are, where they come from, their unique histories, and how they identify. Young people are invited to be open to connecting with one another, open to learning, and unlearning one's own knowledges and co-created spaces to learn and unlearn safely alongside other young people.

Adult allies alongside young people. Adult allies who learn, work, and collaborate alongside young people can support young leaders to connect to self by intentionally cultivating spaces that invite them to exist as a whole being, supporting their freedom, choice, and movement without restrictions or bounds. To do so, adult allies are invited to understand the importance of being flexible, adaptable, and intentional when bringing together young people to dialogue, explore, and co-create (RbD, 2019). For example, this could mean being flexibility with timing, supporting use of language and cultural norms, acknowledging current day realities and intentionality in location, supporting young people to be vulnerable, and encouraging both unique independence and collective cohesion. Further, young people expressed a need to

question, learn, unlearn, and explore beliefs in safe and brave spaces. When working alongside young people, adult allies may consider how they can support these needs. For instance, reflecting on the design of a gathering, ensuring young people have the ability to express identity, questioning systems and beliefs, and ensuring young people have autonomy over their own participation. Adult allies are called to express their own vulnerability, modeling by example. They are also called to respect the needs of a group whenever bringing young people together or running programming.

Policy makers, changemakers, and influencers. For those affecting, influencing, analyzing or creating policy, the call is to bring intentionality to how policies restrict, conform and exclude young peoples' full participation. Examine and understand how young people are leading global movements, engaging in research, and working to influence, change, or create new forms of policy. Dialogue can support meaningful engagement with young people to explore if/how young people can exist as whole beings in these arenas. Specifically, these actors (including researchers) are called to emphasize the importance of relationship building and connecting for young people within and throughout their processes. For instance, methods such as research gatherings and arts-based research often can be a catalyst to authentic connection.

Conclusion 2: Remember, recognize, and re-integrate connection to land

Discussion. According to literature, studies highlight that connection to self and others is important to young people's sense of belonging (Brown, 2017); yet, in this study, young people expressed that land, nature, and water are also inextricably connected to feelings of belonging. Western literature on belonging take a more specific focus on people's connection with self and others, resulting in an over-arching focus on human-centered connection. By contrast, Indigenous academics may not use the English word for belonging when discussing this specific

topic, highlighting instead the role that land plays in science, humanities, and our deep longing for a return to connectedness (Atleo, 2008; Kimmerer, 2013; Thistle, 2017). Young people shared that land, nature, and water is critical to where they experienced belonging and did not involve other people. They highlighted that land, nature, and water are their teachers, showing them how they do not need to change or be anything different than they are, but instead model how to be interdependent, adaptative, and free. One study with youth in New Zealand (Kidman, 2012) supported this notion and found that mountains, lakes, and rivers help inform young people's identity and connection to land. Smith et al. (2002) contended that young people actively engage in place-making activities in a range of cultural contexts from which multiple geographies of belonging emerge with one common denominator, land. Yet, other studies on youth and belonging, often only focus on connection or Being-in-Relation to humans (Cassidy, 2013). Lines of thinking around the relatedness of identity and belonging are often brought into discussions about the significance of physical territories and 'spaces', otherwise known as land, and their role in the construction of shared cultural meanings (Yuval-Davis, 2006b), noting the increasing complexity of cultural identity, national identity, citizenship, and place-attachment, particularly for young.

In addition, within this research, young people shared that land, nature, and water support their freedom and acceptance. In particular, they felt that land, nature, and water were places that held no judgement and encouraged them to be their selves. They also highlighted that feelings of disconnection with self and others were often a result of feeling disconnected to land, and this is aligned with Thistle's (2017) wisdom on an Indigenous definition of homelessness being a disconnect from *all of our relations*, including land whereas Western definitions place focus on physical shelter or housing. Sanchez (2017) further speaks to needing to belong as our deep

of land. Support connection by centering work in physical space, encourage reflection of the land on which things are happening and support young people to connect with land (where they are from, where they are now, land that holds special meaning). Specifically, adult allies are called to integrate the important role of land throughout gatherings and programs and not just at the beginning. For instance, learning and exploring can be engaged in an outdoor space and is encouraged by young people.

Policy makers, changemakers and influencers. We call on policy makers, changemakers, and influencers to acknowledge and recognize that all policy past, present, or future is related to land, and that each place where policy is formed and upheld holds a unique history. Specifically, when forming and creating new policy, history must be considered, as well as, the acknowledgement that young people care and are deeply connected to land. This is of significant importance because often young people are typically excluded from decision making and are not meaningfully invited to participate in systems and structures that create policies. Acknowledging that connection to land supports young people in meaningfully participating in systems, policy changemakers and influencers are called to advocate for more outdoor spaces; especially, within urban settings that often are populated with less green space. More funding is needed to support the creation and accessibility to these spaces, as well as, safeguard existing natural forests and greenery within city landscapes and beyond.

Conclusion 3: Cultivate collective belonging in youth civic spaces

Discussion. The term ‘civic’ is defined in the Oxford dictionary as an adjective (1) relating to a city or town, especially its administration; and (2) relating to the duties or activities of people in relation to their town, city, or local area (2020). Similarly, young people involved in this research, described that the term ‘civic’ as human-centered structures (e.g., a cement

building, city hall) and furthermore, as sterile and rigid systems that constrain aspects of their identity. As such, the latter idea poses a fundamental challenge because in the context of civic participation in Canada, scholars suggest that a strong sense of belonging for young people increases the likelihood of their engagement in civic action (Lemyre, 2016). Therefore, if the term ‘civic’ does not encompass connection to self, others, and land, then young people will likely not feel a sense of belonging and disengage in civic action altogether.

In addition, literature states that young people are 50% more likely to be members of or participate in civic associations if they hold a strong sense of belonging to Canada (Lemyre, 2016). However, there’s deep complexity to what it means for young people to belong to Canada. Korteweg and Bissell (2014) acknowledge the complex realities of defining, prescribing, and sanitizing notions of identity, stating that “Indigenous youth deserve to determine what citizenship and civic identity means to them and their communities” because their identities should not be framed as “citizens of Canadian nation state but rather citizens of much older nations that predate federation and colonization” (p. 21). Where young people belong, grow up, and connect to land extends beyond traditional colonial ideas of belonging to a place, city, or country. Powerfully and simply, young people acknowledged the complex realities of citizenship, identity, and colonialism that they currently face as Indigenous, non-Indigenous, first and second generation ‘Canadian’, and recent immigrants. Young people expressed that the term ‘civic’ is complex and fundamentally disconnected from a worldview of interconnectedness that exists in many traditional ways of being.

In addition, they spoke to the evolving and ever-changing reality that young people exist in and/or belong to a multitude of communities, countries, lands, places, spaces, and peoples. Supported by literature, belonging is far beyond just physical location (Stahl & Habib, 2017) but

also tied to social relations (Massey, 1994). Young people expressed that their interpretations of ‘civic’ countered notions of how they defined, described, and experienced a sense of connection, relatedness, and belonging. They found civic as individualized which compliments what some scholars suggest is not adapting rapidly enough to young people’s evolving and transformational needs (Stahl & Habib, 2017) and resulting in the notion of belonging being “taken for granted” or siloed into merely a personal feeling (Youkhana, 2014). This concept of individualism, citizenship, and disconnection was highly opposed by young people. They urged for a shift away from civic and toward collective, noting that they cannot belong, act, or exist in isolation. For young people, belonging needs our collectivity rather than our individualism. Furthermore, supported by literature, belonging is critical for young people as change-makers and necessary for a just future and collective belonging may need to be fostered before it can be translated into civic spaces (Habib & Ward, 2019; Hamid, 2017; Leistyna, 2009; Smyth & McInerney, 2007).

Rather than nurturing civic belonging, young people expressed the need for collective belonging. This is particularly important as young people are increasingly identifying as part of multiple communities, whether it be communities of culture, language, land, gender, race, or sexuality. Further, young people highlighted how collective belonging is not restrictive to the bounds of a specific place or ‘civic association’, and demonstrates our inherent responsibility, reciprocal relations, and rich diversity found in our greater collective needed to mobilize the important issues of our times. Kovach (2010) furthers the notion of belonging in the context of the collective, stating that “inherent in this understanding of life is reciprocity and accountability to each other, the community, clans, and nations. It does not serve anonymity or rugged individualism well. It is a way of life that creates a sense of belonging, place, and home.” (p. 55).

Calls to action. In response to conclusion 3: Cultivate collective belonging in youth civic spaces, we recommend the following calls to action:

Young people. Young people are called to cultivate collective belonging in youth civic spaces. Youth civic spaces are environments in which youth participation in civic action is fostered (Richards-Schuster, 2005). They include physical places which promote civic behavior through activities for young people to come together and take initiative, and other spaces which promote collective action and empowerment (Richards-Schuster, 2005). Young people can foster collective belonging in youth civic spaces by facilitating more conversations about ‘belonging’, what it means, what it looks like, where it is experienced, and where it is not. These conversations are already happening in the City of Vancouver; such as this research and other youth civic programs and initiatives (i.e., CityHive). Young people are called to participate, be active, and advocate that connecting and fostering belonging is important to be civically engaged. In addition to advocating, young people themselves can co-create spaces that represent their voice, their wisdom and their ways of being.

Adult allies alongside young people. In recognizing that adult allies are often at the core of forming, reinforcing and creating civic structures, we call on adult allies alongside young people to engage in meaningful dialogue with young people surrounding ‘civic’ issues recognizing that physical bounds of cities, municipality are pre-determined/colonial structures that do not determine where young people are engaged and belong. In occupying civic spaces, we call on adult allies to meaningfully engage young people in the design of collective belonging within civic spaces. Adult allies are called to host and fund spaces for young people to engage and explore collective belonging within civic spaces. Fostering collective belonging will require adult allies to deeply listen, be curious, and support the autonomy of young people. In addition,

tangible offerings adult allies can provide are food, space, flexible structures, intentional time for relationship cultivation and accessibility for young people.

Policy makers, researchers, changemakers, and influencers. This research demonstrated how collective belonging was preferred to civic belonging. Specifically, young people felt civic belonging was individualized, disconnected and at odds with some of the largest, complex, and intricate issues of our time. Rather, collective belonging is required. Policy formed around ‘civic associations’ or spaces should foundationally acknowledge the rich diversity, histories and peoples that exist in these places and the role of the greater collective within “politically, civically or defined’ spaces and structures, including how the very terms used can influence how people belong. Policy makers, changemakers and influencers have a responsibility to acknowledge the interconnectedness and intergenerational impacts of policy, research, and practice. As such, they also have an equal responsibility to support young people in changing these policies to reflect a more just society. To cultivate collective belonging, researchers need to uncover and ask more questions about how to do so within civic spaces. Specifically, research can ask and look at the tangible ways young people need civic spaces to integrate collective belonging.

Chapter 6: Closing the Circle

“Indigenous research is a humble and humbling experience” (Smith, 2008).

Our research objectives and methodology were aimed at revealing a better understanding of how young people understand and experiences belonging. This chapter begins with articulating the strengths and bounds of this inquiry, organizational implications, and implications for future inquiry. Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of the study findings, conclusions, calls to action and a summary of this research journey.

Strengths and Bounds of Inquiry

Strengths. This research project was a decolonizing and relational I-YPAR study designed to engage with, and learn from, young people (aged 19-29) about how they understand and experience belonging and how belonging can be cultivated amongst young people today and in the future. This research was explored on the land of the unceded, ancestral and continually occupied x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwiltlh (Tseil-Waututh) peoples. It provided an opportunity for young people to come together to meaningfully share their perspectives and insights and co-create definitions and actions to support and nurture belonging in the future. These strengths are important in and of themselves and must be acknowledged as such.

Bounds. Although this study involved young people, it does not offer a comprehensive analysis of young people’s experiences within and outside of the context of what is now known as Vancouver, BC as the sample size was small, yet also diverse. The findings of this study are not generalizable to young people in Vancouver, BC and beyond. Participants were invited to partake on the inclusion criteria of being within the age range of 19-29, living in Metro Vancouver and able to attend our 1-day research gathering. The inclusion criteria were open and

inclusive; however, participants identified as all women with diverse backgrounds (see Project Participants). Additionally, inclusion criteria were open to all genders, however everyone that participated identified as a woman with she/her pronouns. Although this a strength of the study, it is also a potential bound. Future research would benefit from understanding the diverse experience of collective belonging for all genders. Further, the data and wisdom reflected herein captures solely the voices of urban young people, and there is an opportunity to further explore the experiences, understandings and meanings of collective belonging for rural and non-urban young people. Lastly, this study was not designed to quantify or assess how understandings and experiences have transformed over time but rather explore young people's experience in present day. Future research could explore conceptions and experiences of belonging over a period of time.

As an active host and curator of this study, as a young Indigenous Iskwew researcher, my understandings, perspectives and frame of reference and point of view could be considered both a strength and limitation of this study. In the context of this study, my understandings of what participants offered are inevitably seen, analyzed and interpreted by my own experiences as a young person. To address this, I have chosen to share as much data as possible in participants own words using direct quotations before within the analysis and study findings, weaving through and within the direct wisdom whenever possible. Further, to mitigate the impacts of my presence as lead researcher and to ensure trustworthiness of the data and findings of the study the A(u)nties supported holding to account the trustworthiness of the outputs of our co-created time.

Organizational Implications

This research process was not done directly for or with a partnering organization, but rather the partners were the young people themselves. The ResiliencebyDesign Research Lab at

RRU, was not a traditional partnering organization, however, was a supporter of our research process. First and foremost, the immeasurable impact that has already occurred and that will continue to evolve lies within the connections made within the research process, in and amongst participating young people, the A(u)nties and myself as the researcher. This work engaged in a collaborative action-oriented project and made calls to action that are relevant to layered spheres of influence, including organizational or institutional actors. The intentional use of the 'our' when referring to the research is a powerful way for us to recognize the importance of the collective approach. For this work to continue to have impact, a collective partner does not need to be a structured organization that is civically recognized - rather, reflective of our research, this collective unbounded group belonged to each other and reflects the type of dynamism and young people around the world are currently modelling and asking for. The continued commitment to nurture this work on our respective and interrelated journeys moving forward. That being said the recommended calls to action, as noted in Chapter 5, highlight invitations for young people, adult allies alongside young people and policy makers, changemakers and influencers to make intentional considerations when engaging with young people in their respective spheres of influence. This research and its recommended calls to action can serve as a basis for dialogue and program design within youth serving organizations such as the Raven Institute, Indigenous LIFT Collective, Canadian Roots Exchange, Minerva BC, to name a few. Additionally, as a partner to this work, the RbD Lab can extend this wisdom into its aligned and respective research and practice. Dr. Robin Cox serves as committee member to this research in addition to her role as the Director of the RbD Lab, this will ensure the work continues to evolve and exist within current and future research projects within the university.

The journey of exploring the concept of belonging as a young Indigenous scholar, began long before my journey to thesis and know will continue post thesis as my unwavering commitment to continuing this work and supporting each person who was a part of this research journey continue to be honoured and have their voices and wisdoms amplified in their own spheres of influence. As there are unique and tangible ways this research will continue to have ‘implications’, I also believe it is the start to a long, evolving, contentious and meaningful dialogue within this country. humans are hardwired to seek belonging on a neural and hormonal level supporting interdependence over independence (Ross, 2018; Brown, 2017) with young people being the leading force in this country, this conversation and it’s tangible, actionable, and meaningful implications are just beginning.

Implications for Future Inquiry

Further exploration of collective belonging that reflects all genders and geographic locations of young people in ‘Canada’ is vitally important. While I do believe this work is just beginning, this study was conducted with young people living on ancestral and unceded lands of the x^wməθkwəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwiltulh (Tsleil-Waututh) peoples (Vancouver, BC) with all participants who identify as women with she/her pronouns. I do see this as a strength of our research process however, this study does call for further inquiry into the exploration of collective belonging with all genders and in rural and urban areas to strengthen commonalities and acknowledge, honour and address unique gendered or geographical influences of collective belonging for young people. This would allow for a more fulsome understanding of how we can understand and cultivate collective belonging for a more representative population of young people- one that represents and honour all ways of being, doing, knowing and thriving.

Recognizing historical and current context in which the research takes place, we cannot conduct research involving people in isolation from place- everything is connected. During the time this study took place, youth across the globe were rising in solidarity with marches and school walk outs for Friday for future to demand climate action. Similarly, youth from all across the unceded lands that comprise British Columbia and other provinces, were occupying parliament buildings, legislatures, MLA offices, created railroad blockades and disrupted Canada's biggest intersections to demand their voices be seen and heard. Others were learning, informing policy, running organizations, writing, creating, speaking- mobilizing through their own gifts and talents for issues of deep importance to them. The acknowledgment of present-day realities is a vital component to meaningfully engage, mobilize and connect young people to themselves and others. As relational, responsible and ethical researchers, we must acknowledge both the historical and current day contexts of land and place to gain a fulsome understanding of the past and acknowledge the present in order to co-create the future.

Bringing Your Whole Self to Research, Accept, and Embrace the Process.

As Wilson (2008) says, "if research doesn't change you as a person, then you haven't done it right" (p. 135). This research process has challenged me, pushed me to grow, forged connections and new relationships and alas left me more curious than when I began. As researchers, as humans, we are a part of this sacred process of co-creating, remembering, reclaiming and generating knowledges for our time. In working and researching alongside young people, we must be brave enough to bring our whole selves to accept and embrace the process and acknowledge that the process itself, is data. This research process has changed how I view and understand the notion of belonging, has humbled me, has deeply fostered growth, and has left me with further questions for exploration than when I began.

Proposed Outputs, Contributions, and Applications

Wisdom was co-created throughout the research process through creative means, dialogue and storytelling, where researchers and participants discussed how the knowledge products generated would be shared. The outputs included creative products such as video, art pieces, verbal and non-verbal stories and policy and practice recommendations. The research process and discoveries unearthed through the research process will inform journal articles, conference presentations, and other creative knowledge products such as a video, infographic, and a co-created talk to be presented by the A(u)nties at conferences or a TEDx-like events. Participants will play an integral role as key decision makers to determine what and how outputs continue to be co-created and shared.

This research contributes to vital conversations around belonging. It offered a platform for urban youth to contribute their lived experiences, wisdom, and insights into what it means to belong in the City of Vancouver and how we collectively co-create a sense of collective belonging for all. In addition, this research contributed to the possibilities that exist in urban spaces for inspiring and igniting youth civic participation and action through an understanding of belonging for young people. I hope this project does what Smith (2012) calls “researching back, like talking back, it implies resistance, recovery and renewal” (p. 7). This research looked to reclaim, remember, and honour the center of our nations and our future, our youth. One of the goals of this project is to remind us of our connectedness to one another to all of our relations- a way of being, knowing and relating where it all belongs. The broader applications of this research will come in the form of collaborative conference presentations in order to continue to generate and co-create this knowledge, potential co-authored articles in collaboration with the RbD Lab and position our findings in a way that can spark community dialogue and act as a base

belong. I see a world where every young person across these lands feels like they belong without bounds and I hope that in some small way, this co-created process can act as a guide and a small piece of what can collectively get us there, together.

Where are you trying to belong to?

Above so much, future generations need the land.

Belonging sits in the natural laws of this land.

Rise up.

Uplift values, respect & appreciate people.

Uplift one another.

Create communities & culturally safe spaces, while fostering positive relations.

Free Yourself. Be Yourself. Heal Yourself.

Learn & Educate; Understand your ancestors.

Reconnect to Mother Earth.

Build skills, knowledge & resilience.

Gather.

Create new tables. Change rigid structures.

Celebrate ups and downs together.

There is power in disagreement.

Action is in dialogue.

Feel deeply. Love fiercely.

Create accessible places to feel vulnerable. Hold space for each other.

Inclusion requires understanding. Create networks for support.

Kapwa.

All my relations.

Personal Epilogue

kiscâyâwin PⁿłłΔ·³. What I have learnt, is that my journey to understand who I am as an Indigenous Iskwew in this world, who I long to be in this world, what my responsibilities are and who I am accountable to is a daily tension I grapple with. This research process has challenged me, deeply humbled me and as mentioned previously, has prompted countless struggles of worthiness, of doubt, of anger, of fear, of joy, of concern, of pride, and of freedom. This process has undoubtedly been one of the hardest things I have done and has both disempowered me and inspired me to dig deep, to persevere and to humbly trust the process. This journey has shifted the lens on why understandings of belonging and how supporting the cultivation of belonging for young people, is a deeply interconnected, relational process that requires all of us. We do not have time to be divided, to blame, shame or give up. What I have also learnt is that, I am the hopeful one. I exist to be the hopeful one, the one that believes with every cell in my body that tomorrow will be better for young people. That each day we will lose fewer young people to suicide. That each day the youngest and fastest growing demographic across this country will feel like they belong, I am hopeful that we are learning; we are trying to co-create a new future. Research is about reciprocal learning and unlearning – it is relational –research transforms the researcher as much as it transforms those who participate in the research, and those who read it. I will continue my work as a young person, as a Métis Iskwew, as a learner, and as a researcher humbly in service of the world I see- a world where every young person across these lands belongs without bounds. A world where all young people don't have to journey back to **kiscâyâwin PⁿłłΔ·³**, but instead experience it from their first indrawn breath, like sweetgrass-rooted, boundless, and free.

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Appendix B: Body Map (created by participants)



Appendix C: Participant Consent Form

My name is Kiana Alexander and I am a student currently working on a research project to complete my Master of Arts in Leadership at Royal Roads University and I would like to tell you about it.

What is this research project about?

The goal of this research project is to learn about how young people experience and understand belonging and its relationship to igniting civic action.

Who is supporting this research project?

Royal Roads University, ResiliencebyDesign Research Innovation Lab and Raven Institute are supporting this research.

Why am I being invited to this research project?

You are being invited to take part in this research project because you are a young leader who has wisdom, insights and lived experiences to offer this project and its potential impact.

What does being involved in this research project mean?

Being involved means taking part in planning, dialogue and engagement to inform the research. Also, you will take part in a 1-day workshop on January 11th, 2020, where you and other young people will come together to use art, technology, and play to help me understand more about how you experience belonging and what it means to you. In addition, you will be given the option of doing a one on one interview to allow for the opportunity to go more in depth into the exploration of the concepts and would be active in the co-creation of what that looks like (i.e. interview guide and protocols).

What should I consider while deciding if I will choose to participate?

This research project is about your experiences, so you may be invited to share your thoughts and ideas. This could be exciting and fun, and it's important to know that it also could be emotional.

Your ideas and thoughts are important.

Being involved does not mean that you have to participate in every activity. If you feel uncomfortable at any stage, please let me know and you are free to leave.

If you share anything with us that causes us to worry about your safety or the safety of others, we will not be able to keep that information confidential.

Your individual remarks (when identified) and/or contributions to activities may be withdrawn, it may be impossible and/or challenging to promise full withdrawal of group generated data without compromising the data set. Furthermore, once the knowledge is de-identified, it will be challenging and potentially unfeasible to withdraw individual comments and contributions; however all efforts will be made to do so.

Will the study help you and others?

It is my hope that you will create new friendships. I also hope that your ideas and thoughts about your experiences can help support young people in reclaiming their roles as storytellers, leaders, knowledge holders, and changemakers.

Who will see the information collected about you?

The information you share during the workshop will be recorded and I will have a video camera to capture some of the important things you want to share. We will also use art and technology as ways for you to share your own stories about your experiences.

Your name will not be used in any reports related to the research project, unless you say it is ok. We may also want to share some of your art, images, and videos that you create, and again, your name will not be used unless you want it to. I will also check in with you to ask permission before further use or publishing anything you create.

I will send a draft and final report to you and all other participants for comment and your own records.

Do you have to be in the research project?

You do not have to participate in this research project. Even if you say yes to it now, you can change your mind and can quit at any time. If you decide not to participate, it will not affect your relationship with me or anyone involved in the research.

What if you have questions?

You can always ask questions about the research project. If you think of a question later, you can call me or my supervisor.

If you decide to participate in this research project, please fill out the attached form. You can change your mind and stop being part of it at any time.

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I agree to participate in activities as part of this research and understand that these will be audio recorded for the purposes of research analyses.

Yes
Please Initial _____

No
Please Initial _____

I understand and agree to these activities may be photographed and videotaped for research purposes.

Yes
Please Initial _____

No
Please Initial _____

I am aware that someone will connect with me to consent to the further use of images, creative products or videos this research in publications or presentations.

Yes
Please Initial _____

No
Please Initial _____

I understand that I can choose to have my name used with the art, images, and/or videos I create and/or images taken during the research project in which I participate. I understand that by initialing “yes” I am agreeing to have my name used. If, I initial “no” my name will not be used.

Yes
Please Initial _____

No
Please Initial _____

I have read this consent form and/or it was read to me. I know the possible risks and benefits. I know that participating in this research project is my choice. I choose to be in this research. I know that I can quit at any time. I know that it is my choice to be video/audio taped and know I will be consulted to have my image and creative products I produce used in publications and presentations of this research. I have received, on the date signed, a copy of this form.

Name

Date

Appendix D: Advisory Team Privacy Agreement

Civic Belonging: A Journey to kiscâyâwin Pⁿł̄Δ·² A co-created Exploration into How Civic Belonging for Young People can Ignite Civic Action.

As co-researcher in this research project, I understand my responsibilities concerning the confidentiality (to keep information private) of any research data collected by the project.

I will respect the confidentiality of those who participate in the research even when it seems difficult. I will hold all information that participants tell me—either as a response to direct questions or as volunteered additional information—in complete confidentiality.

For example, I will not talk about who has, or has not, participated in the research during any stage of the project. I will not discuss general or specific research findings with anyone other than Kiana Alexander.

It is acceptable to discuss my work, including general information or concerns with Kiana Alexander.

I, _____ (print name), have read and agree to this Confidentiality Agreement.

Signature

Date