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Exploring the Meanings and Impacts of a Traditional Foods Program with Urban Indigenous Women in London, Ontario, Canada

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in Geography and Environment

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Abstract

As a corrective to historical and ongoing acts of dispossession, Indigenous peoples have engaged in processes of environmental repossession, which refers to various social, cultural, and political processes by which they are reasserting their relationship with their lands so as to create spaces of healing and belonging. Drawing on the Traditional Food Basket (TFB) program offered by the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) in London, Ontario as a case study, the purpose of this research is to explore how urban-based traditional food programming can support Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthen their cultural identities. I undertook a community-engaged approach to qualitatively explore the meanings and impacts of SOAHAC's TFB program among Indigenous women who took part in the program (n=19). Findings demonstrated that the food offered by SOAHAC were meaningful to participants as they represented themes of (a) pride, (b) love, (c) connection (to culture, ancestors, and homes), and (d) health. Interviewees also spoke about the varied impacts of the program on their lives as it (1) enabled the sharing of food with family, (2) supported health, (3) provided financial benefits, (4) supported connection to ancestors and cultures, (5) supported access to traditional foods, and (6) allowed for the discovery of new foods. Findings also suggested that urban Indigenous organizations are places that help to strengthen participants' connection to their Indigenous identities by creating a sense of community, while offering culturally sensitive care and programs that allow for learning or re-learning about cultural practices.

The findings from this thesis highlight the possibilities of urban environmental repossession.

Keywords

Traditional Foods, Urban Indigenous Health, Indigenous Women, Southwest Ontario
Aboriginal Health Access Centre, Environmental Repossession, Indigenous Health
Geographies, Community-Engaged Research

Summary for Lay Audience

Traditional foods are important for the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples. It can, however, be challenging to access these foods in urban areas. The Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC), located in London, Ontario, launched a pilot traditional food basket (TFB) program in 2023 as a way to provide culturally relevant foods to Indigenous peoples in the city. Drawing on SOAHAC's TFB program as a case study, the purpose of this research is to explore how urban-based traditional food programming can support Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthen their cultural identities. Using a community-engaged methodological framework, where decision making powers were shared between the research team and SOAHAC, Indigenous women (n=19) who took part in SOAHAC's TFB program were interviewed. Findings demonstrated that the foods offered by SOAHAC were meaningful to participants as they represented themes of (a) pride, (b) love, (c) connection (to culture, ancestors, and homes), and (d) health. Interviewees also spoke about the varied impacts of the program on their lives as it (1) enabled the sharing of food with family members, (2) supported health, (3) provided financial benefits, (4) supported connection to ancestors and cultures, (5) supported access to traditional foods, and (6) allowed for the discovery of new foods and learning about traditional foods. Findings also suggested that urban Indigenous organizations are places that help strengthen women's connection to their Indigenous identities.

This research is theoretically informed by the concept of environmental repossession, which describes the social, cultural, and political processes by which Indigenous peoples are reasserting their relationship with their land. The findings from

this thesis highlight the possibilities of urban environmental repossession and emphasize the importance of urban Indigenous organizations and their programs in supporting well-being and strengthening Indigenous identities.

Dedication

To SOAHAC

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Chapter 1

1. Introduction

Processes of colonialism and environmental dispossession have uniquely impacted Indigenous women living in what is now known as Canada (Lawrence, 2003). Environmental dispossession describes the processes by which Indigenous people's access to their traditional lands and resources has been reduced or eliminated (Richmond & Ross, 2009). Processes of environmental dispossession can occur in direct or indirect ways. Direct forms of environmental dispossession involve processes that physically disable the use of land, for instance, the contamination of lands that sever access to traditional foods. Indirect forms of environmental dispossession occur as a result of regulations or policies intended to sever Indigenous people's relationship to their traditional lands and resources, as well as the Indigenous Knowledge related to these lands. One example of an indirect form of environmental dispossession is enfranchisement, which describes the legal process by which, for a variety of different reasons, Indigenous people lose their Indian status. The purpose of enfranchisement was to assimilate Indigenous peoples into Canadian society, eliminate Indigenous people's rights, and assert colonial control over Indigenous land (Vowel, 2016). While enfranchisement impacted all Indigenous peoples in Canada, specific gendered rulings under the Indian Act led to unique forms of dispossession of Indigenous women: until 1985, thousands of First Nations women lost their legal Indian status when they married non-Indian men (Lawrence, 2003). Consequently, generations of First Nations women

and their children were banned from reserve-based¹ communities and disconnected from their families (Million, 2008; Gehl, 2000), and dispossessed of their ancestral lands, languages, rights, resources, and the cultural identities and sense of belonging that came with them (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). Affected families subsequently moved to towns and cities, some far removed from their homelands (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). The cultural traumas caused by gender discrimination resulting from the Indian Act are incalculable and intergenerational (Lawrence, 2003).

This social, cultural, and geographic isolation caused by enfranchisement created challenges for affected families, including the ability to access and consume traditional foods (Richmond et al. 2020). Traditional foods are commonly defined as “all food within a particular culture available from local natural resources and culturally accepted” (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996, p. 418). These foods are diverse, nutritious, and hold important social and cultural values within Indigenous communities (Kuhnlein, 2020). Within academia, Wilson & Rosenberg (2002) were among the first geographers to describe the importance of traditional activities such as harvesting traditional foods for the health of Indigenous people. Yet, many Indigenous women no longer live on their ancestral territories where traditional activities more commonly occur and where traditional foods are more easily accessible. Richmond & Big-Canoe (2018) pose the question: “how can Indigenous peoples practice their cultures and Indigenous Knowledge systems in the new spaces and places they occupy?” (p. 185). In this thesis, I am specifically interested in the ways in which urban Indigenous women are coming back to

¹ A reserve refers to a parcel of land, where legal title is held by the Government of Canada, designated for the use of a specific First Nation (Government of Canada, 2023).

their own ways of knowing and practicing their cultures and Indigenous Knowledge Systems. Drawing on the Traditional Food Basket (TFB) program offered by the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) in London, Ontario, as a case study, the purpose of this research is to explore how urban-based traditional food programming both supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identities.

1.1 Research Background and Local Context

SOAHAC is a community health centre in London, Ontario, that provides Indigenous-informed health care to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples, including primary healthcare, traditional healing, and cultural programming (SOAHAC, n.d.). For many years, SOAHAC has been offering food to its clientele, recognizing issues of food insecurity among its clients. For instance, SOAHAC offers fresh produce boxes, Harvest Bucks for local farmers' markets, grocery gift cards, school snack bags, and holiday hampers. Beyond food security, SOAHAC has also been looking at food as a connection to culture and belonging. With this in mind, culturally appropriate food became a focus at SOAHAC (SOAHAC Annual Report, 2023). In 2022, SOAHAC received funding from the London Community Foundation to run a pilot traditional foods program to support access to traditional foods for urban Indigenous peoples. The program has been offering traditional foods to Indigenous peoples in London on a weekly/bi-weekly basis from early 2023 up until January 2024.

This pilot program was conceived by SOAHAC's dietitian, Jocelyn Zurbrigg, based on client input and a long history of health- and food-related collaborative research with clients. SOAHAC has taken part in multiple long-term collaborative research

projects on food security among Indigenous peoples in London and nearby areas (Neufeld et al., 2017; Neufeld et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2021). SOAHAC's TFB program was created to meet the interest of clients, who desired better access to traditional foods. The creation of the program is rooted in years of collaborative work with clients and a focus on Indigenous people's rights to determination in health (SOAHAC, n.d.).

My master's thesis is rooted in ongoing collaborative work with SOAHAC, notably the SOAHAC Food Choice Study, a 10 year-long community-based research project conducted by various researchers in partnership with SOAHAC (Richmond et al., 2021). The purpose of the SOAHAC Food Choice Study was to investigate the geographic and social processes that impact food security and sources of food among reserve-based and urban First Nation peoples living in southwestern Ontario (Neufeld & Richmond, 2017). This study was conducted in two phases. First, a quantitative study was conducted to explore and compare food insecurity between urban and reserve-based Indigenous peoples in southwestern Ontario. Results from this first phase demonstrated that First Nations women with young children were disproportionately experiencing food insecurity, as well as a range of other social determinants of poorer health. The second phase of the study was conducted as a qualitative study examining food choice among mothers and young children (Richmond et al., 2021). Ultimately, the SOAHAC Food Choice Study provided SOAHAC with important social and cultural data to aid them in providing Indigenous peoples in London with relevant food security programming (Richmond et al., 2021). Documenting the impacts of accessing traditional foods for

women in London, Ontario will provide SOAHAC with additional data that will further help them to build culturally relevant food programs.

Many Indigenous peoples living in urban areas of Ontario experience food insecurity (Richmond et al., 2020). Notably, in Thunder Bay, where there is a large urban Indigenous population, food insecurity levels are highest among Indigenous peoples (Levkoe et al., 2019). Across Canada, Indigenous peoples on and off reserve are among the most food insecure (Elliot et al., 2012). In London, Ontario, SOAHAC noted experiences of houselessness, poverty, and hunger contributing to the health and social inequities that Indigenous peoples face (Richmond & Dokis, 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in noted food insecurity among clients at SOAHAC (Richmond & Dokis, 2023). SOAHAC's various food programs aim to support food security, while the pilot TFB program's main objective was to honour the importance of culturally relevant foods.

1.2 Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework that informs this research is that of environmental repossession. Environmental repossession refers to the different ways in which Indigenous peoples are reasserting their relationship and rights to their traditional lands, knowledges, and cultural practices, with a greater purpose of improving health, wellness, and healing. More specifically, environmental repossession describes the “social, cultural and political processes by which Indigenous peoples and communities are reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life” (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014, p.133). Acts of environmental repossession serve in resurgent ways for Indigenous peoples to know and

share their knowledges of and relationships with the land. The knowledge and practices related to Indigenous food systems strengthen well-being, belonging, and identity (Richmond & Dokis, 2023). Indigenous food systems are “a way of life for a given place-based community often shaped by diverse dietary practices, ecological features, geographic variations, and social-political as well as historical experiences” (Settee & Shukla, 2020, p. 4). Processes of dispossession have, however, led to geographic as well as social and cultural exclusion of Indigenous women from their home communities, and have disrupted Indigenous food systems, including the sharing of Indigenous Knowledge related to traditional foods (Lawrence, 2003; Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014; Settee & Shukla, 2020). My thesis employs a community-based approach to examine how SOAHAC’s TFB program might serve as a strategy of environmental repossession among Indigenous women living in London, Ontario.

Past research has presented strategies to support the recovery of land-based practices and knowledge by Indigenous peoples that aim to improve health and restore relationships (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014; Mikraszewicz and Richmond, 2019; Nightingale and Richmond 2022; Robertson & Ljubicic, 2019; Hatala et al., 2019; Morton et al., 2020). These strategies are described as processes of environmental repossession. Most of these processes of environmental repossession have focused on rural and reserve-based Indigenous communities. Importantly, however, the concept of environmental repossession is not limited to rural reserve-based spaces. It is expansive and can be used to understand everyday acts of resurgence across different Indigenous places and spaces. The concept of environmental repossession has been explored in alternate spaces, such as digital spaces, prisons, and spaces of healing, as well as among

Indigenous communities in Aotearoa (New Zealand) and Hawai'i (Reitmeier, 2022; Ambtman- Smith & Richmond, 2020; Peach et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2024). As Indigenous peoples are becoming more and more urbanized, the concept of environmental repossession offers an avenue to re-imagine the relationship between Indigenous peoples, place, and cultural practice. Applied in the context of an urban Indigenous environment, SOAHAC's TFB program offers avenues for health and connection in the city of London, which may be understood as a process of environmental repossession.

1.3 Research Approach

In geographic research involving Indigenous peoples, Louis (2007) emphasises the importance of research contributing to the community involved. Although this thesis offers theoretical contributions relating to environmental repossession within an urban context, the purpose of this thesis is first and foremost to serve as an account of SOAHAC's efforts in supporting their client's health and well-being through their pilot TFB program. To do so, this research took on a community-engaged methodological approach, where decisions making powers are shared amongst community partners and researchers (Castelden et al., 2012). My supervisor and I were invited to help document the community impact of SOAHAC's TFB program. In addition to conducting research on the TFB program, for many months leading up to and during the research phase, I supported the operations of the TFB program, which I describe in detail in Chapter 3. I first came to SOAHAC in January 2023 as a volunteer and I continued to volunteer for the duration of my master's degree. Volunteering allowed me the opportunity to get to know the clients and staff, as well as to better understand the benefits and complexities of

urban Indigenous community healthcare. Spending time with the community that you are partnering with, engaging in conversation with community members, and actively listening and respecting the ideas shared by knowledge-holders are essential to establishing a relationship of trust between researchers and the community partnered in the research (Castelden et al., 2012). In the case of this thesis, my time spent as a volunteer engaging with SOAHAC clients and staff was a crucial step in the research process. I am extremely grateful for how welcoming SOAHAC staff were of me, and for how supportive clients were of the TFB program and this research project.

From August to early December 2023, I interviewed Indigenous women (n=19) who took part in the program to explore how the TFB program supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identities. Although the TFB program was offered to any Indigenous person in the city of London, this research project focuses on the experiences of women who have accessed the program. Indigenous women have unique experiences of dispossession (Lawrence, 2003; Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016; Krouse & Howard, 2009), and have been noted to be disproportionately experiencing food insecurity (Neufeld & Richmond, 2017).

1.4 Study Purpose and Objectives

Drawing from the traditional food basket (TFB) program offered by the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre (SOAHAC) in London, Ontario, as a case study, the purpose of this research is to explore how urban-based traditional food programming supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identities. Based on 19 interviews conducted with women who took part in

SOAHAC's TFB program, this thesis project has two objectives: (a) to explore the meaning and impact of SOAHAC's TFB on the health and well-being of urban Indigenous women, and (b) to examine the people and places that support urban Indigenous women in feeling connected to their identity.

1.5 Chapter Summaries

The remainder of this thesis is presented in four chapters.

Chapter 2: Literature Review: There are various literatures covered by this chapter, including: Indigenous Health Geographies, Environmental Repossession, Food Security in Canada, Traditional Foods, and Indigeneity and the City. Throughout this literature review, I highlight how my research fits into the broader literature on traditional foods, urban Indigeneity, and environmental repossession while also highlighting gaps in knowledge that my thesis seeks to fill.

Chapter 3: Research Design, Methods, and Analysis: This chapter focuses on the community-based research process that I took on in partnership with my supervisor and SOAHAC. I describe the process of coming to SOAHAC as a volunteer and my experience helping to run the TFB program. I also describe the research process and data analysis that took place as I continued to volunteer at SOAHAC. In Chapter 3, there are several key sections, including: Case study: SOAHAC's TFB Program, Research Design, Data Collection, Analysis and Results Interpretation, and Research Limitations.

Chapter 4: Findings: This chapter presents the findings from interviews conducted with Indigenous women who took part in SOAHAC's TFB program. This chapter is organized around four main sections, including: Dispossession and Experiences

Coming into the City, Meanings of Traditional Foods, Impacts of SOAHAC's TFB Program, and People and Places Supporting Indigenous Identities in the City.

Anonymized quotes are used to demonstrate findings as well as tables that quantify the most reoccurring themes from the data.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion: This final chapter discusses and interprets the findings described in Chapter 4, contextualized within the current literature. This chapter briefly summarizes the research findings and discusses the theoretical, methodological, and practical implications of the research. I end this chapter with a short summary of findings, research limitations, and future directions for research. This final chapter is organized into five sections: Key Findings, Theoretical Implications, Methodological Implications, Practical implications, and Conclusion.

Chapter 2

2. Literature Review

Placed disciplinarily within Indigenous health geography, my research is situated at the intersection of a number of research areas. In this chapter, I discuss the literature on: (1) Indigenous Health Geographies, (2) Environmental Repossession (3) Food Security in Canada, (4) Traditional Foods, and (5) Indigeneity and the City. The body of literature covered in this chapter sets the foundation to understand the context of the case study of the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre's (SOAHAC) traditional food basket (TFB) program.

2.1 Indigenous Health Geographies

Indigenous health geography is a relatively new sub-discipline of health geography that focuses on the intersection between Indigenous peoples, health, and the environment. This new sub-discipline centres around the processes that impact the health and environments of Indigenous peoples (Richmond & Big-Canoe, 2018). Indigenous health geography centres Indigenous voices and ensures that communities needs are met within research (Louis, 2007). Indigenous health geography follows a community-centred paradigm where community ideas and concerns are honoured (Richmond & Big-Canoe, 2018). Situated within the discipline of Indigenous health geographies, my thesis is a community-engaged research project that draws on years of scholarship highlighting the importance of community involvement in research (Louis, 2007; Richmond & Big-Canoe, 2018; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008).

Although there is significant diversity among Indigenous peoples, they all share a similar experience of colonization and environmental dispossession. Environmental dispossession describes the processes by which Indigenous people's access to their traditional lands and resources has been reduced or eliminated (Richmond & Ross, 2009). The participants in this research project are no exception and shared various unique and interrelated experiences that are products of colonization and dispossession. In addition to environmental dispossession, a concept that is being used within Indigenous health geography is environmental repossession which refers to the "social, cultural and political processes by which Indigenous peoples and communities are reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life" in support of wellness, healing, and belonging (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014, p.133; Richmond et al., 2024). Placed disciplinarily within Indigenous health geographies and drawing theoretically from the concept of environmental repossession, this thesis will be adding to the literature on Indigenous peoples' well-being, focusing specifically on the experiences of Indigenous women in an urban space.

2.2 Environmental Repossession

My research is theoretically informed by the concept of environmental repossession, a new and emerging concept that is being used in Indigenous health geography (Richmond & Big Canoe, 2018). Environmental repossession describes the "social, cultural and political processes by which Indigenous peoples and communities are reclaiming their traditional lands and ways of life" (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014, p.133). Indigenous peoples have been engaging in acts of environmental repossession as a corrective to historical and contemporary acts of environmental *dispossession*. Environmental repossession has focused largely on reserve-based and rural geographies

(Robertson & Ljubicic , 2019; Mikraszewicz & Richmond, 2019; Nightingale & Richmond, 2022; Nightingale, & Richmond, 2021; Tobias & Richmond, 2016). For instance, Nightingale & Richmond (2021) examined the application of environmental repossession with the Anishinaabe community of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg along the shores of Mountain Lake, a culturally and historically significant place on their ancestral territory. As a way of reclaiming the relationship of the Biigtigong Nishnaabeg with their lands, the Chief and Council of Biigtigong built cabins along the shores of Mountain Lake for community use and then hosted a week-long camp to bring Elders, youth and band staff together. In this case, their findings suggested that these cabins and camp functioned as a process of environmental repossession through reclaiming access to Mountain Lake, reintroducing the community to the land, and re-building community relationships to this land.

While many Indigenous communities maintain ties to their ancestral territories, there are also many that do not (Richmond et al., 2024). Indigenous peoples are now significantly urbanized and so, if environmental repossession is to be useful to Indigenous communities, it must speak to urban Indigenous peoples (Stephens, 2015; Richmond et al., 2024). Recently, research has begun to explore how environmental repossession can be applied in urban spaces. In particular, Richmond et al. (2024) describe the case of Taniwha Club, a youth program for Māori and other Polynesian children in Auckland. The club first emerged as an Indigenous art project, but it transformed into a guerilla gardening ensemble. Before the New Zealand Wars in the 1860s, gardening held significant socio-cultural and economic importance among Māori communities in southern Auckland. Today, the resurgence of guerrilla gardening signifies

an Indigenous effort to reclaim cultural practices. Richmond et al. (2024) argue that everyday practices, such as gardening, are required to make positive change in postcolonial environments, particularly in urban spaces where most Indigenous peoples live.

Repossession offers an avenue to connection to ancestral territories for those who otherwise cannot connect (Richmond et al., 2024). This thesis will be one of the first projects to investigate how accessing traditional foods in an urban area can be understood as a form of environmental repossession and will be adding to the emerging literature exploring the possibilities of environmental repossession in a city landscape.

2.3 Food Security in Canada

My research fits into the broader research on food security. Food security exists when “people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and enable an active and healthy life” (Canadian International Development Agency, n.d., p.1). Settee & Shukla (2020) added that to be food secure enables access to land and water and allows individuals to retain cultural knowledge.

In 2016, Skinner et al. published a review of the literature on food insecurity for Indigenous peoples in urban settings in Canada, the United States, and Australia. Food security was identified as a concern for urban Indigenous peoples in all three countries (Skinner, 2016). Nine out of the 16 papers reviewed mention accessing traditional foods in urban spaces, and six of the nine were based on research conducted in Canada (Brown et al., 2008; Cidro et al., 2015; Elliot et al., 2012, Lardeau et al., 2011; Ford et al., 2012; Kerpan et al., 2015). Although over 50% of the Indigenous population in all three of the

countries reviewed resides in urban areas, only 16 articles met the inclusion criteria of Skinner et al. (2016). This means that little research has been conducted on food insecurity for Indigenous peoples in urban areas. Moreover, food insecurity related to a lack of access to traditional foods has received little attention (Cidro & Martens, 2015). A gap in both urban Indigenous health studies and urban Indigenous food security studies has been noted (Eades et al., 2010; Richmond & Big-Canoe, 2013).

In Canada specifically, Indigenous peoples are more likely to experience food insecurity than non-Indigenous peoples (Richmond et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2021). Richmond et al. (2020) found that urban-based Indigenous peoples in southern Ontario experienced higher levels of food insecurity than reserve-based Indigenous peoples. Urban-based Indigenous peoples were also more likely to frequent soup kitchens and to utilize food banks compared to reserve-based Indigenous peoples in Southern Ontario (Richmond et al., 2020). These findings reflect a similar finding by Tam et al. (2014), that urban-based Indigenous peoples accessed emergency food services more often than rural or reserve-based Indigenous peoples in Canada.

2.4 Traditional Foods

2.4.1 What are Traditional Foods?

Traditional foods are commonly defined as those within a particular culture, available from the local natural environment, often harvested from the land or water and culturally accepted (Kuhnlein & Receveur, 1996; Settee & Shukla, 2020). For instance, for the Haudenosaunee, corn, beans, and squash are some of their traditional foods (Delormier et al., 2017). Other traditional foods include wild rice, berries, and wild meat

(Kerpan et al., 2015; Richmond et al., 2020). Traditional foods are part of larger traditional food systems, which include “the sociocultural meanings, acquisition/processing techniques, use, composition, and nutritional consequences for the people using the food” (Kuhnlein and Receveur, 1996, p. 418). As traditional food systems evolve among different communities with specific geographic, historical, and cultural contexts, traditional food systems are best defined by the community itself (Settee & Shukla, 2020).

2.4.1 Indigenous Foodways and Colonial Control

Settler colonialism has significantly disrupted Indigenous food systems over the past 500 years (Robin et al., 2021, p. 2). Traditional food knowledge and practices were lost due the destruction of lands, water, and animals by settler colonisers (Robin et al., 2021). There is a long history of state authorities controlling access to food in Canada. For instance, the confinement of Indigenous peoples to reserves and the imposition of hunting regulations served as a way to sever connection to land and allow for more land to be available for colonial agriculture (Robin et al., 2021). The imposition of residential schools in Canada also led to loss of Indigenous knowledge and traditions. Children in residential schools experienced lack of food, starvation, and punishments related to food (TRC, 2015; Howard, 2014). The experience of hunger in residential schools was a reoccurring theme in testimonies shared by survivors (Mosby & Gollway, 2017). In addition to the experience of hunger in residential schools, these “schools” also caused the loss of knowledge related to traditional foods and Indigenous food systems (Robin et al., 2021). Children were taught that traditional foods and Indigenous cultures were inferior (Howard, 2014; Robin et al., 2021). The control and destruction of Indigenous

food systems also led to health impacts. The dietary change from a diverse diet that is hunted, gathered, fished and gardened to a government commodity issued diet and store-bought diet is associated with increased levels of diabetes among Indigenous peoples (Howard, 2014).

2.4.2 Benefits and Challenges of Accessing Traditional Foods in Urban Settings

Access to traditional foods has been identified as a means to promote health and well-being (Cidro et al, 2015; Elliot et al, 2012; Foley, 2005; in Skinner, 2016) and cultural learning in urban spaces (Cidro et al, 2015; Kerpan at al, 2015; in Skinner, 2016). The cultural benefits of accessing traditional foods in urban spaces is described in more detail in section 2.4.5. The harvesting, preparation, and consumption of traditional foods is also important for the preservation of Indigenous Knowledge. Although Battiste and Henderson (2000) challenge the need to define Indigenous Knowledge, for the purpose of this thesis, Indigenous knowledge can be understood as “the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 42).

Accessing traditional foods in urban areas, however, is challenging for many urban-based Indigenous peoples in Canada (Brown et al, 2008; Cidro et al, 2015; Elliot, 2012; Richmond et al., 2020; Cidro & Martens, 2015). Colonization and acts of environmental dispossession have been identified as challenges for urban Indigenous peoples in accessing traditional foods (Richmond et al., 2020; Elliot et al., 2012, Hanemaayer et al., 2020; Neufeld et al., 2017). Distance and disconnect from non-urban or reserve-based relations, as well as loss of skills for acquiring and preparing traditional

foods, are all obstacles to taking part in traditional food systems that urban Indigenous peoples sometimes face (Skinner et al., 2016; Elliot et al., 2012; Hanemaayer et al., 2020).

2.4.3 Research on Traditional Foods in Urban Geographies

To date, most research on food insecurity and access to traditional foods has focused on rural and northern-based communities (Richmond et al., 2021; Elliot et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2016; Hanemaayer et al., 2020). Yet, access to traditional foods is in fact higher in northern and western Canadian regions and lowest in the most Southern regions of Canada (Hanemaayer et al., 2020). There is a need for more research on food security and access to traditional foods in urban southern Canada (Hanemaayer et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2021), which is why documenting the impact of SOAHAC's pilot project is necessary. Research on traditional foods has predominately been done quantitatively, with a focus on the amount of food consumed. Little research has been done on the experience of having access to traditional foods and people's attitudes to traditional foods (Cidro et al., 2016; Hanemaayer et al., 2020). My research, which is qualitative, will aim to fill this gap by exploring how accessing traditional foods can support the well-being of urban Indigenous women and strengthen their Indigenous identities in urban areas.

The current Canadian literature on urban food security and traditional foods emphasize the importance of access to traditional foods for both food security and Indigenous food sovereignty (Cidro et al., 2015; Elliot et al., 2012). Food sovereignty, broadly, refers to "the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food

produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems” (Sélingué, 2007 in Coté, 2016, p.8). Morrison (2011) has identified four main principles that guide food sovereignty: self-determination, the recognition that food is sacred, participation in food systems, and supportive legislation and policy. Approaches that support both the economic and cultural dimensions of food security have been noted as necessary to improve food security in Southern Canada (Richmond et al., 2021). Access to and consumption of traditional foods have been identified as more challenging for those who moved from a reserve to an urban area (Brown et al., 2008). Brown et al. (2008) note that the main reason for this challenge is the lack of sharing of foods in urban areas. Gendron et al. (2016), in their research on Indigenous food networks in Saskatchewan, found that there was a strong interest in both better access to and education on traditional foods. While the majority of First Nation adults across Canada would like to consume traditional foods more often (First Nations Food, Nutrition, & Environment Study in Hanemaayer et al., 2020), Richmond et al. (2020) found that urban-based Indigenous people were in fact interested in consuming traditional foods more often than reserve-based Indigenous peoples. Further, both Hanemaayer et al. (2020) and Kerpan et al. (2015) noted that urban Indigenous youth desire to consume more traditional foods.

2.4.4 Examples of Current Traditional Food Programs in Ontario

The Meno Ya Win Health Centre in Sioux Lookout, Ontario is an example of another health centre in Ontario running a traditional food program. This extended health facility offers Miichim (traditional foods) to patients twice a week. If patients would like to have a daily traditional diet, they are also offered prepared frozen Miichim meals. All

the traditional foods offered to patients, including wild meat, is donated by hunters and gatherers (Meno Ya Win, n.d.; Robin et al., 2021).

Little research has been published on urban traditional food programs although there are organizations in Canada that offer traditional foods. Similar to SOAHAC's farm box program in London, the White Owl Native Ancestry Association offers fresh food to Indigenous families in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of Ontario. The White Owl Native Ancestry Association is an urban Indigenous organization dedicated to "culturally safe, wholistic practices and education, supporting well-being across generations" (White Owl, n.d.). This association is partnered with Wisahkotewinowak, an urban Indigenous garden collective that grows medicines and produce such as tobacco and the three sisters: corns, beans, and squash (Wisahkotewinowak, n.d.). In the fall of 2023, I partnered with Wisahkotewinowak and received squash and other vegetables that we gave out as part of the weekly TFB. In Toronto, Ontario, Dashmaawaan Bemaadzinjin (They Feed the People) an Indigenous catering service, provides traditional meals to Indigenous people as well as houseless people in the city (Munoz, 2022).

One example of urban traditional food programming that has been explored in academia is the Urban Aboriginal Garden Project in Vancouver, British Columbia. This urban garden project was established in 2005 with the aim of being a culturally and community-appropriate health promotion project (The University of British Columbia, n.d.; Mundel and Chapman, 2010). Each year, the Urban Aboriginal Garden Project serves 300-400 urban Indigenous peoples living in the Vancouver area. Among the project's activities is growing and harvesting traditional foods and medicines (Mundel &

Chapman, 2010). Mundel and Chapman (2010) suggest that, because it centers on Indigenous approaches to healing, this project can be understood as an example of decolonizing health promotion.

2.4.5 Cultural Impacts of Accessing Traditional Foods

With regard to the impact of traditional foods in urban spaces, Cidro et al. (2015) found that access to traditional foods contributes to a sense of connection to land through reciprocity. Specifically, Cidro et al. (2015) noted the reciprocal sharing of knowledge and traditional foods in cities. Similarly, traditional foods have been identified as culturally important because of the ways in which they support connections to nature, as well as foster sharing among individuals (Receveur et al., 1998 in Cidro et al., 2015). Sharing traditional foods was viewed as a cultural experience (Brown et al. 2008) and sharing country food (the preferred term for traditional foods for Inuit) was noted as important for maintaining kinship ties and relationships as well as for one's well-being (Lardeau et al. 2011). Hanemaayer et al. (2020) explained that youth identified traditional foods as important for their cultural and their collective knowledge. Eating traditional food was also associated with the pleasure that youth associated with their culture and family (Kerpan et al., 2015). Baskin et al. (2009) identified the difficulties that Indigenous women experience in accessing traditional foods in their city as problematic, because their culture was tied to these foods and they hoped to transfer the knowledge associated with these foods to their children. My research will be adding to the literature on the impacts of accessing traditional foods and on the possibilities for reclaiming Indigenous identities that traditional foods can bring in a Canadian urban context.

2.5 Indigeneity and the City

Since the 1960s, the Indigenous population in Canada has increased, particularly in urban areas (Newhouse, 2011, p.51). More than half of the 1.4 million Indigenous peoples living in Canada today reside in urban spaces, located away from their reserves, communities, and ancestral lands (Siggnier and Costa, 2005, as cited in Hatala et al., 2019). Urban spaces are not widely viewed as Indigenous spaces. Indigenous peoples have been (and still are) stereotyped as people who live “out there” in rural areas (Hatala et al., 2019). Today, however, more and more Indigenous youth associate a sense of home and belonging with urban rather than rural or remote geographies (Environics Institute, 2010 as cited in Hatala et al., 2019). Indigeneity is not exclusive to rural or reserve-based spaces. Exploring traditional foods and the experiences of Indigenous women in an urban space can help dismantle stereotypical expectations of what it means to be Indigenous, and add to the growing research on Indigenous resurgence in urban spaces (Howard-Wagner, 2021).

2.5.1 Indigenous Women and Environmental Dispossession

Processes of colonialism and environmental dispossession have uniquely impacted Indigenous women (Lawrence, 2003). Between 1875 and 1986, section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act declared that any First Nations woman who married a non-Indian man would lose her legal Indian status (Lawrence, 2003). Section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act targeted First Nations women, with severe impacts on their lives, specifically geographic impacts: when a woman lost status, she subsequently lost her right to reside on her reserve. Consequently, many Indigenous women moved to cities and towns, some far removed from their ancestral lands (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016; Krouse & Howard,

2009). Importantly, if a First Nations man married a non-Indian woman, he did not lose his status (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). Beginning in the 1890s, this gendered policy led to slightly more Indigenous women than men moving from rural reserves to urban areas in Canada (Krouse & Howard, 2009). The Indian Act, which is still in place today, can be understood as first and foremost a geographic piece of legislation (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). Desbiens and Lévesque (2016) have described the discriminatory policy of the Indian Act as an act of gendering space. Today, geographic as well as social and cultural exclusion from their home communities limits urban Indigenous women's ability to engage with traditional food systems (Neufeld et al., 2017). Krouse & Howard (2009) explain that the impact of Indigenous women's legal and political status on urbanization in Canada needs further examination.

There are many different ways that Indigenous people lost status under the Indian Act, through a legal process called enfranchisement. Enfranchisement was used as a way to assimilate Indigenous peoples, extinguish their rights, and establish colonial control over lands (Vowel, 2016). In 1985, Bill C-31 was passed as an amendment to the Indian Act to end the process of enfranchisement. Up until Bill C-31 was passed, for 116 years, Indigenous women and their children were targets for loss of status under the Indian Act (Vowel, 2016). Bill C-31, however, did not actually reverse the sexism inherent in Section 12 (1) (b) of the Indian Act. Women who were enfranchised and then regained status under bill C-31 were not able to pass down status to future generations in the same way that men with status were able to. In section 6 of the Indian Act, two categories of status, 6(1) and 6(2), determine whether the child of a person with status will have status or not. Under Section 12 (1) (b), men with status who married a woman without status,

maintained their status and in fact passed their status to their non-status partner. Their children will be assigned 6(1) status, which means that their grandchildren will also have status. When women had their status reinstated under Bill C-31, however, they were given 6(1) status, but their children were given 6(2) status. This meant that if their children did not marry someone with status, their grandchildren would not have status. Therefore, the children of Bill C-31 were still impacted by the gender of their parent who were enfranchised and then had their status reinstated (Vowel, 2016). A new bill, Bill C-3, came into law in 2010 to address the inherent gender discrimination that still existed under Bill C-31. Sharon McIvor, a lawyer and member of the Lower Nicola Band in British Columbia, launched a court battle which resulted in Bill C-3 (Vowel, 2016; McIvor et al., 2018). Generations of First Nations people have been impacted by the gender discrimination in the Indian Act, which was central to the process of colonialism in Canada (Lawrence, 2004). The same women who endured the consequences of gender discrimination in the Indian Act, as well as other women in solidarity, organized and mobilized to dismantle the gender inequity that was long ignored and denied by the Canadian government (Million, 2008; Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016).

2.5.2 Indigenous Women: Place- and Space-Making in Cities

Research on urban Indigenous peoples in Canada and the United States began in the 1960s. The focus of this initial research was on assimilation and the assumption that urban Indigenous peoples would “blend” into the city (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. iiiii). It was not until the 1970s that researchers acknowledged that assimilation had not occurred,

based on the ongoing presence of Indigenous peoples identifying as Indigenous in city spaces. Research began to focus on the organizations that Indigenous peoples had created in urban areas. In the 1990s, researchers moved to focus on the communities that Indigenous peoples have formed in cities (Krouse & Howard, 2009). This thesis describes experiences of dispossession among urban Indigenous women. At the same time, it also discusses the importance of Indigenous women in supporting community and strengthening urban Indigenous identities. This section briefly describes the role of Indigenous women in creating places of belonging in cities.

Although there has been a rise in research that focuses on Indigenous women since the 1980s, very little of this research has focused on urban Indigenous women (Krouse & Howard, 2009). Krouse & Howard (2009) explain that the activism of Indigenous women has been vital in the formation of community in cities. Indigenous women's activism in city spaces can be seen in their participation in political movements as well as in their roles "behind the scenes", where they act as keepers of traditions (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. x). These traditions are the foundation on which Indigenous urban organizations have been created in urban spaces (Krouse & Howard, 2009).

Until 1980, according to Green (1980) the role of Indigenous women in urban Indigenous networks was left unstudied. Price (1968) was the first to research urban Indigenous organizations, followed by Fiske (1979). They researched the impact of Indigenous kinship and friendship structures as well as the impact of federal policies on urban Indigenous organizations (Krouse & Howard, 2009). Liebow (1991) expanded on Price (1968) and Fiske's (1979) research by studying how urban institutions help shape

communities. In the 1970s, studies begin to recognize the agency of Indigenous peoples in creating urban communities, rather than focusing exclusively on urbanisation as something that “happens” to Indigenous peoples (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. xii). In the 1990s, research began to emerge on the experiences of Indigenous peoples in cities and on communities as both a source of empowerment and a form of culture generation. For instance, Weibel-Orlando looked at the community built through different Indigenous organizations in Los Angeles (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. xii).

Other researchers focused specifically on the experiences of women in urban spaces. Fogel-Chance (1993) investigated the sharing networks created among Inupiat women living in Anchorage, Alaska. Griffen (1992) focused on the experience of Navajos women working in Flagstaff, Arizona. Joe and Miller (1994), on the other hand, looked at the experience of Indigenous women in adapting to living in the city of Tucson, Arizona (Krouse & Howard, 2009, p. xiii).

Krouse & Howard (2009) compiled a book on community work and activism among Indigenous women in Canadian and American cities. In one essay, Howard (2009) described her research focused on community building in Toronto, Ontario, by Indigenous women. She notes that the women in her study were able to acquire a building to use as a community centre. They also organized and delivered social services and influenced policy relating to Indigenous urbanization. Finally, they helped counter negative imagery of urban Indigenous peoples. Howard’s work, once again, emphasizes the role of Indigenous women in place-making in urban centres. The idea of “making a place” for Indigenous peoples is a reoccurring theme in Krouse & Howard’s (2009) book.

Wright (2009) describes how the formation of the American Indian Women's Service League and the Seattle Indian Centre by Indigenous women supported the reclamation of Indigenous place and space in Seattle, Washington. Similarly, Krouse (2009) describes how the creation of the Indian Community School in Milwaukee by Indigenous women was also an act of reclaiming Indigenous space. The Indian Community School came to life through the takeover of the United-states abandoned Coast Guard station in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Although the takeover was done by men, it is Indigenous women who made the site into a longstanding community organization that serves the children and Indigenous community of Milwaukee. The staff, teachers, board members and founders have been women for the most part. Yet, the role of Indigenous women is not acknowledged in the American Indian Movement (Krouse, 2009). In an increasingly urban world, Krouse & Howard (2009) explain that the stories of urban Indigenous peoples need to be told. Understanding how Indigenous communities are built in cities can help us better understand the experiences of urban Indigenous people.

2.6 Chapter Conclusion

Traditional foods support the well-being and health of Indigenous peoples. For Indigenous peoples living in southern Canada, access to traditional foods can be particularly challenging (Hanemaayer et al., 2020). Hanemaayer et al. (2020), recommended that more community-based research exploring the perceptions and experiences of traditional foods and the determinants of traditional food consumption among Indigenous peoples living in urban areas in southern Canada should be conducted.

This research will be adding to our understanding of the meanings of traditional foods and the impacts of having access to these foods in urban spaces for Indigenous women.

Nightingale (2022) argued that there is a need for research to consider how environmental repossession can be applied in different Indigenous environments, particularly in urban spaces and among Indigenous peoples who are no longer located on their ancestral lands. She further argued that future research should explore how environmental repossession can function through “practices, proxies, and structures” that are not land-based (p. 142). This thesis aims to add to a growing body of literature on environmental repossession, focused specifically on how it can be applied in urban spaces and through food as a proxy to land.

Chapter 3

3. Methods

The research for this thesis employed a community-engaged approach to explore how urban-based traditional food programming can support Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthen their cultural identities, drawing on the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre's (SOAHAC) traditional food basket (TFB) program as a case study. This chapter outlines the approach I took to meet my two research objectives: (1) exploring the meaning and impact of SOAHAC's TFB program on the health and well-being of urban Indigenous women, and (2) examining the people and places that support urban Indigenous women in feeling connected to their Indigenous identities. This research project is embedded in a relational approach that builds on my supervisor's, Prof. Chantelle Richmond, long-lasting relationship with SOAHAC, and involves my own relationship with SAOAHAC, developed throughout the time of my master's degree. This chapter describes the data collection and the process of analysis, but perhaps most importantly, it describes the relationship building that was crucial in allowing this project to come to fruition.

This chapter is divided into 6 sections: (1) Case Study: SOAHAC's TFB program (2) Research Design, (3) Data Collection, (4) Analysis & Results Interpretation, (5) Research Limitations, and (6) Chapter Conclusion.

3.1 Case Study: SOAHAC's TFB Program

Creswell (2014) defines case studies as “a qualitative design in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals” (p. 241). De Vaus (2001) suggests that the unit of analysis in case study research is varied, as it can be an individual, a community, an organisation, an event or even a decision. In this case, SOAHAC's TFB program is the unit of analysis. A case study can be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory. Explanatory case studies explain ‘why’ or ‘how’ certain conditions come into being (Yin, 2104). As my research question is about *how* urban-based traditional food programming can support Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthen their cultural identities, this case study would be considered an explanatory case study. Below I give a brief account of the origins of SOAHAC, the conception of the TFB program, and past research done in partnership with SAOHAC.

3.1.1 SOAHAC (Research Site)

SOAHAC, in the city of London, Ontario, is an Indigenous-informed health care centre that has been operating since 1998. SOAHAC offers culturally aware holistic care to Indigenous peoples in the London area (SOAHAC Annual Report, 2023). Similar to Native Friendship Centres, it can be understood as an organisation that can help to strengthen Indigenous identity in an urban space. SOAHAC's vision is to promote “a healthy balanced life through mental, physical, spiritual and emotional well-being” (SOAHAC, n.d., p.1). Beyond primary care, SOAHAC provides traditional healing programs based on clients' expressed interest in taking part in cultural practices (SOAHAC, 2022).

3.1.2 SOAHAC'S TFB Program

In 2022, SOAHAC received funding from the London Community Foundation to run a pilot traditional food program to support access to traditional foods for urban Indigenous peoples. The program offered baskets of traditional foods to Indigenous people in London on a weekly or bi-weekly basis from early 2023 up until January 2024. The baskets were filled with different traditional foods from across Canada. SOAHAC's pilot traditional food program aids in addressing food insecurity, but most importantly, it provides a way for urban Indigenous people in London to engage with foods that are tied to cultural practices and Indigenous Knowledge. Throughout this chapter, I explain in more detail the functioning of the TFB program and how the baskets were prepared.

3.1.3 Prior Research with SOAHAC

My MA thesis builds on the SOAHAC Food Choice Study, a 10 year-long community-based research project conducted by various researchers in partnership with SOAHAC (Richmond et al., 2021). The purpose of the SOAHAC Food Choice Study was to investigate the geographic and social processes that impact food security and sources of food among reserve-based and urban First Nation peoples living in southwestern Ontario (Neufeld & Richmond, 2017). This study unfolded in two phases. First, a quantitative study was conducted to explore and compare food insecurity between urban and reserve-based Indigenous peoples in southwestern Ontario. Results from this first phase found that First Nation women with young children were disproportionately experiencing food insecurity. Based on this finding, the second phase of the study was conducted as a qualitative study examining food choice among mothers and young children (Neufeld & Richmond, 2017). Ultimately, the Food Choice Study provided

SOAHAC with important social and cultural data to aid them in providing Indigenous people in London with relevant food security programming (Richmond et al., 2021).

Documenting the impacts of accessing traditional foods for women in London, Ontario will provide SOAHAC with additional data that will further help them build culturally relevant food security programs.

3.2 Research Design

For this project, I conducted qualitative research, informed by an Indigenous research paradigm that is grounded in the idea that knowledge is relational (Wilson, 2001). My research is a community-engaged project. Community-engaged research is an approach where decision making about the research process is shared between researchers and the community involved (Castleden et al., 2012). The core tenets of community-engaged research in partnership with Indigenous communities are based on Kirkness & Barnhardt's (1991) four R's: respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility. Community-engaged research is commonly used when conducting research in partnership with Indigenous communities and can contribute to decolonizing academia (Dadich et al., 2019). As suggested by Kirkness & Barnhardt (1991), community-engaged research should aim to produce meaningful and tangible results for community members. Importantly, community-engaged research must be driven by community needs and interests (Tobias et al., 2013). Kovach (2021) explains that in Indigenous research, either of two options need to be present: direct community engagement and/or benefit to an Indigenous community.

The TFB program was created to meet the interest SOAHAC clients had expressed in having access to culturally relevant traditional foods. With the aim of supporting the continuation of SOAHAC's TFB program, I focused on two main tasks: (1) helping to run SOAHAC's TFB program by volunteering at SOAHAC and (2) conducting interviews with women who took part in the TFB program. Below is a detailed description of the steps and procedures involved in these activities.

3.2.1 Indigenous Methodological Framework

When engaging with an Indigenous methodological framework, Wilson (2001) explains that researchers should be asking themselves: "How am I fulfilling my role in this relationship?" and "What are my obligations in this relationship?" (p. 177). Therefore, as I explored how SOAHAC's TFB program supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identities, my main focus was on upholding and cultivating my relationship with the SOAHAC community. Within the discipline of geography, Louis (2007) describes Indigenous methodologies as an alternate way of thinking about research. She explains:

"If research does not benefit the community by extending the quality of life for those in the community, it should not be done. Geographers need to start building ethical research relationships with Indigenous communities. By doing so geographers will contribute to the body of knowledge about Indigenous peoples and their relationship to the places where they live, those cultural landscapes infused with meaning." (Louis, 2007, p.131)

Above all else, I hope this research provides relevant information for SOAHAC to use as they seek funds to continue the TFB program. In the section that follows, I describe the process of coming to SOAHAC and my time spent as a volunteer. I also describe some of the challenges that arose while helping with the TFB program.

3.2.2 Community-Engaged Research

This research is built on an ongoing relationship between the Indigenous Health Lab at Western University and SOAHAC. The project follows previous research conducted by Dr. Chantelle Richmond in partnership with SOAHAC (Richmond et al., 2020; Richmond et al., 2021; Neufeld et al., 2017; Neufeld & Richmond, 2020). As I undertook this specific research project, I was brought into a long-lasting and ongoing relationship established by my supervisor, Dr. Chantelle Richmond, and SOAHAC.

Prior to data collection, and in line with community-based participatory research procedures (Castleden et al., 2012), I volunteered weekly with SOAHAC's food programs beginning in January 2023. This allowed me to foster a relationship with the SOAHAC staff and community members before I began data collection. Although volunteering at SOAHAC does not alter my positionality, by forming relationships with the SOAHAC community, including staff and clientele, I was better able to understand the needs of SOAHAC's clients. Volunteering also allowed me to learn about the services offered by SOAHAC, the challenges clients face, and the ways in which SOAHAC addresses these challenges.

Led by Jocelyn Zurbrigg, SOAHAC's head Registered Dietitian and Diabetes Educator, SOAHAC offers three separate food programs: (1) the Farm Box, (2) the Emergency Food Hub, and (3) the TFB program. The latter was a pilot program, funded by the London Community Foundation, which ran from January of 2023 to January of 2024. As a volunteer, I helped with all three programs, particularly focusing on the TFB Program. SOAHAC also offers holiday hampers, which include food to prepare a holiday

meal, as well as back to school snack bags for families with children (SOAHAC Annual Report, 2023).

3.2.3 Researcher Positionality

My positionality inherently shapes how I see the world, and therefore also shapes how I approach research. Reflecting on my own positionality by asking myself “Where am I speaking from?”, and “And how am I connected to what I am researching?” allows for me to have better awareness of my own role and place in my research. Reflecting on positionality can help researchers question the idea that there is an objective way to see and understand the world. This reflection can also help us to contest the idea that western ways of doing research are the only correct and acceptable ways to engage in the creation and the sharing of knowledge. This awareness is important for conducting respectful research. Reflection on positionality in research does not centre the researcher; rather, it allows the researcher to better understand their own strengths and limitations.

I grew up in Tiohtià:ke (Montreal), which is on Kanien'kehà:ka territory. One factor that led me to this research is first and foremost my interest in the environment. I was always curious about the environment, but my time working at a sleep-away camp in the Laurentians in Quebec solidified my desire to pursue an education that relates to the environment in some way. I am forever grateful for the woods and the lake that make up my camp, as well as the community of people that make it feel like home. My experience there fostered in me a sense of care for the natural world and helped me to realize how much our environment shapes us as people, and the importance of the community that spaces can provide. It is at the root of my research interests.

Based on my interest in the environment, I decided to concentrate on Environmental Studies in Cégep. Many of my courses were focused on Indigeneity. This was the most important turning point for me, and what led me to be interested in taking part in community-based Indigenous research today.

One of my Cégep teachers was the first person who made me aware of the hyper-focus on damage-centered research within Indigenous scholarship. He invited me to take a step back from focusing on the study of damage in research, which was another important turning point for me. Reading Tuck's (2009) "Suspending Damage: A Letter to Communities" for the first time was also critical in enabling me to re-think how Indigenous research has been conducted, and how it could be conducted in the future. As I progressed through my bachelor's degree, I realized that the research that inspires me the most is action-based, and strives to address inequities using collaborative and reconciliatory practices. I feel very grateful that today, I am able to take part in research that is community-based.

My undergraduate degree gave me the opportunity to study cases involving humans and their relationships to the natural world. The further I pursued the study of the environment, the more I realized that most of the concepts that I was interested in were based on pre-existing Indigenous Knowledge and worldviews. I became interested in research that focused on the connection between racial and environmental justice. All these experiences have led me here, as an invited settler in an Indigenous research context.

This research explores various topics, including food and gender. Through my involvement with the TFB program and conducting interviews with participants, I

became more aware of the significance of food. What particularly stood out to me was how we can care for one another through food. Although love is rarely discussed in academic research, it emerged as a theme in this project. While some participants talked about traditional foods representing love, I also got to see how much care and love SOAHAC staff showed to their clients by cooking for them and sharing food and recipes. This allowed me to think more about my own relationship to food. Being away from my family for grad school made me realize how much I miss being able to stop by my parents' house for a meal. I think one of the ways my dad shows love is through food. I believe my dad's passion for cooking is inspired by his father, my grandfather, who loved many things, especially food! As I spent more and more time at SOAHAC, I was particularly interested in the role of women in community building throughout this project. I am grateful to my mum, whose interests in gender studies and feminism have inspired me and shaped my own interest in equity-focused research. I am extremely grateful for having been able to take part in SOAHAC's traditional food program, and for the kindness that SOAHAC staff and clients have shown to me since I became involved in this project.

3.2.4 The Role of the Researcher and Community Relations

Since January of 2023 and throughout my master's degree, I volunteered for the farm box program at SOAHAC. This program entails preparing boxes of produce and then distributing them to those who signed up each week. Fresh produce was dropped off at SOAHAC from Turner's farm in Ingersoll, Ontario. Jocelyn and I, as well as any available staff and volunteers would divide the food up into boxes that would then be picked up by clients throughout the day. Although part of my time at SOAHAC was

spent volunteering for the farm box program, I spent a significant portion of my time preparing the food baskets for the TFB program and distributing them. Between January 2023 and November 2023, on a weekly or bi-weekly basis, I ordered traditional foods from a range of suppliers. I prepared around 50 baskets and distributed them to SOAHAC clients on Thursdays. The traditional food baskets were offered weekly from March 2023 to August 2023 and bi-weekly from September 2023 and January 2024. The baskets usually contained 8 or 9 items. Some foods included in the baskets were: wild rice, maple syrup, honey, strawberries, blueberries, tea, white corn, elderberry syrup, bison, venison, salmon, and pickerel. While some of the foods ordered and distributed were sourced by me, many were recommended to me by SOAHAC staff or by Abby Feather, a previous research assistant for Dr. Chantelle Richmond who worked at SOAHAC.

Most of the food that I ordered came from Indigenous farmers, hunters, and gatherers or from Canadian based Indigenous owned companies. There were two exceptions: some of the meat, and dried berries. As we had a partnership with just one person who hunts and fishes, we needed to reach out to other sources to get enough meat and fish to distribute throughout the year for the baskets. During my time at SOAHAC, I was constantly searching for new Indigenous vendors to purchase traditional foods from. It was sometimes hard to obtain the large quantities of food (often between 50 to 100 items) that I needed to fill the baskets. The Indigenous companies that I ordered from were usually small, family run, or run by only one individual. As the months went by and the program gained momentum, more volunteers joined SOAHAC and were able to help Jocelyn and I to prepare the baskets. When SOAHAC moved location in August 2023, we gained more storage space for traditional foods and increased freezer space to store

meat and fish. For one week's particular basket, we wanted to offer squash, and so we purchased fresh produce from Wisahkotewinowak, an urban Indigenous garden collective in the Kitchener-Waterloo region of southern Ontario. Among other things, Wisahkotewinowak grows the three sisters crops: corns, beans, and squash. I would have liked to purchase more produce from Wisahkotewinowak; SOAHAC, however, did not have the storage capacity to keep the large quantities of produce required to meet the needs of the TFB program.

Running the TFB program was a collective effort and would not have been possible without the help of volunteers and staff who took time out of their workdays or lunch breaks to assist in running the program. Through this collective effort, I was able to get to know staff, and to see how much care they put into their work and how much dedication they showed in supporting their clients. In particular, I worked closely with Jocelyn Zurbrigg (Registered Dietitian and Diabetes Educator) who coordinated the TFB program. Jocelyn has been working at SOAHAC as a dietitian for over 15 years and running SOAHAC's different food programs. She was a crucial member of this community-engaged research project. Among the many roles she played, she acted as a community gatekeeper (Flick, 2022). That is to say, she allowed me to take part in the TFB program, and introduced me to the staff and managers at SOAHAC, as well as the clients who later took part in the TFB program. I was in constant communication with her about how the TFB program was going, and later about how the interviews were going. Jocelyn is well known and loved by the clients who take part in SOAHAC's food programs. Throughout my time volunteering at SOAHAC and conducting interviews, clients would often express their gratitude for her commitment to providing nutritious

foods to the SOAHAC community. Working alongside her throughout my master's thesis was very meaningful to me: her kindness and her dedication to the food programs inspired me and reminded me of the importance of community health.

Jocelyn and I tried to tailor the baskets to suit the interests of SOAHAC clients. As we distributed the first baskets, we included notes in each, inviting suggestions or feedback on the TFB program. We created a short survey asking SOAHAC clients for suggestions on the food security programs, including a question on which traditional foods they would most like to find in the baskets. The goal was to include items in the traditional food baskets that SOAHAC clients wanted to have.

As a settler graduate student conducting research, my positionality limited me in sharing a personal understanding of what these foods mean and what they represent. The food I ordered and distributed was not my own food. I am also aware that most of the foods that I requested for the baskets were made available because of pre-existing and personal relationships between SOAHAC staff and hunters, fishers, and farmers. SOAHAC staff have put Jocelyn and I in contact with Indigenous hunters, fishers, and farmers, to enable us to acquire food for the baskets. I am extremely grateful for SOAHAC's staff willingness to put me in contact with these people, as the corn, fish, and meat we obtained through these connections were some of the clients favorite foods to receive in the TFB. My Thursdays spent at SOAHAC giving out the traditional food baskets as well as the farm boxes were my favourites days of the week. Although they entailed a lot of heavy lifting of food boxes (which I am not good at), I got to hear about

clients' thoughts on the TFB program and to see that it was a meaningful program for many of them.

3.3 Data Collection

My data collection was undertaken during the summer and fall of 2023. In total, 19 interviews were conducted with Indigenous women who were part of the TFB program. One participant reached out in December of 2023, expressing interest in taking part in an interview. Her interview was conducted over the phone in early January. All interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix 3). As I was collecting data, I continued to volunteer at SOAHAC and to help run the TFB program.

This research project was submitted for research ethics approval to Western University's Research Ethics Board (REB) on May 17, 2023. It was approved on July 14, 2023. A subsequent amendment was submitted soon after, and approved on August 2nd. To view the ethics approval, refer to appendix 1 and 2.

3.3.1 Participant Recruitment

All the women recruited to be interviewed met three inclusion criteria: (1) they identified as an Indigenous woman, (2) they had been taking part in SOAHAC's TFB program and (3) they were 18 years old, or older.

Recruitment of participants was done using two methods. Jocelyn knew many of the clients from her work administering the food programs at SOAHAC, and was consulted about participant recruitment. The first recruitment method was that she asked clients if they would be interested in taking part in an interview. If they expressed

interest, I then followed up with them to set up a time to meet. The second method was that we twice put up a recruitment sign during the farm box distribution and traditional food distribution day. This second method led to many women showing interest in taking part in an interview. Although unplanned, snowball sampling also occurred as a method of recruitment, when participants who took part in an interview told others, who then contacted us to express interest in taking part in an interview themselves.

Interviews and recruitment happened in parallel. In qualitative research, rather than focusing on the number of participants, there is a larger focus on the richness and quality of the data (Hennink et al., 2017). Recruitment ended once theoretical saturation was reached. Theoretical saturation describes the point within data collection when no new insights are being shared (Hennink et al., 2017).

3.3.2 Semi-structured Interviews

All interviews were recorded using two audio recorders. SOAHAC staff recommended to me that my research should be conducted in person. In the past, SOAHAC had attempted to conduct virtual research, and found that participation rates were low. For this reason, I offered to hold all the interviews in person. Of the 19 interviews, 15 of the them were conducted in person, 13 at SOAHAC and two at Western University's Wampum Learning Lodge. A few participants preferred remote interviews. Two interviews were done over Zoom, and two over the phone. All interviewed participants received a letter of information and a consent form to sign.

All interviews followed a semi-structured interview guide (see appendix 3). Semi-structured interviews are based on predetermined open-ended questions and additional

questions that arise as the interview is taking place. The semi-structured interview is the most widely used interview format in qualitative research (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The first three interviews were filmed so that we could make a short film about the TFB program. I discuss the making and purpose of the film in Chapter 5. Participants were offered an honorarium in the form of a grocery store card for participating in an interview. The participants who took part in a filmed interview were offered an honorarium of \$100 and those who took part in a non-filmed interview were offered an honorarium of \$75.

Jocelyn took part in the first three interviews with participants, allowing her to comment on any of the questions from the interview guide afterwards and to ask questions of her own. My supervisor, Dr. Chantelle Richmond, also took part in the first three interviews. Conducting the first few interviews with Dr. Richmond allowed me to learn from her and ask for guidance and suggestions about interviewing. Once all the interviews were completed and transcribed, the interview transcripts were returned to the participants. This ensured that all the participants had a copy of the interview and allowed all participants to comment on the transcript or to ask for parts of the interview to be removed. No participant asked for adjustments or deletions in the interview transcripts.

3.4 Analysis and Results Interpretation

The first three interviews that were conducted were transcribed by me, and the following 17 were transcribed by the transcription service Transcript Heroes. All of the transcripts were uploaded to NVivo, a qualitative analysis software. Using NVivo, I conducted a thematic analysis of the interview data to identify key themes by coding the

data. Thematic analysis is a common qualitative research analysis method where patterns in the data are identified and reported (Kovach, 2022). A code is defined by “tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the descriptive or inferential information compiled during a study” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 56). The role of coding, according to Seidel & Kelle (1995), is “(a) noticing relevant phenomena, (b) collecting examples of those phenomena, and (c) analyzing those phenomena in order to find commonalities, differences, patterns, and structures” (p. 55-56). I first coded the interview data inductively, that is to say, using a bottom-up approach to form codes. Inductive coding means that the person coding does not have preconceived ideas of what will emerge from the data (Chandra & Shang, 2019). Once the initial inductive coding was done, I coded the interviews a second time, deductively, to organize and identify the general themes that come up in the data. In deductive coding, codes are formed based on established concepts (Chandra & Shang, 2019).

When coding, I tried to use the word(s) that participants used as much as possible. I coded both themes and sub-themes that came up. For instance, a sub-theme of health included nutrition and diabetes. Very broad themes were identified through codes, such as “meaning of traditional foods” and “impacts of SOAHAC’s TFB program”, which directly reflect some of the objectives of this thesis. For Coffey & Atkinson (1996), this type of coding is considered to be the first level of coding. More specific sub-themes, such as “discrimination in hospitals”, were also identified to form the broader categories of analysis.

We chose to conduct thematic analysis using NVivo software for several reasons. First, although thematic analysis is an inherently western form of analysis, it can also be used in research informed by an Indigenous research paradigm (Kovach, 2021). Second, thematic analysis has also been used in previous qualitative research on food security in partnership with SOAHAC (Neufeld & Richmond, 2107) and in previous research informed by environmental repossession (Nightingale & Richmond, 2022).

3.5 Research Limitations

Several challenges arose during the research process. One significant challenge was that SOAHAC moved locations in August of 2023. Because of this move, SOAHAC did not restart the distribution of food (the Farm Box as well as the TFB program) until mid-September of 2023. During that time, recruitment of participants was put on pause. In addition, as I was not an employee at SOAHAC, there were also certain barriers in communication with clients if I wanted to contact them by phone. Because SOAHAC is a health centre, all information on its clients, including contact information, is held confidentially; I never left with the contact information of any client. I could only communicate by phone with participants (e.g. to set up interview times) when I was physically present at SOAHAC. This made the process of setting up interviews slightly more time-consuming.

3.6 Chapter Conclusion

Geography, as a discipline, is a product of colonial processes (Castleden et al., 2012). There is a long history of research that has been done *on* rather than *with* Indigenous peoples, which led to exploitative and extractive research practices (Castleden

et al., 2012). Community-based research and Indigenous methodologies can help protect against the perpetuation of the harm caused by years of extractive research with Indigenous communities. Community-based research produces empowering knowledge that is both culturally respectful and relevant and Indigenous methodologies has the possibility to stimulate geographical theories and scholarship (Castleden et al., 2012; Louis, 2007). In concrete terms, I aimed to embody these insights in a number of ways: by building relationships with the staff and the clients of SOAHAC, by inviting participants in the research to reflect with me on the meaning and impacts of the TFB program, by ensuring that participants were compensated for their time, and by sharing research results with SOAHAC and the participants.

Various scholars, including geographers, have outlined how research can be done in an ethical, respectful, and useful way in partnership with Indigenous peoples (Louis, 2007; Kovach, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous health geography in particular centres Indigenous communities and their needs within research. There has been so much harm done through research; by contributing meaningfully to community, research can also contribute to positive change.

Chapter 4

4. Findings

Drawing from the traditional food basket (TFB) program offered by the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Access Centre (SOAHAC) in London, Ontario, as a case study, the purpose of this research is to explore how urban-based traditional food programming supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identities.

This thesis has two objectives: (a) to explore the meaning and impact of SOAHAC's TFB on the health and well-being of urban Indigenous women, and (b) to examine the people and places that support urban Indigenous women in feeling connected to their identity.

This chapter presents the findings from 19 semi-structured interviews with Indigenous women who took part in SOAHAC's TFB program. To maintain anonymity, all participants have been given pseudonyms and all quotes have been anonymized.

In line with the objectives of my thesis, this chapter is organized into four main sections, where I describe: (1) dispossession and the experiences of participants coming into the city, (2) the meaning that the participants attribute to traditional foods, (3) the impacts of SOAHAC's TFB program, and finally (4) the people and places that support the participants in feeling connected to their identities.

Table 1: Participants

Pseudonym	How do you identify?
Beatrice	Chippewas of the Thames
Vera	Six Nations
Leah	Chippewas of the Thames
Dakota	Oneida
Lucy	Chippewas of Kettle & Stony Point First Nation
June	Kettle Point
Josephine	Six Nations
Hannah	Kitamaat (Haisla Nation)
Florence	Oneida Nation of the Thames
Emma	Shawanaga First Nation
Bonnie	Ojibwe, Potawatomi, & Odawa (Parry Island First Nation)
Maya	Christian Island
Rebecca	Oneida
Kate	Aamjiwnaang First Nation
Darcy	Métis
Dorothy	Oneida
Fiona	Oneida Nation of the Thames
Lily	Chippewas of the Thames
Ella	Naotkamegwaning First Nation (formerly Whitefish Bay First Nation)

4.1 Dispossession and Experiences Coming into the City

In this first section, I describe experiences that participants shared during the interviews that help contextualize their experiences with traditional foods. Participants discussed ways in which they have been distanced from their cultures and identities through acts of dispossession, such as the Sixties Scoop. They also reflected on racist and hostile experiences in cities, and not feeling that they belonged.

Describing these experiences of dispossession, mistreatment, and discrimination in cities was not one of my original objectives. These experiences, however, were significant for participant's experience of the TFB program, and so I have decided to include the stories that they shared with me, to provide background to their representations of the meanings that traditional foods hold for them, and context for the impacts of the TFB program that they identified. Any insight provided by the participants

into their past and current experiences can inform the understanding of their experiences with traditional foods, and their thoughts about the TFB program.

Although some of the participants grew up in London, many grew up in different areas across Turtle Island (Canada and the United States), and then found their way to London, Ontario. When asked to describe their experiences living in London, participants mentioned feeling different, experiencing racism, and being mistreated in institutions such as schools and healthcare spaces. Almost all of the participants explained that they found it challenging to connect to their Indigenous identity while living in London. In discussing women's well-being and how the city shapes their sense of identity, it is important first to understand the experiences of participants in coming to live in London and continuing to live there. In addition, it is also important to contextualise the findings within experiences of dispossession that the participants shared during interviews. This section describes experiences of dispossession and the past and present challenges that the participants have experienced coming to, and living in, cities.

4.1.1 The Sixties Scoop, Enfranchisement, and Residential Schools

Six participants shared that they grew up in the Canadian foster care system and/or were part of the Sixties Scoop, an era of forceful removal of Indigenous children from their homes and families, which led to a large overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the foster care system (Stevenson, 2021).

I was in the Sixties Scoop. I went from foster home to foster home to foster home. And I just didn't feel safe at hardly any of them. (Josephine)

Participants also described losing Indian status as having a significant impact on where they grew up. There are many different ways that Indigenous people lost status under the Indian Act, through a legal process called enfranchisement (Lawrence, 2003).

Enfranchisement has been a key avenue for the elimination of rights and the assimilation of Indigenous people within the Canadian context. One pertinent example is that until 1985, Indian status women who married non-Indian status men lost their Indian status. Without status, women could no longer live on reserve, nor could their children, dispossessing them and future generations of their family (Lawrence, 2003). Two participants described women in their family losing status, one explaining:

No, unfortunately, I didn't grow up on the res. My grandmother, years ago, she married a white man, so she lost her status. (Lily)

Loss of status and the displacement that can ensue can cause a loss in identity. For Lily, that meant she did not know she was Indigenous until she was 10 or 11 years old. Beatrice, another participant, explained that her mother was enfranchised, but then regained status when Bill C-31 was introduced. Bill C-31 passed in 1985 and sought to address the gender discrimination in the Indian Act by allowing those who lost their status, as well as their children, to regain status (Lawrence, 2003). The demographic and cultural damage caused by the loss of status of Indigenous women prior to Bill C-31 passing remains incalculable (Lawrence, 2003).

The experience of being in residential schools also severed many ties to Indigenous cultures and foodways. One participant explained that she did not grow up eating traditional foods because her grandmother, who raised her, was in residential school for ten years.

We didn't eat a lot of traditional food growing up on Oneida. My grandmother who raised me, she was in residential school; she didn't grow up with traditional food, because she was in there from age seven to seventeen. She didn't experience a lot of traditional foods. (Dorothy)

Beatrice, both of whose parents were in residential school, explained that her father did not identify as Indigenous. Bonnie explained that her whole family is from a

specific Indigenous community in Ontario, yet she was not born there, as her grandfather had moved to Toronto so that his children would not be sent to residential school:

No, I was not born [on Parry Island First Nation Reserve] no, I was born in Oakville. My dad had moved away [from the reserve] at the time of the residential schools. His dad, my grandfather, had snuck him into the city to keep him away, so that he wasn't placed into a residential school. And that's why he moved to Toronto and then he moved to Oakville, where he met my mother and they got married, and then we moved to Parry Island First Nation Reserve. (Bonnie)

4.1.2 Challenges Connecting to Indigenous Identity Living in London

All cities in Canada are situated on Indigenous land, premised on historical and ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Tomiak, 2017). Indigenous place-making and self-determination have been policed, particularly aggressively in cities (Tomiak, 2017). Many participants explained that they found it difficult to connect to their Indigenous identity while living in London. Kate finds it difficult to partake in cultural or ceremonial activities, such as attending a sweat lodge, living in London. Sweat lodges are constructed to conduct ceremonies that support healing (Anishnawbe Health Toronto, n.d):

There's nowhere to go to do a sweat. If I need to have a sweat lodge to release my bad month or something, it's not there. There's nothing available. And then when we want to make appointments with healers or Elders, you need to make that well in advance because they book up. There's nowhere we can go to practice our traditions other than wait for something to pop up. (Kate)

Fiona did not have a lot of Indigenous friends outside of her family when she moved to London. She explained that it was hard to make connections when she first arrived in London:

I would say when I moved here, and as I raised my family and everything, like most of my friends were not Indigenous peoples. I find that Indigenous people here in London kind of live in like certain areas and the school and the part of town we were in there wasn't very many Indigenous people. And then there's even

a matter of trust among each other, a lot of Indigenous people who leave the community, sometimes it's because of traumas, it might not be safe for them to be in their community, it might not be safe for them to be in their own home. So when they come and they live in in big urban area, they don't know a lot of people, it is hard to make connections. And there's that, who are you? And where do you come from, and who is your family? And so if you're coming into an urban area, because of safety issues in your community, or in your home, that makes it challenging as well. And so I found that I didn't have very many Indigenous friends, the only Indigenous people that I was around was my family. (Fiona)

Outside of SOAHAC, Darcy and Hannah have found it difficult to feel connected to their Indigenous identities living in cities:

So, it's hard for me to do actually much of anything, unless I connect with someone in SOAHAC who knows me, or I have a few Native friends in London that know me and know my story and that, and I'm accepted. But it's really – it's hard, you know. So, I just do what I can do, and I don't try to – I guess I stay in my own lane. [Laughs] You know what I mean? Like, I'll do things through SOAHAC, I've seen the elders, I've signed up for things, you know, and people are getting to know me. But it's kind of hard. (Darcy)

Hannah moved to London to gain access to better medical services. Before coming to London, she did not feel connected to, what she has referred to as, her roots:

I never really used to connect with my roots before. And now I am finding my roots now. So I'm – SOAHAC is helping me a lot. I'm very interested in learning. (Hannah)

4.1.3 Negative Connotations Associated with Indigeneity

Harmful stereotypes and ideas about Indigenous peoples continue to be perpetuated today. Three participants described negative connotations associated with their Indigenous identities. Some participants did not know about their Indigenous identity growing up. For Darcy, it was a family secret. Upon reflection, she realized that the foods she ate growing up were tied to her Indigenous identity, although it was not spoken about in her family:

It was a bad thing then. But now, looking back on some of the food we ate, some of the phrases that we had, like, if I would have known this as a kid, I would have

figured it out, right. So, I decided that I would try to identify with our culture and not keep it a secret anymore, you know. (Darcy)

Fiona's family member thought that eating traditional foods in the city was "savage", reflecting settler mainstream cultural norms of foods (Vowel, 2016):

And so eating rabbit or a goose or duck or something, that's, you know, the savage life, that's res life. And [my aunt] kind of grew up in the city, and well off and stuff like that. But I just remember, she just kind of had this a little bit of a bougie attitude about eating traditional foods. (Fiona)

Beatrice explained that she was teased as a child when she came back to London after spending time on her reserve because she would come back with an accent. She mentioned that she had worked her entire life to try and get rid of the accent. When I asked her why, she explained:

Well, I mean [my parents] were put in an environment where they were told any Nativeness is not allowed [...] so my mother was constantly trying to get us to not be Native. You know we're a family of seven and we're happy and we're doing it, you know? We're not on social assistance. She was trying so hard to not be a statistic. (Beatrice)

Beatrice explained that for most of her life, she was treated as though she was different from others. She says that at present, she finally doesn't feel that she has to avoid showing that she is Indigenous.

4.1.4 Racism in the City

When asked about their experiences living in London, some participants described having experienced racism. Leah explained that as an adult, looking back on how she was treated when she was a child in school in London, she now understands that her treatment was rooted in racism.

I didn't understand why some people just really didn't like me as a kid. As an adult I realized that it was very much racism. Like, the littlest things that I thought were the cause weren't the cause. Like, who treats a second grader like that? It's I guess gotten better in that there's a lot more diversity in the city but a lot of the

places that I was able to live and attend school as a child were very, very white. And the people I made friends with were kind people, kind kids. It was never really the other kids who treated me poorly. It was very much the adults, which is so messed up. (Leah)

Rebecca has noticed that Indigenous flags are being stolen in her neighbourhood.

She also identifies this as racist behaviour:

I find there's a lot of racism, especially in my neighbourhood. You know, we have a few of us that are Indigenous, and we put our flags out and our flags are always stolen but yet, you know, the Canadian flags are flying. (Rebecca)

Others, while not using the word "racism", described feeling different, or experiencing mistreatment in school situations. Beatrice described being called a racial slur in class:

I mean it was probably grade four when I realized that there was a difference between me and other kids. You know I was just – I was a kid, you're a kid. You look like that, you look like that; it's not a big deal, right? [...] And it was grade four somebody called me a wahoo and I didn't know what that was but I was sitting there in class and I'm like what is that? [...] The teacher sees my face and goes, "What happened?" I said, "Somebody called me a wahoo" and she's like, "Oh!" She made a big deal out of it, "But what is it?" [...] Yeah, and then just after that it just became more apparent to me that, yes, I was different. Why am I different? (Beatrice)

Vera describes the bullying her grandson experienced in school because of his appearance which led to her daughter pulling him out of the school he was attending.

Unfortunately, my grandson was bullied for who he is, the way he looked. Because he's beautiful, long black hair with – he had a braid, he got teased about that. And so much so that it was the last straw. Because my daughter's voice wasn't heard, my grandson's voice wasn't heard. And this occurred at the school he was attending, and my daughter said that's it. (Vera)

Fiona spent most of her childhood in the United States, occasionally returning to her home on Oneida. While living in the United States, she described receiving few traditional teachings as a child. Rather, she was taught harmful stereotypes about

Indigenous peoples. Without many traditional teachings, she described feeling a loss of identity living in a city:

I mean, I went to school in the 70s 80s and so it was very kind of bleak, we were still kind of the drunken Indian or savages or even extinct. So, it was a totally different experience when I went to school. So I didn't have very much teachings, and then I would come back to Oneida and then I'm immersed into learning, you know, Indigenous traditions and ways of life. So it was, it was confusing, I really had to learn how to walk in both worlds. So I had a foot in each path, the white path and the red path. And I think for the most part, I did fairly well. But I really felt a loss of identity, being in the urban area and not having a lot of those traditional teachings. And mostly knowing from books what an Indigenous person [is], [...] they look at Indigenous people across America as just you're all natives, all Indians, and you're all the same. (Fiona)

Ella was part of the Sixties Scoop and was put into foster homes, until she eventually moved to London at the age of 17. She describes her time in foster care as “not going well” and left as soon as she could. Growing up as an Indigenous child and not knowing she was Indigenous, Ella felt like she did not fit in. Her son, who has grown up his whole life in London, felt similarly. He feels different and finds it hard to discover who he is while living in London. Ella described her experience as a child in school:

You feel different. And that's what I [felt] growing up. I went to school and I didn't feel like, well I didn't like where I was anyway. But I was more of a farm laborer than anything. And then going to school, it's like, I didn't fit in with the people or they weren't accepting of me. And that's what I found hard. And I switched high schools, and it was just the same way. I almost had the feeling they didn't like me. Now I like myself. I am getting there. (Ella)

A few participants described negative experiences in medical settings. One participant commented that she appreciates SOAHAC's Sweet Talk sessions, classes that focus on diabetes and nutrition: “it helps to have a place provided especially for [Indigenous peoples], because I've been treated badly at a hospital in London before” (Fiona).

Another participant described a negative experience in a healthcare environment that lacked cultural safety. Her experience with primary care at SOAHAC, which promotes culturally sensitive and Indigenous-informed care, was a significant change in her experience of healthcare.

And SOAHAC, of course, which was a huge game changer because previously my family doctor was – he’s retired now but an old white man who was one of the few people in the city who would accept our health insurance. And everything he kind of attributed to, oh, well this is because you’re Native and then that was where he stopped explaining what was wrong. “Well, you’re just going to have to deal with this because you’re Native”. But there was nothing behind that. Whereas when we started seeing the nurses [at SOAHAC] it was like, OK. Yes. We do deal with this because of this, this and this, and these are the ways we can help it. So it was just this huge shift of cultural understanding. (Leah)

The experiences these women shared from their past and present can enhance our understanding of how they relate to traditional foods and their perspectives on the TFB program, which I describe in the following sections of this chapter.

4.2. Meanings of Traditional Foods

First, I set out to understand what traditional foods meant to the participants and what it meant to them to have access to these foods through SOAHAC. Traditional foods have various meanings to the participants. In discussing the meaning of traditional foods, participants focused on themes of (1) pride, (2) love, (3) connection (to culture, ancestors, and homes), and (4) health.

Table 2: Meanings of Traditional Foods

Meaning of Traditional foods	Number of participants who mentioned	Number of Mentions
Pride	2	2
Love	2	2
Connection	10	10
- Connection to culture	5	5
- Connection to ancestors	3	3
- Connection to home	2	2
Health	6	6

4.2.1 Pride

Two respondents, when asked what traditional foods mean to them, responded that these foods make them feel proud to be Indigenous, suggesting that food can be a source of positive associations with Indigenous identities:

The whole Indigenous thing impacts me and I'm proud to be Indigenous. And I'm still in the learning process, you know, in different areas. (Lily)

Maya described having a strong sense of self as an Indigenous woman as well as an extensive support system living in London. When I asked her what traditional foods mean to her, she replied: "I would say honour and pride".

4.2.2 Love

Two participants described that traditional foods are associated with love. They remarked on the act of love that is put into the preparation and consumption of traditional foods:

Just trying to figure out other ways to say this but just, like, very much love. Love in the people who put it together. Love in the people who grow [traditional foods], process them so that they're available. Love from the people who made it before

us so that we have it. And love for self as we prepare it for ourselves, whether it's for us to eat or for us to share. (Leah)

Vera has been learning how to cook and prepare traditional foods through trial and error, as a way to care for herself:

Because all this food takes time to make. And when you're doing that, you're putting more love in it for yourself. You're making it for yourself. (Vera)

4.2.3 Connection

For ten participants, traditional foods held meanings associated with connection: participants described how these foods foster connections to their ancestors, cultures, and homes. For some, traditional foods allow a connection to culture that they were denied. As mentioned earlier, some participants were put into foster care, removed from people who could teach them or share knowledge about traditional food systems. Others grew up not knowing that they were Indigenous.

4.2.3.1 Connection to Ancestors

Ella, Kate, and Vera all said that traditional foods represent a connection to their ancestors. Ella was part of the Sixties Scoop and it was not until she was in her thirties that she learned that she was Indigenous. For Ella, traditional foods make her feel closer to her ancestors, a connection that was severed when she was put into foster care, but one that she has been actively fostering as an adult. Her son has also been able to reconnect to his Indigenous identity by preparing the foods from the basket for their family.

For me, having lost all that I had, because when I was little, I probably ate Native food, the traditional foods, and then being taken away from that, I lost everything. I lost my identity, I guess. Now that I'm back to me, I feel closer to my ancestors. Like I'm not eating with them. But I'm eating what they had. It is like I'm sharing now, and it makes me happier. That's how I would put it. (Ella)

Kate also described how cooking and sharing traditional foods with her family makes her feel connected to her ancestors. She explained that there are not many places where she can practice her culture in the city, but serving traditional foods at family gatherings brings an element of her culture.

Well eating traditional foods to me means I'm in touch with my ancestors, I'm in touch with my people. My culture is still alive and prevalent at my dinner table. That's what that means to me [...]. So when I gathered my traditional foods from SOAHAC, I would bring them to a family event and serve that traditional food at the table. So that way there was the representation of who we are as a culture. Rather than just a turkey or a ham, we had that traditional foods, wild rice, fish or a deer. Something is in there. Because when we ultimately offer our prayers to our feast plate, that's who we're honouring, our spirits. So that's what that means to me. (Kate)

When I interviewed Vera, she had begun to transition her diet to focus on traditional foods. She described this transition as a health journey. Traditional foods represent a connection to her family and ancestors. She explained that, throughout this journey, she felt more connected to her ancestors because she was often asking herself "What was it like back then to eat?".

4.2.3.2 Connection to Culture

Dorothy, Rebecca, and Darcy all described traditional foods as representing a connection to their cultures. Dorothy was raised by her grandmother, who was sent to residential school for ten years. Residential schools intended to eliminate Indigenous culture, including knowledge and access related to traditional foodways, and so her grandmother did not eat traditional foods during her own childhood, and as an adult did not feed traditional foods to the children in her care. Dorothy noted that traditional foods represent a connection to her culture that is somewhat new to her, because of the intergenerational impact of her grandmother attending residential school:

It's that culture, yes. I like it, it's new to me, because I didn't really grow up with a lot of it. But I still haven't got it down 100%, but I've learned how to make corn soup. (Dorothy)

Rebecca grew up in foster care, where her foster family did not allow her to practice a culture outside of theirs. The only time she was able to eat traditional foods was when she went to her auntie's house on Sundays. For Rebecca, traditional foods represent: "an acknowledgement of my culture. It's an acceptance".

For Darcy, who discovered that she was Indigenous as an adult, traditional foods represent a connection to her culture that was long kept a secret. Deciding to try to connect with her Indigenous identity, Darcy developed a connection with the SOAHAC health team.

Becoming more aware of my culture, it means more to me because it gives me connection to the land, to my spirituality, to the culture. I've tried to change the way I eat, the way I see things. (Darcy)

4.2.3.3 Connection to home

June grew up eating traditional foods and now runs an Indigenous food-related business. She described traditional foods as representing "something that makes it feel like home". She lives in London, but her family lives on reserve. Josephine, who has tried to pass down knowledge about traditional foods to her family, expressed a similar sentiment:

It just means I'm closer to home. Yeah, I live in London, but it's not really home-home. I try to teach my children and my grandchildren the old ways, or tried to teach them something. (Josephine)

4.2.4 Health

Four participants mentioned that traditional foods represent health and health benefits to them. Darcy and her family all have diabetes, and Darcy reflected on her own

experience of diabetes and how she is using traditional foods to journey towards a healthier life. She remarked that:

And it came across – it just made sense to me that no wonder there’s a lot of diabetes and a lot of health issues in the native community, because they’re eating a lot of stuff that they didn’t have [prior to colonization] (Darcy).

Here, Darcy refers to foods that Indigenous peoples ate prior to colonization and prior to the restriction of Indigenous peoples to reserves and the severance of ties to land and hunting grounds. Darcy explained that as money was scarce, she would find herself eating foods such as macaroni and cheese, hotdogs, and spam. She went on to explain that for her, eating traditional food means consuming healthier foods and a sense of freedom: “But it’s, I guess, a lot of cleaner eating, and it’s sort of a sense of freedom, in a way.”

For Beatrice, traditional food represented earth-based foods, with positive associations between nature, health and well-being: “They mean foods that come from the earth, [...] it’s good for – not only nutrition-wise but for your soul”.

4.3 Impact of SOAHAC’s TFB Program

Colonialism aims to eradicate Indigenous foodways and the Indigenous knowledges related to these foodways. Yet, traditional foods are still harvested and consumed today. SOAHAC’s pilot TFB program was created based on the expressed interest of clients to have access to traditional foods in the city of London, Ontario. These findings show that SOAHAC’s TFB program (1) allowed for sharing of food with family members, (2) supported health, (3) provided financial benefits, (4) supported connection to culture and ancestors, (5) supported access to traditional foods, and (6) supported the discovery of new foods and learning about traditional foods.

Table 3: Impacts of SOAHAC’s TFB Program

Impact of SOAHAC’s TFB program	Number of participants who mentioned (n=19)	Number of mentions
Familial impact	10	19
Health impact	7	16
Financial impact	8	10
Connection	4	9
Accessibility	10	11
Discovering & Learning	10	24

4.3.1 Family

Ten participants mentioned that SOAHAC’s TFB program allowed them to share traditional foods with their families. Participants emphasized that preparing and eating these foods is not simply a means of feeding their families, but is also a way to share their culture and to maintain knowledge about these foods and how to prepare them. Food, beyond providing nourishment, contributes to the construction of identities and of culture (Levkoe et al., 2019).

Maya commented that she believes that the program helps to bring her family back to “the way it should have been”. She added that if colonization had not occurred, Indigenous peoples, including she and her family, would still be hunters.

It gives me a lot of pride to be able to serve this to my kids and to my grandkids because that’s the way it should be you know? (Maya)

Rebecca and Hannah, neither of whom had had access to traditional foods or knew how to prepare them before participating in SOAHAC’s program, mentioned that by preparing traditional foods, they are also able to pass down this knowledge to their children. Hannah felt excited about being able to prepare traditional foods based on recipes that are included in the baskets and her daughter was excited for her as well.

Hannah explained that since she has been learning how to prepare traditional foods, her daughter could learn as well. In a similar way, Rebecca hopes that the culture attached to traditional foods will be passed down through her family:

[The TFB program has had] a great impact on my life, yes. I've actually been able to now introduce the culture to my children so that they can grow up and be able to introduce it with theirs too. (Rebecca)

Ella explained that her whole family bonds over food. Ella's son cooked the food from the baskets for her. She brought him with her for her interview, so that he could share his thoughts about the basket as well. Her son said that cooking the meat from the baskets, such as venison or bison, would put a smile on his mother's face. Ella and her son, neither of whom had access to traditional foods in the city prior to SOAHAC's program, had the opportunity to enjoy the food together. Ella is hopeful that cooking traditional foods is something that will stick with her son:

My energy gets really low at times, but I love it when [my son] cooks. Because it's so good. And watching him do it makes me happy. Because I think this is something that will stay with him. (Ella)

Many of the participants are in the habit of sharing the traditional foods with their families and noted how much their family members love the foods included in the baskets. Kate explained that her children had not all tried wild game before, and had different reactions to the wild game meat:

My youngest one, I cook a lot of fish for him, the wild game. Because he's so urbanized, he's not used to it. He didn't grow up living in extreme poverty like me and my two older ones did, so he's very urbanized. So when he eats that wild game, he's like, "What is this? Why does it taste different," and whereas my older ones are like, "This is good shit" [laughs]. (Kate)

4.3.2 Health

Seven participants mentioned that SOAHAC's traditional food basket had health and nutritional impacts. Dorothy reported that it has allowed her to cook healthy meals for her family.

And it makes me feel good that I can make a wild rice salad that my family's not used to, but they like it, you know? And I know it's healthier, there's the health benefit. (Dorothy)

June commented in positive terms on the nutritional impact of the TFB program:

"I feel like I'm putting more nourishment in my body, rather than a bag of chips or a handful of candy or something". Fiona and Beatrice, explained that eating traditional foods has helped them to regulate their diabetes:

And the wild rice, you know, stepping away from eating white rice or even instant rice or as I call it cardboard you know, it helps with regulating those sugars for diabetics. So I'm very grateful to the program that they've introduced with just traditional foods. (Fiona)

Beatrice has been monitoring her diabetes with food, and expressed gratitude towards the TFB program for providing foods that she would not usually have:

I'm diabetic. I've been dealing with it for 23 years now. I'm still monitoring with food, no insulin. Yeah, but the traditional food box really does help. It does [help] just to get these foods that, again, I wouldn't normally grab for myself. (Beatrice)

4.3.3 Finance

Eight participants mentioned that SOAHAC's TFB program had had an impact on their finances. Participants observed that these foods are expensive when purchased commercially, which is why they were not in the habit of buying them for themselves. Some had identified certain traditional foods, such as wild rice, that were available at grocery stores in the city, but rarely or never bought them, because of their high cost.

June, for example, found it hard to access traditional foods in London, and if she could not get wild rice from her reserve, she would have to order it online, which proved to be very expensive:

I would have to order it on Amazon, and it cost a fortune to get wild rice to make soups and casseroles and stuff like that, right. We can't afford it right now, because you know – it's so expensive, so having this program is amazing. It's awesome. (June)

Vera has been on a health journey that she began after promising her grandson that she would become healthier. The high cost of traditional foods was hard for her to manage:

Because when I came here and Jocelyn said we have traditional food – like *our* food, right. And I just broke down because I told her, I said, 'You don't know how hard it's been to budget money.' These foods, like it's expensive. And to know that this program was here. I didn't know about it until much later. (Vera)

Vera, too, remarked that wild rice was unaffordable for her. She argued that crops that originate from her ancestral lands should not be so unaffordable:

Which is just ridiculous from my point of view, because something that is here, native to here, one of the original plants, it should not be expensive. (Vera)

4.3.4 Connection

One of the findings on the meaning of traditional foods for participants was that many believed the preparation and consumption of these foods represented a connection with their ancestors, their cultures, and their homes. This is reflected in my findings on the impacts of the TFB program. In responding to interview questions about the impact of SOAHAC's TFB program, four participants mentioned that it had allowed them to connect with their culture and ancestors. When asked about feedback on the program, Ella simply said: "I love it. Don't stop it. That's my connection right now." Dorothy

observed that SOAHAC's program has helped her to develop a connection to her culture:

"it gives me a connection to my culture that I didn't have before".

I did taste [wild rice] a couple of times, you know, other people cooking it, but now it's staple to me because they're good about giving us wild rice from SOAHAC, and so now it's become a regular food for me. [...] It feels like I'm connecting with the part of our culture that I was denied before. (Dorothy)

For Vera and Leah, SOAHAC's program made them feel more connected to loved ones who they associate with traditional foods:

I feel better knowing I have that connection with my ancestors by eating this food. So that's on a spiritual level. And then when I'm cooking my food I can hear my grandmas. (Vera)

Leah explained that SOAHAC is now a place that she comes to not only for healthcare services, but also for food that helps her feel connected to memories and peoples that she associates with traditional foods:

Very simplistically, the reminder that [traditional foods are] still there whether or not I would have known how to find it. Now there is a place that I come to for many reasons. But it's here; there are people who know what to do with it and there are very clear instructions on these things. [...] It makes me feel connected both to memories and to other people that I know that eat these foods and also have fond memories. (Leah)

4.3.5 Accessibility

Ten participants mentioned that SOAHAC's program allowed them to access traditional foods that are difficult to find and/or are expensive to purchase in the city. The participants remarked that they have rarely seen traditional foods in supermarkets in the city. Importantly, some of the participants wanted to consume more traditional foods or to maintain a traditional diet, but had been unable to because these foods were simply unavailable in stores in London.

As noted above, Vera began a journey to restore her health as a promise she had made to her grandson. It began as a two-month challenge. Once the two months were up,

she told her grandson that she was going to maintain her new diet, only eating traditional foods. While she began this health challenge, she learned about SOAHAC's TFB program: "I could breathe a little bit knowing that I can get this food. I have access".

Two women, Emma and Bonnie, were interviewed together. They explained that they want to be able to maintain a traditional diet in the city, and to pass it down to their children:

Yes, like I said, there's no store where we can go and buy [traditional foods]. Even with our herbs and our roots and our stuff, we have to go to healthy stores. See, this is a problem, it is a problem for us, because we should be comfortable in the city. Be comfortable with maintaining our own food diets that we want, the traditional ones (Bonnie). Emma adds: "And then to pass it down to our children too".

Nine participants stated explicitly that they were unable to access traditional foods in London, Ontario, prior to SOAHAC's traditional food basket program. Participants commented that they had rarely seen any traditional foods in grocery stores. Some participants were able to obtain traditional foods by travelling to their reserves, but finding a means of transportation there often proved to be difficult.

I have looked around and I haven't been able to find [traditional foods] anywhere. Other than if I had someone to drive me out to, you know, the res and find somebody out there that had some. (Rebecca)

Ella and her family were not able to have access to traditional foods in London prior to SOAHAC's program. Ella's son, who cooks the food from the basket for her, had never had the opportunity to cook traditional foods before Ella began participating in the program. Because Ella had had no connection to her Indigenous identity until she was in her thirties, the access to traditional foods provided by the TFB program made it possible for the first time for her son to prepare those foods for her. She reported that the

connection to her identity, and the connection to her son, made possible through the TFB, brought her happiness.

London, Ontario, and other cities across Southern Ontario are home to Indigenous peoples from across Canada. Although there are some similarities among the traditional foods consumed across the country, there are also many foods that are particular to specific regions. Kate described how difficult it was for her to find traditional foods to support a family that had moved to southern Ontario from northern Canada.

Compounding those difficulties are regulations in urban areas prohibiting hunting.

Because I even worked with families and students that come from way, way, way up north and they were looking for things like quail or ... I can't even remember what they said. [...] And there was nothing that I could give them other than I would go home to Kettle Point and get fish and bring it back for this family. But there was nothing that was available and I'm like other than going out and shooting your own rabbits or squirrel like there's nothing. And then I'm like, 'you can't hunt in the city, so I don't know'. (Kate)

A few participants only had access to traditional foods when they went to their reserves where they might be gifted or purchase it from a hunter.

Well occasionally sometimes northern communities, so if they, they would invite like some of our youth from different communities or even from N'Amerind to go moose hunting or deer hunting. So occasionally, you know, they would call and say, hey, we have this many pounds of you know, moose or deer. You know, first come first served kind of thing. (Fiona)

A few other participants mentioned that they were able to obtain some traditional foods prior to SOAHAC's program from a family member who hunts. Otherwise, some found wild rice or meat at the grocery store, but, again, noted that these foods were very expensive:

Unless you had family members who were hunters, [traditional foods are] not really attainable in the city. Or affordable. So it's I think it's been really important to have this [program]. (Fiona)

Josephine described the TFB program as a “gift” as it allows access to traditional foods for people who were not able to obtain traditional foods by other means, and/or for those unable to afford to purchase traditional foods.

Well, I hope it becomes more than a pilot project and does get permanent status. [...] So [the TFB program is] a gift. And it helps a lot of people. People that can't access traditional foods, people that can't afford much because they're on a fixed income. (Jeanette)

4.3.6 Discovering and Learning

Ten participants emphasized that SOAHAC’s TFB program has allowed them to learn about and try traditional foods. The program made it possible for two participants to try traditional foods for the very first time.

Hannah said that, when she was growing up, traditional food weren’t part of her life, but she had been “very excited” to try traditional foods through SOAHAC’s TFB program. She described her first time trying wild rice: “I looked at the wild rice and it looked challenging – When I tasted it, oh, it was amazing. I loved wild rice”. Two other participants also responded that they had been able to try wild rice for the first time through SOAHAC’s program. Dorothy said: “I’ve found that I really like wild rice. I’d never had it until I got it from SOAHAC”. The program also allowed Lily to experience traditional foods for the first time: “I never really knew what traditional foods were, to be honest”. She explained: “I don’t know how to describe it. It makes me feel proud, to be honest, to be able to try out the foods I was never able to have”.

Aside from learning about new foods, some participants commented on what they had learned about the preparation of traditional foods. While some of SOAHAC’s clients had long-transmitted knowledge on how to prepare traditional foods, others were relatively new to its preparation. Some clients had told me that they did not know how to

cook some of the traditional foods that we offered, especially the meat and the fish. Others had asked for tips on how to prepare some of the food. Jocelyn Zurbrigg (SOAHAC's head dietitian and TFB program coordinator) and I then planned to include recipes in some of the baskets, to begin to address these requests. We followed through, and some participants in their interviews remarked on the knowledge acquired through these recipes. For instance, Ella's son has been learning about how to prepare corn soup using the recipe and ingredients that were provided in the basket. Similarly, Rebecca, Lily, and Josephine said that the recipes included in the baskets supported them in learning how to prepare traditional foods:

I didn't [know how to prepare the traditional foods] but there was a recipe that came with it, so that helped a lot. And then since I started getting them, I started researching and asking around. So now I'm getting a little folder on my computer of all these different recipes that I can try out. So it's slowly bringing me back and getting me back on that track to where I want to be. (Rebecca)

Throughout our conversation, Fiona emphasized the importance of the TFB program in allowing urban Indigenous peoples to have the opportunity to try traditional foods. Traditional foods are often easier to access on reserves. Fiona did not grow up within her Indigenous community, although she did visit it. Coming of age in a city, away from her home community, she felt that she received little traditional teachings. Throughout her interview, Fiona reflected on the experience of being Indigenous in a city space. She stressed in particular the resilience that Indigenous people have had to demonstrate, and the adaptation that Indigenous peoples have had to enact, in the face of colonial powers. She acknowledged that this adaptation has led to some Indigenous peoples losing ties to traditional foods. Yet, she sees the value in allowing people the chance to try these foods:

I have to remember that, you know, we Indigenous people who've lived in the urban setting, we've adapted, we've always been able to adapt. That's why we're still here. Because we're resilient. [...]. I think [the TFB program] is great, because it's giving people a chance -- Indigenous, urban Indigenous people -- a chance to eat traditional foods that they have never had before. And, you know, maybe they don't like it, or maybe they do, or sometimes they'll just keep trying. (Fiona)

Lucy phrased this point in terms of choice, saying that the TFB program had provided her with a choice that had never been available to her before in the city, the choice to consume traditional foods. Even participants who had tried traditional foods before SOAHAC's program mentioned that SOAHAC's TFB program had allowed them to sample new foods. Darcy and Dorothy explained that SOAHAC's program allowed them to experiment by eating traditional foods that they wouldn't usually consume:

And actually, if it weren't for SOAHAC, I wouldn't have even known about some [traditional foods]. For instance, I delved into juniper berries – Yes, and they can bring a rabbit, for lack of better words, “to life.” It was pretty good. I was skeptical at first, because I've only used juniper berries to make cold remedies and stuff, to up your vitamin content, you know. I've never, ever cooked with it. (Darcy)

Dorothy was supportive of the TFB program since Jocelyn and I first began giving out baskets. Among other things, it allowed Dorothy to try new traditional foods:

I love [the baskets], I think they're very – I just love them, and I hope they get permanent, because it does; it makes me feel connected to my culture, I'm learning, I'm getting healthier food, you know, that I might not try otherwise. (Dorothy)

4.4 People and Places Supporting Indigenous Identities in the City

The second objective of this thesis was to examine the people and places that support urban Indigenous women in feeling connected to their identity. SOAHAC's TFB program is one example (among many others) of programming that supports Indigenous practices within cities. Beyond food, I was interested in the ways in which urban

Indigenous women are returning to their own ways of knowing and to practicing their cultures and Indigenous Knowledge Systems.

Nine participants disclosed that they find it challenging to connect to their Indigenous identity while living in the city. A significant finding is that those challenges were mitigated by engagement with Indigenous organizations: four participants explained that they had had a difficult time before they started getting involved with London's Indigenous organizations. Fifteen participants said that Indigenous organizations help them to feel connected to their Indigenous identity.

Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHACs) are health care organizations that are Indigenous-led and serve rural, urban, and reserve-based communities. There are currently ten AHACs in Ontario, including SOAHAC in London, Ontario. In addition to AHACs in Ontario, there are also Native Friendship Centres, including N'Amerind Friendship Centre in London. These Indigenous organizations are important sites of belonging and place-making (Nelson & Wilson, 2020). Participants were asked about places and people that make them feel connected to their Indigenous identity in London, and most participants identified urban Indigenous organizations (such as SOAHAC) as places of connection to their Indigenous identity. Specifically, participants mentioned SOAHAC, N'amerind Friendship Center, and Atlhosa. N'amerind Friendship Center and Atlhosa are London-based non-profit organizations that offers services to urban Indigenous peoples.

Rebecca has been using different programs at Atlhosa, some specifically for Indigenous women. She explained:

You know, we were all Indigenous [women] sitting around and we all understood each other. Like there was no judgement, no nothing and it was just wonderful.
(Rebecca)

Lily had never tried traditional foods before SOAHAC's program. She explained how SOAHAC has been beneficial for her: "everything I've learned, I've learned through [being] here with SOAHAC. She continues: "To connect with my own people? I really don't know any of my own people, really; everybody I've met, I've met through programs here".

Ella explained that since coming to SOAHAC, she has been able to feel more connected to her Indigenous identity. Because she grew up in foster care, she did not know that she was Indigenous until she was an adult.

It was [difficult to feel connected to my Indigenous identity] when I first started, but since I've gone to SOAHAC, I feel like whatever was stopping me is now open. And the first thing is, I didn't know I was native, that was kept from me. And all I was told was well, I was advertised in a magazine [...] As far as that identity, I'm feeling more native every day. (Ella)

Rebecca, Beatrice, and Fiona emphasized the value of having Indigenous specific services in the city. They commented that they used to have to find a way to go to their reserve or band to access certain services before Indigenous programming expanded in London.

I've had a lot of support with Atlohssa. And then of course here at SOAHAC. Having, you know, my doctor's office being here and the different programs and social workers, all that kind of stuff. So that helps a great deal. Before I would've had to go out to the reservation in order to get that kind of support, so that helps.
(Rebecca)

Beatrice explained that before SOAHAC opened its doors in 1998, her only way to feel connected to her identity as an Indigenous woman was to return to her reserve. If she was unable to secure a ride, she was not able to go.

Oh, I mean we're talking years ago when some of this started; before that, yeah, there was no way. I would have to go back to the res and do things on the reserve. I, being on my own, don't have a vehicle so I'd have to rely on rides, "Sorry, car is full" you know, so I just kind of gave up on that for a while. Then SOAHAC came back and started doing more and more things and I'm trying to get more involved. (Beatrice)

Fiona commented that urban Indigenous people's needs were ignored before Indigenous organizations in cities began opening their doors. After meeting other Indigenous peoples while visiting London's Indigenous organizations, and creating community with those she met, Fiona now calls London her home.

So yeah, I really have a strong conviction that having Indigenous organizations is really important. And then to, you know, work together in solidarity to help the community and especially urban Indigenous. In the past, we always seem to be kind of overlooked. You know, you had to go to your band, and you had to fight kind of for what everybody else was receiving. So supporting SOAHAC and being supportive of organizations like N'amerind friendship center, and Atlohsa, those are all really important to the urban Indigenous community here. And this is my home. And this is where I like to practice and work. (Fiona)

Leah explained that SOAHAC was "a huge game changer" for her with respect to healthcare because she feels that she has encountered more cultural understanding at SOAHAC than she had in appointments with their previous doctor. Similarly, Darcy explains how the health care providers at SAOAHAC have supported her health journey:

I'll do anything to help SOAHAC. I owe them, like, honestly, if it weren't for [doctors and nurses at SOAHAC] at first – I didn't want to listen to them, and I was going down the wrong path. And so I thought, OK, fine, I'll give them a chance. And it's because of that that I'm in such good shape right now, you know. So, I would do anything. (Darcy)

Leah and Fiona noted the importance of London-based Indigenous organizations in supporting community for Indigenous peoples. They both described the loneliness and isolation that can be felt living in a city. As well, they both compared the sense of community built by Indigenous organizations in cities to Indigenous communities outside of the city and to Indigenous communities pre-colonization. Leah explained that

Indigenous organizations and programming such as SOAHAC's TFB program serve as reminders that there are places that provide community and support for Indigenous cultural traditions in cities, where it can feel like there is no Indigenous community presence:

There's such an emphasis on being part of the Indigenous community that once you're aware of it, whether that's from birth, childhood, teenager, whatever age, you know that that's something that's missing and once you know it's there you can put a name to that feeling, that loneliness, that disconnect. And it's just the more outreach there is about what is available and definitely the more programs and spaces there are, the more people it can reach. And even if it's as simple, quotation marks, as traditional food boxes, it's something that reminds you that tradition isn't always the western idea that we're taught in schools. It's traditions of families, of villages, of communities coming together and caring for each other. (Leah)

In a similar way, Fiona remarked on the importance of Indigenous organizations in creating a community for urban Indigenous peoples. Living in cities, outside of communities, Fiona explained that it can be easy to become isolated and to feel lonely:

Our people knew that, as a Haudenosaunee person, we lived in big, long houses with extended family, we were our support, we were everything to each other. And then having that strong connection also helped us to make a strong community with our other clan brothers and sisters. And now everybody is like, you're 18, get out of the house and live on your own and be on your own, and on your own land, and with a fence up and it can be very hard. [...] You can feed your mind, you can feed your body, but emotionally and spiritually, if you're not being fed, you're going to struggle, because you're not in balance. So that's the one thing that I think is really important about having SOAHAC, and N'Amerind and Atlohsa here in London is having the community. (Fiona)

Importantly, although a few participants mentioned that their family members who lived in the city helped them feel connected to their Indigenous identities, these results show that participants overwhelmingly find that Indigenous organizations in London -- such as Atlohsa, N'Amerind, and SOAHAC -- are the places that helped them to feel connected to their Indigenous identities. Urban Indigenous organizations help create a sense of community for the participants, while offering culturally sensitive care

and programs, such as the TFB, which allow for learning or re-learning about cultural practices.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5: Discussion & Conclusion

The purpose of this final chapter is to discuss and interpret the findings described in Chapter 4 and to make sense of their meaning within this thesis as a whole. Drawing on the Southwest Ontario Aboriginal Health Access Centre's (SOAHAC) traditional food basket (TFB) program as a case study, this thesis has qualitatively explored how urban-based traditional food programming supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city, and how it strengthens cultural identities. The research responds to two objectives : (1) to explore the meaning and impact of SOAHAC's TFB program on the health and well-being of urban Indigenous women, and (2) to examine the people and places that support urban Indigenous women in feeling connected to their identity. In the section that follows, I discuss themes of food, gender, Indigeneity, and urbanization and how they all intertwine; these main themes converge around the importance of urban Indigenous organizations and their programming in supporting Indigenous women's well-being and strengthening cultural identities in the city. Below, I first summarize the findings described in Chapter 4.

This chapter is divided into 5 sections: key findings, theoretical contributions, methodological contributions, practical contributions, and conclusion.

5.1 Key findings

5.1.1 Dispossession and Experiences Coming into the City

In interviews with participants in SOAHAC's TFB program, the meanings and impacts of that program emerged against the background of their previous experiences in

cities and their personal and familial experiences of dispossession. Environmental dispossession has limited Indigenous people's ability to take part in their cultures and share Indigenous Knowledge, including knowledge related to food and foodways. Participants articulated their awareness of the ways in which they had been distanced from their cultures, and understood the TFB program as, among other things, one means to access them.

Many of the participants reported feeling different from others when they were growing up, being mistreated in educational institutions and in healthcare spaces, or experiencing racism. Some participants described learning about the negative stereotypes that are associated with Indigeneity and the impact on them of those stereotypes. Others recalled being taken away from their families during the Sixties Scoop and growing up in the foster care system. A few participants explained that they learned about their Indigenous identity only later in life, either because they grew up in foster care removed from their families, because their Indigenous identity was kept a secret, or because a family member was enfranchised.

5.1.2 Meanings of Traditional foods

In addressing the first research objective, the thematic analysis of 19 interviews led to four findings with respect to the meaning of traditional foods: for the participants who were interviewed, traditional foods represent (1) pride, (2) love, (3) connection (to culture, ancestors, and homes), and (4) health.

First, traditional foods were a source of pride for two participants; these foods make them feel proud to be Indigenous. Second, participants described the act of

preparing traditional foods as an expression of love (towards the self and towards those who allowed them to have access to it). Third, many participants described how traditional foods represent a connection to their cultures, their ancestors, and their homes. Preparing traditional foods is a way for participants to reconnect to their Indigenous culture, a connection that had been severed for some due to the Sixties Scoop, or other acts of dispossession. Finally, participants also reported that they understand traditional foods to be healthy and nutritious. Others explained that the foods help with the treatment of diabetes, which often runs in families and is prevalent in some Indigenous communities (Halseth, 2019).

5.1.3 Impacts of SOAHAC's TFB program

The impacts of SOAHAC's TFB program were identified as (1) allowing the sharing of food with family members (2) supporting health, (3) providing financial benefits, (4) supporting connection to cultures and ancestors, (5) supporting access, and (6) allowing for the discovery of new foods and learning about traditional foods. The first impact was social: SOAHAC's TFB program made it possible for participants to share traditional foods with their families. Preparing and sharing these foods allows for the sharing of culture that is intertwined with traditional foods, and the transmission of culture between generations. Second, the TFB program also supported participant's health, particularly in relation to regulating diabetes. A third impact was made clear when participants added that the TFB offered financial benefits as well. Some traditional foods, such as wild rice, can be found in grocery stores, yet participants stated that these foods were too expensive for them to be able to purchase them. A few participants had been shifting their diets towards more traditional foods, for health reasons, and the TFB

program helped them to avoid the high cost of purchasing traditional foods. Fourth, SOAHAC's TFB program allowed participants to feel connected to their ancestors and cultures by accessing and preparing traditional foods. A fifth impact of the TFB program was that it provided access to foods that had been inaccessible. Many participants said that they had been unable to access traditional foods living in the London area. A few explained that they could access traditional foods if they went back to their reserves, but that it was often challenging to find the means to travel to their reserves. Finally, the last impact concerned knowledge. For many, SOAHAC's TFB allowed them to discover new traditional foods, to try traditional foods for the first time, or to learn how to prepare traditional foods, such as corn soup.

5.1.4 People and Places Supporting Indigenous Identities in the City

With regard to the second research objective, many participants explained that it was difficult for them to feel connected to their Indigenous identities while living in London. A few participants, however, mentioned that it was easier for them to feel connected now that they were involved with Indigenous organizations across the city. 15 participants mentioned that Indigenous organizations in London (N'Amerind, Atlhosa, SOAHAC) or Friendship Centres in other cities where they had lived in the past have helped them to feel connected to their Indigenous identities. In particular, participants noted that urban Indigenous organizations contributed to building a sense of community while providing culturally sensitive care and programs, such as the TFB, which support learning or rediscovery of cultural practices.

5.2 Theoretical Implications

As I analysed and considered the data from the interviews, I found myself returning to two questions: “Whose futures are imagined, emplaced and made im/possible in and through the city?” (Tomiak, 2017, p. 931) and “how can Indigenous peoples practice their cultures and Indigenous Knowledge systems in the new spaces and places they occupy?” (Richmond & Big Canoe, 2018, p. 185). It is important to recognize how dispossession has shaped the experience of Indigenous women. It is also important to recognizing the role that Indigenous women are playing in creating spaces of belonging in cities. I am interested in the ways in which urban Indigenous women are practicing their cultures and upholding their own ways of knowing in cities, which are spaces that participants in this study have described as being, at times, hostile. Racism and negative stereotypes, mistreatment in schools and healthcare spaces, foster care, the Sixties Scoop, the intergenerational consequences of residential school, and the loss of status are all experiences that were shared among most participants of this study. Poor health, exclusion, and loss of cultural identity among Indigenous women are all products of the gendered impacts of environmental dispossession (Gehl, 2000; Million, 2008; Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016; Lawrence, 2003).

In spite of historic and ongoing experiences of dispossession, as Fiona explained in her interview, urban Indigenous peoples are still here; they have adapted. We need a framework to understand *how* Indigenous peoples are reasserting and reclaiming their relationship to cultural practices, traditional lands, and ways of knowing, particularly in urban spaces. The concept of environmental repossession describes the different ways by which Indigenous peoples and communities are reclaiming their traditional lands and

ways of life in support of wellness, healing, and belonging (Big-Canoe & Richmond, 2014). It has been used in multiple rural and reserve-based contexts, including on Biigtigong Nishnaabeg territory and along the Biigtig Ziibii (Pic River) (Nightingale & Richmond, 2022a; Nightingale & Richmond, 2022b; Mikraszewicz & Richmond, 2019). Recently, literature on environmental repossession in urban settings has been emerging. Hatala et al. (2019) explored Indigenous youth's perceptions of connections between land, nature, and wellness in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. They suggest that environmental repossession in urban geographies can be understood as a set of "place-making and meaning-making processes" that nurture human-nature relationships within urban geographies (Hatala et al., 2019, p.122). According to Hatala et al. (2019), environmental repossession in the city can be understood as a variety of everyday acts of decolonization that Indigenous peoples employ to "reconstruct and acquire cultural authenticity such as processes of 'land- making' and nurturing human-nature relationships within urban cityscapes" (Hatala et al., 2019, p. 124). Peach et al. (2020) describe how Indigenous gardens on university campuses exemplify the mobilization of Indigenous peoples towards environmental repossession within settler colonial institutions. Ambtman-Smith & Richmond (2020) describe how the concept of environmental repossession can support health and healing in spaces far from traditional territories, such as in healthcare spaces. Coombes, in Richmond et al. (2024), discusses environmental repossession within the context of a Māori youth project, Taniwha Club, in southern Auckland, Aotearoa (New Zealand), and their acts of guerrilla gardening. Recognizing the experiences of resettlement and displacement of Indigenous peoples globally, Richmond et al. (2024)

argue that if environmental repossession is to be useful to Indigenous communities, it must speak to urban Indigenous peoples.

Environmental repossession seeks to “restore Indigenous place-based relationships and practices, including those relating to land” (Richmond et al., 2024, p. 10). It is often described as being supported by three elements: connection to land, the sharing of knowledge, and social relationships (Mikraszewicz & Richmond, 2019). As environmental repossession has yet to be extensively studied in an urban context, it is valuable to look at how these three elements of environmental repossession can be manifested in a city space. Applied in the context of an urban Indigenous environment, environmental repossession offers an avenue to explore how Indigenous women are engaging in particular practices of repossession that support well-being, health, and connection or re-connection to identity. This thesis argues that a program of distribution of traditional foods to Indigenous peoples in an urban setting supports processes of environmental repossession in several ways: through the cultivation of relationships, through the reassertion of connection to place, and through the transmission and sharing of knowledge. Using SOAHAC’s TFB as a case study, below I describe how the findings from this study can be understood through the theoretical framework of environmental repossession.

5.2.1 Relationships

A key component of environmental repossession is that it fosters relationships. The case study of SOAHAC’s TFB highlighted multiple ways in which Indigenous organizations and the programs that they offer foster relationships. The provision of

traditional foods offered a connection to ancestors and allowed participants to share these foods with their children, and so served as an avenue to share culture between generations, and to pass down knowledge. More broadly, SOAHAC and other urban Indigenous organizations support networks of care and kinship, facilitating community-building in cities.

5.2.1.1 Connection to Ancestors and Sharing with Family Members

Connection to ancestors is directly tied to wellness (Richmond et al., 2024). Participants made reference to their ancestors throughout the interviews. For example, Ella feels closer to her ancestors now that she knows about her Indigenous identity and has been engaging in her culture, through practices such as consuming traditional foods. Vera has been on a health journey in which she has been trying to eat a traditional diet. She feels as though she can hear her grandmothers as she prepares traditional foods. SOAHAC's TFB program has also allowed for participants to share traditional foods with other members of their families. Sharing food is, then, more than just a practice of feeding a family; it is also a practice of sharing a culture. These examples illustrate the theoretical claim in concrete practices: preparing and sharing traditional foods is one way in which Indigenous women are both reconnecting with their relationships with ancestors (and the places associated with their ancestors), and acting to strengthen their relationships with younger generations.

5.2.1.2 On Urban Indigenous Organizations Supporting Community

A significant finding from this thesis is the importance of urban Indigenous organizations in supporting connection to Indigenous identities. Importantly, as cities have become home to many Indigenous peoples, it is crucial that their well-being, and

health should be nurtured in urban spaces. Three of London's Indigenous organizations, SOAHAC, N'Amerind Friendship Centre, and Atlhosa are places that participants go to feel connected to their identities as Indigenous women. Beyond programs and culturally safe care, Indigenous organizations offer a network of support and foster community (Nelson & Wilson, 2020). The significance of Indigenous spaces in cities merits further investigation. Below I situate SOAHAC within the history of urban Indigenous organizations built by women.

SOAHAC's services are almost exclusively run by women. This is not unusual; I want to highlight the specific role that Indigenous women play in fostering community in cities. The Indian Act, which remains in place today, can be understood first and foremost, as a geographic piece of legislation. Desbiens and Lévesque (2016) have described the discriminatory policy of the Indian Act as an act of gendering space. Dispossessed and displaced from their homelands, Indigenous women have been at the forefront of place-making in city spaces. There is now an extensive network of Indigenous institutions and organizations in cities, providing various services that promote wellness and belonging (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). As of 2016 in Quebec, nine out of the ten Native friendship centres were run by a woman (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). These places of relationality and belonging, such as Native Friendship Centres like N'Amerind or health centres such as SOAHAC are key elements of the infrastructure in cities that support connection to Indigenous identities and help to build community.

These institutions have progressed from invisible to visible infrastructure in the city as they have moved from what many considered “domestic” spaces to more institutional spaces (Newhouse, 2011). Women have been identified as key architects of what Newhouse (2011) has called “the invisible infrastructure” of urban Indigenous institutions (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016, p. 89). That is to say, Indigenous women in particular have been key players in these institutions and organizations that have long been ignored.

Although many Indigenous women live physically removed from their home communities, women-led friendship centres allow Indigenous women to find a community “of mind and spirit” (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016, p. 96). Efforts by Indigenous organizations aim to re-cover and re-make land-based practices and relationships to urban spaces in support of healing, belonging, and thriving (Hatala et al., 2019). In this way, these spaces allow for the strengthening of Indigenous identity and maintenance of relationality to ancestral homelands. Native friendship centres are “new” Indigenous spaces of safety, security, and inclusion in cities (Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016). The creation of these centres allows for Indigenous women to assert their belonging in the city.

One theme that has emerged from my research on this project is that environmental repossession through re-forging relationships is fostered for many urban Indigenous people through Indigenous organizations providing programs such as SOAHAC'S TFB program. The TFB program does so in two ways: first by offering a means for Indigenous peoples to connect with their ancestors and with their families, and

second, by providing a structure in which Indigenous people can recover and build community ties. Moreover, Indigenous organizations are largely created and administered by Indigenous women. Although, then, Indigenous women arguably suffered more extreme environmental dispossession because of gendered enfranchisement by the Indian Act, they are also the prime movers in environmental repossession, in two ways that I explore in the next sub-section: first, Indigenous women are building programs that reconnect people to traditional lands through traditional foods sourced from those lands, and second, they are at the same time building community among Indigenous people in urban spaces. Programs like SOAHAC's TFB program offer strategies to Indigenous women as they imagine their futures in urban environments, to allow them to build community.

5.2.2 Land

5.2.2.1 Establishing Connection to Traditional Lands

Indigenous foodways are intricately linked to land. SOAHAC's TFB program allowed participants to establish connection to traditional lands as well as creating meaning in urban spaces. SOAHAC's TFB allowed participants to access foods that are harvested, hunted, fished, or gathered by Indigenous peoples on Indigenous land.

While some participants can and do return to their home communities, some have no ties to their communities. Displacement and enfranchisement have led to the severing of ties for some Indigenous peoples, and to living far removed from their home communities. More broadly, Indigenous peoples are now increasingly urbanized, and this movement towards urban spaces is expected to continue (Stephens, 2015). Environmental

repossession enables those who might not be able to connect to traditional lands otherwise to reconnect in new ways (Richmond et al., 2024)

5.2.2.2 Meaning-making in Cities: Creating New Spaces of Belonging

Tomiak (2017) explains that the city is “at the heart of settler colonialism” in Canada (p.940). While cities are premised on the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Tomiak, 2017), they are also the home to many Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (North America) (Stephens, 2015). Over half of the Indigenous population in Canada now resides in cities; in the United States and Australia, the Indigenous population living in urban areas is also over 50% (Skinner et al., 2016). Throughout the 20th century, Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island (North America) transitioned from being a rural to an urban population. With this shift, came changes in community organization (Krouse & Howard, 2009). Beyond simply populating cities, Indigenous women in particular have been at the heart of creating community in city spaces (Krouse & Howard, 2009). As acts of resistance against the gendered and geographic control of the Indian Act, Indigenous women have created new spaces of belonging in cities. Until recently, environmental repossession has been applied as a concept mostly in rural and reserve-based spaces. In a newly published book on environmental repossession, Richmond et al. (2024) sought to challenge the misconceptions about what Indigeneity looks like, including how connections to land can take place. By doing so, we can more easily consider alternative spaces of connection, such as cities.

Hatala et al. (2019) suggest that environmental repossession is not just the reoccupation of a physical space. Rather, the connections to land that environmental

repossession refers to become “dynamic sites of meaning, struggle, spiritual inquiry, and transformation” (Hatala et al., 2019, p.122). Exploring environmental repossession in urban spaces allows us to re-imagine the relationship between individuals and place, and the relational philosophies that are dominant in Indigenous cultures.

If we understand place-people connections as existing outside of physical/spatial boundaries, the possibilities for environmental repossession to be enacted in the city broaden. By engaging in place-making and meaning-making processes in the city, Indigenous peoples are both strengthening their connections to their ancestral territories as well as strengthening their connection to the city. As Indigenous peoples are becoming more and more urbanized globally (Stephens, 2015), re-imagining how connections between peoples and places can be reinforced, created, and maintained in urban spaces is crucial in dismantling the colonial limited understanding of Indigeneity and in honouring the resurgence of Indigenous peoples in cities.

This research contributes to the literature on environmental repossession by suggesting that accessing and preparing traditional foods in city spaces can be a form of environmental repossession with significant consequences for health, identity, and family and community relationships. Understanding how environmental repossession can be enacted in spaces that are sometimes far removed from traditional lands is crucial for a variety of reasons already noted: some Indigenous people will not have a family or community to return to, and city spaces are home for many.

5.2.3 Knowledge

Indigenous Knowledge refers to “the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and other living beings and spirits that share their lands” (Battiste & Henderson, 2000, p. 42). SOAHAC’s TFB program, importantly, helped participants gain access to traditional foods in the city of London. Food has long been used as a way to further control and dispossess Indigenous peoples. Food can also serve as a way to reconnect and re-gain autonomy and agency over health and well-being, to *repossess*. Traditional foods are central to culture, identity, and Indigenous self-determination (Settee and Shukla, 2020). The TFB program allowed for clients to try foods that they might not have had before, or had not had access to for a long time. The sharing of traditional foods and recipes helps to nurture ties that, for some, have been lost.

Environmental repossession through the acquisition and transmission of Indigenous Knowledge occurred among the participants in SOAHAC’s TFB program in two different ways. First, the program led to sharing of knowledge related to foods, which also often involved a knowledge of the places from which the food was sourced. Second, simply in virtue of attending these centres, participants in the program and clients of SOAHAC exchanged knowledge among themselves and with health practitioners, traditional healers, and other service providers. For example, a few participants mentioned that they have learned Indigenous languages by attending different urban Indigenous organizations in London. Beyond the specific forms of knowledge sharing, such as recipes and languages, there were also many everyday acts of sharing knowledge with each other, facilitated by contact through the program. As clients

would come to pick up their TFB, they had opportunities to talk amongst each other about traditional foods. By chatting with clients during the distribution of the baskets, I also got to learn more deeply about the foods being distributed, and feel grateful for all those who shared their knowledge with me.

5.3. Methodological Implications

Community-engaged research that serves the community involved is a core tenet of Indigenous health geography (Richmond & Big-Canoe, 2018). Following community-engaged practices can help minimize the possibility of harmful research. Community-led research creates culturally relevant data that can help, in this case, to provide evidence for the benefits of traditional food programs in cities (Richmond & Dokis, 2023). Among geographers, ethical research relationships with Indigenous communities need to be built (Louis, 2007). A focus on respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility is encouraged when conducting community-engaged research (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). As a settler scholar, it was vital for me to constantly reflect on my position within my research and at SOAHAC. In the case of SOAHAC's TFB program, running a traditional food program is labour and resource intensive and requires a lot of preparation. As a form of reciprocity, my role as a volunteer was simply to share my time with SOAHAC. Sharing time and resources, if invited and offered in an appropriate manner, is one way in which settler graduate students can take part in community-engaged research with Indigenous communities. This research project, and the methodological approach it took, is adding to the examples of settler scholarship research within geography.

It was important that this research was relevant for the SOAHAC community. In discussion with SOAHAC, it was decided that the creation of a film would be a useful way to demonstrate the impact of the TFB program. And so, as part of our research outputs, a film was made to highlight the TFB program. The making of this film occurred in tandem of this thesis, however, it is an important element as it is used, among other things, to demonstrate the value of the TFB project to the program's funders, the London Community Foundation. A few of the first interviews were filmed, so that we could include the voices of women who have been receiving the baskets in the film. On April 11th 2024, we held a viewing of the film at SOAHAC for the SOAHAC staff, the participants who took part in the film, and the funders of the TFB program, the London Community Foundation.

The creation of this film was important for many reasons. As the funding for the pilot TFB program ended in December of 2023, we hope that the film will help support SOAHAC to gain funding to continuing the TFB program in the future. It has now become a staple among clients who take part in the food programs offered by SOAHAC, but since December 2023, SOAHAC no longer has funding to continue the program. The film and film screening was also important as it highlighted how much work went into running the TFB. The TFB program was a collective effort: it would not have run if it was not for the dedication of Jocelyn, other SOAHAC staff, and volunteers. The film also allows for participants to see what others had to say, and how their experience may differ and resemble each other at the same time. There are many ways to share the story of SOAHAC's pilot program, this thesis is only one of them.

5. 4 Practical Implications

In this section I discuss the practical implications of the findings from the research on SOAHAC's TFB program. The discussion is divided according to two themes: urban traditional food programming and urban Indigenous organizations.

5.4.1 On Food, Well-being, and Identities

In London, Ontario, it is estimated that Indigenous people are ten-times more likely to endure food insecurity compared to non-Indigenous people (Our Health Counts, n.d.). Access to traditional foods is a way to alleviate food insecurity for Indigenous peoples (Elliot et al., 2012). Addressing food security in a culturally sensitive way is important for a number of reasons, one of which is that it has practical implications. The purpose of this research project was not simply to demonstrate the need for traditional food programming in cities. SOAHAC's TFB program came into being because clients at SOAHAC had expressed interest in this program, so the perceived need had already been demonstrated. We were interested in investigating why this type of programming matters -- what it means to the participants, and how it impacts their lives.

More than just nourishing the body, food contributes to well-being, identities, and cultures (Hanemaayer, 2020; Levkoe et al., 2019). The findings from this project identify food as closely linked to culture, reflecting similar findings by other researchers (Martens & Cidro, 2020; Baskin et al., 2009). Along with identifying the practical, cultural, and relational meanings traditional foods hold for Indigenous women, this research highlights that traditional foods can be difficult to access in London, Ontario. SOAHAC's TFB program increased accessibility, as many participants had not been able to obtain these

foods prior to participating in the program. SOAHAC's TFB program contributed to wellness by, among other things, supporting health, particularly in relation to regulating diabetes, and making possible the production of new knowledge about traditional foods. While many participants have had experiences of dispossession that can lead to the loss of knowledge of traditional foods, SOAHAC's TFB program allowed for learning or re-learning about these foods. The program also supported different types of relationships: to family, ancestors, homes, and cultures. Relationality is a key element of wellness (Richmond et al., 2024). By sharing traditional foods with family members, participants were able to share their culture, while also nurturing a personal connection to their ancestors, homes, and cultures. In doing so, participants were able to strengthen their Indigenous identities in the city. In addition, urban Indigenous organizations support healing and are centres for culture (Cidro et al., 2015). Among participants, these spaces were identified as important for providing opportunities in the city to strengthen their Indigenous identities.

5.4.2 Program Constraints

In volunteering at SOAHAC as well as by talking with clients during interviews, certain constraints on SOAHAC's TFB became evident to me. One constraint was the limited workforce. Running the traditional food program is labour intensive. The funding for the TFB program covered the complete cost of all the food, but did not allocate funds to pay for a coordinator of the program. The program was administered entirely by Jocelyn and myself. Many volunteers helped with the program, as did some staff members in pauses between seeing clients, or during their lunch break. Recognizing the level of effort, care, and work that is put into running a pilot food program is vital. For

this program to be sustainable, it needs dedicated human resources as well as financial resources. Further, for this program to expand, the demand for the TFB program could be better met if food storage facilities were expanded.

Another constraint was the lack of resources to continue the TFB program. The funding for the TFB pilot program ended at the end of 2023, and to date, SOAHAC has not secured funding to allow them to continue the TFB program as it was developed in the pilot. Currently, SOAHAC has funding for 2024 that will allow them to purchase meat and fish, but not to order other traditional foods.

A third constraint highlighted in the interviews was that many participants had little knowledge of traditional foods or experience in preparing them. Some participants asked for more recipes to be included in future baskets. Building the capacity of this program to include more knowledge sharing will be an important component in future efforts to provide access to traditional foods.

5.4.3 On Urban Indigenous Organizations

Beyond providing culturally relevant foods, SOAHAC helps to strengthen Indigenous women's connection to their Indigenous identities. Recognizing the importance of Indigenous organizations in urban spaces, such as health care centres and friendship centres is vital. One reason SOAHAC was mentioned as supporting connection to identity is that participants felt safe and understood at SOAHAC, while in other healthcare spaces they did not. Racism and discrimination are serious barriers in accessing proper and culturally safe health care for Indigenous peoples in Ontario (Monchalin et al., 2020; Kitching et al., 2020). Effective community development and

delivery of health-care depend on relations of trust. Culturally appropriate programming that is open to community feedback, such as the TFB program, can help build trust.

The experiences of Indigenous peoples in Canada must be understood within the context of historical and contemporary colonial policies (Kitching et al., 2020). Land dispossession, the intergenerational harm of residential school, the impact of the Sixties Scoop, enfranchisement, the reserve system, as well as other colonial policies have all played a role in shaping the experiences of Indigenous peoples and are intricately linked to the health status and well-being of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous organizations in cities are offering spaces where these experiences are not diminished or forgotten. Rather, they recognize the harm of years of colonial harm and try to address it in meaningful ways. Culturally sensitive health care and community-building are important for many reasons, one of which is that they are more effective; they can be powerful. Some participants, notably Verra, Darcy, and Ella, have been on health journeys, and SOAHAC's TFB program has played a role in supporting these journeys.

As I return to the question that Tomiak (2017) posed: "Whose futures are imagined, emplaced and made im/possible in and through the city?", I think about the futures that are possible for Indigenous peoples in cities. In the case of Canadian cities, it is important to recognize that cities have been built on the dispossession of Indigenous peoples (Tomiak, 2017). It is also important to recognize the history of place and meaning-making that Indigenous people, women in particular, have undertaken in cities.

5.5 Conclusion

This research project sought to explore how urban-based traditional food programming supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identity. SOAHAC's TFB program promoted wellness in many ways. Participants faced experiences of dispossession that can result in loss of knowledge related to traditional foods. The TFB program facilitated learning or relearning of these foods and helped to foster connections to family, ancestors, homes, and cultures. Relationality was nurtured as participants shared their cultures through traditional foods, reinforcing their Indigenous identities in urban contexts. Urban Indigenous organizations play a vital role in this process, serving as cultural hubs that support healing and strengthen Indigenous identities within cities.

This research is expected to help SOAHAC secure funding for future years that will enable them to continue the TFB program and eventually transition all of their food security programs toward a focus on traditional foods. Second, this project is adding to the emerging literature exploring environmental repossession in urban spaces. The highly gendered impacts of environmental dispossession have led to legacies of poor health, exclusion and loss of cultural identity among Indigenous women (Gehl, 2000; Million, 2008; Desbiens & Lévesque, 2016; Lawrence, 2003). This research highlights: (1) how urban-based traditional food programming supports Indigenous women's well-being in the city and strengthens their cultural identity; and (2) the importance of urban Indigenous organizations in supporting the well-being of Indigenous peoples in cities. Applied in the context of an urban Indigenous environment, this research showcases how Indigenous

women are engaging in practices of repossession to reclaim and strengthen their identities and place-making.

5.5.1 Limitations

As I was working as a volunteer throughout my research, it was sometimes difficult to balance the distribution of the food baskets while also setting up times to meet for interviews. My role as a volunteer at SOAHAC was important, and so I felt the need to continue to honour my role in supporting the TFB program while I began the process of interviewing clients. One challenge that was recurrent for me was the limitation on my contact with clients. As a volunteer working in a health center, other than when I saw clients in person during food distribution hours, I could only contact clients by talking to them on the phone while I was physically present at SOAHAC. For confidentiality reasons, I could not leave SOAHAC with contact information. This constraint made setting up interviews somewhat more difficult than expected.

Upon reviewing the interview transcripts, I noticed that there were occasions when I could have followed-up on responses and comments that participants made. As it was difficult for some participants to recount parts of their stories during the interviews, I wanted to make sure that clients felt no pressure to say more than they felt comfortable sharing. The data might have been richer, however, had I asked more follow-up questions at certain points, when appropriate. The process of interviewing clients taught me many things, including the importance of deep listening.

5.5.2 Future directions

The TFB program was a pilot program, introduced with the hope that it would offer important impacts and learning lessons for growing a better program. One future goal for urban-based food programming is to transition from the mere offering of traditional foods into knowledge sharing, practice, and ideally sovereignty over traditional foods and foodways, in all of the places Indigenous peoples find themselves, including urban spaces.

Indigenous peoples' futures were not imagined in the construction of cities in Canada (Tomiak, 2017). Applying the concept of environmental repossession in a city allows for new futures to be imagined and made possible for urban Indigenous peoples. This case study is only one of the many stories of Indigenous women engaging in environmental repossession in a city space. There are many more yet to be told.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board Approval



Date: 14 July 2023
To: Prof. Chantelle Richmond
Project ID: 123340
Study Title: A cultural evaluation of SOAHAC's Traditional Foods Basket Program (London, Ontario)
Short Title: Traditional Foods Basket
Application Type: NMREB Initial Application
Review Type: Delegated
Full Board Reporting Date: 04/Aug/2023
Date Approval Issued: 14/Jul/2023 11:59
REB Approval Expiry Date: 14/Jul/2024

Dear Prof. Chantelle Richmond

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the above mentioned study, as of the date noted above. NMREB approval for this study remains valid until the expiry date noted above, conditional to timely submission and acceptance of NMREB Continuing Ethics Review.

This research study is to be conducted by the investigator noted above. **All other required institutional approvals and mandated training must also be obtained prior to the conduct of the study.**

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
4.1 RECRUITMENT_SCRIPT	Oral Script		
2.19 END_OF_STUDY_LETTER	End of Study Letter	17/May/2023	1
2.5 SHARING_CIRCLE	Focus Group(s) Guide		
5.5 LETTER OF INFORMATION_CLEAN (1)	Written Consent/Assent	28/Jun/2023	two
5.5 LETTER OF CONSENT_SHARING_CIRCLE_CLEAN	Written Consent/Assent	28/Jun/2023	one
2.5 INTERVIEW_GUIDE_CLEAN (1)	Interview Guide	28/Jun/2023	two

Documents Acknowledged:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
TRAC Response Template - Transcript Heroes	Technology Review document	28/Jun/2023	1
Acceptance of Risk - Medium Risk (1)	Technology Review document	28/Jun/2023	1

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Riley Hinson, NMREB Vice-Chair

Appendix 2: Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board Amendment Approval



Date: 2 August 2023

To: Prof. Chantelle Richmond

Project ID: 123340

Study Title: A cultural evaluation of SOAHAC's Traditional Foods Basket Program (London, Ontario)

Application Type: NMREB Amendment Form

Review Type: Delegated

Full Board Reporting Date: 08/Sep/2023

Date Approval Issued: 02/Aug/2023 19:36

REB Approval Expiry Date: 14/Jul/2024

Dear Prof. Chantelle Richmond,

The Western University Non-Medical Research Ethics Board (NMREB) has reviewed and approved the WREM application form for the amendment, as of the date noted above.

Documents Approved:

Document Name	Document Type	Document Date	Document Version
5.5 LETTER OF INFORMATION – FILMING	Written Consent/Assent	31/Jul/2023	1
Video Release Form	Written Consent/Assent	01/Aug/2023	1

The Western University NMREB operates in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2), the Ontario Personal Health Information Protection Act (PHIPA, 2004), and the applicable laws and regulations of Ontario. Members of the NMREB who are named as Investigators in research studies do not participate in discussions related to, nor vote on such studies when they are presented to the REB. The NMREB is registered with the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services under the IRB registration number IRB 00000941.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Ms. Katelyn Harris, Research Ethics Officer on behalf of Dr. Isha DeCoito, NMREB Chair

Note: This correspondence includes an electronic signature (validation and approval via an online system that is compliant with all regulations).

Appendix 3: Interview Guide

Interview Guide

Thank you for agreeing to meet with me today. {Clara introduces herself}. The goal of this project is to learn more about what the Traditional Foods Baskets mean for Indigenous women who received them. Do you consent to having this interview recorded? Let's start with getting to know a little about you.

About the interviewee:

- i. Can you tell me a little about yourself and your family?
 - a. where do you live and who do you live with?
 - b. how old are you?
- ii. What First Nation do you belong to?
 - a. do you still have family in your community and do you visit there?
- iii. How long have you lived in London?
 - a. How do you like living here?
- iv. Have you lived in other places?
- v. What brought you to London?

About Traditional Foods:

1. Can you tell me what traditional foods mean to you as an Indigenous person?
2. What traditional foods do you enjoy the most? And are you able to access those foods?
3. Did you have access to traditional foods in London prior to the traditional food baskets?
4. What have you enjoyed most about the traditional food baskets?
5. Are there any foods you would have liked to see in the traditional food baskets?
6. Did you know how to prepare the foods in the traditional food baskets?
7. What do traditional foods mean to you as an Indigenous Person?
8. Do you have any memories of traditional foods growing up?
9. Has accessing traditional foods through SOAHAC's traditional food basket made an impact on you or your family? Please describe. (Prompts: economic, social, cultural)

About Connections:

1. In our previous studies, we have found that Indigenous women in the city can sometimes feel less connected or supported to their cultures.
2. Do you find it challenging to connect with your cultural identity in London?
3. Are there people or places that help you feel more connected to your Indigenous identity here in London? How do these people/places support that positive belonging?
4. The traditional food baskets is a pilot program and we would love to see it become a permanent part of SOAHAC's programming. Do you have any comments or suggestions about the traditional food baskets that you would like to share? Maybe new foods? Or other offerings? Possible classes/programs to make it more accessible?

I greatly appreciate the time that you have taken to share your thoughts and experiences with me. Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Curriculum Vitae

Name: Clara Lewis

Post-secondary Education and Degrees: Dawson College
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
2016-2018 DEC

McGill University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada
2018-2022 B.A.

Honours and Awards: Social Science and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)
Canada Graduate Scholarship – Master’s
2022-2023

Related Work Experience: Teaching Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2022-2024

Research Assistant
The University of Western Ontario
2022-2023

Presentations:

Lewis, C. (2024, April 16) Supporting Practices of Environmental Repossession through a Traditional Foods Basket Program in London, Ontario [Conference presentation]. AAG 2024, Honolulu, Hawai’i.