Webinar 4: Queering Indigenous Land-Based Education

Participants:	Max Liboiron (Metis), Madeline Whetung (Anishinaabe), Ryan Crosschild (Blackfoot - Kainai), Kyle Shaughnessy (Dene), Riley Kucheran (Ojibway)
Moderators:	Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), Alex Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree)
Abbreviations:	ML = Max Liboiron, MW = Madeline Whetung, RC = Ryan Crosschild, KS = Kyle Shaughnessy, RK = Riley Kucheran, LS = Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, AW = Alex Wilson

---

(0:33) LS: My name is Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. I've been doing land-based education for about twenty years. I am faculty at the Dechinta Centre for Research and Learning. I live in Peterborough Ontario. I'm Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg from Alderville First Nation and I'm really excited for this conversation.

(1:05) ML: Tanisi, Max Liboiron [introduction in Indigenous language]. My name is Max Liboiron, I am Metis, I'm scooped, so I'm connecting and reconnecting, although I grew up on our traditional territory luckily. I'm from Lac La Biche, Treaty 6, Northern Alberta, and I now live and work on Beothuk land in Newfoundland and Labrador in Saint John's. I run a feminist and anti-colonial marine science laboratory called Clear. And so yeah, I'm going to be talking about all the compromises and impurities that come with that kind of position.

(1:49) LS: Awesome, thanks for being here. Riley?

(1:55) RK: Bozhoo, my name is Riley Kucheran. I'm Ojibway and Ukranian from Pic River First Nation, which is where I currently am. I am a PhD student and incoming Assistant-Professor of Design Leadership at Ryerson University School of Fashion. I work on Indigenous fashion, its history and significance, the theory of Indigenous fashion which also happens to be very queer. I've also spent some time at Dechinta, first as a student and then as an assistant, and yeah, I'm excited to be here.

(2:32) LS: Awesome, thanks. Ryan?

(2:37) RC: Did you call me? I'm sorry it like bleeped out or something (chuckle).

(2:41) LS: (Laugh) Sorry I might have unmuted myself in the middle, yeah. Ryan!

(2:45) RC: Yeah, I'm just really excited for today's panel and feel immensely honoured to be sharing space with such an amazing group of people. I had a chance to take a quick look at what everyone is doing, and it just looks so amazing, so it's really encouraging to see all the amazing work everyone is doing.

(Blackfoot Greeting). So, my Blackfoot name is Sikapiohkiitopi but I also go by Ryan. I'm Siksikaitsitapi from Kainai. I live in Sik-Ooh-Kotoki, the City of Lethbridge, in the heart of Blackfoot territory and I'm a PhD student at the University of British Columbia on unceded Musqueam territory. A lot of my research is kind of built on my interests in queer Blackfoot traditions, queer Blackfoot life and politics, and trying to think through the complications with trying to engage in these kinds of conversations when they're such highly divisive questions of memory in the context and aftermaths of targeted gender oppression and violence. And so, trying to think through how we have these kinds of conversations when anti-queer violence and heteropatriarchy are still very much visible not only in settler contexts, but also within our own communities. That's where my work is coming from.

(4:32) LS: Thank you, Maddy?

(4:36) MW: Aniin everyone. Can you all hear me? I'm wearing my noise blocking headphones, so I can't hear me and that's why I was asking. So, yeah, my name is Maddy Whetung, I am Anishinaabe, Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg from Curve Lake First Nations. I also live in Peterborough. I'm a PhD student at UBC in the geography department, and I will also be joining Riley at Ryerson as a new faculty member in geography starting next week, I can't believe it. So, my research is about accountability in the queer community, and particularly with attention to our geographies and places, and the ways that we take into account Indigenous land and those processes. Because I'm Michi Saagiig and because I'm living in this territory, I base my work here, and right now, my work is happening with people who are living or connected to the territory in some way. I'm just in the very exciting research interview phase. Now that it's summer and I can sit outside with people, and do physically distanced interviews, the work can go on. So, Miigwetch. I'm very excited to be here and chat with all of you on this, in this group.

(6:27) LS: Miigwetch. Kyle can you introduce yourself, I noticed you're back.

(6:33) KS: Yeah, I'm back, so that thing is happening, but that's okay. I think I sort of something new this time. So yeah, Mahsi. My name is Kyle Shaughnessy. I'm talking to you today from Stó:lō and Tsleil-Waututh territory in Vancouver, BC, my home. So, I am mixed backgrounds, so I am both Irish on one side of my family, and sort of mixed European and Dene on the other side of my family. My family is from Yellowknife, it's where I was born and spent the first few years of my life. It's where a lot of my family still lives, and so they're Tlicho First Nations. I'm also Two Spirit identified; sort of transgender Two Spirit identified person. So, my roles in terms of what I do for work, I'm an Indigenous education consultant at the Centre for Teaching and Learning Technology at UBC, and then also, a split role with the HR department in terms of like staff training. So a lot of the work

that I'm doing revolves around land acknowledgement, and specifically, since we've started shifted to this online learning, doing land acknowledgements is something that a lot of folks are really wanting to brush up on, get more comfortable with, right now because it's really changed the landscape of that because we're all in different territories, and so lots of (sound disturbance) people wanting to be able to speak to that well. And then, my other sort of role, is also as a grad student at Dalhousie University, sort of by distance. And so, what I've been focusing on there for the past couple of years, in my thesis, is around the healing roles of Two Spirit educators. So just interviewing Two Spirit educator folks, folks who do diversity training, Two Spirit training, Two Spirit teaching, and talking to them about how they see themselves as having a role in the community, and also borrowing on so much of Alex's work, I'm very excited to be in your company. And just around, if they see that education experience, and coming to an educator role as something that assisted them in coming in as a Two Spirit person as well. Borrowing on a lot of amazing work and so excited to be in the company of so many amazing people today. So, Mahsi.

(8:52) LS: Mahsi, okay I'm going to turn it over to you Alex.

(8:58) AW: Right, wow – what a lineup. It's an honor to be on this with you, and my name is Alex Wilson. I'm from the Opaskwayak Cree Nation, in Treaty 5 territory. Right now, I'm at my parents' place, and my mom just walked in. She's been taking part in these webinars in the background. Last time I was in the truck and she was sitting there with me. So yeah, this is where I grew up. And if I can turn the thing around here maybe you could see…The creek at the back there, and so, that creek is called (Cree name) and means a bit off to the side, and it was where people would pull over off the main river system here. So, we are on the Saskatchewan River Delta, and the Saskatchewan connects to Lake Winnipeg, and then north as well, to a number of lakes, and then all the way to the Hudson Bay. So, this is where I grew up with my queer little life [laughter], for the most part, and now I live back here about 20 miles north of here in our territory in Clear Water Lake, or (Cree name). I'm a professor at the University of Saskatchewan and we have a Masters in Indigenous Land Based Education. This is the tenth year that it's been running, and over the year's kind of, learning that there's quite a variation of what people think of when they think of land-based education. And then, just learning from students and other community members about some of the issues that have come up as we continue to kind of contextualize and refine what we mean when we say land-based education, and this issue of queering has come up. And so, there's a course that I teach called Queering Indigenous Land Based Education, and I have to teach this summer and as you all know, COVID has impacted us. So, now I'm trying to figure out how to queer the queering course, without just making it all online. So, we've been having discussions with Leanne and Glen and Kelsey and thought it would be a good idea to have a webinar on

this topic. Not just obviously to help me with my course [laughter], but also because there's a need to create safe spaces and also to think more critically about what queering means and how it can be kind of transformative and liberatory for people. I really love, you know Kalani Young is a Kanaka Maoli scholar and she says, queering is transforming poison into medicine. And I really like that kind of way of thinking about it. Queer can be a noun of course, like when we are talking about people, but it's also a verb, and so that's kind of the way that I think about it. We are really interested to hear from all of you as panelists, what does queering Indigenous land-based education mean to you? Should we…Does anybody want to volunteer to go first? Or would you rather I choose people? No one is going to say.

(12:50) ML: I want you to choose people, 'cause that means at some point you'll choose me, and that'll feel good.

(12:55) AW: I choose you then to start Max [laughter]

(12:58) ML: That feels a little bit good (laughter). Alright, so we're doing question one? What does queering Indigenous land-based education mean? Okay. Actually, Alex, you stole some of my thunder, which is fine you can share. That's okay, it's good. Where queering is, I mean sometimes it's a noun, like people use it, but I very much understand it as a doing, and a being, and a knowing. It's not like 'oh that's queer that stable thing that is done hurray we have achieved queer right there'. It's doing things queerishly, or queerly, that sort of stuff. For me, that includes a lot of not reproducing or investing in binaries, not just straight or gay, male or female, but also things like alive or not alive, nature/culture, contaminated/pure – that's actually the worst one. And yeah, so that's really crucial and it's actually really hard to do. I think Ryan was talking about how there is still a lot of this that gets into even what we could call 'traditional', or cultural knowledge. For me, that also means some promiscuity of what counts as land-based education, and I do it in contaminated spaces in two senses, so I really loved this quote you introduced that queering is, turning poison into medicine. I think that is the best bumper sticker for my lab now because we do contamination in two senses. Number one, almost all of my land-based work is literally organized around pollution, mostly plastic pollution, but plastics also, PCB's, and all these other sorts of nasty friends. But secondly, usually it's alongside or within Western science, which is not so queer and is really, and not fabulous almost at all, and really invested in these binaries that aren't queer and aren't good, and really believes in mastery which is like not very queer. So, luckily science needs a lot of queering and land education could use some queering, so they're pretty happy bedfellows in that way. But yeah, that's sort of the shortness of what queering land-based education kind of looks like for me, this sort of turning poison into medicine, and resisting, and enacting things that are not binaries in this highly compromised space of science.

(15:22) AW: Thank you, yeah. Maddy do you want to add to that?

(15:33) MW: Sure yeah. Thank you for that Max, that was yeah, really getting my brain going there. I think for me, I like what you said Max about not working in binaries and sort of not getting to this fixed location of the perfect purity because I think a lot of the work that I have done in terms of queering in land based education has been about creating safe spaces for queer youth, really because when I was a young queer person, a lot of the traditional land based learning spaces didn't feel safe. And so, for me, creating that safety has never been about… I'm going digress a little here, but I think like creating safe space for me has been about keeping as many people as possible in the circle. So, I think sometimes within queer circles we can think about safe space as sort of removing people we view as harmful, but when we are out on the land, especially being a part of communities where we have to sometimes come from trauma, we want to keep as many people in the circle as possible, and so, for me, I think bringing in queer youth and ways that also bring in safe elders, who are open to learning about queerness, and sort of having that multidirectional, cross-generation learning about wherever one is at, has been where some of the most exciting queering has happened. Yeah, maybe that's all I'll say for now.

(17:44) AW: Yeah, I'm interested to hear like what's some of the things you've done, maybe you could just add to that. Sorry, I'm kind of going off script, but I'm just getting excited here.

(18:00) MW: That's okay (laughter), yeah. Well…So some of it was during my time at Dechinta as the land-based team leader doing…like practicing circle governance with the students, having queer students on site, and you know, working with student expectations about you know, how some of the olders, or elders, might not have the same knowledge or a language, or terminology, but…you know sort of like coaching the students on how to meet the olders and elders on where they're at, and coaching the olders and elders on how to meet the students with where they're at. A lot of my role, I suppose, when I was on site at Dechinta, has been working in that in-between space. And then, one of the things that we have done in our territory was organize a canoe build, which was my hope, having been a part of projects before that had not felt like safe learning spaces, was to…me and my co-organizer, an artist, a local artist here, who is also Anishinaabe, we sort of viewed ourselves as, we've been through some experiences, and knew that our traditional teachers, you know the ones that held the traditional knowledge, might not have the same knowledge about gender or queerness that our young…queer youth were coming with, but we also wanted to be able to learn about canoe building, so we sort of viewed it as me and Tia as body blocking all the bad stuff that could've come out of that. Like we viewed ourselves as being in-between all of that, the hurtful or harmful things that could have filtered down, and you know, being that person who says, I want

to learn how to build the canoe and getting your hands on it, and then immediately handing it off to another young person, who might not have been able to…felt comfortable or safe asking to be in there. And then, you know, there was a lot of behind the scenes work, explaining to our teachers that this is how we think about gender and this is how you know, these are the kinds of the things that we can't talk about when we are talking about the canoe, and so a lot of…I mean, this is I suppose, really links to my PhD research about accountability and how we try and keep people talking to each other, and just really meeting people where they're at with what they know, and not expecting everyone to have had the same level of exposure to everything all the time I think. I don't know if that answers your question

(21:35) AW: Yes, thanks for that. Ryan, do you want to add?

(21:41) RC: Yeah, I agree with all that has been said so far, it's really got me thinking about some of the challenges I've faced in my own lived experience in my own community. But I also think part of this queering land-based education is about recognizing the ways in which our practices are already queer. Part of the problem I think is that our ability to notice queerness has been weakened because we've been told that it's unnatural, sinful, we've kind of been conditioned to think in these binaries, not just in terms of gender but also in terms of things like traditional/modernity, the kind of urban life/city life, all of these things are in binaries. We've been thrust into this way of thinking by being in this relationship with settler colonialism and what comes with that is, cognitive imperialism, and I myself struggle because I've been conditioned to think this way. So, it's a constant process of trying to unlearn. And I think for a lot of like, queer Indigenous folx, we've been forced to hide and learned to live in peripheries of Indigenous life and politics, and so like, thinking about it more collectively, or broadly, all Indigenous peoples, our way of life has been threatened by settler encroachment, by violence, many of us have gone through great lengths to defend ourselves and lands from further violence, but I also think like, it is also in those moments of defending and resisting, that this politics of traditionalism can become toxic, and it can manifest into the anti-queer practices that exist in so many of our communities today. So for me, I like that, what you said Alex, it's about transforming poison into medicine, and in my own MA thesis, the title of it was, working with this theme of needing to Smudge Cistems, Smudging Cistems with a C. And it's about this rejection of broad sweeping and repressive generalizations of traditional protocols that are exclusionary, they're activated in a particular narrow view of traditionalism that is dangerous when land based activities are motivated by fear driven logics that are wrapped up in this desire to always preserve this authentic way of doing things. I think that…Not that there's anything inherently wrong with wanting to preserve or restore, I think that it's the way in which we go about doing it, just like how we are engaging in this online way of learning, it's not inherently problematic, but we have to

understand the context in which it's situated in, in that it can become problematic. And so, it's this fear I think of losing our way of life that prevents us from seeing and hearing and feeling the experiences of so many other diverse lived experiences happening outside of the category of authentic Indigeneity. We don't recognize those as being this expression of relational politics of ethics, but it's happening, it hasn't gone anywhere. I think for the most part, in many instances I see a lot of Indigenous projects framed as preservation or restoration, which are all too frequently bundled with toxic nationalism, ableism, heteropatriarchy, and anthropocentrism. Many of us who are doing land-based education who are receiving funding are also forced to adhere to this neoliberal, evidence based funding model that strips away what queerness is actually really about, which is the ability to imagine otherwise, it's kind of this rejection of being categorized and controlled, but a lot of the time we are forced to adhere to different kinds of accreditation standards, best practices, which are all too conveniently predicated on Western colonial notions of success and what education is. And so, by being part of that system, it's kept us on this fast-paced rhythm, where I think right now, with what's happening with COVID, we've been able to slow down and start to notice a lot of things that we haven't been able to before. Like, when we're involved in a lot of these projects, whether it's university, when we are getting a degree, or you're getting grant funding, a lot of us are trapped or placed in a position where we're kept in this fast-paced rhythm with having to meet so many different deadlines, having to submit budgets, having to justify our budgets within this funding model, and all of this really prevents us from being actually engaged in relational ways of being, to really critically reflect, to practice the art of noticing, to learn land literacy, and to actually like engage in relational thinking. I also see this is a problem with the toxic politics of traditionalism, and these fear driven logics that kind of attempt to harden Indigenous lifeways into rigged, narrow conceptualizations that are built on gendered protocols and heteronormative thinking and being, that's kind of packaged and organized in a way that is intelligible to funders. And so, for me, queering land-based education should be about trying to find ways to work with the situations we're in and making them our own and making the best out of those situations. Many of us had to do this in our own lived experiences. So, queering land-based education is about being open to experimenting with new ideas and techniques, that allow us to think differently, and be different. And, I think that that's something a lot of queer folx, Indigiqueer or Two Spirit, have really had to learn in many cases when we've been forced out of our communities due to violence, we've been able to engage in these different ways of being in relation to our Indigeneity that may not always fall into those romanticized, or stereotypical conceptions of what it means to be Indigenous, or have to engage in land based learning…And so I appreciated what Max said about we also have to think about what constitutes queer land based activities. I think too often it gets

framed in these dominant masculinist orientations, so we really need to think critically about those particular contexts.

(29:13) AW: Thank you. Kyle?

(29:20) KS: I knew I was next. I could feel I was next [laughter]. Yeah, so what queering Indigenous land-based education means to me, I mean I think so much of that is just being fully present and alive and acknowledged as a Two Spirit person and the work that I'm doing. So, the majority of the work that I'm doing right now, is not tangibly land based, it's about land. So, it's talking about territory, it's talking about knowledge about land, it's talking about relationships with land. And so, for me, I'm consistently and regularly modelling land acknowledgements, or encouraging other folks along their path to be able to offer them in a way that feels good them. And so, for me, just consistently naming myself as a Two Spirit person, naming any opportunities that I have to apply that lens, that Two Spirit lens, those Two Spirit teachings, any stories that relate back to gender and sexual diversity that I can weave into the ways that I'm educating, is incredibly important to me, just to take up that space and role. I think that, you know, that is sort of the place that I've kind of come into, is realizing that this is what I do, this is what I love to do, this is where my heart is, offering relational education and being able to just sit with people in a learning process and develop those relationships, and that is sort of what my role is. That is sort of where I've come into as a Two Spirit person. So, I think even being able to mention when we are doing land acknowledgements we speak a lot about which nation or peoples this land was traditionally inhabited by, but also when we talk about Two Spirit people we're a nation based…when we are talking about land acknowledgements that's nation based, but when we are talking about Two Spirit people, it is not necessarily nation based. I mean as much as we are Indigenous first, as an identity as Two Spirit people, Two Spirit people don't all come from the same geographic area, yet at the same time, there's high migration rates to be able to access communities and services and safety, so that needs to be acknowledged when we are queering that land-based education work. We are even talking about just ways to critically think about how we do our land acknowledgement. So, something that I'm trying to mention, is that when we engage in online spaces, these are exclusive spaces, these aren't spaces that everyone has equal access to. So many of the communities that I've worked in have only gotten electricity in the last couple years, let alone internet, let alone using Zoom. Access for elders to be able to have the technology to be able to have these conversations. So, I think it's really about applying that critical lens, applying that queer critical lens, and just being fully alive and present as a Two Spirit person, and sort of lending those teachings wherever I can with the education I do, regardless of it has anything to do with gender and sexuality, but how can I weave it into the conversation. That's the thing about being Two Spirit, it's the harmonization of culture, gender, sexuality,

spirituality, it's how we use our bodies, it's how we think, it's how we feel, it's how we love, it's a harmonized way of being. It's not this siloed way of being, like, this is what I do for work, this is my gender and sexuality, this is where I live. It's a way of having all those things come together. It's important for me to carry those in all the ways I do my work.

(32:49) AW: Thank you. Riley?

(32:54) RK: I still can't get over this metaphor that I'm speaking to you from inside the closet [laughter]. I need to like come out of the closet to talk about…Or I need to go back into the closet to talk about queer ed on Zoom. Kyle's answer really resonated with me which is…taking up space, and the importance of taking up space, which is what I think I contribute when I'm queering Indigenous land based ed. Really using my body and using my appearance to, I guess queer people's conceptions of Two Spirit people. Being as truthful as I can to myself, and not letting me apply filters to that. I think I feel most at home when I'm on the land, so I would want to not try and put on appearances, and to be myself on the land I think is one of the most important things. In preparing for this, I was reminded of an appearance at Dechinta, I think the last time I was there, and I had arrived at Dechinta already with a beard, so I was already looking pretty scruffy, and then when you get to Dechinta and you spend some time in the bush, you get even scruffier and smellier, so I was looking super masc, like super butch wearing all my plaid flannels, things like that. And then, one morning, I don't know why, but I just thought, I want to shave, so I shaved my whole face, and it was chilly that day, so I also grabbed one of those kokum scarves, grandma scarves. I was wearing that like a kookum. In reflecting on it now, it was actually almost like an act of drag, of changing my appearance and switching it up on people. I remember I was walking by, and two of the old elders saw, and not even at me they were like whispering, laughing and howling, "I've never seen a man wear a kookum scarf like that." I was just like so happy to hear that, because how does that quickly change their perception, and something that I barely thought of might make someone think again. That act of taking up space and being true to oneself could lay a seed probably for someone. If they start thinking about that, that'll grow in their mind, and maybe the next time they see me, I'll do something else. But I just think taking up that space is so important, and having that visibility is like, I don't want to diminish it, it's like a first step, it's just being present, but it's a really important step as well in this kind of long process of queering. And I've had similar experiences up here in my territory in Biigtigong. I think what I've tried to do because I didn't grow up in Biigtigong, I grew up in Southern Ontario, urban for most of my life, so I didn't know many of the people in Biigtigong when I started coming back here a couple years ago, I have relations here but they're pretty distant. But what I tried to consciously do, because I was really worried about coming back to my community and not knowing about this kind of

internalized Christian morality, and not knowing the situation which was up here. What I started doing was being very conscious about talking about my partner, and using male pronouns, I was like, oh he's a great gardener, he's a great baker, you'll love him, and just really stressing those pronouns to just to take up that space and normalize that I have a partner, he's male, deal with it. I think I was just so pleasantly surprised when…you know some community members would respond with humour. I clearly remember an elder, after talking about my partner for a while, she was like, oh if you didn't have that partner I would have gone after you, and like winking at me, and I howled with laughter. I loved it! It's using that humour to queer. I think humour is a big part of queering. So, yeah. Miigwetch.

(37:07) AW: Great, thank you. Yeah, sometimes, just the things that can be ordinary really can be shifting in terms of queering but also like making people completely shift their understandings. It just reminded me of the story that, maybe some of you have heard me tell before. With our land-based cohort we always go to Hawaii as one of their courses as a study tour. I have permission to tell this story. The first time we went down into this one area, we were getting kind of a little introduction and tour of the site, and we were going to be staying down there for a week or so, and there were two porta potties, when we kind of got to that part, the woman that was taking us around, the elder, she said…she explained Kapu, or sacred law, and she said this is the men's washroom and this is the women's washroom, and you know she said that's part of our sacred law and all of that. I could see all of the students turn to me, like you know, is she going to say anything. I had this dialogue in my head that lasted a millisecond, but it seemed like it went on and on and on. I just looked and said, there's 18 students that identify as female and two or three that identify as male, and then…the elder kind of got it, and said, ah Kapu is lifted (laughter). So that's how easy it can be, right? Sometimes we put all of these, this whole history of values on what's sacred, sacred law and tradition, but really could be as simple as lifting the Kapu, so to speak. Leanne did you want to add or go onto the next kind of section?

(39:17) LS: I'll queer it and do both [laughter]. So, I really liked this idea that Max and Alex talked about as queering as a practice, as a politic, and as an ethic. And I think, I like this idea that Ryan talked about that for me, I see that ethic and practice in the land if you don't bring heteropatriarchy and a gender binary and transphobia onto it conceptually. A lot of what I think I've been trying to do is destroy that kind of gender binary and amplify queerness, Indigenous queerness as a normal state, and as a normal practice. And being able to take things in my territory like day, night, man, woman, and just leave that, but find a conceptual language to talk about how, well you can find polarity and a binary in day and night, but there's also…It is also a cycle, and there is a different amount of light at every single point in the day, and that creates a circle, and sort of using that as a teaching to bring

everybody into the circle talking about individual self-determination, non-interference, respect for diversity, consent, sort of…all of these Nishinaabeg ethics, that can in traditional practices and ceremony and land-based practices, get I think very Christianised and colonized, and used to exclude and to dishonour and to shame queerness. Part of that for me, has been to engage kind of over the last twenty years with ceremonial leaders who are willing to talk about these things and who do not want to uphold those gender binaries, to create a practice around ceremony that's a safe space, or as safe space as possible for queerness, and that does not practice half the lodge is man, half the lodge is woman, women in skirts, the kind of exclusionary taboos around menstruation and pregnancy, and sort of just…just destroy that and amplify the rest and so…It's also been really great in my territory to have Maddy here and we were participants in the canoe project, and that was the first time I participated in a land based, a queer land based, Indigenous education project that I did not have to organize, and so, it was amazing because I didn't have to do any of the background work. At one point, my child [name] was misgendered, and I was like, "do you want me to say anything?" And she was like, "no Maddy will take care of it" [laughter]. And so, that was just…having now sort of a community around this at Dechinta and then also in my own territory, my kids are just growing up with a completely different understanding of the world. So, I don't know what's going to happen when they find out what's going on outside their little bubble [laughter]. At Dechinta, we've been…this is something we've been talking about and been practicing sometimes very successfully and sometimes not very successfully for sort of the last decade. We have lots of Indigenous Dene woman students. We have lots of queer students. We've had trans students through our program. We recently did a fish camp in the winter, partnering with the Rainbow Coalition in Yellowknife. And so, part of my responsibility there has been to have those conversations with our staff and with our elders. I've taken that on because I'm not Dene, and if it goes badly, my family doesn't get impacted. I can still come back and make canoes with Maddy. But it hasn't actually…well yeah it has, there's been sometimes that it's gone badly, and we've had to not have those elders back. But for our YKDF and elders they've been really amazing, and really supportive…although like Maddy said, it's been…the language…the language has been…because their first language isn't English, and because they don't know the terminology, the conversations are actually really funny. It often takes a bit to get to the root of what I'm asking [laughter]. And then, I've also had lots of questions or conversations with Anishinaabe elders, trying to find this way, this queer way, with inside our culture, with inside our knowledge system, that it's different from the way Anishinaabe culture and ceremony is traditionally enacted, and umm…That's been really great because you don't have to say Father Sky, Mother Earth, Grandmother Moon, you don't have to gender everything all the time. There are actually lots of other words that were more normalized in the past that we can bring up. I've learned, I think I've learned

so much from trans students and from queer students. When I was teaching in Alex's program, we were camped by [name of lake], a beautiful lake. We had about twenty or thirty Indigenous students who were teachers. There was a transphobic joke told and a student came and asked me to intervene. And I went and talked to the student and talked to the class. I patted myself on the back because I thought I did a good job, and the student came back and said, that actually sucked, that was superficial, and you did not get to the bottom of anything. So, I spent that night with the mosquitos sharing a cabin with Alex, trying to figure out what I was going to do the next day. So we ended up taking space, and taking the whole day, and I talked in more detail and more specific, braver, more vulnerable and then all of the teachers actually had so much…so many stories about trans students in their class, about how to intervene with their parents, about how to intervene with social services, and we ended up taking the whole day to talk about that issue. I would not have done that had I not been willing to listen and really hear the firmness of that student, and break down that binary with boundaries, between student and teacher. And so, that was a really, really valuable teaching for me. That was something I've really taken…I will always remember and take with me forward from Alex's class. So, the next part of the question is sort of, what's working, what are you doing, what are you doing in your own land and practices and research…to uh…to queer your work? Max are you happy to be called upon?

(47:08) ML: Yeah, I always sit in front at events 'cause I'm so short, so this is kind of just like that again, so it's good. So, what are we doing? I think I'll talk about two different flavours of things that's happening. The first thing, so again, I do both what scientists call field work, but we call either homework, homeland work, or land and water work because there's no field that isn't a home, and it's super rude…but also laboratory work. So, I spend a lot of time, and I think that it's working, is that teaching folks that you're always in relation with the land even if you are not out there in the bush, or on the land, or going out. If you are in the lab, in the university, in the concrete room with your eyeball to a microscope, you're engaging in land relations and all the principles that you feel so strongly when you're out on the horizon in the sky, are also true when you're looking through the microscope. And so, what does that look like? What does that mean? What are you doing with the sample that you would do with a Moose? Because samples are much less charismatic than a moose. That helps a lot with the nature, not nature binary, or urban/nature binary, or a lot of the purity discourses that Ryan and other folks have been talking about too. Plastics are land. Oil is land, they're horribly abused land, and they have been set up to fail land, it's like not cool. They're traumatized land you might think, but they're still land. And so, the question I always present to the lab is, how do you do good kinship with bad kin? And you know this, especially as queer folks, you know this, especially if you're Metis, we are all about making kin, but we've got so many assholes…so many assholes. So, we

know how to manoeuvre those. Leanne just said break down binaries but with good boundaries, like yes, so what does that look like…the task I give them is, how do you love plastics? That means that love cannot be like, this wonderful rising thing that makes you feel good in your chest, that's not what love can be, what is love if you're loving plastics, and plastics are land? And students usually spend years working on that project, and the best results of that question have been people breaking up with their significant others when they realize there wasn't actually any love, because they can love plastics better than their significant other because they were relying on that good feeling to be the foundation of certain relationships. And I was like, yes [laughter] breakups are the best scientific sort of results we've gotten so far coming out of those sorts of lessons. But that's sort of an abstract way of talking about what we do, which I usually find very annoying when people talk about abstracts and things discursively. The main way that we talk about what we do and works is to talk about protocol, when I say protocol I mean it in both the scientific and ceremonial sense, which basically just means all the steps you do in the order, so that you are oriented towards the good and you are always reproducing the goods, and your feet are always pointing towards the good horizon, and they are not strained to these other horizons. And it's actually the same in science as it is in ceremony in those terms. And I think too, going back to part of what Ryan was talking about, like when you talk about protocol and link it back to science, people sort of drop some of the pretentious, sacred, super macho sort of things that happen because yeah…you sort of go back and forth between the sacred and the scientific and those start to get blurry, which also means it gets harder to be a purist. So, what does that look like? One of the binary things that we work on not doing is live and not live. So, we only work with dead things in our lab, we don't work with any live animals, we work with a lot of animal guts, and we look in them for plastics. And so, students are taught about how those guts are still animals, and those guts are still land, and those guts are…you still have responsibilities to them the same as when the moose is walking around and you can make eye contact with it. So that means you don't wear ear buds when you're working with your samples and cutting it off. It means that you don't take gory photos. It means that if you have rising levels of grossness, that's you dealing with yourself, and you need to go deal with yourself and those feelings of grossness because they are not coming from the sample, they are coming from you. Same with…I use the example of sex all the time, if you are in the middle of sex and something super gross…that's about you, that has nothing to do [laughter] with the bodies that are happening - oh okay, so students sort of get that a little better. Whenever I compare something to sex, students get it better for some reason. I think because they spend a lot of time thinking about sex. And then at the end, we repatriate all our guts back to the land. Right, so basically, we throw them into the water with nice words. Sort of ceremonial but without…it's basically ceremonial, sometimes elders come and talk to us about what is happening. There's also

super boring things like, we don't sex all our animals, or even better, I try and get the students to sex dead animals. Have you ever tried to sex a fish? It's super hard. It's super, super hard. Or sexing a dead goose, that's also very hard. So, if you've ever sexed a live goose, I don't know if you have, but you flip them over upside down, and if it's a boy goose, or a goose with a penis, it's little penis pokes out. But when the goose is dead that doesn't always happen, and so, you end up having geese that have penises and geese that don't, but the geese that don't have penises aren't always necessarily female geese. And so, what do you do with that? And so, we leave a bunch of…we have geese with penises and geese without penises that are dead, and those are our scientific categories. I teach the students how those are proper scientific categories and how they also you know…basically through trying to sex things that are almost impossible to sex, they then start thinking about how that's also impossible with animals that aren't geese and fish, and are human, if they weren't already there. And then I think the last thing we do that is successful, and this goes back to what Madeline was just saying, when I ask the students, what is the coolest thing about our lab because we do all these feminist and anti-colonialist things, like repatriating guts? And they're like, "Oh, the best thing about the lab is that it's a good place to eat my lunch!" And I'm like, really? That's the coolest thing…No! We're so cool, we do cool stuff, look at the theory, look at our publications, and they're like, "nah, it's a good place to eat my lunch." So, it's just…especially with where I am in St. John's Newfoundland, it is so…it is so painfully homogenous here. We have what's called a founding population. Everyone is so close; all the settlers are so closely genetically related that they are almost a pure genetic group that scientists come to do experiments on [laughter]. They are purer than any Indigenous group pretty much in the world, genetically. That's how…it's not only white, there's only one kind of white, it's not just sex, there's only one kind of sex, it's not just straight, there's only one kind of straight. I never thought I'd miss a diversity of white people until I came and lived here because it's so…that there's a good place to eat, where no one gives a shit what you're pronouns are, or what you're doing, the most interesting thing is, "hey what's in your sandwich?" As opposed to any other question that might be out there, is actually really significant in this space in a way that I underestimated when I first came here. I came here from New York City, it's a totally different ball game here. The politics are fundamentally different when you live in a colony, and this is still very much a colony. So, thank you!

(55:01) LS: Does someone want to jump in organically and deepen the conversation? Or do you guys want me to pick? I'm going to pick Maddy because I know you have to go at 5:30. So why don't you go next and get it all out.

(55:24) MW: Thanks Leanne. Yeah, I do have to go at 5:30, that's why. I just want to apologize for that, and if I don't make it to the next round of questions. A lot of what you…I mean…So I am a geographer, but I am a human

geographer so I'm really appreciating listening to you talk about working in a lab and working on the scientific side because there are scientists in my department, and I'm like, I don't know how to talk to you. And just listening to you talk Max, about the way you engage in your work relationality is sort of helping me. I was like…I would like a follow up conversation about that [laughter]. So, I like the way you said that you're always in a relation with the land no matter where you are, and I think that…that idea I have been trying to bring into my everyday life, especially during pandemic quarantine, lockdown times. Just thinking about…I feel like I'm more in my place than ever before, and my relational world has never felt smaller at the same time – my human relational world I should say. So, I think going out…we live right next to a creek and a big forested area, we live in the city, in like the middle of the city, but there's this giant park that runs right through the city. Every single day going out and walking in the park for hours at a time, which I didn't have time for before we were at home…made me…You know, I was able to be with the, all of the progression, all of the changes for spring, and know…see the Fiddle Heads as they were coming up, and instead of going out and picking a whole bunch all at once, I would pick like a handle in the morning and come home and eat them…I think like, re-thinking the way we are in place and…having an opportunity, like you said Ryan, to slow down, and I wanted to…I was thinking about that question in terms of education, what is working? I don't know if I have the answer to that. I think what is working, what feels like it's working so far, is…and I think this is something everyone has touched on a little bit is just talking to each other. I mean Leanne you talked about how you took time and space, you said more, you gave more details, and I think Max you're talking a lot about changing the way we talk about things, and how we communicate beyond the binary. And just kind of…bringing conversations to the forefront has been what has been working for me in education. And I think, Riley I really appreciated your story about talking about your partner in community and sort of making that point and bringing that to the forefront. I have thought a lot about coming out and being out in Anishinaabe territory where…You know my mom tells stories about growing up on the reserve and like the intense homophobia that was there, and you know, queer people of her generation who left and never came back. I feel like now, when I am around, people are just like okay. I like the change in attitude, it has been so dramatic, and I think…You know in my family people were like, "Yeah okay, that's great." Moving on, next topic. And so, people don't seem like…We talk about normativity and what is normal for us, and I think, what I have witnessed a lot has been people being like, "Yeah, this is fine. This is normal. Just carry on with what you're doing." And that…It's kind of funny because I think sometimes the way we think about queerness, we define it so much by difference, by like what is different from the norm, and so, to see it as like part of everything, and to have other people in the community who don't identify queer see us that way too, has been kind of cool. I feel like there are so many more things

that everyone has said that I want to talk about, but I'm going to pause there, so I can listen too.

(1:01:42) LS: Does anyone want to jump in?

(1:01:44) KS: Sure, I will. Yeah, I just want to follow up on what Maddy was saying, and then also what Max was talking about before. In terms of relationality, that's one of the ways I feel I am sort of queering my land-based education is talking about relationality. So, in a couple of different ways. As a trans person, like when you name yourself as trans and come out, and especially when you sort of go on any sort of physical transformation journey, through like hormones or surgery, or anything like that, it's a very exposing process. It all of a sudden feels that you are wearing on the outside of your body, all the things that gone on inside your head for everyone to see. So, it can be a really…it can be again, a really exposing process. I think that out of that comes a need to have a sense of humility and just be able to be comfortable being yourself. Take joy being yourself, and in those awkward moments, like I know this one time I was doing a workshop with a colleague, we were up in northern BC, and we were supposed to be there for a big event at the Friendship Centre taking place. We were doing a gender diversity workshop around creating welcoming spaces for Two Spirit people, and just the way the day was going, so many of the folks weren't able to be in the room at the same time. There was a lot of coming and going, so we ended up canceling the workshop and just sitting around. It was me and my co-worker and about ten to twelve moms and aunties who were just working at the Friendship Centre, to make the food and create the welcoming space, and just be there with everyone. We just sat around telling stories about the first time using a new bathroom, and some of the ridiculous and hilarious things that have happened, and just coming up with those stories of awkward moments, and just being in ourselves and showing up entirely. So much of what…queering Indigenous education, like land-based or not, for me, is about really sort of just holding that dual role of being able to show up with humility and being yourself. If we're doing a workshop or we're all eating, that's fine, I don't need to stand up there and point with a laser pointer. Like, let's sit down and eat some sandwiches and just talk about this topic. We don't need to come in there and be off-putting right? We need to welcome people in and build those relationships and take down those walls. And so, it's that one side of having that humility, just being your comfortable self, but then also having that respect for protocols. So, it's sitting around delivering a workshop while you're sitting there eating a sandwich, and knowing, this elder is speaking, they may have been speaking for 45 minutes in the workshop but they're going to be speaking now, and we're all going to be listening because this is going to come full circle. It's about being able to respect those things that are very, sort of hardened fast rules, those protocols, at the same time just being your relaxed self. I think for me, just taking those walls down, having that humility, and having that openness

in telling those stories is what is going to create space for some of that…some of that place-based change through doing those land acknowledgements. So again, that's mainly what I've been focusing on in my work. I need to be able to cultivate a relationship with my co-workers, and with other people at the university, so that someone is comfortable enough to come to me and say, "I'm so uncomfortable when I see this on the agenda, to do a land acknowledgement, I look for the first Indigenous person and ask them to do it." I need to be able to cultivate that level of comfort and humility, with other people as well, so that we can work from where they're at because I don't want someone coming to me and saying, "Can you please give me this statement to look up my territory on Native Land, and then I can just plug what I find in there so I can just read that off the agenda." I need people to be able to feel comfortable and open to be able to come and actually engage in that process and do that education. And also, to further the idea of relationality, like what is your relationship to land, because that's how you're going to have a meaningful acknowledgement is understanding that these are things that I notice, this is how the ground feels near my home, here's a sacred spot that I go to, here's something that I see out my window all the time, here's the lands that I grew up on that I didn't know anything about the lands, but in retrospect, I want to do that honour now, and I want to revisit where I did grow up. I want to talk about where I was born, how my family came to settle on these territories, so we need to have so much…yet relationality just really needs to be at the heart of being able to do acknowledgements for people. And so, being able to have that skill, that insight, that reflection, as a queer person to just be able to relax and be yourself, is sort of how I try to cultivate that, to bring us to a good place to have those good relationships, and further that work together. Mahsi.

(1:06:54) RK: I can go if you want…I don't think I have enough experience to be able to comment on definitely what works in land-based ed. I do consider myself more of a student in land-based ed than I am an educator. But I do feel like, I return to taking up those different roles. At our elder camp up here in Biigtigong, I made sure of taking up different roles simultaneously. So, being called upon to chop wood because I'm a tall cis male, that was natural for someone to ask me to do that, but then to, after that, make a point of going into the kitchen and helping the cooks and inhabiting those different spaces that were clearly divided by gender, but being able to show how it was natural for me to inhabit both spaces in the camp, I think was important. Earlier I mentioned how fashion is queer, and I think I need to do more thinking about why that is, beyond the fact that so many queer people are attracted to fashion. I think, Kyle what you spoke about in being able to fashion what you feel on the inside outside, I think is really important. At the school of fashion, we've been really working on tearing away that gender binary, so students can create non-binary collections and we've broadened the range of what you can design, in terms of size and body

abilities. I think also encouraging a kind of politics with students as they design to really say what they want to say, and to not feel censored in what they design. I think you know…taking up space is also, for me, it's a responsibility to create space. As the school of fashion is paying more attention to Indigenous design, I was very grateful that we started a beading circle, but I noticed a lot of my queer friends weren't coming to the beading circles, so I spoke to them and realized that we needed a Queer/Two Spirit beading circle separately. It wasn't enough just to create an Indigenous space to gather, it was essentially creating a queer Indigenous space to gather. And I think that's where the beautiful magic happens, when you're able to sit in a circle and spend time with each other. Like a lot of people here have mentioned how being able to speak freely and build those relations is key.

(1:09:38) LS: Riley can you add…Riley just finished his comps, hurray [laughter]. But during your comps I was thinking, you were talking a lot about the land, and bringing the ethics of the land, and caring for the land, into the fashion world, and how that was conflicting a lot with capitalism. And I thought that was actually a way of Indigenous queering the fashion industry. And it gets back to this idea, that even if we are not on the land, we are still in relation with the land.

(1:10:11) RK: Yeah, I think the values that come from Indigenous fashion all come from the land because it is so intimately connected. When you're doing a process like hide tanning, for example, you are really modelling what it's…you are modelling collaboration, you're modelling respect and reciprocity, and…It does just take a whole community to create Indigenous fashion I think. In Western fashion, there's this notion of like the designer who's a genius, and they see visions, and they're able to articulate them, and they design them, and the production of that is all removed. But in Indigenous fashion, it is so dependent on community members working together. I think that it's a method of queering fashion.

(1:11:07) RC: Yeah I think for me, the way that I understand this is…On the one hand, I do a lot of contract work in my community where I have assisted different child and family organizations try and get accredited because it's part of their funding arrangement that they have. And so, for me, I find that to be a really frustrating process, as I've mentioned before, as it follows that neoliberal-evidence based funding formula, but outside of doing that kind of work I'm also a member of the Siikaapoitaasiiksi, or the Grey Horse Society, where I'm partner to Abukibistan which is the leadership bundle in our sacred societies in my community. As a member of this society, I really have a lot of rights and privileges that I didn't realize. This society is kind of like where you begin your path to acquiring certain rites and transfers to be able to conduct ceremony and be recognized as a sanctioned knowledge keeper or elder, later on. And so, I didn't realize this because I was

approached to join as a partner to the bundle holders that I'm a part of, and I didn't realize that there's a lot of power that comes with being in this position. There's also a lot of strict rules that follow those exclusive gender protocols, which has not been easy because I find myself in those spaces where I'm most frustrated with the way ceremony is conceptualized, where it's enacted, maybe not like in blatant forms of anti-queer violence, but it's definitely still there, those sentiments. But being in this role, I also have a lot of access to elders and knowledge keepers, and this goes back to what everyone else has been saying, is that it's allowed me to take up more space, to ask those kinds of hard questions, and to really start to make visible a lot of the concerns and experiences of, not just myself, but this problem of anti-queer violence in Blackfoot spaces, and to make that more visible for a lot of people to see, and to hear, and…It's exhausting work. It's not always…I guess this…I feel like sometimes like doing land-based learning can get romanticized, and it's always like super fun and it's always like we're camping, and falls into those tropes sometimes, but it's a lot of work! And I myself, I'm allergic to almost everything, and so, I have a really interesting relationship with the land where I'm out there…Part of one of the responsibilities I have is that I have to ride a horse, and I'm allergic to horse hair, and I'm allergic to hay. It's just interesting to kind of reflect on, even my own body is like, telling me that this relationship is not…it's not all…this kind of romanticized…being on the land is where it's at, and I'm not saying it's not, but it's just a lot more complicated and nuanced than that. And so, I think for me, acknowledging that it's a process, it's about how to be in relationship with pain; for a lot of this it's painful to be in those spaces. For me, to engage in certain ceremonial practices, like just the other day, I had to go up to the mountains and harvest a Jack Pine tree for one of our...it's like a staff that we put our bundles on, so that in itself was really a lot of work. It took a lot out of me. And so, it's about knowing what you're capable of doing, it's knowing your limitations, but it's also about being in relationship with pain, being in relationship with knowing that you're going to be in situations that are contentious, and we can't always avoid that. And I myself don't like conflict. I am a six-foot three Blackfoot Indian man that…it just looks intimidating to a lot of people [laughter], but I hate conflict. I just don't like it, so for me, it's just this interesting…it's been this interesting experience where being involved in this society, I've been able to learn a lot about place-based relational politics and ethics, and teachings. But I've also learned a lot about myself and what it means to do this kind of work. It's really about being in that relationship with, at least for me, that conflict and knowing when it's okay to question, and knowing when it's okay to challenge these kinds of conceptions people may have, but also to know when you are tired and exhausted, and for your own wellbeing you just don't have it in you to continuously do that all the time, and for me, learning that that's okay. At least while I'm involved in this group, I'm acquiring this different knowledge from elders, and I see it as a way for me to start to eventually, what Leanne has been talking about, is about making

ceremony a safe space for others. And so, the way that Blackfoot societies as a governance unit function, are.. that's how we pass down, and still pass down, the knowledge around placed-based, or land-based education. It's not tethered to any kind of western or colonial funding framework…it's a very structured way of passing on knowledge, and so, that has kind of been my way of seeing the best way to acquire this knowledge, and then to start to take up more space, to start challenging a lot of these gendered ways of thinking that reinforce heteronormativity and anti-queer violence. Part of being in this role as well has been that, there was another individual who, and I have permission to share this story, who approached the leader of this society I'm part of, and was able to create a Queer Blackfoot Social Society modelled after traditional Blackfoot governance practices, where it was publicly acknowledged and witnessed at our Sundance ceremony, so it's actually…in many ways recognized now as being part of Blackfoot law. This is a recognized society; we were able to get it recognized at our Sundance. And so, it's still in its infancy, but through creating this we've been able to have more queer Blackfoot folkx come together, and again, it goes back to just talking and sharing our stories. In sharing those stories, it's actually allowed us to create our own world, create our own space, and that goes back to what Riley was saying about some of the queer folks wanting to start their own beading circle. This was…while we want to have not just queer folkx do this kind of work, it's also a desire to have our own space to be able to have these conversations on our own terms without having to worry about having someone interject or question what we're doing. It allows us to be creative and to be in relation with these teachings on our own terms. And so, what we are now planning to do is, we have our own tipi that we set up at the Sundance, every year, and it allows us to make ourselves known to the community that it's not just that we're at the periphery anymore, we are actively at the centre, at the Sundance. So, that's just for me, one of the ways I see this working outside of the other work I do with, working with organizations that are tied to this strict neoliberal funding model. We don't have to worry about that. A lot of it is just what we are able to do. I think for a lot of us, we didn't realize how much influence we can actually make just by relying on each other, and just by bringing our voices together. There's a lot of power that we have, that we don't realize we have. So, this is what I've seen working. Although it's still challenging because we still have to deal with that pushback from the community, but it's something that a lot of people, who are part of that older generation, didn't actually think would be possible in a Blackfoot context. To have a queer Blackfoot social society. So yeah, that's just kind of how I've been thinking through this question.

(1:21:59) LS: That's awesome. Miigwetch for sharing that. Alex?

(1:22:07) AW: Hi there. So, we've kind of covered some of these questions in just our discussion so far, and umm…I was thinking about how, you know,

sometimes our land based education programs, or programming, does kind of replicate colonial structures and I know all of you are working to undo that. It is very difficult sometimes to…when you're working with elders who have such entrenched ideas, whether…I mean, you can't really have a conversation with them and say like, this is colonial violence, because they don't talk that way. So, it's a gentle kind of way forward that we have to follow. One of the things that I've found here anyways is that it takes a lot of time to do that kind of relational vetting, I guess. To see who's going to be working with students, especially younger students, and women or queer people as well. And there have been times when, you know, you go to a community and people tell you right away who to stay away from, and that's been kind of…not a challenge, but I think it's something that's been working here in [name of place] at least. We spend a lot of time knowing our family relations, and who, knowing who's not going to make a joke hopefully, or who's not going to do exclusionary practices. I found that for every person that says, you know, that creates a binary in their ceremonial space. You can go and find someone who doesn't. So that's kind of the hard work that we must do, it's to just accept and then kind of find someone who doesn't do that kind of binary work within a ceremonial space, because sometimes people think it's not as legit, but in fact, it is and those people are out there. So, the next thing that we wanted to kind of talk about…maybe some of the barriers for queer Indigenous people in terms of participating in Indigenous land-based education, and then…Let's just open it up for anyone who wants to speak to that.

(1:24:53) RK: I think it's been touched on earlier, but Leanne mentioned the jokes, and I think, you know, you do just have to pay so much attention to those often kind of causal jokes, or subtle stigmas that come up, and address them when they happen, like you did Leanne. When I told that story about the elders laughing at my kokum scarf, I think I was mature enough and in a place to understand why they were laughing, and I didn't take offence by it. But a student who's not as equipped to deal with that situation might not have taken it that way. And I think, those are the kinds of things that can eat at you and can rain on your overall experience if it's not addressed. So I think establishing, you know, through governance circles, as we do at Dechinta, establishing that you know, you are able to bring things up, that you know, you might be initially shy to bring something up, but for sure, bring anything to the attention of the group that's bothering you because it can ruin things for your experience. I remember [laughter] another story. We were talking about what love in the bush might look like. And I was being forward about what my views, and being open about my sexuality, and we were talking about the term Two Spirit and how it encapsulates a whole bunch of different traditions. I made a joke about, "Yeah I can see myself having a role in the bush with a whole bunch of men [laughter]". And making a joke about…about that and then someone scrunched up their face and said, "Oh you mean like Brokeback Mountain?" And made a joke about that, and a

few of them laughed. I was able to kind of unpack it, and was like, “Actually, I kind of do mean that.” And we were able to talk about that. But I think so…not everyone is going to be equipped to hear a joke like that, or to hear an offhand remark like that, and be able to address it. So, I think yeah…it’s important to think about those things.

(1:27:25) AW: Should we move on to the next question?

(1:27:29) LS: I’m actually just going to have…I have just a couple of things to add. So, in my own work particularly at Dechinta, I see part of my responsibilities as having these more difficult conversations ahead of time with staff, and with elders, to try and prevent and try and create a safer space for students, so that when Riley is rocking his kokum scarf, people are okay with it ahead of time. But also thinking through things like outhouses, bathrooms, swimming, accommodations, and our application forms…thinking through all of those things. Having lots of queer Indigenous staff on site that are actively, and different personalities, as a sort of a diversity, so that everybody like Kyle is talking about…can connect with somebody and feels like they have a space where they will be affirmed and are going to be listened to. Having the governance circles, doing a lot of modelling…The Den e are so much better at this than the Anishinaabe, but because they’re closer to the land, they are also very much like, you need to know, all genders need to know all of the skills as a matter of survival. So, men need to be sewing and cooking in case you’re in the bush alone and you need to do all of those things. Women need to know how to hunt. And then using that, which is binary, but then breaking it down further, and having people model doing all of that, and having folks on site, like Maddy and Riley who are actively jamming any kind of spaces that happen, so that our students are sort of…more immersed in that. I can find somebody…If stuff comes up, they can find somebody they trust that they can talk to. Our next…Alex maybe I’ll just go onto our next question. We sort of talked about how our programs are making the land a safer space, even in terms of…in Max’s lab being like a lunchroom. How’s the pandemic, and how is the move to Zoom based learning, to online learning, impacting all of this? So, this is something that we’ve been really thinking through at Dechinta, where in the North people don’t have access to computers, they don’t have access to internet. The elders and leadership are saying the safest place is on the land. Our institutions are really pushing for online learning, were worried that if we do a really great job with online learning that we’ll never be able to go back on the land again because it’s just cheaper to have webinars [laughter]. I actually found Max’s work because I was trying to think of things that you can do on the land on your own, so what are the opportunities? What are some of the risks? What are the ethics? How are people coping with the pandemic?

(1:30:50) ML: If I can start that would be great because I'm super hungry and I'm going to go soon [laughter] because this has all been my dinner time. So, this has been something that has been…At first, I was like this is amazing. Our entire lab moved online almost overnight with almost no prep. And at first I was like, this is amazing, because what I've been trying to teach these folks for so long is that the land is here, it is your computer, and ignoring that is bad land relations, and your computer is not going to work after a while because you keep ignoring those relations. So, at first I was super pumped and…that it would be a harder lesson but a clearer lesson to talk about how your monitor is in the land relation, and when you are sitting in your room that is a land relation. I had some mentees who were like, well I can't do the steps that we would normally do when we are out on the land. And I'm like, well imagine you are out on the land, what's the first thing you do when it's time to gain knowledge like in this sort of homework sort of thing? And they're like, oh well the first thing you do is listen. And I'm like, okay, that's what you do. The first thing you do is listen, sit there, and listen. And they've probably never in their urban space sat down and actually listened as opposed to block out noise [laughter] before. So, they learned certain things. Okay, what's step number two? Well, long term, slow observation. You know, usually I'd be watching the water or watching the ice or watching the whatever. Okay, well pick something in your space, in your house, and watch it like you would watch the water, and almost everyone in the lab choose a house plant (laughter), which is the… because they weren't quite ready. But one of the students watched the spaces, watched her blinds, like her venetian blinds because she thought I think to watch the quality of the light change over time, but she…at the lab meeting she said, "I was noticing the dust accumulate, and one day, there was red dust, and that was the day I wore my red fuzzy bathrobe all day because I was sad." And I was like, "yes, plastic is a main component of house dust now, and that's new!" And so, we did all these lessons about plastic contamination and house dust, and all the issues that go with plastic pollution in the air you breathe in house dust, and where is the most house dust, on the ground, who's on the ground? Animals and babies, and what does that mean…right? And it worked really well, the way it's supposed to in the bush, so that was really good. But at the same time, I've come to realize there are things I teach that really depend on there being a dead fish there, like really for real, and I can't kind of fake that. And so, there's been a lot of what do we release and what do we not release, and how do we do…if one of the main principles of land based education, or whatever you want to call it, is that you learn in the doing, than what are we doing right now? And that's been something that I need to work on. Like how are we getting our food? In that case, how do we apply the principles of food sovereignty to that when we are not allowed to go to grocery stores? So, there are still some things that I don't know how to work on, but a lot of the…one of the things that I've been talking to Alex about that we are going to do in August, when we both have minutes, is that I use drawing a lot, in

the bush, but it works here. One of the things about drawing, if you learn how to draw properly, "properly", is it's all about seeing. So, one of the exercises, we can actually do one of the exercises right now, do you want to do an exercise right now about seeing in the bush? Okay, so I think it's usually a pine cone in the bush, but I think it works…like if you just choose a part of the room you're room and you look at the slice, the line, between the ceiling and the wall and just try…like it's a line, but try and move your eye very slowly and continuously along that line as if it's a continuous thread, and pay attention to how your eyes, and do it as slow as you can, try and make your eyes move along that smoothly. What happened to your eyes? Did it go so smooth? No, your eyes go in little jerks, and your eyes only go in little jerks. You have never in your life seen a continuous line, it is actually impossible. What happens is your brain fills in between the lines and says, "Oh yeah man, there's lines everywhere, go straight." There is no straight, there has never been straight, all the ways of the world…there has never been straight. Your eyes fill in the blanks, and one of the things I think anti-colonialism, decolonization, land based ed, is that it teaches you to stop listening to your brain and just notice what's happening…because your brain is filling in the gaps, and it's often filling in the gaps with bullshit [laughter], with like binaries, and things you think you already know, but you don't know. You think you've seen a line, but you've never seen a line, and take that as the basis for learning about land. Right? And so, we spend a lot of time drawing and training our eyes to see things without thinking, so that we can do that with other parts of the scientific method, or what I would just call knowing things. So yeah, that's what we do in COVID times, look at lines, try and not to note them [laughter].

(1:36:23) AW: Woah, you just blew my mind there a little bit Max.

(1:36:25) ML: Just you wait till our official drawing lesson Alex, it gets better. That's the intro (laughter).

(1:36:36) AW: Thanks for giving us your time. I know you're having your dinner time there, so thank you so much!

(1:36:45) ML: My pleasure. I'm going to listen for a little while and then I'm going to go get pizza.

(1:36:51) LS: Ryan or Kyle?

(1:36:53) KS: Sure, I can go. Yeah, so how has the pandemic been impacting all of this, and sort of the opportunities and risks involved? I would say the number one way that the pandemic has impacted me or my life, or my work in terms of queering Indigenous land-based education is, pretty specific. The way I think I'm even connected to this call right now is that I actually had a trip planned to Yellowknife, to Dechinta, to come home and see some of my

family and spend a couple of weeks there, and present some of the work that I've done so far in my masters research. It was sort of, part of my preparation process, sort of what Margaret Kovach talks a little bit about, you know that preparation into doing Indigenous research is really developing a relationship with your topic, developing a relationship with yourself and your work. And so, part of that for me was being able to come home to Dene territory to have a bit better understanding of my methodology and epistemology, and my trip was scheduled for March 19th to 31st, and it was that magical March 13th day that everyone remembers when everything seems to officially come to a halt. There wasn't necessarily any kind of travel restrictions or anything like that at the time, but it was just sort of a sense between myself and my partner. You know we've got parkas in a box, food ordered to the post office, Airbnb, and the flights and everything, but we were just like, this just doesn't feel right. Some of the stuff that I was looking forward to doing up in Yellowknife was a conversation with community members, including elders, about gender diversity, about Two Spirit anything in Dene communities. Like what are some of the conversations that have been had? Let's even start to talk about them if they haven't been had. I was really looking forward to getting that experience, and also, I haven't been up to the North since I was like a kid. You know I was really looking forward to being up there in the wintertime and just being on that territory, and unfortunately it was cancelled, so that's one of the ways it's impacted. And also just that…that ability to have that epistemology to inform how I am doing my work…you know like, Dene laws, or like grandfather teachings, just ways of guiding my process in my work, for how to do protocol, those sorts of things are now missed from my work more than they would've been had I spent that time. So now what I'm doing is that I'm trying to cobble together the protocols that I know based on the territories that I've lived on, and participated in, as well as trying to gain any further insight that I can from connecting to family members online, connecting with any sort of online resources like, Dene Journey (?) [laughter], or watching these things to increase my knowledge base so that I can make sure that I have something that is nation-specific to me and informed in my work, and not just in other nations that are not necessarily home to me. So, that's one of the direct ways that it's impacted and kind of thrown off that process for me. But, I would say in terms of the paid work that I do in my role at UBC, the way it's impacted is that, I came into that role in the second or third week of everyone working from home, and so that's the department that I work in…is sort of the department folks go to when they are wanting to take their courses online, and mentoring them through good teaching practices, how to sort of make that transition…and then the smaller department I work in is folks is on Indigenous approaches to pedagogy. And so, so I came in and that was what everyone was taking the opportunity to do. If they weren't doing land acknowledgements in their course work, or in their in-person courses, they needed to start doing this in their online work. It was now a perfect opportunity, so it has been such a

great opportunity to meet with staff around redesigning their program. And for an online format, how do they incorporate Indigenous content? How do they incorporate Indigenous worldview into the ways that they're designing their programs? How do they increase access for Indigenous students and staff and faculty? Increasing the trainings that we now have online. With everything shifting online it's actually created a world of opportunities for those things. At the same time, so much of what informs my work informs the way I approach my work is conversations with elders and witnessing conversations between elders, and that's something I really missed. I've had maybe only one to two chances in the last few months to sit amongst a group of elders…you know I knew that it was something I was missing out on, but then last week the Indigenous education department at UBC had a series of events, and one of the days was tea with elders, and we sat for an hour and a half…you know they're talking about the weather, talking about COVID, but then as you're having those conversations, or witnessing those conversations with elders, is incredible moments of wisdom just come out of conversation, and I had three different moments, or three different things that just landed on my heart that I've been able to carry with me that have actually shifted the way I work, even in just the last week, how I walk through the woods near my house, how I do my relations, how I do my own relation with myself in terms of my own mental health, emotional health, physical and spiritual health. And so, that's been something that's been a bit of a risk because so much of my work relies on elder teachings. And so, as we move online that's really been a decrease, so it's something that I'm really looking forward to having more of when we get back to in-person, and also other supports to ensure we do have more access to conversations with elders online. Mahsi.

(1:42:46) RK: I did just want to mention… Kyle I think you mentioned how your partner was going to come up with you up to Dechinta which I think is so great, I think it's so important for queer partners to also partake in land-based ed. I know Dechinta made a point of bringing families and making space for mothers and those with kids, to bring their whole family up to the land, and I think the same invitation should be extended and encouraged to queer partners, so that students and community members can see queer partners and we can start hacking away at that just being normal. In terms of the pandemic I kind of see two patterns, some people are forging ahead with land-based ed and some people are taking the time to pause, and I think that's very fair and valid to kind of take time to rest and recover, Zoom fatigue is for sure real. Part of powwow, however… very early on we made a decision to move powwow online entirely, we just couldn't ethically take that risk of bringing so many knowledge holders, and elders, and dancers together in one space. We kind of toyed with the idea of doing a social distance powwow where we could livestream it, but even the thought of bringing, say, a hundred dancers together, we just… we didn't want to, we didn't want to. So, we're pre-recording everything, and land-based activities

was actually supposed to be a part of the powwow, we work with Ryerson science department [indistinguishable] Amber Sandy, who is the Indigenous liaison at the SciXchange. We were supposed to do hide tanning at the quad, which is really really powerful because it's right in the middle of campus and there's a fire burning the whole time, and it really just claims space which is so important with Ryerson in particular because it's so urban. But instead of hide tanning, we are making the shift to working with fish skins and fish scales, which is something that anyone can do from home, in fact Amber encourages people to go to a local sushi restaurant and request skins and they're often happy to give you fish skins. And Amber has been actually using Instagram to stream the process for tanning fish to get fish leather and we're also going to be using that in the School of Fashion because I think it's such a beautiful material that you get from the end, and I think students will be happy to engage in that process and design something with that fish skin. And I think you get a lot of those same lessons… persistence, it's just this hard of a process to do, but I think that's one way that you can scale to try and bring land-based ed into people's houses. I think with the caveat that you maybe think through the context (contents?) that accompanies those activities and probably be available for questions because you can't mimic that social setting on the land. And then in [place name –unsure] we were supposed to be working on a food cultivation project particularly with the youth, we were going to be building some rice beds and getting youth involved in gardening, and we hit pause on that project as well. I think in part we're okay with that decision because of the risk involved and I think instead we pivoted to Facebook actually, so many community members are on Facebook, and we just started a group where gardeners can post their own gardens. I think the logic behind that was just getting people excited about gardening and sharing little tidbits of knowledge so that when we do get back, maybe next summer, maybe the summer after that, we have a community of gardeners who are excited to get together and work on kind of a larger community-wide project. Sorry, in terms of the powwow, I think it was also really important that we went online because so many of the organizations in Toronto that would normally be hosting their own Powwows… Native Women's Association, Toronto Men's Residents… they are so focused on frontline services and keeping their clients safe amidst the pandemic, so all of those urban powwows were cancelled so I think it was so important that the University powwow that employs students to be able to work on it, could pivot and do something for the community, because I think, you know, we haven't had powwow trail over the course of the summer and I think people will be looking for excuses to celebrate and to get a glimpse of normalcy again. We still had to honour our grads, we still had to pay community members, and feed people, and take care of people, and were thinking through ways of doing that through social distance methods.

(1:48:06) LS: Ryan?

(1:48:10) RC: Yeah, I mean I think obviously it's this…the challenge has been to…I think the pressure to really quickly shift everything to an online format has been really unfair to a lot of educators, to a lot of people who deliver really good programing, and the expectation that you can just really quickly put it online is…has been really challenging for a lot of people, especially when you kind of risk losing your funding to actually run these programs. And so, I think that's one of the more obvious things happen. But also too like, I don't know…I'm still trying to think through what it means to engage in the digital or online way of being in relation to Indigenous knowledge systems, and I think for a lot of queer folkx, and even myself, when I was younger, I had a hard time trying to find connection with my queer Indigeneity, and the way I did that was actually through building kinship relations with people online. I mean even right now, I don't think I would have ever been able to participate in a panel or a webinar like this just because of how busy things can get, and when we are all in different locations it's always hard for us to gather. And I know a lot of attempts to have a Two Spirit or queer Indigenous gathering of young scholars, even at my own, at UBC, it's been really difficult because a lot of us are in these different locations. We're in the same program, we have the same supervisor, but we've actually never met just because of how crazy and fast paced everything is, and the expectations that are put on us. And so, I think right now, one of the good things that have happened it's allowed a lot of us to be in conversation, albeit in very awkward ways, like it's so weird because I can't even hear myself because I also have noise cancelling headphones, it's just weird trying to have these conversations in this way but it's also, I think…one pathway where we're able to have a lot of these more serious conversations where we wouldn't be necessarily be able to do that outside of a webinar context, you have to think about the cost of hotels, travel, and a lot of us just can't afford to do that. So, I think that's one of the things. The other thing too though is…There's this assumption that a lot of people have…I don't know how I want to enter into this conversation…I'd say in my own community, a lot of people haven't been listening to a lot of the protocols, the health protocols to stay home, and it's complicated, and I find myself in the middle because I obviously know the importance of not spreading this virus, but then when I was talking to some elders in my community they said, "well those are ethical considerations for our human relations, but we also have ethical relations and responsibilities to fulfill with our more-than-human kin, with our ceremonies that just because there's a pandemic doesn't mean that we stop engaging in ceremony and we stop our relationship with the land, that we have to actually keep going." So you have these conflicting conceptualizations of health and wellness, and like just…I think it was in May, there was the Beardy Sundance gathering in Saskatchewan that had a huge RCMP presence that tried to dismantle the ceremony, and that's what I've been seeing in my own community. There's this heightened police presence and you also think about with what's going

on with the Black Lives Matter Movement, and it's almost like this…the RCMP, the police are more emboldened, their more in a fragile state because everyone is watching them. And in that state, there's been a lot more blatant forms of violence that have been popping up. And so, I think that's something I've definitely seen being impacted by COVID. It's that…it's not so much the virus that a lot of people are scared of, it's the heightened police presence and kind of…using this pandemic as a way to justify keeping us off the land, to use it as a way to incarcerate us for practicing our ways, our land-based practices. There's been a lot of people talking about having to bring our…if we have to bring these practices back underground like what happened during Sundance and the Potlatch ban era. And so, even in my own community it's…we're trying to figure out how do we do ceremony, how do we have Sundance because we can't cancel our Sundance, it's never happened before. At least for me, I don't know how to navigate that because there's two different ethical systems, or ethical considerations, going on to not wanting to spread the virus, but then also too, there's certain kinds of ceremonial obligations that you can't just ignore. It's really kind of a…it's a messy thing to try and think about, with what's the best way or appropriate way to go through this, and I don't know. And I've been in situations where somebody in our group tested positive for it, and so there's a lot of fear and stigma happening within our own community. There's a lot of lateral violence that's been going on, and so, it's just a whole host of other challenges with trying to figure out how do we do this work in such complicated times. Yeah, and then the other thing I was thinking of is, my…I have a lot of younger brothers and a niece who are on Tik Tok, and there's like this Indian Tik Tok thing that's like so amazing. I don't know. It would be interesting to look more into this because it's almost like a platform of…being politically aware and celebrating Indigeneity without always having to be in a state of resistance or defending, it's just kind of about celebrating the playfulness or the…that idea of what it means … again going back to what Max said originally, what constitutes queer land based learning, and within an online context, I don't know…I think it's quite interesting to see Tik Tok used as a platform to talk about these things, to engage in certain kinds of land based practices, albeit in not perfect ways, but given the circumstances, I think it's something I would have never thought of being possible before. So yeah, that's just something I've been introduced to that I'm trying to think through. That's just all I have to say.

(1:51:33) LS: Miigwech Ryan. Thank you, when you were talking, it's the Indigenous queer community that has this body of knowledge spanning back centuries now of how to do ceremony differently, and in a safe way, so I feel like…I feel like in COVID, now that it's even more complicated, that's the body of knowledge that we can draw on. Those are the experts in figuring out how to…meet our ethical obligations to our non-human relations while also staying safe. I want to thank everybody for your clear Indigenous brilliance

and for taking the time to spend with us on Zoom. This was a really amazing conversation! I also want to extend an invitation to keep the conversation going. Kyle if you want to figure out a way of presenting your research, and doing that in person thing, online, that would be great. If you are interested in Zooming in to a lecture in the fall semester, we'll be on YKDFN territory, that would also be great. And if the broader group is interested in working towards having a queering the land, land-based gathering at Dechinta, Kelsey has been really adept at getting SSHRC connection grants, so that might be a way of supporting people in 2025 (laughter) when we're allowed to get together again. That might be something we can look forward to on our calendars eventually. So, let us know if you wake up in the middle of the night, and are like oh my god I can't believe I said that, and you want something edited. Let us know how we can support you and your work, and how you want to continue this conversation. And Kelsey will be in touch around honorariums and next steps. So, thanks to everybody and I hope you have a really good evening.