Silent Voices, Absent Bodies, and Quiet Methods: Revisiting the Processes and Outcomes of Personal Knowledge Production Through Body-Mapping Methodologies Among Indigenous Youth

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Abstract
At the interface of Western and Indigenous research methodologies, this paper revisits the place of the “personal” and “autobiographical” self in qualitative visual research. We outline a community and partnership-based evaluation of a theater program for Indigenous youth using arts-based body-mapping approaches in Saskatoon, Canada, and explore the methodological limitations of the narrator or artist’s voice and representations to translate personal visual-narratives and personal knowledges they hold. In so doing, we describe how body-mapping methods were adapted and improvised to respond to the silent voices and absent bodies within personal visual-narratives with an epistemological eclecticism handling the limitations of voice and meaningfully engaging the potentiality of quietness. Extending the conceptual and methodological boundaries of the “personal” and “autobiographical” for both narrator and interlocutor, artist and observer, we contribute to debates on the processes and outcomes of personal knowledge production by articulating a generative, ethical, and culturally-grounded project mobilizing body-mapping as a quiet method that pursues self-work—the passionate and emergent practices of working on one’s self and making self appear in non-representational and ceremonial ways.

Keywords
arts based methods, emancipatory research, narrative, community based research, critical theory, methods in qualitative inquiry

That was mom and dad. I first heard that in a sweatlodge. They were sprinkling that mind-your-own-business medicine over the Grandfathers [rocks]. They never told me what the ingredients comprised of. Mom and dad would smile when I asked what that meant. From a Cree man’s perspective as an oskapewis [ceremonial helper], my business is my culture. One’s business is what keeps one busy, what keeps one moving. What is the undercurrent behind one’s skills, one’s knowledge? The pipe’s my business. My prayers are my business. Those teachings on how I conduct myself here on Mother Earth are my business [. . .] My business makes sure the next generation is at a point where they can pass those teachings on. My business is no different than my ancestors; to protect knowledge and allow knowledge to thrive. But my business is not everyone else’s business. My business is my medicine. My sacred story is my medicine. Everyone else has their sacred story. Not everyone is gonna understand me and my business (Kelley Bird-Naytowhow, telephone conversation between first and second author).

Qualitative visual research methods have been popularized under the premise of youth empowerment and voice in Western liberal democratic societies as having the capacity to “make visible,” “give voice to,” and “break the silence of” young people (Thomson, 2009). While admirable, this premise of voice-giving has potential to misguide researchers on methodological and ethical grounds influenced by emancipatory agendas at times preoccupying research (Baraldi & Cockburn, 2018).

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On the one hand, an enlightenment rationale tells us people have something important to say, and with the appropriate tools, we can adequately capture their perspectives to inform those working to improve their lives (Mannion, 2007). In contrast, a dangerous assumption conflates “silence” with “powerlessness,” therefore dismisses silence in favor of voice as superior, good, liberatory, and civilized (Lewis, 2010). Minimizing cross-cultural contexts of voice, this premise accepts youth voice as self-evident while denying the “voiceless” agency and viewing silence as nothing more than an obstacle when mobilizing the methodological pursuits of truth, justice, and good health during research (Kawabata & Gastaldo, 2015; Spyrou, 2016).

In this paper, we reflect on our application of arts-based body-mapping methods with Indigenous youth in Saskatchewan, Canada as we revisit processes and outcomes of knowledge production from the perspective of the “personal” and the “autobiographical” methods characterizing it. We mobilize body-mapping as a quite method when considering the challenges of translating voice within Canadian Indigenous contexts. We do not propose a body-mapping protocol to obfuscate these challenges, but openly explore the instruments and sensibilities of quiet methods to handle such limitations and open unique research possibilities for voice as well as silence. Often conceptualized and operationalized with enlightenment or emancipatory rationales, we position our methodological considerations alongside Indigenous epistemological standpoints underpinning a more spiritual and inspirational turn for youth voice.

The silences we have heard and absences we have seen demonstrate how quietness becomes a vibrant site of personal knowledge production in generative, ethical, and culturally-grounded ways: finding purpose, sharing one’s gifts and talents, self-preservation, and caring for self. They nurture conditions for what we refer to as self-work; that is, working on one’s self and making self appear during the research process—or minding one’s own business. These discussions contribute to literature problematizing youth voice in qualitative visual research more generally, and share theoretical insights and circumstantial consequences when adapting body-mapping methods within Indigenous research contexts focusing on health, wellness, and resilience.

**Body-Mapping: Where Do We Go From Here?**

The arts-based research method known as body-mapping has gained considerable attention over the last 2 decades, particularly in the health field (De Jager et al., 2016). Body-mapping seeks to represent the embodiment of peoples sensory and bodily capacities through visual-narratives (Brett-MacLean, 2009). It generally consists of a life-sized image of the body traced out and adorned with different artistic symbols for participants to reflect on and express their lived experiences, often around a topic of research interest (see Figures 1 and 2). The representational qualities of body-maps have steadily adopted diverse protocols and art-genres to explore physical bodies as sources of social knowledge (De Jager et al., 2016). By evading a reliance on textual materials and auditory senses, body-mapping has been inclusive of individuals with lower literacies, elicits storytelling around tasks, and accommodates those preferring creative or alternative forms of expression (Bagnoli, 2009; Barriage, 2018).

Attempting to rectify the condition of being silenced by rationalizing voice-giving to the “voiceless,” body-mapping literature has documented its therapeutic, pedagogical, artistic, communicative, political, and investigative potential as both a method and therapy (De Jager et al., 2016). The structured body-mapping workshop approach emerged as an art-therapy for women living with HIV/AIDS in South Africa in 2002 (Solomon, 2007). Although concerned with methodological pursuits for truth, justice, and good health, body-mapping remains a phenomenological and reflexive process much concerned with the “personal” and “autobiographical”—the first-person perspective. As Meiring and Müller (2010) explained, “[e]ven though the body with its emotions, desires and sensations is mediated by physical and social conditions, it is the basis for perception and knowledge of ourselves and objects within the world” (p. 2); it can be consciously perceived both outwardly and inwardly (Koch & Fuchs, 2011).
Despite various potentialities, body-mapping’s visual-narrative and therapeutic capacities—those inaugural undertakings to story healing of self and bodies—have largely been neglected, weakened, and in some instances, inappropriately applied, thus perpetuating harm (Orchard, 2017a). As Orchard (2017a) warns about borrowing body-mapping methods, researchers have adulterated methodological integrity in favor of methodological innovation seeking newness and improvement without considering cultural adequacy and theoretical orientations. While body-mapping literature has focused on describing procedural, empirical, and ethical aspects of adapting its methods, few attempts have ventured to discuss critically the implications of local cultural context and theory on such application, and particularly within Indigenous contexts contending with dominant modes of Western knowledge production (e.g. Gastaldo et al., 2018; Meiring & Müller, 2010; Orchard, 2017b). In the following section, we discuss the epistemological and methodological challenges of mobilizing body-mapping as a personal and autobiographical approach within Indigenous contexts. We engage scholarly debates that seek to problematize the “first-person perspective” and “silence” at the interface of Western and Indigenous knowledge systems.

Performing Method in the First-Person Plural

The “personal” and “autobiographical,” or first-person perspective, I, has long menaced the aspirations of Western science and politics for its inability to attain, and possibly undermine, aspirations for truth and justice within dominant positivist and critical (Marxist) frameworks. The methodological implications involve preferences for constructing the world in the third-person singular or plural (e.g. Ellis et al., 2011; Kovach, 2009; Polanyi, 2015). The former views the “personal” as a threat to empirical objectivity while the latter conceives its individualism as a guise to uphold a dominant social class at the expense of underprivileged masses (Ermine, 1995). Although describing positivism as a greater menace to Indigenous knowledge systems for its atomistic, monothetic, and totalizing propensities—which served as tools of scientific racism and cultural imperialism to dispossess and colonize Indigenous lands and Peoples Ermine (1995) further addressed the challenge posed by critical theory. While used in service of Indigenous struggles, critical frameworks preserve the Western world’s “degenerate outlook” on knowledge and truth: “In short, the western world has capitulated to a dogmatic fixation on power and control at the expense of authentic insights into the nature and origin of knowledge as truth” (p. 102).

Scholars concerned with the first-person perspective have therefore crafted intellectual and political spaces that are pluralistic; inclusive of the first-person as a criterion of methodological rigor and knowledge validation (e.g. Kovach, 2009; Valverde, 2004). The “personal” here cannot be represented prior to, outside, or independent of history, position, experience, and bias—I am because we are. Without perpetuating assumptions constructing truth of and about a unitary and absolute self based on Judeo-Christian foundationalism or modernist secular humanism, the first-person perspective has the capacity to view self-in-relation as multiplicative and multivocal (Valverde, 2004). In other words, the process and outcomes of personal knowledge production are regarded in the first-person plural (/we). This plurality disrupts the Kantian unification of self by recognizing the dialogical nature of intra-subjectivity (Ellsworth, 1989); other-than-human agents (or spirit helpers) from which voice emerges (Morton et al., 2020); and shifts the explanatory capacities over narrative from “whose point of view” to that of “plot” and “literary form” (Valverde, 2004).

This pluralizing perspective, however, hinges on a relevant yet stale debate on privileging either authenticity or non-truth (personal agency) in relation to voice, truth, identity, and power (see debate in Spyrou, 2011); that is, whether knowledge can uncover the “real” or whether the “real” is inexorably illusory and socially constructed. As a function of granting an epistemological hybridity, or eclecticism, many argue that self-understanding should be flexible enough to handle irreconcilable and non-coherent rationalities (Conquergood, 2002; Goldstein, 2012; Law, 2004; Valverde, 2004). While liberal democratic affinities of epistemological hybridity may not be optimal to build theoretically impressive critical methodologies, they may be worthwhile for individuals interpreting their everyday experiences and researchers escaping this debate by tracing the way knowledges are performed with ethical agency, free from pure skepticism about the “personal” and genuine concern over its autobiographical production.

Furthermore, the first-person plural is widely mobilized through representational practices of codifying tacit knowledge and deploying voice that strives for animated and speaking subjects to be seen and heard: confession, testimony, consultation (Bernal et al., 2012; McCall, 2011). Yet, these loud and outward expressions of personal knowledge while contingent during knowledge generation may not always be congruent with other personal and political projects performing method in the first-person plural that are non-representational and ceremonial (e.g. Ermine, 1995), and require quieter and inward expressions of self characterized by silences, introspection, and spiritual embodiment. As such, the first-person perspective may benefit as much from silence-seeking as it does from voice-giving.

Ontologies of Silence and Absence

The nature and being of silence and absence has been broadly constructed through notions of powerlessness and passivity within social science research (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2013). Emerging from earlier emancipatory discourses, conceptions of silence or absence were a punitive effect of domination and penalty. The notion of being silenced or erased as opposed to being silent or absent has constructed the excluded and victimized subject as pathological and incomplete, thus requiring intervention by means of speaking up and out (Kidron, 2012).
Voices apprehend different versions of the “real” and confer a moral duty to use them; perhaps we are even irresponsible if we do not transmit them as they become synonymous with survival, healing, and recovery (Howard, 2018).

Nevertheless, a growing literature conceptualizes being silent or absent within critical frameworks as counter-narrative strategies (Spencer et al., 2020). Firstly, silence or absence can operate through secret knowledge empowering people to actively control silencing or invisibility. Secondly, silence or absence safeguards in cases where voice and presence can be misappropriated or used against the speaker or participant (Ryan-Flood & Gill, 2013). When reading them as incompletions free of error and reconciliation, not hidden Otherness, and correlates of what it means to be heard and seen, they may invigorate sites of inquiry and method largely unengaged (Law, 2004). Among Māori youth, however, Ormond (2001) explained that silences and absences connoting protection can in fact model oppressive self-silencing and become detrimental for personal development. The task for method, then, becomes one of ethical allegiance, and not linguistic or clinical intervention.

While valuable for operationalizing the “personal” and “autobiographical,” these progressivist ontologies of silence and absence obscure faculties of spirituality common across many Indigenous knowledge frameworks (e.g. Ermine, 1995; Kovach, 2009; Rice, 2005; Wilson, 2008). Considering methods produce personal knowledges through spiritual connection, narratives not only become evidential data, but sacred stories that are alive and contain gifts; grounded in natural, moral, and spiritual truths; and transformed through reflection, orality, dialogue, and emergence (Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017). The materialities of method cannot be separated from spiritual knowing and practices deemed sacred, reverent, and self-restorative (Debassige, 2010).

When applied to visual research methods previously criticized for rationalizing and explaining visual material in the context of talk and text (Powell, 2010), silence and absence may productively engage personal knowledge production in non-representational and ceremonial ways that voice may not achieve. Moving to resituate experiences of undocumented Latina youth from a decolonial feminist ontology that is embodied, spiritual, affective and inspired, Elfreich (2019) argued for “stillness” to characterize methods that capture interconnections between the self, soul, and world. Their boundaries malleable and passionate enough to sense the non-coherence characteristic of the “personal” (Law & Singleton, 2013).

Based on our own observations and reflections applying body-mapping approaches, we similarly argue for an embodied, affective, spiritual, and inspired orientation to body-mapping that moves beyond its therapeutic underpinnings to engage self-work. From an Indigenous standpoint, we argue that silence and absence—or quietness—can re-direct and progress research relationships and methods in generative, ethical, and culturally-grounded ways. Although recent methodological contributions have admirably sought to problematize children’s and youth voice, and the power relations and contexts that mediate them (Carnevale, 2020; e.g. Faccia et al., 2020; Spencer et al., 2020), they have done so to the extent that silence or absence remains an extractive and representational site of knowledge production for curious researchers and even those genuinely interested in young people’s voices. Building on these ideas, we demonstrate here that in specific cultural contexts, silence may urge researchers to step back and allow quietness to function in non-representational and ceremonial ways.

Context and Methods
The Gordon Tootoosis NIKăn̓tw̱in Theatre (GTNT) was born as a dream among local Indigenous artists to provide cultural and artistic opportunities for Saskatchewan First Nations youth. One program at GTNT, the Circle of Voices (COV), was initiated in 1999 through the inaugural production titled, “Truth Hurts,” incorporating themes of cultural identity, residential schools, and family. With the overall vision to build creative capacity, explore personal and career aspirations, and enhance cultural and social wellbeing, participants assumed responsibilities for each production: acting, stage management, design, and production assistance. A COV program coordinator, assistant coordinator, Elder, theater professionals, mentors, and GTNT staff guide youth through this process.

In the winter of 2017, GTNT’s Executive Director began conversations with our research team about evaluating resilience, health, and wellness outcomes for COV participants (see Hatala & Bird-Naytowhow, 2020). Our working relationships were guided by shared visions to support youth experiencing socioeconomic and personal hardships in Saskatoon’s central neighborhoods. Drawing on a “Two-Eyed Seeing” approach (Wright et al., 2019) to grapple with the practical, ethical, and cross-cultural challenges of an evaluative study at the interface of a university and community-based partnership involving Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, the research was guided by local GTNT ethical protocols and approved by the University of Manitoba’s Behavioral Research Ethics Board (HS20626–H2017:103). By 2018, COV became a field site for over 8 months, including training workshops and rehearsals.

Initially, personal and cultural development were prioritized where youth participated in one sharing circle each week with an Elder to discuss strengths and challenges, receive cultural teachings, and journaling their experiences. COV ran Monday to Friday from 4 PM to 9 PM at various locations including a youth-serving organization, university drama department, and high school. However, time commitments increased to rehearse the final production developed by Curtis Peeteewin. It was entitled “Pimâtisiwin” and showcased over 8 days in Saskatoon followed by a 1-week tour of First Nations communities. Encompassing themes of food, land, language, and wellness, the story centers on a girl named Autumn experiencing her berry fast as she learns about her family and culture.

Based on conversations amongst university and community partners, a body-mapping methodology was selected, including
a body-mapping workshop (Solomon, 2007) and conversational interviews (Kovach, 2010). Body-mapping was identified as having capacities to trace the embodied resilience, health, and wellness outcomes of COV participants. Moreover, including youth during data collection was argued to enhance the trustworthiness of data and empower youth to assume control over their personal narratives while representing their peers, has become increasingly prevalent to serve decolonizing research agendas.

The research team, including two youth research assistants (YRA) and one adult research coordinator (ARC, second author), proceeded to conduct a body-mapping workshop and interviews. YRA were identified based on existing relationships through research activities (n = 1) and COV alumni (n = 1). The study comprised a convenience sample of 10 participants aged 18–24 years old (out of 11 COV participants), including six females and four males self-identifying as Nêhiyaw Plains Cree (n = 6) and Métis (n = 4). In addition to observing COV sharing circles, a series of data collection events were structured in three rounds to explore evaluation objectives and ensure sustained contact and follow-up with participants: round one interviews (before final production); 2-day body-mapping workshop (after final production); and round two interviews (6 months after workshop). Questions were developed to explore the life histories of youth, experiences in COV, and perspectives on wellness and resilience.

Despite establishing a body-mapping protocol, it was left to our improvisations when meeting evaluative objectives of the community-university partnership while accommodating participants’ personal objectives. Employing visual methods during evaluation demands a managerial discipline and scientific aesthetic of voice characterized by outward expressions of loudness, coherence, and objectivity (Harklau & Morton, 2005), which at times were at odds with quieter methods engaging personal knowledge production that are discussed below.

Field Reflections: Improvising Methods and Practicing Self-Work

A COV participant (P), YRA, and ARC gather at a community center for a second interview and began with a discussion about cultural identity, which carried the conversation forward:

YRA: Would you explain a little bit what it means to be Christian today?
P: Still working on it [laughs].
YRA: What does it mean to be Cree today?
P: It’s good. I’m proud.
[Awkward laughter among YRA and P]

YRA: Is your cultural identity important to you?
P: Yeahhh [speaks quietly].
YRA: How so?
P: Mmmm . . . It’s like knowing where you come from, like who you are.

[12-second pause]

YRA: Ummm
P: Proceed. [speaks with cutesy tone]
YRA: Do you want to help me? [mumbles away from audio recorder]
P: Nooo [speaks slowly].
ARC: Can you explain that a bit?

[Excessive laughter]

P: It’s so racist. It goes way back and it’s still happening today.
YRA: Can you tell us about it?
P: Oh my God. Okay. [casually lists social issues with a confident and abrupt tone] Like residential schools. It started from there . . . that cycle . . . like all the drinking and the drugs, then like with let’s say [clicks fingers] — Family and Social Services. They’re still taking kids and got our people taking our own kids [laughs]. Like with the jail too, there’s mostly native people [. . . ] so there’s like a lot with that. Carry on. [laughs]
ARC: At your age in today’s times, how does that affect you?
P: [long, deep breath] A lot. [laughs]
ARC: Has that history hindered your family?
P: Yeah.
ARC: Either positive or negatively?
P: Um-hmm.
YRA: Do you care to explain? [laughs]
P: [11-second pause] Gee.
ARC: Can you explain that a bit?
P: Noooo [speaks slowly].
YRA: Would you say people from your cultural background are treated fairly?
P: Proceed. [speaks with cutesy tone]
YRA: Ummm
ARC: We’re just trying to get a clearer picture.
P: [laughs] I don’t’ know. [explains slowly with doubting and faint tone] My family, most of my family, is on the rez because living in the city is more difficult nowadays. Does that answer it. [laughs]

The excerpts above illustrate the first and last minutes of an interview with a COV participant. It captures a common problematic of voice that moved the research team to improvise methods while evaluating the COV program. It describes a moment where a YRA asks a participant about her cultural background. Without providing much clarity on reasons she identifies as both Christian and Cree, and only having laughter, murmurs, hesitations, and terse statements containing little to grasp on, the YRA progressively exhausts her rhetorical repertoire of probes until silence soon replaces the discontinuity reached in the participant’s narrative. After a 12-second pause fills the room to the tune of shuffling papers containing interview questions, the assistant turns to the ARC in a plea for help. Through a struggle over voice, partial translation, and the negotiation of semantic irregularities and ambiguous utterances, the dialogue continues for just over 24 minutes after which the conversation concludes with the YRA thanking the participant and the participant stating: “Yeah I’ll probably expect another gift card. Just kidding [laughs].”

As participants visually narrated their bodies as body-talk (oral stories) and body-maps (drawings), the problem of voice...
presented a glaring limitation; that is, an inability to draw out, apprehend, and translate the complex, and sometimes incomprehensible, structures of personal visual-narratives. They were often inexact, incomplete, and lacked narrative coherency outside the conventions of linear storytelling (beginning, middle, end) and familiar master scripts. Yet visual-narratives were at times unevenly punctuated by a confrontational rawness of voice suspending any unnecessary excesses of thought, from which a “loud,” “coherent,” and “conclusive” voice appeared, which should not be mistaken as representing a more coherent sense of self or clearer picture of life. They do not always indicate “good” stories outside their cultural context, social location, and lived experience (Hyvärinen et al., 2010). Furthermore, the conclusiveness of narrative closure has been challenged from the perspective of Indigenous oral traditions as it risks prematurely inducing finality and limiting Indigenous potentiality (Vedal, 2013).

We therefore revisit the processes and outcomes of personal knowledge production when adapting body-mapping methods. We focus on the ways silence and absence operated through personal interactions and methodological improvisations with youth participants that were at once open to the problems of voice, but equally nurtured quieter conditions with a different potentiality for method we refer to as self-work. The following themes outlined in this section describe these conditions and their implications for transforming relationships and methods in practice: 1) ethics of non-interference, 2) inner-workings of quietness, and 3) ceremonial practices of self-work.

**Ethics of Non-Interference**

The application of body-mapping during the COV evaluation presented a general sense of “confusion” among participants. Confusion did not necessarily arise from confusing instructions, but approaching body-mapping through an ethics of non-interference between participants and the research team. In other words, the team encouraged the process to remain non-interference between participants and the research team. It allowed participants to control their personal visual-narratives with unexpected outcomes. As a participant recollects in their second interview after performing body-mapping:

I was skeptical about it [body-mapping]. I was like, “what am I doing? This feels goofy. Weird. I’ve never done this.” I didn’t really have specific feelings about it except I didn’t feel like there was a point of doing it, not until I got into it. It was pretty neat, I found myself kind of tearing up every now and then. I was always in such deep thought.

The research team, however, did not abandon participants or retreat into objective neutrality. The team’s responsibility to maintain a critical and self-reflexive atmosphere for working on one’s story was performed through introductions and preparations. The participants and research team began with introductions to position themselves and account for what they knew about their stories. Likewise, preparation involved participants returning to visual-narratives in different stages of the overall evaluation design as well as brainstorming ideas and symbols on scrap paper prior to creating body-maps. These protocols were facilitated by burning medicines (e.g. sweetgrass, sage) to help participants connect with and cleanse their spirits, and tobacco ties were offered in exchange for stories/gifts and to forge sacred relationships of trust, reciprocity, and respect (Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017).

Equally, creative and practical decisions contributed to the confusion such as insufficient time, learning a new art-form, retrieving faulty memories, and feelings of not being a good artist or art being inadequate to replace writing and speech. “I’d rather write things down than draw them” was a sentiment expressed by several participants. Furthermore, combinations of symbols, emotions, art supplies, and magazine images shaped participants’ understandings whereby diverse personal epistemologies interacted with visual material. In some instances, such interactions were less contentious than others. For example, recognizing magazine images could reinforce stereotypes or limit participants to consumerist and polycultural representations, the team ensured critical discussions occurred to think through their meaning and appropriation. The objective for the team became working through misunderstanding, confusion, and playfully performing alternative points of view, plots, and narrative genres for participants to re-position their different selves while understanding the whole person. As the team held space for discussions, participants reflected on positive and uncomfortable moments in their lives and during COV; the team shared personal stories and cultural teachings; and participants designed body-maps and decided whether to work alone or together.

Nevertheless, an ethics of non-interference did not settle challenges of accurately or precisely translating voice and representing stories. Even though her body-map was the most detailed, a participant expressed limitations of body-mapping and the non-representational qualities it fails to capture (see Figure 3): “They [other people] can try to see what I’m about based off of this [body-map]. In reality, like, you can’t really judge a book by its cover.” Instead, body-mapping allowed the research team to observe and engage not only the voices of participants on their own terms and within their own bodily, narrative, and artistic context, but the silences and absences, or quietness, emerging. In a productive scene indicative of complication rather than rupture or closure, this ethic assisted participants sense, articulate, protect, draw out, and work with their stories without the team’s interventions undesirably contributing to them.

**Inner-Workings of Quietness**

During the interviews and body-mapping workshop, quietness generated from the silences in body-talk and absences on body-maps characterized improvisations of the body-mapping protocol. Quietness was not simply the nonappearance of auditory and visual representations within participants’ visual-
narratives, but acted as strategic moves of evasion to protect their sacred stories as well as introspective moments of deep inward thinking about stories they attempted to transmit. Ensuring our instruments and sensibilities were responsive, we recognized that working on and storying self must not only nurture quietness, but equally remain mindful and slow.

Strategic moves of evasion (mindfulness). Figure 4 shows the body-map of the only participant who actively chose to participate in the body-mapping workshop but not the interviews. As the word “silence” over her mouth indicated, she enjoys being an introvert. Similarly, in more or less nuanced, sophisticated, and explicit ways, participants’ body-talk and body-maps were characterized by strategic moves to carefully evade personal truth-telling. They were expressed among some participants, such as the excerpts introduced earlier in this section, by self-distancing personal narratives from life experiences to present reality and history as factual, objective knowledge independent of who they are, where they come from, and how self-knowledge was acquired. Alternatively, silences and absences were expressed as ambiguities surfacing body-maps; discontinuities in voice through verbal deflections of non-responses, one-word answers, jokes, and oppositional stances to answer back; and shifting commitments on what participants thought we wanted to hear and have illustrated, and what they wanted to say and draw.

In both instances, the inner-workings of quietness functioned as protection and self-preservation as participants withheld voice when asked unwarranted, uncomfortable, or painful questions. Even with the well-intentioned protocol to involve YRA to hear the voices of participants with clarity and ensure rapport and safety could be established, they were not fully capable of doing so. As one participant shared with us: “He [YRA] said things he probably shouldn’t have, but it was nothing to get mad about, there’s just slight little triggers, but nothing to set someone off, just you know the whole being mindful thing.” Encountering these inner-workings of quietness as the research team improvised body-mapping, the research team had to consistently remain mindful when questioning participants while engaging their positionality.

Introspective moments of deep inward thinking (slowness). Without reducing the inner-workings of quietness to calculative agency witnessed above signifying protection/self-preservation, interactions between participants and the research team produced a
different kind of quietness suggesting introspective moments of deep inward thinking. As many participants have endured legacies of colonization, racism, and intergenerational trauma within their families, communities, and institutions they rely on, the team recognized that participants may have never been asked taken-for-granted questions, been inspired to view themselves positively, or may not have engaged self deeply while surviving daily hardships: “I never really had a say or a word or anything in my family.” Under these conditions, youth have been misunderstood or have not been critically questioned without being excluded and punitively chastised. It required the team to not only be mindful during the body-mapping process, but slow to allow for self-reflection. As a participant learned when rushing to draw their body-map: “I’m still really unsure of myself. I probably should be more connected with who I am as a person”.

The research team never fully grasped whether participants always arrived at a deeper questioning of self or understood their stories. And of course not every moment needed to be deep, enlightening, and confessional. However, deep inward thinking was expressed through doubting silences of hesitation to place thoughtful images on body-maps; treating representations about self with an aesthetic and moral sensitivity; and it was characterized by pauses and the indecisiveness of words: “I guess;” “like;” “mmmm;” “does that make sense;” “what do you mean;” “I don’t know how to answer that.” These moments required the team to approach body-mapping with a curious patience. For one participant explaining how he did not learn anything and embellished his body-map with random symbols (see Figure 5), when patiently provided time and space for self-reflection, he began to construct meaning about traditional eagle feathers he received in his life through a SpongeBob SquarePants reference.

Ceremonial Practices of Self-Work

Our observations and reflections of adapting body-mapping approaches suggest avoiding reaching total closure, where quietness constitutes and acts upon stories and bodies themselves in generative ways. Explaining the blank parts of her body-map (see Figure 6), a participant stated: “there’s a lot of power and wonder behind that [purposely leaving body-maps blank for the audience]. I believe things happen for a reason. But I also know that our stories are not finished. There’s a lot untold. That’s why I end there.”
What we refer to as closings, and not closure, however, were not merely a strategic matter of self-preservation and protection, or even a happenstance and thoughtful introspection about self, but came from a solitary quietness and ceremonial place of not knowing and wanting to find out about self—what is unexplored and untold. They do not represent the catharsis of Aristotelian tragedy, or the Judeo-Christian apocalyptic notion of salvation’s final closure (Ødemark, 2017). Rather, closings were momentarily reached through one’s ability to comprehend a stable and coherent narrative continuity about self, even if it was unfinished business (Vedal, 2013). As one youth participant explained: “I had to make myself feel like I was alone so I was able to do this . . . make it more clear for myself.”

This was achieved through quiet, mindful, and slow practices of self-work engaged by few participants, which we describe as ceremonial, or what Ermine (1995) explains as “authentic insights into the nature and origin of knowledge as truth” (p. 104); knowing and making apparent one’s purpose, gifts, personhood, spiritual power, personal medicine, sacred story, and so on.

A young man further elaborates on these ceremonial practices of self-work and personal renewal as he retreated into quiet solitude, which we illustrate at length to capture the processes and outcomes of body-mapping he experienced (see Figure 7):

I didn’t really think too much of it [body-mapping], it was just art to me. I guess that’s when I started understanding the actual feeling of creating art, and that art being your own past, your own present, your own future. You have memories of a past you weren’t a part of. I felt like I was remembering things that weren’t even mine to remember. I started thinking: “did I have a past life before this?” And then I started putting myself more into the present, thinking about everything that’s going on. I was crying . . . I stayed away from all of them [participants]. I felt like I was letting them down because I was staying away . . . Doing the little lines on the body-map, like it was healing. For me it was about my position at the time, and my environment because I was getting pretty tense and triggered. Kelley [ARC] stayed. I really like he doesn’t have an attitude. But he was there and helped me through a lot—the emotional parts. Even though I was emotional he was still encouraging me to be creative. “Use those emotions!” “You feel mad right now? Put it down on that paper.” That’s exactly what I did and one thing led to another, one road then the other. Representation of taking the easy way out to another representation of taking the hard way. The good life comes through the hardest decisions and taking the easy way out is just straight up suicidal like when I was growing up. Body-mapping put me through a lot, but for good reason. Some things I used to deal with before, half of those things, I don’t even deal with them anymore.

For us to pursue, induce, or avoid closings and closures, or deny a young person from closing their story and naming their sacred truth because it did not suit our program evaluation objectives, presented incredible dangers. Instigating total closure in this historical moment under persisting conditions of colonization, suffering, and injustice could prematurely connote assimilation or death; harm one’s bodily sense of self; and could easily normalize settler time, thus securing a settler past and future, and limiting Indigenous imaginaries and futures (Hatala et al., 2017; Rifkin, 2017). Furthermore, encouraging participants to close these visual-narratives with traces of incompletions and deletions, and craft a stable sense of self on their own terms and within their own context, becomes crucial to surviving such threatening social conditions (Vedal, 2013). Thus, reconciling this tension from a ceremonial perspective necessitated respect for participants closing visual-narratives yet remaining open to connection and ambivalence, allowing for personal autonomy and self-sovereignty while recognizing shared interdependence between the research team, participants, and other sentient beings (Morton et al., 2020).

**Discussion: Epistemologies of Self-Work & Quieter Methods**

Adapting body-mapping within various cultural contexts, such as those engaging urban Indigenous youth, remains largely underexplored in qualitative health research. Although considerable discussions have mobilized body-mapping as a
therapeutic and narrative visual research method, the processes and outcomes of personal knowledge production have not explored methodological implications that consider silence and absence from an Indigenous epistemological standpoint that is generative, ethical, and culturally-grounded. Our observations and reflections when adapting body-mapping approaches illustrate when methods are characterized by an epistemological eclecticism considerate of non-interference, quietness, and spiritual embodiment, they hold potential to handle challenges posed by voice and engage in self-work; that is, working on self and making self appear in non-representational and ceremonial ways. Or in other words, minding one’s own business.

While pushing the methodological boundaries of the “personal” and “autobiographical” within qualitative visual research more generally, the notion of self-work and quiet methods we articulate appear antithetical to many Western conventions of research suspicious on centring the self so intimately and privileging voice-giving over silence-seeking (Ermine, 1995). Without precisely naming what body-mapping is, this boundary-work raises important questions from a cultural standpoint about the “personal” and “autobiographical” when adapting body-mapping approaches.

If It Is Not Therapy, What Is It?
The “personal” and “autobiographical” in Western therapeutic contexts is widely accepted from social-constructivist perspectives, such as narrative therapy (Besley, 2002) or transcultural psychiatry (Kirmayer, 2007). Criticizing dominant, individualistic psychotherapeutic approaches to mental health and counselling, the central premise of these approaches, in particular, situates individuals in their family and community contexts to re-author their lives that externalizes the “problem” to achieve personalized outcomes (Kirmayer, 2007; Smeja, 2019). While enhancing Indigenous healing practices, we raise challenges with these approaches when conceptualizing self-work. In particular, these approaches depart from the mere fact that a “problem” exists, even if it is external; secularizes knowledge production devoid of spiritual knowing; and as specialized knowledges, have a tendency to hermeneutically and linguistically colonize personal epistemologies in practice (Hayward, 2003; Smeja, 2019).

On the contrary, Cree scholar Willie Ermine (1995) discusses the concept and practice of mamâhîtwisîwin—“the capacity to tap into the creative force of the inner space by the use of all the faculties that constitute our being” (p. 104)—to articulate what Indigenous epistemologies may comprise of within Nêhiyaw Plains Cree contexts. Distancing Indigenous epistemologies from scientific positivism and classical critical theories, which premise knowledge production as detached, fragmentary, and outward, Ermine’s (1995) proposition for epistemology relates to “pondering great mysteries that lie no further than the self,” (p. 108) or similarly as Bird (2005) suggests, “the mind is where the spirit lives” (p. 44). Knowledge emerges from an inner space, incorporeal and metaphysical, that taps into the “life force” or “energy” connecting self to all existence, and from which creativity, healing, sustenance, and self-actualization arise.

The inquisitive and introspective knower places themselves in the stream of consciousness to explore the mysteries of inner space—self, mind, nature, spirit, being—eventually giving rise to an outward subjective worldview grafted on inward wholesness and harmony, and manifesting physically as community, a corpus of tribal knowledge enacted as culture and custom, which in turn, transforms inner space. They remember ancestral sounds and lingering words long after they have been spoken (Beeds, 2014). However, self must not be mistaken as an isolated abstraction, but an unfinished exploration in connection with “happenings,” the land, and other sentient beings. “It is an experience in context, a subjective experience that, for the knower, becomes knowledge in itself. The experience is knowledge” (Ermine, 1995, p. 104).

If body-mapping is not a form of therapy per se, we find value alongside propositions similar to Ermine’s, and others (e.g. Yates, 2010), to situate self-work. We have come to regard body-mapping as a sometimes complex and incoherent cultural playground—embodied, affective, spiritual, and inspired—to perform and play with the “personal” and “cultural” as a means to working on self and making self appear. We do not ignore that narrative coherency can lead to improved psychological and health outcomes, which is still contested (Adler, 2012), or suggest that youth work on themselves and construct a “traditional cultural self.” Recognizing an ever-growing literature on research methods related to personal healing (e.g. Howard, 2018), we refrain from reducing self-work to the therapeutic and somatic auspices of good health, and avoid its maladaptation as a technology of responsibilization governing personal conduct (Harris, 2004). Instead, self-work acts as a personal passion following mysteries of the inner self—open to surprise—where self-healing might be one of many passionate journeys.

Quieting Body-Talk and Body-Maps
Ermine (1995) locates this passion amongst the “corporeal sacred acts that give rise to holy manifestations into the metaphysical world” and the “metaphysical that constructs meaning in the corporeal”: dreaming, visioning, meditating, and praying (p. 106). It is no one’s business on how others come to understand self; “an explicit recognition of the individual’s right in the collective” (pp. 107–108). Thus, these practices need not assume researchers only feel useful when amplifying quiet voices and surfacing hidden perspectives with enlightenment rationality. Nor do they suppose researchers become sharper analysts by using quiet methods to analyze quiet things compared to loud instruments of voice often prescribed with methodological imperative. Rather, quiet methods become bodily and ceremonial acts of deep thought to draw out stories acting on self and making self appear, characterized by non-interference, quietness, dialogue with...
self, wholeness, humility, renewal, and that “mind-your-own-business medicine.”

Scholars have discussed these practices as instances of listening, witnessing, and feeling with one’s heart and spirit (Clark, 2016; Hart, 2010). In her own work on personal identity development using a Muskego Inninuwuk (Swampy Cree) methodology, Rowe (2014) centers the “personal” in her research. She establishes methods within her own biographical, ethical, and cultural epistemological framework:

I continued to learn about the ways in which to incorporate spirit and inner knowings into all aspects of my life [...] I have acknowledged, honoured, and incorporated knowledges coming to me from dreams, happenings, and meditation within my every day. Preparations included offering tobacco at various times throughout my journey, asking for guidance in particular areas, and to give thanks for the knowledges shared with me at different points in time. (p. 11)

Despite the importance of mamâhâwisiwin or deep inward thinking, whether we prescribe “depth” and “inwardness” as if a deep self is the only manifestation of the “personal” are not certain. With many Indigenous youth in Canada forcibly separated from families and communities through devastating effects of assimilation and dispossession, digging deeper and inward does not necessarily mean some untapped resource, answer, or new narrative turn will be found. Rather, they might search outward and elsewhere, perhaps looking to connections with other people, nature, and the land as opportunities for personal knowledge, healing, and insight (Hatala et al., 2019). Alternatively, considering that personal knowledges come from a deep self might not always be suitable (Lewin, 2015). At times, loud methods that pursue outward aims of truth, justice, and good health are also necessary (e.g. testimony, “real talk,” counseling). Based on our observations, quieting instruments and sensibilities of body-talk and body-maps engrossing self-work may equally need to be mindful and slow, allowing for extensions of time, space, and patience to work with oscillating frequencies showing up in visual-narratives that are simultaneously loud and silent, present and absent. They need not rely on any one way to arrive at self-knowledge.

Speaking Without, Flattery, and the Wisdom of the Old One’s

Moving beyond the ineffability of translating the “personal” as it cannot be understood outside its context, what must the professional do if they must now speak without others? We are not concerned on who this professional might be, which is discussed elsewhere and we recognize has implications for harm and (mis)appropriation (see Kovach, 2009), but with a more practical question on conduct. How does one conduct themselves when performing method in the first-person plural to motivate self-work? The challenge for conduct has been previously framed through tensions to harmonize closer intimacies and professional distances. Gravitating toward intimacy (e.g. De Leeuw et al., 2012; Liebenberg et al., 2017; Wheaton-Abraham, 2016), the challenge for scholarship becomes one of flattery leading to self-delusion or lies that suit calculated self-interest (Valverde, 2004). And, yes, while not responsible for their healing or spiritual growth, we might have to support youth with a kind of unconditional love. Although negotiating spaces between intimacy and distance remain important, they call for an ethical criticism, or wisdom, that helps direct contradiction, chaos, and passions. As Ermine (1995) further explained:

It was the Old Ones [Elders], from their position in the community, who guided young people into various realms of knowledge by using the trickster. The Old Ones, above all, knew the character of the trickster and his capacity to assist with self-actualization. The fact that this trickster-transformer continues to intrigue us speaks of our unfinished exploration of the inner space (p. 105)

In relational terms, wisdom comes with responsibilities to instill wonder; perform the tedious and tricky task of “fusing the energy” to practices of knowing that manifest dreams and inspiration (p. 109); encourage the aesthetic and spiritual valuation of knowledge; and ensure narrative resources travel safely and are embedded into folds of ancestral knowledge from which wisdom materializes (Ermine, 1995). With body-mapping we do not presume the “Old Ones” must be elderly, hold the title of “Elder,” or that anyone can position themselves as a wise person. Instead, it is entering a ceremonial relationship when performing method with a gentle kindness as a personal guide or helper, whose character is attuned to personal qualities of youth—humor, temperament, spirit, and moral courage. For Indigenous youth finding themselves subjected to a discursive space of “what is lacking,” relationships progress methods in ways that value one’s gifts, strength, and resilience (Beeds, 2014; Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017).

Conclusion: Self-Work as Cultural Protection

The methodological pursuits of the “personal” and “autobiographical” in qualitative visual research to achieve truth, justice, and good health may not always align with our improvisations of methods, especially when considering the unpredictable processes and outcomes of personal knowledge production in unique cultural contexts. Building on insights from the field, this was the case when adapting body-mapping methods with Indigenous youth. While improvising body-mapping methods during a program evaluation in ways that were embodied, affective, spiritual, and inspired, we had to perform research with an epistemological eclecticism that nurtured quieter methodological conditions to engage in self-work; that is, working on one’s sacred story and one’s business. Our methods required the quieting of instruments and sensibilities that not only focused on voice-giving but silence-seeking. They handled the challenges voice posed to transmit visual and oral narratives that were at times messy and non-
coherent, and required us as researchers step back and engage the quietness of participants on its own terms and within its own context in non-representational and ceremonial ways. As Kawabata and Gastaldo (2015) have pointed out, qualitative research has typically dismissed or found little value in silence, attributing this exclusion to cultural bias that exists among Anglo-American researchers doing research in the West.

But as much as this project we articulate for body-mapping is about self-work, it is equally concerned with cultural protection. In the context of historical and ongoing legacies of colonization that have fortified theft and imposition in the lives of Indigenous youth, protecting the sacredness of stories about self with remarkable care and the quiet spaces they are engaged remains paramount. They are a delicate site of personal and spiritual growth. Even writing about Cree knowledges in this publication so publicly and “coherently”—and considering where they might travel to—made us grapple with questions about protection; or writing without participants and YRA who were uninterested in co-authoring an academic publication. But for researchers, facilitators, therapists, or helpers who seek to engage in this project concerning the “personal” and “autobiographical” through body-mapping, and other visual research methods, it rests on the conviction that we respect youth as stewards of their sacred stories, or “Little Elders” (Bird-Naytowhow et al., 2017), and perhaps practice that mind-your-own-business medicine for ourselves when doing so.

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Note
1. “Rez” is a colloquial term used for a First Nations (Indigenous) reservation in Canada. Reservations are geographic areas of land that were (and are) set aside for First Nations peoples and geopolitically administered by the federal government. During the processes of settler-colonization in Canada, First Nations Peoples were pushed from their traditional territories and lands and forced to live on the limited reserve areas with refusal or resistance being punishable by federal law. While they are considered by many residents to represent “home” or “community” today, they do not necessarily encompass the entire geographical area of traditional homelands and territories pre-colonization.

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