

# Survivance: An Indigenous Game for Change

*Elizabeth LaPensée*

*Simon Fraser University,  
School of Interactive Arts & Technology*

## Abstract

Historical trauma caused by colonization has had generational effects on the mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual wellbeing of Indigenous communities. Survivance is a social media game for change that brings players through the Indigenous hero's journey on a path to recovery through quests and acts of survivance. This paper briefly describes the game prototype and elaborates on the impact it has had on players from the urban Indigenous community in the Portland, Oregon, United States so far.

**Keywords:** *game, Survivance, Indigenous, Oregon.*

## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 The Inspiration

The urban Indigenous community in Portland, Oregon in the United States faces high rates of poverty drug and alcohol addictions, Type 2 Diabetes, educational dropouts, homicide, domestic violence, child abuse, sexual abuse, homicides, and suicides according to findings included in *The Native American Community in Multnomah County: An Unsettling Profile* (Curry-Stevens, et al., 2011). The striking disparities speak to the wide-reaching and long-term effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples that include the loss of land, culture, and lives. In response and in the hope of healing the community, the Portland-based Native American non-profit organization Wisdom of the Elders

(WISDOM) and its sister Northwest Indian Storytellers Association (NISA) created the multimedia curriculum project “Discovering Our Story” (WISDOM, 2009).

*Survivance* (WISDOM, 2010) is a social game adaptation of “Discovering Our Story” that translates the curriculum and video content of storytelling into gameplay [Figure 1]. It exists within the larger “Games for Change” movement, spearheaded by game industry experts such as Eric Zimmerman and Jane McGonigal. As McGonigal (2011) believes, games can “save the world.” Her recent work is based on the idea that reality is broken: modern existence is fraught with unhappiness and isolation. She looks to games, which have the ability to stimulate the mind and create psychological benefits through engaging in play, as the cure. By playing games, we can connect to social networks and extend ourselves into new forms of community. *Survivance* contributes to the movement by showing the healing effects of social gameplay in the urban Indigenous community of Portland, Oregon.



Figure 1. Symbol for the Wanderer Phase in *Survivance*

## 1.2 The Game Design

*Survivance* ([www.survivance.org](http://www.survivance.org)) begins by asking players to choose a quest in any part of the Native American Hero's Journey that they feel applies to them or will help them. There are three prototype quests per phase of the journey. The phases within the game are The Orphan (“questioning our circumstances”), The Wanderer (“wandering in search of answers in unfamiliar places”), The

Caretaker (“befriending and caring about others”), and The Warrior (“confronting a challenge”). The Changer (“returning, transformed, to help others start their journeys”) and The Elder continue the journey and are beyond the scope of the game quests.

Once a player completes a quest, they then create an “act of survivance” [Figure 2] in any medium to represent and reflect on their experience of completing the quest. An act of survivance is a form of self-determination as inspired by Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor’s definition of “survivance.” Vizenor (1994) defines survivance as “an active sense of presence, the continuance of native stories, not a mere reaction, or a survivable name. Native survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, tragedy, and victimry. Survivance means the right of succession or reversion of an estate, and in that sense, the estate of native survivancy” (p. vii). Survivance is more than mere survival—specifically, the survival of Indigenous peoples in the face of colonization, victimization, and attempted dominance by settlers—it is a way of life that nourishes Indigenous ways of knowing.



Figure 2. Acts of Survivance for The Caretaker: The Giving Quest

Players are welcome to share their acts of survivance across social networks such as Facebook, Twitter, and file hosting services such as YouTube and Vimeo. *Survivance* thus connects to and reinforces existing paths of Indigenous self-determination in online spaces that are more likely to be seen and shared. The game’s website either links to acts of survivance internally or externally and keeps a trail of the player’s movement from one quest to another.

### 1.3 The Players

The *Survivance* players whose experiences are explored in this paper are Indigenous students at Portland State University who participate in the urban Portland Indigenous community. The ten core players wrote open-ended reflections online prior to playing and after playing. In some instances, the core players participated in talking circles: a unique Indigenous research method that involves open-ended discussion between the researcher and participant(s), who are recognized as equal collaborators and contributors to the research (Lavallée, 2009). Three additional players add a layer of validation to these ten core player experiences. The validation players were introduced to the game through recommendations from previous players and engaged in playing *Survivance* without first writing an introductory reflection. They contributed written open-ended reflections after completing gameplay and have participated in talking circles. Their experiences are useful because they suggest what gameplay could look like outside of the context of a research study.

The journey of playing *Survivance* is broken into Motivation, Quest Journey, and Act of Survivance. “Motivation” reflects on the perspectives and in some instances clear motivation that players entered the game with. The “Quest Journey” details the reflections the players shared in writing and during talking circles about their experience playing through a quest. “Act of Survivance” describes the acts of survivance the players created—an act of survivance being a story in any medium inspired by the quest journey. The descriptions involve looking closely at the act as well as integrating reflections from writings and talking circles with players. The motivations, quest journeys, and acts of survivance fall into the areas of “Culture,” “Identity,” and “Wellbeing,” described further in the following sections.

## 2 Motivation

Since the impact of the game on the community is reliant on individual players’ selections of quests and unique acts of survivance, motivation is an important factor to understand. A player’s interests, life experiences, and aspirations prior to playing

*Survivance* shape motivation. Before playing a quest in *Survivance* and creating an act of survivance, players wrote a short reflection that involved answering the question: What interests you in playing *Survivance*? Although each response was unique, the self-described motivations fit under the categories “Culture,” “Identity,” and “Wellbeing.” “Culture” represents the continuation of, revitalization of, and active presence of traditions, beliefs, language, traditional stories, and family stories. “Identity” involves the seeking of, acceptance of, or reconnection with ancestry and relations. “Wellbeing” is the act of or promotion of being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy.

The forms of motivation across the core players were almost evenly distributed—three players were motivated by Culture, three players were motivated by Identity, and four players were motivated by Wellbeing. The three validation players were also evenly distributed across the motivations. Of Culture, players were interested specifically in continuation of language, revitalization of traditional stories, the active presence of family stories, and the active presence of spirituality. In Identity, players were informed by recognizing collective identity, exploring a loss of identity due to family members denying Indigenous ancestry, and disconnection from identity because of physical or familial distance from the peoples.

Since the core players are limited to ten players and the validation players are limited to three players, there may be a myriad of other possible motivations missing from this description. For example, I walked into *Survivance* as a player motivated by the active presence of traditional stories, which fits under Culture. I wanted to explore traditional stories and understand ways to adapt them into contemporary forms (such as digital art, animation, games, and comics) that would still honor their traditional forms. I also hoped that these stories would reach the next generations and inspire youth to tell their stories in any medium.

Further, the majority of the core players have only completed one quest each. As I played through the game, I found that my motivations became multifold and dipped between Culture, Identity, and/or Wellbeing. For example, at times I was motivated to express my mixed Identity as an Irish, Anishinaabe, and Métis person. At others, I recognized my own need for developing emotional Wellbeing.

Regardless of the specifics, I am confident that any player's motivation will fit within Culture, Identity, and/or Wellbeing and that the present players offer a robust view into a range of motivations.

## 2.1 Culture

Culture widely encompasses the knowledge and characteristics of a particular community (Cordero, 1995). This can include belief systems, traditions, language, stories, and other forms of making meaning (Cordero, 1995). Due to the effects of colonization, Indigenous culture involves practices of continuation, revitalization, and active presence in our world today. Continuation reinforces known and widely accepted traditional knowledge. For example, Donald L. Fixico (2003)—the Shawnee, Sac and Fox, Muscogee Creek, and Seminole Distinguished Foundation Professor of History at Arizona State University—points to circular thinking as a foundation of Indigenous culture. Circular thinking is reflected in talking circles, in which every voice is represented. Revitalization is an attempt to recover traditional knowledge and bring it into the present as closely as possible to its traditional form. The Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival (Northwest Indian Storytellers Association, 2011) offers an opportunity for professional storytellers to tell stories, many of which are traditional. While it cannot be said that these traditional stories are exact to their original form in many instances because of translations into English, these stories are nonetheless living (Vizenor, 2008). Active presence involves representing Indigenous culture within contemporary contexts. Communities such as Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace (AbTeC) create works within “cyberspace—the websites, chat rooms, bulletin boards, virtual environments, and games that make up the internet” so that Aboriginal communities can seize “an unprecedented opportunity to assert control” over Aboriginal representation (Lewis and Fragnito, 2005). Projects include *CyberPowWow*, an online community of artists who use new media to explore Indigenous issues (Fragnito, 1996); “Skins,” an effort to teach game development



skills to Indigenous youth and adapt traditional stories into videogames (Lameman [Dillon] and Lewis, 2011); and *TimeTraveller*™ (Fragnito, 2009), a machinima series starring a time traveling Mohawk who revisits and rectifies historical trauma. In all forms, Indigenous culture involves understanding the practices and self-expression of Indigenous peoples *today*.

In the core players, quest selections and acts of survivance were motivated by the continuation of language, the revitalization of traditional stories, and the active presence of family stories. The active presence of spirituality was an additional motivation found in one of the validation players. These are described in greater detail below.

Sky Hopinka, who is Ho-Chunk/Pechanga from California and moved to Portland for his undergraduate degree, worked with saving Indigenous languages prior to playing *Survivance*. He is deeply involved in Portland State University's Chinuk Wawa Social Club, which is a collaborative gathering of students and community members interested in learning and actively speaking Chinuk Wawa. Chinuk Wawa is the trade language of the Pacific Northwest and spread vastly across the coast and lands. Through the Social Club, he learned the language teaching methodology *Where Are Your Keys?* (WAYK). When he began to play *Survivance*, he looked for other opportunities to use the methodology. He was offered an internship with WAYK to teach the Numu language at Warm Springs Indian reservation during the summer of 2011. Consequently, his quest choice was informed by his ongoing commitment to the continuation of language.

Toma Villa, who is from the Yakama Nation and was raised in Portland, is a fisherman and artist who fishes out of Cook's Landing with his Uncles. Prior to playing *Survivance*, Toma had an existing interest in the revitalization of traditional stories. He described that he often asks "about old times and things of the river." However, he "never seem(s) to get the whole stories, just bits and pieces." Toma is motivated to pass on complete stories to the next generation—"I take it upon myself to make sense of things and finish off the stories so I can mainly tell them to my little girls." His quest selection was informed by his passion to revitalize traditional stories as closely as possible to their original form, understanding that some elements have been lost.

One of the validation players also added to the Culture motivation. Alina Begay,

who is Navajo, was led by the active presence of her spirituality. While she wanted to be open-minded in her gameplay, she was acutely aware that her incoming beliefs would influence her quest choice, journey, and act of survivance. Her spirituality is based in a version of The Book of Mormon that is translated into Dine' Bizaad (the Navajo language). She seeks to acknowledge her traditional Navajo spirituality in the context of the teachings of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which is a contemporary influence.

The players had a wide range of motivations that fit under Culture. Sky's interests in the continuation of Indigenous language extend beyond his peoples and reach to the possibility of continuing any language as he works to promote and pass on the WAYK teaching methodology. Toma's inspiration to revitalize traditional stories will ensure that these stories remain in the minds of the next generations. Alina's passion to interweave her Navajo beliefs with the teachings of Jesus Christ shows the dynamics of individual Indigenous spirituality. In all instances, the players are motivated to express Culture, which is a dynamic form of survivance unique to each individual.

## 2.2 Identity

Self-determination of identity is a vital part of survivance. Since the physical displacement of peoples from their lands (Garrouette, 2003), federal government has appropriated and controlled Indigenous identity under the guise of giving Indigenous peoples benefits by establishing blood quantum requirements, which has resulted in denied rights and displacement of recent generations (Pevar, 1992, p. 12). Internal racism is also a pressing issue. In many historical cases, Indigenous people denied their own identity in order to avoid institutional racism. In more recent instances, tribes have a particular interest in limited legal "Indian" status to control the allocation of tribal resources such as land, money, and political privileges (Garrouette, 2003, p. 16). However, there is a surge of recognizing "mixedblood" or "crossblood" identity, which is "an international confrontation" of legal definitions of Indigenous identity (Coltelli, 1990-91, p. 112) and opens us to celebrate our current forms of Indigeneity.



In the core players who were drawn to explore their identity, quest selections and acts of survivance were informed by acknowledging collective identity, generational denial of Indigenous identity, and physical distance from culture that disrupted identity. One validation player was also greatly motivated to celebrate resistance to government definitions of Indigenous identity. The specifics of each player's motivations are described in-depth below.

Andrew Belzer, who is a world-traveling Cherokee, described himself as a “wanderer” by “choice.” He is motivated by the “challenge” of “learning new things in unfamiliar situations.” As someone who has been a wanderer his “whole life,” he too comes from wanderers, both his mother and father. He was “excited” to have the opportunity to speak with his mother about her “past” and “stories” to reinforce his existing sense of identity. His quest selection was informed by his interest in learning about his family's stories, which express the active presence of his mixed Cherokee family in the modern context of world travel.

Anuheia Naeole, who self-identifies as “Native Hawaiian,” is interested in reflecting on her “collective identity.” She noted that her ancestry is mixed and includes other cultures along with Indigenous Hawaiian. She was motivated to choose a quest that could be “applied” in her “daily life.” She saw *Survivance* as an opportunity to celebrate her collective identity and her tendency to be a “caretaker.”

Cynthia Stehl is Blackfoot from her father. Cynthia has had to “change and adapt” due to life circumstances, which were “extremely hard and difficult.” Although she is “starting to heal and regenerate,” she still has “feelings/fears” that she “wrestles with.” She finds that she is “still wandering and searching.” Part of her search is rooted in the denial of her Indigenous ancestry by her grandparents' generation. Her quest selection was motivated by her interest in finding out more about her Blackfoot culture and understanding why her grandfather so adamantly denied his own identity, which has had a lasting effect on the following generations.

Heather Chambers, who is Jamestown S'Klallam from her father, “desires to connect” with her Indigenous heritage. The Jamestown S'Klallam live in the northern Olympic peninsula of Washington. Since Heather lives in Portland, she has been “cut

off from the tribe by distance.” She has also been separated from the tribe by the complication of legal tribal status. Her father and older brother were the last of her family who qualified to be enrolled. She wanted to find a quest that would help her reconnect with that part of her identity.

Shilo George, who is Tsistitas (Southern Cheyenne-Arapaho), was a validation player who wanted to celebrate her identity and the perseverance of her family in the face of the government’s attempts to eradicate tribal status. She is motivated to confront the “true effects of colonization” on identity brought about by concepts such as “blood quantum.” Her ongoing exploration of the “tools of genocide” and generations of her family’s resistance led to her quest selection in *Survivance*.

The various motivations that fit within Identity are understandably unique and yet united in their affirmation of self. Andrew, who is confident in his identity, is interested in recognizing Indigenous peoples as they are in the present. Anuheia, who is strongly connected to her identity and acknowledges that she comes from many cultures, is motivated to express her collective identity day-to-day. Cynthia, who is searching for answers about her Blackfoot heritage, is motivated to understand the struggles experienced by her grandparents’ generation and to connect with that part of her identity. Heather, who has felt forcibly disconnected from her Jamestown S’Klallam heritage because of her lack of tribal status, is motivated to reconnect with that side of her identity. Shilo, who is firm in knowing her identity, is motivated to look closely at the devastation caused by colonization and resist the residual loss of identity. Each player’s motivations are very specific to his/her own experiences with identity based on family history. Despite the differences, each player is joined in a common goal to express self to the fullest possibility.

## 2.3 Wellbeing

Survivance also applies to literally surviving as in *living* and living well. Due to the disparities caused by historical trauma and ongoing institutional racism (Curry-Stevens, et. al., 2011, p. 3), Native Americans face higher mortality rates

from chronic and infectious diseases, suicide, and homicide (Barnes, et. al., 2010). Most alarmingly, Indigenous youth are five-times more likely to commit suicide than youth from other communities (Reder, 2010, p. 180). Economic challenges, limited access to health care, crime, and walls in the educational system contribute to these troubling issues (Curry-Stevens, et. al., 2011).

However, there is hope for healing. Indigenous advocacy based in traditional knowledge suggests that a path to recovery from these troubling issues relies on balancing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual wellbeing (Curry-Stevens, et. al., 2011). Physical wellbeing involves prevention of and/or recovery from chronic and infectious diseases such as cancers, diabetes, heart disease, tuberculosis, and strokes. It also encompasses prevention and/or recovery from drug and alcohol abuse. Emotional wellbeing is the ability to cope with emotions brought on by challenging situations. Mental wellbeing includes concerns such as stress, depression, and anxiety. Spiritual wellbeing, in this case, broadly refers to an individual's connection to cultural and spiritual practices (King, et. al., 2009).

Of the core players, quest selections and acts of survivance that related to Wellbeing involved the act of and promotion of living as well being physically, mentally, and emotionally healthy. The validation player reinforced the motivation of being emotionally well. Each player's motivation is described in-depth below.

Stephen Printup, who identifies as a "Comanche combat veteran," is concerned with the suicide rates in (as he states) "Indian country." Bolstered by the needs of the community, Stephen is interested in finding ways to bring awareness to suicide issues as well as prevent future suicides. His direction when choosing a quest was based on what would give him an opportunity to make an impact in this troubling issue.

Katie Gargan is a member of the Rosebud Sioux Tribe of South Dakota who was raised in Portland. She is dedicated to promoting "healthy lifestyles." At the time of playing *Survivance*, she was the coordinator of United Indian Students of Higher Education student group at Portland State University and an employee of Healing Feathers, a Native American student advocacy group focusing on

suicide prevention and healthy living. She was “excited” about the opportunity for “introspective” when selecting a quest.

Brianna Bragg, who is Yankton Sioux, wanted to “face the feelings and challenges” she encountered “before and leading up to” her younger sister having cancer. Survivance in this instance meant helping her sister with *surviving* and defeating cancer cells through support and cultural healing practices. She was drawn to the Warrior and Caretaker quests, since she helped her sister “complete a year long battle with cancer.”

Barbara Gladue is also known as Assimiwnan Quaw (Chokecherry Woman) from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa Indians. She dropped out of Junior High School due to the pressures of being “under privileged, underserved, overlooked, and plagued with a feeling of hopelessness.” Since, her “passion and heart is to serve and advocate for Native America’s,” which is aided by completing a college education and seeking her own mental and emotional wellbeing. She was looking for “healing” when she chose her quest.

In the Medicine Wheel or Sacred Hoop, which is a symbol used by many Indigenous peoples, wellbeing means being emotionally, mentally, physically, and spiritually balanced (Montour, 1996). That is, one cannot be fully physically well without also being mentally well. The aspiration for physical, emotional, and mental wellness for the self and others is emphasized in the core players and validation player. Stephen is concerned with preventing rampant suicides in the community, which is directly linked to emotional and mental wellness. Katie shares the motivation of suicide prevention within the larger context of physical health, such as drug and alcohol prevention. Brianna is concerned with her sister’s physical wellbeing and her own emotional and mental wellbeing during the process of helping her sister overcome cancer. Barbara clearly recognizes the connection between mental and emotional wellness and how that has been affected by her childhood experiences. While each player has his/her own specific emphasis in the Medicine Wheel, they are also united by the overlaps inherent in balancing Wellbeing.

## 2.4 Conclusion

The motivations of the ten core players and three validation players offer a glimpse into a variety of backgrounds to *Survivance* players. Although each motivation is unique, they informed the categories Culture, Identity, and Wellbeing. In some players, motivations are overlapping, such as Alina, whose motivation was to explore her culture and celebrate her spiritual practices, which more specifically fits under Culture, but from a distanced look also relates to the Wellbeing of her spirituality. Players experienced growth in their motivations and even further crossover as they played through quests, which is described thoroughly in the next section.

## 3 Quest Journey

Looking at the quest choices and the experiences of playing through the quests as described by players helps inform the impact *Survivance* has in the community at the quest stage of gameplay. After looking through the *Survivance* website to familiarize themselves with the content, players select their first quest. Players may choose a quest from any phase of the journey based on where they feel they are at in their lives currently. The game relies on a player's motivations and sense of self at any given time, thus it does not require a linear play-through from The Orphan quests to The Warrior quests. As a player, I found myself going back to first quest (The Orphan: The Listening Quest) after completing the majority of the game, because I was not yet ready to face the ways in which I identified with the boy in the story of "The Boy Who Became Bear" when I began playing *Survivance*.

Quest selections determine where *Survivance* will have an impact. Of the ten core players and three validation players, four chose quests in The Orphan, six in The Wanderer phase, one in The Caretaker, and two in The Warrior. The Orphan quests tend to be more about internal reflection. The Wanderer quests combine internal reflection with looking to new information, in some cases from other people. The Caretaker quests involve interacting with other people. The Warrior quests

encourage interacting with the larger community. The number of players limits the understanding of *Survivance*'s impact, since not every quest was selected. However, the popularity of particular quests helps to see where players in this particular community are most likely to contribute.

Quest experiences help to inform what forms of impact *Survivance* has on individual players and the community. Based on the descriptions of the players' experiences, every quest was successful in meeting the intentions of the phase (The Orphan, The Wanderer, The Caretaker, The Warrior). For all players, the journey set out by the quest was rewarding for their sense of self, which is elaborated on in the quest-specific subsections below.

### 3.1 The Orphan

The Orphan quest phase is about "questioning our circumstances." As storyteller Roger Fernandes (Lower Elwha Band of the Klallam Indians) asserts, every person is an orphan in some way and our journey begins in this place (WISDOM, 2010a). The Orphan includes The Listening Quest, The Core Values Quest, and The Broken Hoop Quest. The Listening Quest tells the story of "The Boy Who Became Bear" through Roger Fernandes and asks players "How do you identify with the boy in the story?" and "How does this influence you now?" None of the players began with this quest, but four of the core players commented that they watched the video while exploring the *Survivance* website as a way to introduce themselves to the game. In The Orphan phase, two players chose The Core Values Quest and two chose The Broken Hoop Quest. The quests and experiences are described below.

In The Core Values Quest, players watch a video of Jamestown Klallam elder and storyteller Elaine Grinnell, who tells a story of active presence and reflects on what it means to be interconnected and part of a tribe (WISDOM, 2010b). Players are then asked to write a list of ten values, whittle those down to five, then three, then just one. "This is the center of your belief system," the game purports. Stephen described that he narrowed his values down to Happiness, Family, and Love, and that he had



an “emotional” experience trying to choose just one, and ultimately went with Love, which greatly informed his act of survivance, explored in the next section. Alina, a validation player, stated that it was “easy” to complete The Core Values Quest—“spiritually” has been her “quest in life.” “It encompasses my entire life, dictates my decisions, influences whom I associate with, and ties me to my family forever for eternity,” she elaborated. The two players described different experiences—for one it was a difficult process, for another it was simple. Despite the differences in the process, both said that determining a core value was “helpful.”

One core player and one validation player chose The Broken Hoop Quest, which introduces the concept of historical trauma through the historical and family stories of Haida elder and storyteller Woodrow Morrison Jr. (WISDOM, 2010c):

In my dad’s generation (my father’s now 96 years old) and the generation just before him were sent to Carlisle Indian School in Pennsylvania. They sent them all the way from Alaska to Pennsylvania and others were sent to the Haskell Institute in Lawrence, Kansas. When they were there, they had to wear a little patch, like Hitler did to the Jews. But they wore a little patch just with a thin thread holding it on that said ‘Speak English.’ ‘And if I caught you talking Haida, I’d take that name tag, and take that tag and it had your name sewn on the back. At the end of the day we’d turn them in and whoever turned in the most would get a prize.’ So that was one of the things they did to stop you from speaking your language.

After watching the video, players are tasked to: “Explore historical trauma, whether experienced by you or by relations. Seek out stories.” They are then asked, “How might this past trauma impact you today?” Heather identified with the quest because it has been “difficult” for her to find out more about her Jamestown S’Klallam culture. Her family was “quiet about the Native side of the family,” which is a common experience caused by colonization. She reflected: “My grandfather was silent in regards to the tribe and the Native culture all the way to his death when I was in high school.” To complete the quest, she revisited stories she was told during her childhood. Conversely, Shilo’s family is proud of their Tsistitas (Southern Cheyenne-Arapaho) heritage, but still devastated by what she refers to as the “genocidal tactics” of boarding schools. She looked back at the “true effects of colonization on the recent six generations” of her family, but also transformed the experience of the quest by seeing the “strength

and hope” of her ancestors and reaffirmed her identity in relation to “blood quantum.” Similarly, Heather was able to reclaim her identity.

Each player’s journey was personal and influenced by the motivations they walked into the game with. The quests were successful in challenging players to “question” their “circumstances.” Stephen was surprised to see “Love” as his core value, since his life as a combat veteran has been distanced from that term. Alina was not surprised to see “Spirituality” as her core value, but she was reaffirmed in the importance of the term to her identity. Heather reconnected with her Jamestown S’Klallam culture and found stories of historical trauma throughout her family. Shilo reaffirmed the existing connection with her culture and revisited stories of historical trauma in her family, which allowed her to confront her issues with “blood quantum.”

### **3.2 The Wanderer**

The Wanderer quest phase involves “wandering in search of answers in unfamiliar places.” Roger Fernandes elaborates: “The Wanderer has these questions about their life and they don’t know where the answers are at, so they begin to wander. They don’t know where the answers are at, but they hope that by wandering, they’ll bump into them somewhere.” Quests include The Searching Quest, The Collective Identity Quest, and The Wounded Hoop Quest. The Searching Quest with words from Roger Fernandes tasks players with seeking out an Indigenous story. The Collective Identity Quest, led by Elaine Grinnell, asks players to look at what groups they belong to in order to construct their collective identity and challenges them to remove unhealthy connections and encourage healthy connections. The Wounded Hoop Quest, with stories from Woodrow Morrison Jr., propels players to confront feelings associated with historical trauma. Not surprisingly (considering that the core and validation players are undergraduate students who are naturally in The Wanderer phase of their lives), the most frequently played quest of all phases was The Searching Quest with five instances. One other player chose The Wounded Hoop. The quests and experiences are described below.

The Searching Quest begins by watching a video of Roger Fernandes, who explains

the Hero's Journey and the place of the Wanderer. He relates the importance of stories and storytelling to our ongoing self-determination. The quest then challenges players to: "Seek out a story from your tribe/nation/peoples. It can be any form of story, such as traditional or historical. You can hear stories by attending events, asking relations, or even looking online!" Players reflect on the questions: "How do you identify with the story? What is its meaning to you?"

Of the five players who played *The Searching Quest*, one received parts of traditional stories through oral storytelling, one heard stories from a family member, one read a traditional story published in a book, and one sought memories of stories internally. Toma referred to his summer travel as "wandering journeys" that gave him the opportunity to share and "work out" a story about Elk and Sturgeon that his Uncle told him while fishing at Cook's Landing. The story his Uncle told him was only about Sturgeon: "He didn't tell me the whole story, just that there was a story about sturgeon and elk and that they are connected." He asked a friend about the story; his friend told him "a bit more" but it was "still broken up and not the full story." He had to piece the stories together to create a whole story. Andrew, who also heard stories orally, sought inspiration for his act of survivance from his mother's stories. In his reflection, he recounted the factual story of his family—his father, his grandparents on his father's side, his mother, the joining of his mother and father—and how their journeys have influenced his identity. Katie read the creation story of the Black (Pe Sla' in Lakota). When she picked the quest, she initially thought she would write a story, but once she read the story in detail, she was inspired in another direction, described in the Acts of Survivance section. Cynthia felt that she "got hung up on" the quest, since she has had many "life changing things happen" in the past four years. She looked back through her own memories and sought stories internally, which gave her the feeling that she "made a large amount of progress on [her] quest." All of the players started with the exploration of stories in many forms and applied them to their current lives.

More pointedly, *The Wounded Hoop* quest calls out emotions related to historical trauma. It poses to players: "What feelings of yours are caused by past trauma? These might be isolation, sadness, anger, fear, and despair." The quest then reassures the player:

“You are not alone. Historical trauma has caused separation, silencing, and abuse which impact us physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.” Woodrow Morrison Jr. (WISDOM, 2010c) recounts the effects of historical trauma:

When you're away from home... they indoctrinate you, well people call it brainwashing, but brainwashing implies removing impure thoughts, so maybe that's what they were doing. But when we got home, after spending a year of being told that everything we did at home as bad, wrong, dirty, evil, sick, whatever... Well, when you grow up in a tribal society the non-verbal communication is paramount. So we would get home and they'd see this rejection, and they would reject us. So once you get this dialectic, this tension between two worlds, once it starts, you go back to school, you come back, the gap gets wider and wider until finally you're in a state of normlessness.

Later in the video, Woodrow Morrison Jr. tells about the eradication of traditional beliefs that upheld women as the respected foundation of the family and connection to the land. Barbara chose *The Wounded Hoop* and listened closely to the story that explained the Haida understanding that a woman is the foundation of the totem pole. Her feet are placed in the ground, for she is the one who is strong enough to hold up the rest of the totems and to remain firmly planted. Barbara identified that her perception as a Chippewa woman aligned with Haida beliefs: “To the Haida, if the woman is unbalanced, so too is her family, her man cannot stand, because she holds him” (WISDOM, 2010c). By listening to another person's journey, she was able to revisit her own: “Once I Identified with Mr. Woodrow's personal testimony and learned of his journey to solace, I found it easier to reflect upon my own hurt, and anger.” She found that “his journey to freedom” gave her “hope to open an old wound” and still be able to recover and heal more fully.

The six players who chose quests in *The Wanderer* phase sought answers through stories. In all instances, the stories started off as or became personally relevant during the quest journey. Toma took on the challenge of recreating a traditional story and spent an entire summer seeking its elements. Andrew went to his mother to find out more about travel stories related to his family. Katie found a traditional story in written form that inspired her. Cynthia confronted her own stories through memories and internal reflection. All of the players described either a sensation of “inspiration” or “healing”

that occurred during their quest journey.

### 3.3 The Caretaker

The Caretaker quest phase is about “befriending and caring about others.” It includes The Retelling Quest with words from Roger Fernandes, which tasks players to revisit a traditional story and retell it in any form. The Giving Quest, led by Elaine Grinnell, has several steps of gifting that culminates in giving to a stranger. The Sacred Hoop Quest with stories from Woodrow Morrison Jr. asks players to explore feelings that have had a negative impact on relationships, to work towards resolving relationships that need healing, and to create new healthy relationships with others. One core player chose The Giving Quest, detailed below.

In The Giving Quest, Elaine Grinnell tells stories of companionship and support across the tribes: “We have our sister tribes of Port Gamble and Lower Elwha. We work together to protect our fisheries and all of our natural resources, you know. We work together on our language and education. We help each other. We may have something they don’t. We share then. That is maximizing your natural resources” (WISDOM, 2010d). The quest steps involve giving first to yourself, then to someone close to you, then to someone you are familiar with, and finally to a stranger. Anuheia took several days to complete the quest. To give to herself, Anuheia made a DVD of photos of the four years she attended Portland State University. To give to someone close to her, she wrote a “letter of appreciation” to her two best friends who helped her through those four years. To give to someone she is familiar with, she brought a Hawaiian dessert for her co-workers. To give to a stranger, she volunteered for the Pilipino Cultural Night, which included self-expression for the Filipino community such as cultural dances and spoken word. She described the quest as applying to her “day-to-day” life and that the strength of her collective identity grew over the time she took to complete the steps.

The Giving Quest is successful in The Caretaker phase’s hope to reinforcing friendships and express caring. Anuheia’s experience involved reflection, self-

expression of her Native Hawaiian identity, appreciation of the support that helped her through university education, and an introduction to a community related to another part of her heritage.

### 3.4 The Warrior

The Warrior quest line involves “confronting a challenge.” It concludes the phases of the journey playable in *Survivance* and leads to The Changer, which is the “return home” involving continuous self-determination until one becomes The Elder. The Warrior thus includes The Telling Quest, The New Ways Quest, and The Fight Quest. The Telling Quest challenges players to create their own story. The New Ways Quest challenges unhealthy behaviors. The Fight Quest involves mending the player’s sacred hoop by forming new healthy relationships and behaviors. One player selected The Telling Quest and one chose New Ways Quest.

Roger Fernandes introduces The Warrior in The Telling Quest with: “The Warrior fights a battle, they become the warrior. This is when the hero does what we think a hero should, which is they fight the battle, they kill the dragon, they save the baby in the burning building, whatever. But they wouldn’t do that unless they had gone through the previous phases.” Players are asked, “What’s a story you want to tell? What parts of yourself must you face? What parts of yourself can you share?” and challenged to create their own story. Brianna Bragg described her experience as “intraspiritual” as she confronted the questions. Her story involved her recent journey as a “caregiver” to her “little sister,” who eventually “won her battle” with Ewing Sarcoma cancer. She felt that telling her story would help her “heal.”

The New Ways Quest poses: “What unhealthy behaviors do you have?” Elaine Grinnell serves to encourage players in the context of recovering from alcoholism: “I’d say it’s worth it. You’ll find new friends. You’ll find new things to do. And then you’ll be in control of your own life” (WISDOM, 2010d). The quest offers: “Get rid of [unhealthy behaviors] by keeping yourself busy! Learn stories, learn about your history, learn a language, learn about medicinal plants, or learn skills to express



yourself.” Sky chose The New Ways Quest as he embarked on a summer internship with the Where Are Your Keys? (WAYK) language program. During the internship, he supported Numu language revitalization for youth on the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs Reservation. He was completely invested in the internship and lived in a house on the reservation. As Sky described, the process was strenuous at times: “We’d get up in the morning, go to the reservation, work for nine hours, then go home and talk about everything that happened until it was time for sleep then start it all over again. It was intense, and it was fun, and it was stressful and frustrating and it was extremely rewarding.” However, it was also rewarding: “It’s just really encouraging to see these young adults passionate about language revitalization and their desire for a healthy community and taking part in a program like this.”

For both Brianna and Sky, The Warrior quests encouraged them to confront challenges. In Brianna’s case, she had to face emotions that she experienced during her caretaker role with her younger sister during her battle with cancer. For Sky, he was challenged to dedicate a summer to a language revitalization project in a community unrelated to his own nationhood. Both concluded their quests with a sense of completion about their journeys. As expected, The Warrior quests require more time and involve an ongoing transformation that ultimately leads to players entering the role of The Changer.

### **3.5 Conclusion**

The quests successfully led players on journeys that met the intentions of each quest phase. Players in The Orphan quest phase “questioned” their “circumstances.” Stephen felt that he discovered something new about his values, while Alina was reaffirmed in her values. Those in The Wanderer phase sought out answers. Toma pieced together a traditional story from multiple storytelling encounters with family. Andrew reached out to his mother to hear new family stories. Heather sought out stories from her family that had been hidden. Cynthia confronted childhood memories about her family. Barbara faced her childhood trauma and turned her experience

around by seeing the connections between Haida and Chippewa perspectives on the role of women. The Caretaker quest involved “befriending and caring for others.” Anuheá gave thanks to friends who supported her and made new connections through an event. Finally, The Warrior phase provoked confrontations of challenges in the players. Sky entered a community he was unfamiliar with and collaborated with them to continue the Indigenous language. Brianna faced the emotional but ultimately uplifting journey of helping her sister defeat cancer.

Although beyond the scope of this study, it would be interesting to follow an individual player’s journey from quest to quest. As I played *Survivance*, I found that I first picked quests that fit what I was already doing in my life. When I ran out of quests that were “easy” for me, I had to confront more challenges, which was a difficult and rewarding experience. From the core and validation players, it is clear that any starting quest in the journey creates a meaningful experience, which is made visible in the players’ acts of survivance.

## 4 Acts of Survivance

While the possibilities for acts of survivance may go beyond the categories of Culture, Identity, and Wellbeing, the initial acts by core and validation players in some instances lined up with the players’ incoming motivations and in some instances followed another path. Within Culture, acts speak to language, storytelling, arts, and traditional values. Identity acts relate to self-identity and ancestral identity. Acts of survivance are described in detail below and integrate player reflections. Wellbeing includes acts that emphasize personal and community mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health and balance.

### 4.1 Culture

Connections with land and culture are intrinsically linked to health for Indigenous peoples (Wilson, 2003). Similarly—understanding that the land directly

informs Indigenous languages—language reclamation is essential to the process of healing from historical trauma (McCarty, 2003). Sky Hopinka shot and edited a short film about the future of Indigenous language and the process of revitalization of the Numu language at the Warm Springs reservation (Hopinka, 2012). Although Sky is involved more directly in the continuation of the West Coast trade language Chinuk Wawa, he chose to focus his act of survivance on the Warm Springs youth and “Where Are Your Keys?” (WAYK) language learning methodology. Sky explained: “I really wanted to hear what the high school kids had to say, and I really wanted to do what I could to give them a voice.” Sky sees direct connections between language and the overall wellbeing of a community: “It’s just really encouraging to see these young adults passionate about language revitalization and their desire for a healthy community and taking part in a program like this.” Film, although certainly not a traditional medium, has been adapted by Indigenous peoples for self-determination in a medium that often depicts stereotypes of Indigenous peoples (Kilpatrick, 1999; Rollins, 2011). Sky’s film provides a look at the youth interest in revitalizing language, the helpfulness of WAYK techniques, and changes seen in the community during the program. As one youth shared: “It’s our culture. It’s what our ancestors gave their lives for, trying to save our people. And that’s what a lot of people don’t get. I’m going to try to keep my culture alive.”

Stories, across all cultures, reflect our knowledge and ways of being (King, 2003). Returning to and creating new stories can reclaim tradition or reconcile colonization (Corntassel, 2009) for purposes of healing. Both Katie Gargan and Toma Villa combined storytelling and art. Katie created a beadwork medallion inspired by the story of the Black Hills [Figure 3]. As she described, “... the Black Hills are in the background, with a moon up above and arrows in the middle to signify the four directions.” She chose beadwork for its role as a traditional medium, while also reflecting that her piece was made using glass beads, which were introduced in the last 200 years or so during trade between Indigenous peoples and settlers. She understood her beadwork as a “story” and directly referenced the overlay of accounts of the Black Hills.

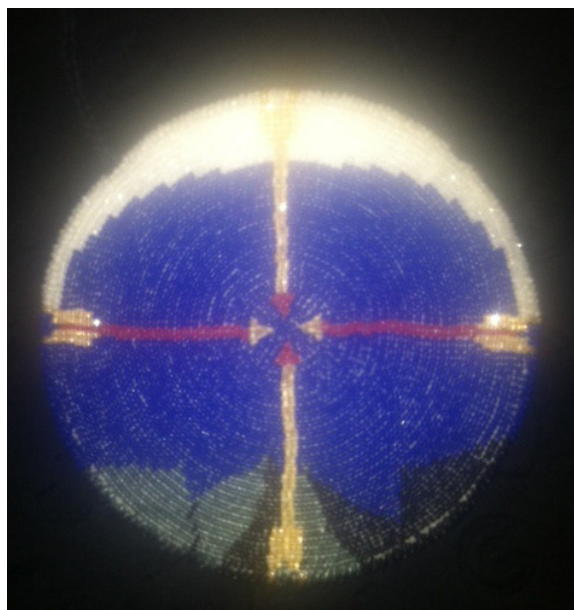


Figure 3. *Black Hills Medallion* by Katie Gargan

While Katie's act took the form of beadwork with an existing written story for context, Toma Villa challenged himself to recreate a traditional story along with carving for a linocut print [Figure 4]. Toma first pieced together the story of Elk and Sturgeon from listening to different relatives, often while fishing, as described in the section above. He chose to adapt the oral tradition to a written story "Wilups and Wawúkya" (Villa, 2012). After finishing the story, he created a linocut print for the "visual aspect." He described the process as "long" but "great." He started by drawing Elk and Sturgeon together in different ways, and when he came to "what would work best," he "finally got it" and started carving. Although written stories are not widely seen as tradition, carving certainly is. Toma combined both, motivated by passing the story on to his daughters in words and visuals. He wanted to show in the linocut how Elk and Sturgeon are connected, and thus he literally connected the two figures in his act of survivance.



Figure 4. "*Wilups and Wawúkya*"  
by Toma Villa

Traditional values are fundamental to healing since ways of knowing shape the pathway. In Indigenous tradition, truth is within the self as opposed to outside and absolute (Monture-Okanee, 1992). With the loss of these values comes the disfiguring of traditional roles, such as those of women (Monture-Okanee, 1992). Barbara Gladue created a painting to represent the traditional role of women [Figure 5]. In her painting, the woman is portrayed as a tree, and as Barbara described, "[She] is nurtured by the earth where her roots lie, she is in the center because she represents balance." The woman is "large because she is connected to the cosmos." She is connected with the moon, the sun, and the stars at the center of rotation, reinforcing balance for herself. The red in her dress represents "anger and strength," Barbara explained. Further, she adapted the notion of "The Broken Hoop" (the name of the quest that led to her act of survivance) into a black belt around the woman's waist to show a complete,



unbroken hoop, symbolizing Barbara's personal transformation and recognition of the traditional value of women in her nation. Although painting with acrylics on canvas is not necessarily traditional, Barbara's medium choice reinforces survivance since she adapted Western techniques to the certainly traditional process of painting for Anishinaabeg (as Barbara is from the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa).

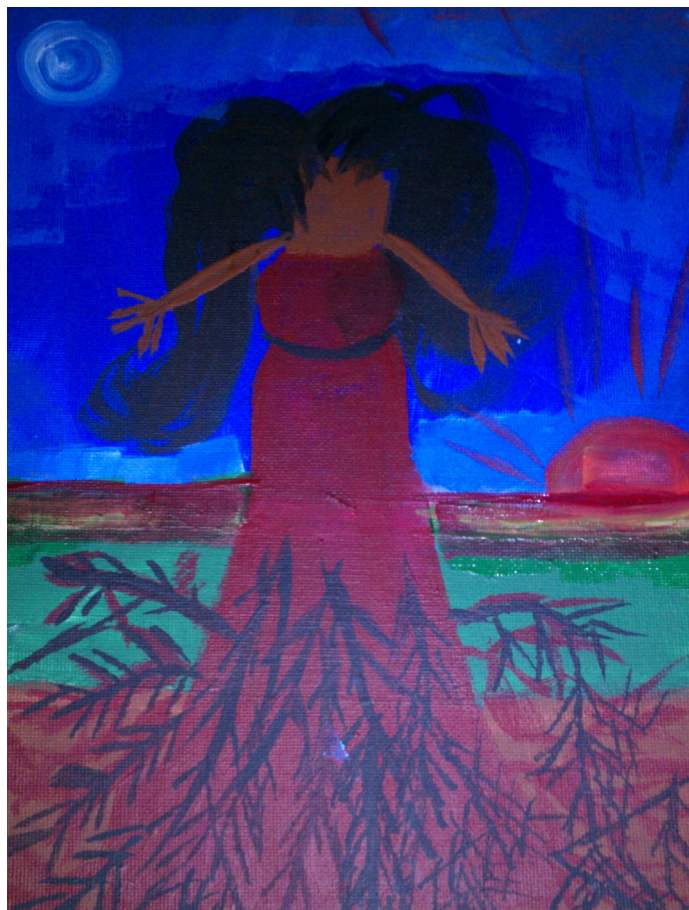


Figure 5. Painting for *The Broken Hoop Quest*  
by Barbara Gladue

Kānaka ‘Ōiwi (or “Native Hawaiian”) traditions value friendship, as Anuhea Naeole explained when describing the digital collage she created to display elements from her journey during the Giving Quest within the Caretaker phase. She used a close-up photo of a letter she wrote to a friend, a screenshot from a slideshow themed around her four years as an undergraduate at Portland State University, a poster of the Annual Pilipino Cultural Night that she volunteered at, and a photo of the Haupia (a traditional Hawaiian dessert) that she made for her co-workers. Each individual element was an experience shared with other people and culminated in a collage for her to later recall



“memories” of “respecting and honoring” her friendships. Anuheā’s act of survivance combines stills that capture her expressions of friendship in handwriting, a slideshow on a DVD, in-person at a cultural event, and in-person at her workplace. She utilizes digital media technology in both her quest and her act to continue traditional Kānaka ‘Ōiwi friendship practices of showing appreciation and gifting.

## 4.2 Identity

Identity and empowerment can contribute to self and community health (Kirmayer, et al, 2003). The individuality of identity can be expressed through *Survivance*. Andrew Belzer, who was confident in his identity prior to playing *Survivance*, wrote a poem inspired by his mother telling him stories about his family during his quest journey. Along with writing the poem, he also described his family’s travels. He considers his close family his “tribe” regardless of heritage. His father is Cherokee from his father and grandfather before him. Andrew’s mother is from England and traveled to Israel after nursing school, which is where she met Andrew’s father, who had fled from the United States to Israel to avoid the Vietnam draft. His parents traveled together through the Middle East and eventually settled on a small farm in La Calera in Bogota, Colombia, where Andrew was born. Andrew identifies as a “global citizen” and is therefore concerned with global issues. He believes that culture is “found in your heart, not only your blood.” His poem “Mother’s Breath” (Belzer, 2012) speaks to his connection with the land in Colombia, where he will “return home.”

### “Mother’s Breath”

I was born as the sun set  
behind the mountains of Bogota,  
an afternoon child.  
I was born alone in a room  
with only one other person,  
Mother, midwife and nurse.  
The story goes that the night before  
my mother had seen Rocky I,  
and I was born a fighter.

My father built us a house  
 from wood and straw  
 and pieces of aluminum.  
 No running water, No electricity  
 we were very poor,  
 we were very happy.  
 Colombia gave me my first breath  
 like a second mother  
 she nurtured my growth.  
 I was born in wanderer  
 yet I will return to her, Colombia,  
 air, water and ashes.  
 Aire, Agua y Cenizas

- Andrew Belzer, 2012

Confirming and reclaiming identity requires self-exploration and revisiting past stories and connections to relations. Heather Chambers, whose father is Jamestown S’Klallam and Chilean and whose mother is Danish, was firm in her identity but also felt disconnected. Her father and brother were the last to qualify for tribal enrollment and her grandparents were very quiet about culture due to the shaming that occurred from colonization. Although her father has recently reached out to participate in gatherings, Heather pointed out that “the family [she is] the closest to has been disconnected from their culture.” Her act of survivance involved writing a short story titled “Heinz 57” (Chambers, 2012) about the two stories she “heard the most often growing up” that related to her culture. She weaves historical stories with layers of how she was told these stories and her own experiences in school as a child exploring using the structure of a recipe. She uses Clallam words, details her connections to relatives who upheld the culture, and also describes her exploration of her Scandinavian culture. While she was explains that “Heinz 57” was a grade school nickname to describe someone of mixed heritage, she reclaims the term as positive rather than negative through her act of survivance.

Exploration of identity can also be very individual. Cynthia Stehl (2012),

whose father is Blackfoot, wrote the short story “Little Fox.” The story is written in a style similar to traditional Native American animal stories. She used her act of survivance as a way to process her life experience, focusing mostly on three years that have drastically “changed” her. Her act speaks to survivance since she uses a traditional style of story with the contemporary process of a written short story format. Her hope was to “share [her] experience of coming through the darkest night and surviving.” In the story, the fox survives, and in fact thrives by making new healthy relationships and coming to acceptance with the past.

Identity can also be affirmed prior to playing *Survivance* and still benefit from deeper exploration. Shilo George (2011) created a seven panel portrait series titled “kill the man. save the Indian.” Although Shilo was well aware of her family and her heritage prior to playing *Survivance*, the quest journey and act of survivance propelled her to ask difficult questions and confront answers that were potentially traumatizing but also very revealing and therefore healing. The piece relates to her portfolio of works, which “experience, explain, and present the complex concepts” of her “mixed Indigenous/white heritage and identity.” During the process of creating the series, Shilo reflected on “the tragic loss of cultural traditions and values due to over 200 years of genocidal tactics, in particular the devastating effects of boarding schools” in her family. For Shilo, creating art acts as “healing balm” on “emotional wounds.” As she made her act of survivance, she was gifted with the presence of Trickster in the form of a rabbit in one of the panels and navigated the tricky spaces between settler/Indigenous relations. As she explored her inner struggles, she felt “connected” with her “ancestors and culture.”

#### 4.3 Wellbeing

Indigenous wellbeing concerns holistic physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual balance (Lavallée, 2008). Mental and emotional wellbeing are central to preventing suicides, which are a devastating concern for Portland’s urban Indigenous community (Curry-Stevens, et al, 2011) and require culturally specific approaches (Crofoot-Graham, 2002). Stephen Printup created a proposal and presentation for

a social media campaign to bring awareness to and prevent suicides in Indigenous communities. “The Life First” project asks people to submit words or phrases that make them feel positive. These words or phrases are then printed on the front of a t-shirt followed by “For My Life.” The back of the t-shirts state: “Defeating Suicide in Indian Country.” As Stephen explained, the project provokes discussion around the distinctly higher rates of suicide among Native American youth, causes people to contemplate what “Indian Country” really means, and serves as an “impetus for a mass dialogue about racial stereotypes.” To date, Stephen has presented the project to the Clinton Global Initiative in Washington, DC and started an email list. In the near future, he will begin the Facebook and Twitter campaigns. Certainly, social media is a contemporary means of distributing information and facilitating global discussions. Stephen’s act of survivance utilizes the Internet as a space for mobilizing Indigenous people and creating change by showing youth that mental and emotional wellbeing is important to a wide community.

Often, Indigenous community members are impacted by imbalances in physical wellbeing (Curry-Stevens, et al, 2011). Brianna Bragg’s younger sister was hit by Ewing Sarcoma cancer. Brianna kept a journal and collected photos about walking alongside her sister during her battle with cancer. She took care of her sister, attended the treatments, and provided emotional support. Her sister’s connection to culture, reinforced by Brianna and other relatives, helped her on her path of healing. She smudged—a traditional form of ceremony involving the burning of sweetgrass, sage, and/or cedar and cleansing one’s body, mind, and spirit with the smoke—throughout her fight. Brianna captured some of these moments using photos. Eventually, as Brianna continued the quest, her collection of photos inspired her and her sister to finish the series with a journey to the beach on her sister’s last day of chemo treatment. Since, her sister has been healthy with no signs of cancer. Brianna put together the photos for her act of survivance because, being a photographer, she considers images to be a strong form of contemporary storytelling.

As wellness involves mind, body, and spirit, spiritual wellbeing must also be

recognized on the path to healing. Although Alina Begay was not surprised to narrow down her core values to her spirituality during the quest journey, she found that she experienced realizations about her spirituality while creating her act of survivance. Alina created a digital photo collage, which involved taking a photo of herself while praying and wearing Navajo regalia, as well as collecting images from the Internet that related to her unique spirituality. She also included a photo of a traditional Navajo wedding basket that she crocheted, representing the four sacred mountains and Navajo balance in life. She came to find that her spirituality “encompasses” her “entire life,” informs her decisions daily, influences who she associates with, and “ties her to [her] entire family forever for eternity.” She was raised with Navajo traditions within Mormon religion, but points out that she does not “fit the mold in thinking or appearance of a typical Navajo or Mormon.” She “melds” these practices in “harmony” and within finds her own spiritual wellbeing.

Emotional wellbeing concerns maintaining connections to land, culture, and community within the context of holistic healing. Another validation player explored more in-depth in other findings described her experience creating an act of survivance as “emotional.” She completed two quests and created two acts of survivance that she chose not to share since she had an “internal struggle about sharing the things that are negative.” Interestingly, Haida storyteller Woodrow Morrison Jr. and I had discussed this possibility during a talking circle at a café years earlier. It was his belief that negative acts were valuable for personally processing, but that sharing them with the world would not be helpful, since they could contain “poison” that others could be susceptible to. The second validation player recognized this possibility without outside prompting, and understood that the acts of survivance were most important for her. She came to see that Indigenous people are “survivors” and need to “keep on doing what we do.” She explained that “bad things happen, and it hurts us and beats us down, even when we are just trying to be good people and do good things.” Nonetheless and that it is important for Indigenous people to continue on in healthy ways.

## 4.4 Conclusion

In most instances, players' incoming motivations directly related to their acts of survivance. Sky Hopinka and Toma Villa entered *Survivance* as contemporary storytellers interested in Culture and their acts are related to their ongoing work. Andrew Belzer, Cynthia Stehl, Heather Chambers, and Shilo George approached *Survivance* to reconcile with Identity and in turn their quest choice and acts of survivance directly spoke to Identity themes. Stephen Printup, Brianna Bragg, and Lemkea second validation player had very clear motivations concerning Wellbeing and *Survivance* provided an opportunity for them to continue on that path.

Occasionally, a player's motivation helped them enter and choose a quest in the game, and their primary area of impact changed during the process of creating an act of survivance. Alina Begay was motivated by her mixed Culture and her act spoke to her personal spiritual Wellbeing. Anuheia Naeole was motivated by her Identity and this influenced deeper connection and day-to-day applications of her Culture during her quest in her act of survivance. Katie Gargan was motivated by Wellbeing due to her life's work and found an act of survivance that continued her Culture to be the most rewarding. Similarly, Barbara Gladue was motivated by personal Wellbeing, which she found during the process of creating an act of survivance that revisited and renewed traditional Culture around women.

Although it is helpful to understand the acts of survivance in terms of Culture, Identity, and Wellbeing, that is not to forget the value of the journey of the players. It is also important to recognize that these areas often have crossovers. Rather than focus on categorizing the areas of impact, this research recognizes *Survivance*'s impact on the players themselves, the communities they are active in, and the world around us all, described further in the following section.

## 6.0 Impact

*Survivance* impacts the player's self, the community, and the world. Impact on the



player's self is seen mostly during the quest journey and the process of creating an act of survivance. The impact on the self and the act of survivance can in turn have an impact in the community. Further, the impact in the community and the acts of survivance can have a broader impact in the world. The layers of impact are best described from player to player with considerations for their incoming motivation, experience during the quest journey and making their act of survivance, the act of survivance itself, and what has happened since playing *Survivance*.

## 6.1 Self

While it certainly could be said that any self-growth ultimately benefits a community that an individual participates in, and in turn improves the community, which ripples out to the world, there are specific impacts described here. Andrew Belzer, Alina Begay, and the second validation player's gameplay reflected self-development.

Andrew Belzer entered *Survivance* with identity as his motivation and created a poem for his act of survivance that reflects on his global identity. Through playing *Survivance*, he affirmed for himself: "culture is found in your heart, not your blood." During his quest journey, he spoke more in-depth with his mother and found out where his "wanderer" inclinations come from—much like his parents, he has "traveled extensively." He also always "return(s) home." Andrew, despite not being blood bound to Colombia, recognizes that this land is his home. *Survivance* helped Andrew reaffirm his identity. Currently, he is applying to graduate school for a Masters in Spanish, the primary language of Colombia. His mother also recently visited Cartagena as a volunteer, which Andrew intends to do before starting school again.

Alina Begay sought a place to explore culture while playing *Survivance*. Although her journey and act of survivance more directly related to spiritual wellbeing, culture was also interwoven throughout her experience. Prior to playing *Survivance*, she felt "afraid" to share her culture and spirituality with others, since she was concerned with stereotypes associated with being Native and being Mormon. After playing *Survivance*, she shared: "I dictate who I am. I may be different but I could never imagine or want to

live my life any other way.” She expressed that she “loved” playing *Survivance* for self-development: “... it really made me think and helped me grow and even heal.”

## 6.2 Self and Community

While every player experienced impacts on the self while playing *Survivance*, several players also directly impacted the community either during the quest journey, through their act of survivance, or since playing the game. Cynthia Stehl, Anuheia Naeole, Heather Chambers, Katie Gargan, Brianna Bragg, Barbara Gladue, and Shilo George all had various layers of contribution to their respective communities and thus the larger urban Portland Indigenous community.

Cynthia Stehl approached *Survivance* as an opportunity to grapple with her identity. Through the quest, Cynthia realized that her “life looks and is completely different than it was four years ago.” She chose to adapt a traditional storytelling style to a new story with animal characters and a journey that reflects her life experiences. Her hope is that other people will read her story. She sees it as a contribution to the community to help others that are going through similar experiences.

Anuheia Naeole wanted to explore her identity, and in a way did so, through actively representing her culture during her quest journey and act of survivance. After playing *Survivance*, Anuheia reflected: “There is so much ... that we do daily that not only affects ourselves but also affects others around us.” She represented her culture during her quest journey through friendship traditions. By giving thanks to her support system of friends and colleagues as well as volunteering at an event, she directly contributed to the community during the quest. She found that playing *Survivance* was “very rewarding not only towards [herself] but for others in [her] daily life.”

Heather Chambers began *Survivance* with an apprehension about her identity. As a child, she felt a fissure in her family’s cultural identity during her grandparent’s generation, which resulted in feelings of “disconnection.” Heather explained: “... they simply shutdown everything connected with their culture.” Telling her story and revisiting her childhood helped her reflect on the “broken hoop,” a symbol that has

helped her grapple with identity issues. Her journey has not ended, but rather just started. She expressed that still has more personal healing to do and more “information” to find. Since playing *Survivance*, her and her father have been more active in the community.

Katie Gargan expected to see themes of wellbeing in her quest journey and act of survivance since this is her area of work in the community. Instead, she followed her own path and described herself as “thankful” for the chance to create an act of survivance based on the Black Hills creation story. While beading, she experienced emotional balance during an otherwise hectic time of the year in school. Katie shared: “...when I am beading my mind is calm and my emotions are balanced. By virtue of how much time beading this medallion took I was forced to relax for extended periods of time over the past couple of weeks.” Katie was then able to share the medallion and its accompanying traditional and historical stories with her community, thus giving back the story after the process of interpreting and recreating it as a form of cultural reclamation.

Brianna Bragg began playing *Survivance* near the end of her sister’s battle with cancer. She hoped for continued physical wellbeing for her sister as well as emotional wellbeing for herself. *Survivance* offered a path to healing from the struggle she had experienced as her sister’s caretaker during cancer. Brianna felt that writing her reflections and visually sharing her story “empowered” both the story and herself. Further, the story offers hope to her and her sister’s community. They shared information about cancer with their community through an event booth during the journey of healing. Since playing *Survivance*, Brianna has been able to share the photo story of her sister’s healing process and received emotional healing for herself.

Barbara Gladue walked into *Survivance* in the hopes of receiving wellbeing. She found personal wellbeing through reconnecting with and exploring her culture. During the quest journey, Barbara reflected on her experiences in her marriage and household: “I recognize that when I am doing well my house is in order, meaning, my husband and kids are too happy and doing well; when I’m out of balance, so too is my family (my house).” As she created her act of survivance, she experienced “empowerment”: “I knew what the painting would look like before I actually got it on a canvas, but once I

began painting I became emerged in what it truly meant; the connection to the earth, the cosmos, how we are from the same blood line; how ‘it’ flows through you, me, the earth, the sky, the sun. I became empowered.” Her healing of self in turn opened her eyes to see that she is part of a community of Indigenous women. She describes: “I especially felt a sense of pride, and strength—a connection like a chain link, to all the women who have gone before me and even those who have not yet come, that we ‘Women’ are The Back Bone, The Foundation of mankind.” She saw connections between her peoples and others in regards to the traditional roles and values of women, which strengthened her internal sense of value as well as reflected out to her immediate community.

Shilo George was motivated to play *Survivance* as a way to seek identity affirmation. In her act of survivance, she wanted to see herself and her ancestors together after the “decimation” of their lineage “from the effects of genocide and historical trauma.” In the process, Shilo reaffirmed her identity: “Blood quantum has no bearing what-so-ever on my ability and right to reclaim my heritage and culture and to heal my wounds.” Her act of survivance served as her piece for the Art Scholarship Student Exhibition, which was available online at *Survivance.org*, as well as on display at Portland State University’s Art Building for the community to see. Since playing *Survivance*, Shilo has continued her studies and affirmation of her identity.

### 6.3 Self, Community, and World

Some of the players had clear impacts on the self, their respective communities, and also the world either during the quest journey, through their act of survivance, or since playing the game. Sky Hopinka, Toma Villa, and Stephen Printup each created acts of survivance, which have had ripples through the community and have propelled their work forward into the world.

Sky Hopinka approached *Survivance* as an opportunity to promote culture by means of language recovery. By playing *Survivance*, he felt “closure” for the work he did during the summer. He commented: “... a big change happened within me during

the summer, I felt like I found a direction to go in, which is Indigenous language revitalization.” He has a “resolve” because of “finishing the film and seeing the final cut.” Since playing *Survivance*, Sky is pursuing a Masters degree in Film in the hopes of enabling ongoing work in language revitalization and filmmaking. While his quest journey had an impact on the community at Warm Springs Indian reservation, his act of survivance also has had an impact on the urban Portland Indigenous community by inspiring activity in the Chinuk Wawa language club. He felt that sharing the film was essential since it is “important for people to share with each other what they’re doing, what they’ve got going on, and to help spread the word of what else is out there, what is lacking, and what needs to be done.” The film helped promote the Where Are Your Keys (WAYK) language program. Since, Indigenous communities all across North America, including urban and reservation communities, have picked up the methodology. The program enables Indigenous language revitalization on a global scale.

Toma Villa continued and reclaimed cultural traditions through playing *Survivance*. Since finishing his act of survivance, Toma has created prints to tell the story to other people. He shared: “I printed out some on my small press at home and took them around to show people and tell the story, they would listen with full attention and loved it, and it helped out to have a visual to go along with it as well.” In addition to sharing the linocut print online and using it as a visual to pass on the story in-person, he also donated a print to the Northwest Indian Storytelling Festival’s auction, which is hosted by the Northwest Indian Storytellers Association, a sister organization of Wisdom of the Elders. His work through *Survivance* encouraged him as a storyteller and artist. He gifted his work directly to the community for a monetary contribution. Since playing *Survivance*, Toma’s artwork continues to be featured alongside master artists such as Lillian Pitt.

Stephen Printup walked into *Survivance* with the strongly determined motivation of encouraging emotional and mental wellbeing in the community. Although his experience was “emotional,” his act of survivance turned proposal for the “The Life First” social media project was received well by the Clinton Global Initiative. He described himself as “motivated to continue the work.” The campaign is certain to

have an impact on the urban Portland Indigenous community where Stephen intends to launch the project. From there, he hopes for the project to grow via social networks into worldwide awareness of suicides in Indigenous communities.

## 6.4 Conclusion

*Survivance* has many moments to create impact—during players’ quest journeys, while making acts of survivance, in the acts of survivance, and in times following as players heal after the process of gameplay. The forms of impact are on the self, the community, and the world. Thus far, all of the players have been directly influenced by gameplay. For example, Shilo George has since sought out her personal pathway to healing. In many cases, players have directly participated in their communities, such as Heather Chambers and her family, who have returned to community events and gatherings. Further still, work explored in *Survivance* has reached the world. Sky Hopinka’s ongoing film work with *Where Are Your Keys?* (WAYK) has helped to bring the language teaching methodology to Indigenous communities all across North America.

Although *Survivance* is currently a prototype, it is likely to be developed into a mobile app with the guidance of youth players over the next few years. Since it is a community-oriented game, further steps in the design process will continue to directly involve the community.

Many thanks to ongoing support from Wisdom of the Elders, the Northwest Indian Storytellers Association, Aboriginal Territories in Cyberspace, and the Aboriginal History Media Arts Lab.



## References

- BARNES, P.M., ADAMS, P.F., & POWELL-GRINER, E. (2010). Health characteristics of the American Indian or Alaska Native adult population: United States, 2004-2008. *National Health Statistics Reports*, 20. Hyattsville, Maryland: National Center for Health Statistics.
- COLTELLI, L. (1990-91). Gerald Vizenor: The trickster heir of Columbus: An interview. *Native American Literatures Forum*, 2(3), 101-16.
- CORDERO, C. (1995). A working and evolving definition of culture. *Canadian Journal of Native Education*, 21, 28-41. Retrieved from <http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/detail?accno=EJ541684>
- CORNTASSEL, J., Chaw-win-is, & T'lakwadzi (2009). Indigenous storytelling, truth-telling, and community Approaches to reconciliation, *English Studies in Canada*, 35(1), 137-159. doi: 10.1353/esc.0.0163
- CROFOOT-GRAHAM, T. L. (2002). Using reasons for living to connect to American Indian healing traditions. *Journal of Sociology & Social Welfare*, 29(1), 55. Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://connection.ebscohost.com/c/articles/6852677/using-reasons-living-connect-american-indian-healing-traditions>
- CURRY-STEVENS, A., CROSS-HEMMER, A., & Coalition of Communities of Color (2011). *The Native American community in Multnomah county: An unsettling profile*. Portland, Oregon: Portland State University.
- FIXICO, D. L. (2003). *The American Indian mind in a linear world: American Indian studies and traditional knowledge*. New York, New York: Routledge.
- GARROUTTE, E. M. (2003). *Real Indians: Identity and survival of Native America*. Berkley, California: University of California Press.
- KING, T. (2003). *The truth about stories: a Native narrative*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- KING, M., SMITH, A., GRACEY, M. (2009). Indigenous health part 2: the underlying causes of the health gap. *The Lancet*, 374(9683), 76-85. <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0140673609608278>
- KIRMAYER, L., SIMPSON, C., CARGO, M. (2003). Healing traditions: culture, community and mental health promotion with Canadian Aboriginal peoples. *Australasian Psychiatry*, 11(1), S15-S23. doi: 10.1046/j.1038-5282.2003.02010.x
- LAMEMAN [LaPensée], B. A. & Lewis, J. E. (2011). Skins: Designing games with First Nations youth. *Journal of Game Design and Development Education*, 1(1). Retrieved from <http://www.rit.edu/gccis/gameeducationjournal/skins-designing-games-first-nations-youth>
- LAVALLÉE, L. F. (2008). Balancing the medicine wheel through physical activity. *Social Work Publications and Research*, 4(1). Retrieved March 1, 2013 from [http://www.naho.ca/french/journal\\_V04\\_01.php](http://www.naho.ca/french/journal_V04_01.php)
- LAVALLÉE, L. F. (2009). Practical application of an Indigenous research framework and two qualitative Indigenous research methods: Sharing circles and Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 8(1). Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <https://ejournals.library.ualberta.ca/index.php/IJQM/article/view/943/0>

- LEWIS, J., & FRAGNITO, S. T. (2005). Aboriginal territories in cyberspace. *Cultural Survival*, 29(2). Retrieved November 12, 2011, from <http://www.culturalsurvival.org/ourpublications/csq/article/aboriginal-territories-cyberspace>
- MCCARTY, T. L. (2003). Revitalising Indigenous languages in homogenising times. *Comparative Education*, 39(2), 147-163. doi: 10.1080/03050060302556
- MONTOUR, L. (1996). The medicine wheel: Understanding “problem” patients in primary care. Presented at the Fifth Annual Meeting of the Native Physician Association in Canada. Ottawa, Ontario, August 23-25, 1996. Retrieved from <http://xnet.kp.org/pemanentejournal/winter00pj/wheel.html>
- MONTURE-OKANEE, P. A. (1992). The roles and responsibilities of aboriginal women: reclaiming justice. *Saskatchewan Law Review*, 56(2), 237-266.
- PEVAR, S. L. (1992). *The rights of Indians and tribes: The basic ACLU guide to Indian and tribal rights*. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press.
- REDER, D. (2010). Sacred stories in comic book form: A Cree reading of *Darkness Calls*. In D. Reder and L. M. Morra (Eds.), *Troubling Tricksters: Revisioning Critical Conversations* (pp. 177-191). Waterloo, Ontario: Wilfrid Laurier University Press.
- VIZENOR, G. (1994). *Manifest manners: Narratives on postindian survivance*. Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- VIZENOR, G. (2008). The aesthetics of survivance. In G. Vizenor (Ed.), *Survivance: Narratives of native presence* (pp. 1-24). Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press.
- WILSON, K. (2003). Therapeutic landscapes and First Nations peoples: an exploration of culture, health and place. *Health & Place*, 9(2), 83-93. doi: 10.1016/S1353-8292(02)00016-3

## Web Sites

- FRAGNITO, S. (1996). *CyberPowWow*. Retrieved March 14, 2011, from <http://www.cyberpowwow.net/>
- FRAGNITO, S. (2009). *TimeTraveller™*. Retrieved March 14, 2011, from <http://www.timetravellertm.com>
- Northwest Indian Storytellers Association. 2011. *Northwest Indian Storytellers Association*. Retrieved December 17, 2012, from <http://wisdomoftheelders.org/category/nisa/>
- WISDOM. 2009. *Discovering Our Story*. Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://www.discoveringourstory.org>
- WISDOM. 2010. *Survivance*. Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://www.survivance.org>

## Media

- BELZER, A. (2012). Mother's breath.
- CHAMBER, H. (2012). Heinz 57.

GEORGE, Shilo. (2011). kill the man. save the Indian. Survivance.org. Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://www.survivance.org/orphan/orphan2-3.html>

HOPINKA, Sky (2012). A fascinating story: a summer with ‘where are your keys?’ [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://www.vimeo.com/37413280>

STEHL, C. (2012). Little fox.

VILLA, T. (2012). Wilups and wawúkya. Survivance.org. Retrieved March 1, 2013 from <http://www.survivance.org/wanderer/wanderer1-3.html>

Wisdom of the Elders (Producer). 2010. Discovering our story: bear story [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://blip.tv/discovering-our-story/bear-story-3034980>

Wisdom of the Elders (Producer). 2010. Discovering our story: Elaine Grinnell 1 of 2 [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://blip.tv/discovering-our-story/elaine-grinnel-1of2-dos-yr1-4024956>

Wisdom of the Elders (Producer). 2010. Discovering our story: Woodrow Morrison 1 of 2 [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://blip.tv/discovering-our-story/woodrow-morrison-1of2-dos-yr1-4025094>

Wisdom of the Elders (Producer). 2010. Discovering our story: Elaine Grinnell 2 of 2 [Video file]. Retrieved from <http://blip.tv/discovering-our-story/elaine-grinnel-2of2-dos-yr1-4024959>