

"IT'S ALL INTERCONNECTED...
LIKE A SPIDER WEB"

A qualitative study of meanings of food and diet in a north-eastern Cree community

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DISCLOSURE OF AFFILIATIONS, FINANCIAL SUPPORT, AND MITIGATING BIAS

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Affiliations:

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EEYOU ISTCHEE REGION

- Eastern James Bay Cree (Eenouch)
- 9 communities
- A level of autonomy through treaties like the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement
 - Regional board of health and social services
- T2DM rates in Canada
 - Age-adjusted prevalence is 3-5 higher in Indigenous vs. non-Indigenous populations in Canada
 - Highest rates by region: 29% in northern Quebec



RESEARCH SETTING

In research about Indigenous health and underlying influences, there is a need for

- Greater understanding of cultural meanings attached to health and wellbeing
- Adoption of community-level approaches





RESEARCH METHODS

AIM: to obtain to a greater understanding of attitudes and meanings around food and healthy eating in a Eastern Cree community.

- Semi-structured interviews
- Observation (living in the community for 4 weeks)

Local experiences and the interconnection of food, diet, and health



CREATING 'HEALTH' & 'FOOD'

Healthy food

- Traditional food
- Access (store, hunting)
- Preparation
- Ingredients

"There's not much at the store [...] everything is gone when I come Wednesday afternoon." – Sally*

Two versions of 'healthy'

- Relating to traditional food and preparation methods
- An imported concept of 'healthy,' relating to what people learn from health workers with respect to illness and diagnosed conditions

"I learned two cultures, to associate both [...] this is how we eat healthy and this is how we eat healthy [gesturing with each hand]. So what I did was I took both of them and I just went like that [puts hands together]." – Diana*

*Names have been changed



CHANGE

"So, in the olden days, they were slim...they were strong [...] because they eat traditional food. They walk, they portage [...] today it's different. So many are diabetic... so many... and that's the thing I look at... I don't want that... you have to be careful what I'm eating, you know, so more I eat traditional food." – Solomon*

Concerned with "keeping the identity" – Ruth*

"Yeah... my parents were survivors [...] I think there's a link to why we don't know what is healthy, that's what I think and it's scary that we're like that – do you understand?" – Ruth*

Blurring between 'southern' and 'traditional' modes of accessing and preparing food

- "Moose stir-fry"
- "Sauté-ing" traditional meat



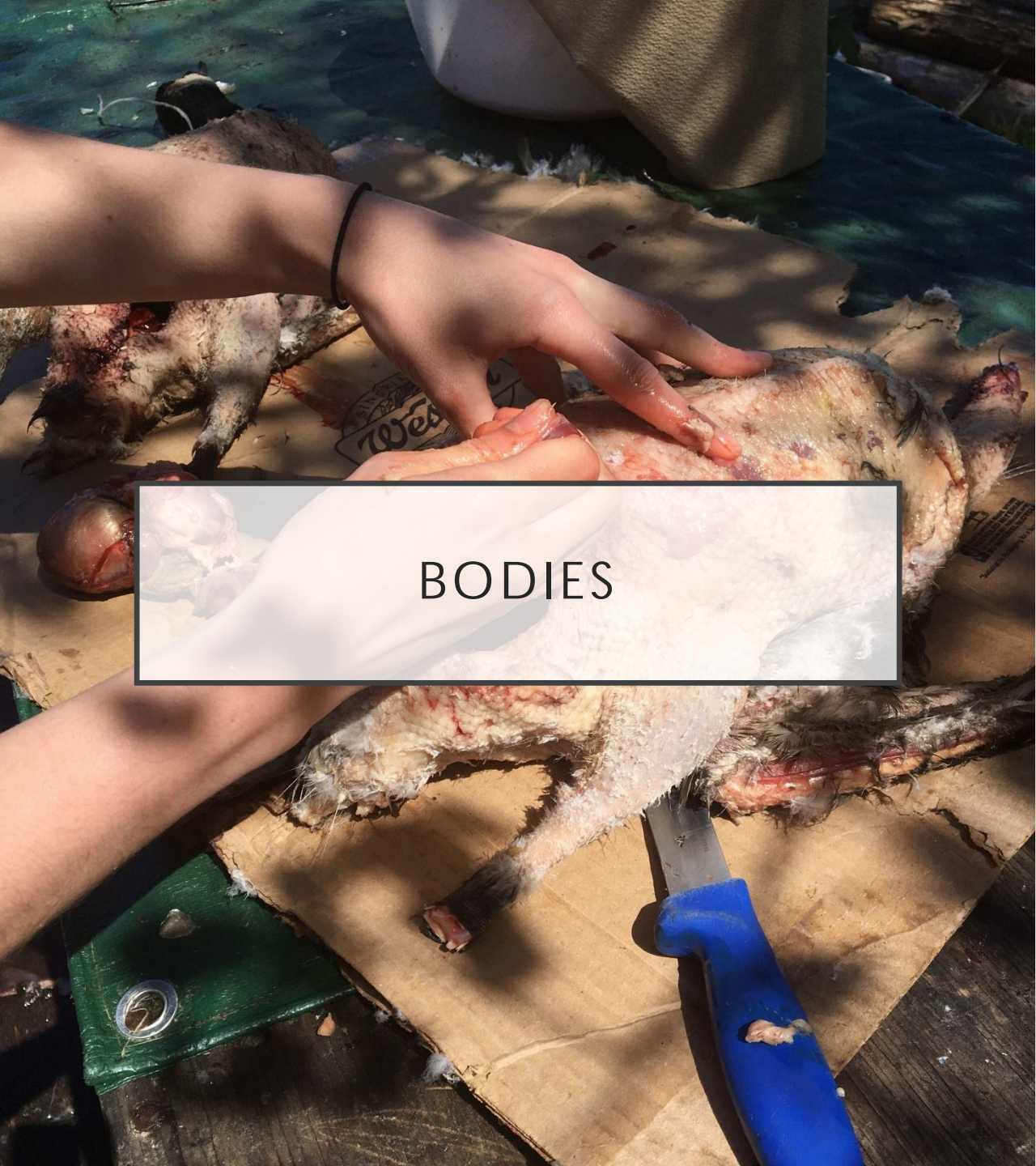
- Interconnection

"It's all interconnected. We're all interconnected in one way or another [...] my grandfather would say, it's all like a spider web. And he said, all the animals work that way eh – all creation works that way [...] And he was talking about the river at that time [...] so he said once LaGrande is affected, everything in creation is affected, he said. Even us, he said [...] we're supposed to protect them." – Diana*

- Disconnection and reconnection

"Disconnecting our roots completely [...] that already happened once when our parents were taken away to residential school [...] when they came back, they had to carry that intergenerational trauma [...] that's where obesity really started. And when I compared my mother's obesity to my grandmother, my grandmother wasn't obese – my mom was...and that had to do with her grief that – cause she was disconnected from her mom. So she was disconnected from her Walk-Out [important traditional childhood ceremony]." – Diana*

- Old connections, traditional ways of living on the land, have been severed.
- New connections, associating non-native ways with traditional practices, are being formed



BODIES

"Whatever [the elders] said, I do it in the bush [...] it's very good [...] comparing now what we eat – it's from the store, from the restaurant – they keep eating that same. So when they want to eat traditional food, only once they eat it. They stop, they go back to poutine, fries, and it kills them [...] today it kills our bodies. Whatever we eat, from the store [...] you're killing the body." – Solomon*

The "Cree Body" plays a crucial part in thinking of health

- Making sense of change
- Disconnection and reconnection

"If I don't eat anything wild meat for a while, I get sick [...] since I've been down south, I tell [husband], next time you come, bring this, this, this. And he'll be like, 'why?' – 'Cause I don't feel well.' I tell him that I feel sick." – Diana*

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK OF 'RESEARCH AS USUAL'



Snapshot view of
community context
with regard to food



'Culture' is not static &
people are resilient

My findings indicate a
local capacity to adapt
to the rapid changes in
lifestyle and
environment



Work with/be guided
by local accounts and
perceptions to
provide the most
appropriate care



THANK YOU

