DRAWING ON RICH TRADITIONS TO NOURISH OUR CHILDREN

GOT BANNOCK? TRADITIONAL INDIGENOUS BREAD IN WINNIPEG’S NORTH END

VOICES OF URBAN ABORIGINAL PEOPLES WITH DIABETES

EXPLORING INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVES ON A SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGE TAX

THE NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DIABETES ASSOCIATION ENVISIONS DIABETES-FREE HEALTHY COMMUNITIES
FEATURES

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NADA newsletters are distributed on a bi-monthly basis. Submissions are due the first Friday of the month of distribution.

The NADA newsletter will feature a regular recipe section starting with the next issue. We welcome submissions!

The next newsletter will be November 2018, with submission deadline of October 26, 2018.

Please send submissions to jefflaplante@nada.ca
Message from the Executive Director

Greetings!


This edition of the newsletter is a little light on submissions, but still very informative and interesting. We would like to sincerely thank Monica Cyr, Joyce Slater, Moneca Sinclaire, Natalie Reideger, Grand Chief Dr. Wilton Littlechild, and Miranda McLellan-Granger for sharing the included articles with our readers.

We are also back in resource development mode and we are extremely pleased to be working on a couple projects with the Manitoba First Nations Education Resource Centre and the Diabetes Integration Project at the First Nations Health and Social Secretariat of Manitoba. We expect these will be published and available in the first months of 2019.

A couple of great events are coming up. In October, the Third Annual Conference on Native American Nutrition is taking place at the Mystic Lake Centre in Minneapolis, Minnesota. This annual conference brings together tribal officials, researchers, practitioners, and others to discuss the current state of Indigenous and academic scientific knowledge about Native nutrition and food science, and identify new areas of work. Our colleagues at Ongomizwin Research Indigenous Institute of Health and Healing at the University of Manitoba are hosting their 6th Annual Indigenous Health Research Symposium, titled “Our Truths, Our Voices: Reclaiming the world through story”, at the UM Bannatyne campus.

All my relations,

Jeff LaPlante
Executive Director
Indigenous peoples are “Inuwak,” Peoples of the Land. We have a spiritual relationship with our mother earth; our food is from the land and is intrinsically related to our cultural and spiritual way of life. Food not only nourishes us physically, it impacts our mental attitude and is an essential part of many of our spiritual ceremonies.

Unfortunately, integral parts of our culture and our connection to the land have been impacted or interrupted in many ways. Colonization disrupted access to the land and our traditional food sources. The genesis of much of the poor nutrition in our communities – and specifically with our children – begins with the history of residential schools.

The meals served at the residential schools did not meet Canada’s Official Food Rules, nor did they meet the later updated version of these guidelines in the form of Canada’s Food Guide. Food was often inadequate both in terms of quality and quantity; children were hungry and suffering from malnutrition.

We have heard so many accounts from residential school survivors of being served food that was not fit for human consumption. In my experience as a boy at residential school, I remember we were fed dog biscuits.

The school meals were also unfamiliar – a far cry from the traditional food that many of our parents and grandparents had hunted, fished or harvested. Food was used as a weapon in the schools, including as a form of punishment. If you misbehaved, it could be taken away from you.

This history of poor nutrition in Indigenous children, starting with colonization and worsening through the residential schools, has carried through to today. Much like abuse, as we have found in our research of the residential school system, poor nutrition passes on through the family. If you are not fed properly as a child, you will not promote nutritious food to your own children. This is how habits are formed; we feed our children the way we were fed as children. And on it goes.

Today our communities are faced with additional challenges around supporting their children to eat well and develop healthy food habits. For example, in isolated communities, healthy food choices are limited and expensive. Unhealthy choices are abundant and heavily marketed – and this is true in all communities across the country. Pop and other sugary, high fat snacks line our store shelves usually at our children’s eye level, and not surprisingly, this is the first thing they see and the first thing they want.

This has led to some very negative effects in our communities including high rates of type 2 diabetes, obesity in our children and other health complications. I remember an older man speaking at a traditional gathering summing it up well: “The day we started getting sick was the day we started hunting on the shelves.”

We have been led to poor nutrition through history, habit, availability of poor choices and marketing.

Now we need to go back. There is richness in our traditional teachings, richness in our cultures and richness in our traditional ways of life that still have instructions for us. It is time to reflect on these traditions and take a holistic approach as we move forward.

We need to repair the flow of traditional knowledge from parents to children that has been damaged, and in some cases, severed due to the residential school system. We can do this by helping to educate our young parents about healthy eating and cooking.

We also need to make changes to our present environment. I have challenged schools and
community centres to remove pop machines and other unhealthy choices. All communities should have access to affordable healthy food. Special efforts should be made for our remote communities where food costs are high, and more nutritious items can be the most expensive.

Celebrities and athletes have long been used to market food and we can do the same by having our own First Nations role models promote healthy lifestyles to our children.

Legislation to prohibit junk food marketing to our children would protect them and promote better food and drink choices. Bill S-228, currently in the House of Commons, is expected to pass this year.

Canada’s Food Guide is undergoing revisions and this is an opportunity to consult with Indigenous leaders to ensure it is culturally relevant and reflective of our First Nations, Inuit and Métis teachings.

In the old days, our chiefs would look ahead to see what was coming so they could warn our communities, find a solution and protect them. Now is the time for all of our Indigenous leaders to do the same. Treating illness is important but we need to shift more of our focus on wellness and prevention by advocating for change at all levels to ensure all our children enjoy long, healthy lives.

Wilton Littlechild, Ph.D., LLB, Q.C. Cree Nation, Grand Chief, Indian residential school Survivor, lawyer and former Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and an expert advisor with EvidenceNetwork.ca.

Wilton has the distinction of being the first Treaty First Nation person to acquire his law degree from the University of Alberta in 1976. He also holds Bachelor and Master’s degrees in Physical Education, an honorary Doctor of Laws degree from the University of Alberta, and the Indigenous Peoples’ Counsel (IPC) designation. An avid sportsman and athlete, he has won more than 70 provincial, regional, national and international championships, was a founder of the North American Indigenous Games, and was selected as a torch bearer and ambassador for the 2010 Olympics. He has been inducted into seven sports Halls of Fame.

Wilton served as a Member of Parliament from 1988 to 1993 for the riding of Wetaskiwin-Rimby, served on several senior committees in the House of Commons, and served as a parliamentary delegate to the United Nations. He was appointed as Honorary Chief for the Maskwacis Crees and also honoured by the Chiefs of the Confederacy of Treaty 7 and 8 First Nations as the International Chief for Treaty 6. Chief Littlechild is a dedicated advocate of the implementation of treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Crown, and a pioneer of the global Indigenous rights movement. He was recently honoured with the Alberta Order of Excellence.
Bannock is a flat quick bread made with few ingredients. It has a reputation for being delicious. The bread is often associated with Aboriginal culture, yet its origin stems from Scottish settlers. This article examines the meaning of bannock to the Aboriginal people of the North End neighbourhood in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Aboriginal people are the Indigenous inhabitants of Canada; however, colonialism has resulted in the breakdown of their way of life, negatively impacting the lives of Aboriginal people. More recently, there has been a cultural revival among Aboriginal communities across Canada. Indigenous ways of life, including food-ways, are being re-discovered, explored, and celebrated. In this qualitative study Aboriginal participants (N=25) participated in focus groups and in-depth interviews about their experiences with bannock. Transcribed interviews were analyzed for themes and sub-themes. Results indicate that bannock is viewed as an important food for Aboriginal residents of Winnipeg’s North End neighbourhood, despite its historical associations with European settlers. Bannock is associated with family histories, cultural events and ceremonies, and food security. Bannock is seen as having a deep connection to identity. The future of bannock, however, is uncertain due to inconsistent teaching in homes, schools, and communities. We argue that bannock is a traditional Aboriginal food whose creation, sharing, and consumption have deep connections to Aboriginal identity and sustainable well-being. Opportunities to learn about bannock should be incorporated into formal and non-formal educational programs in schools and communities.

Bannock is home-made bread that is generally consumed by the Aboriginal1 First Nation, Métis and Inuit Peoples of Canada (Ingram & Shapter, 2002). It is defined as dough that is kneaded into a shape and baked, or fried, and cut into wedges, or squares (Kuhnlein, Receveur & Ing, 2001). In addition, “There are almost as many words for [the bread] as there are ways of cooking it. Known also as bannaq, bannuc, galette, gallette de mischif and sapil’il, it plays a vital role in the lives of Aboriginal Canadians” (Blackstock, 2001, p.11). Regional differences also exist; in Winnipeg, Manitoba, if bannock is fried in oil it is called “fried bannock” while in Wisconsin-Madison, south of Winnipeg, fried bannock is referred to as “fry bread” (Vantrease, 2013).

At first glance, bannock appears to be a simple bread, made of flour, fat (lard or oil), salt, and baking powder; however, it is far more than just these few ingredients. For example, as the literature shows, bannock is a contested food because of its colonial roots. Consistent with this idea, Devon Mihesuah (in press) argues that bannock is not ‘traditional’ food in Indigenous2 cultures, because its ingredients are not indigenous to the North American hemisphere, and therefore bannock cannot be considered authentic. Conversely, Bell (n.d), argues that bannock’s origins predate European contact as Aboriginal peoples have long consumed flat-like “breads” from various plant foods that were indigenous to the land, and that bannock, as it is known today, was simply integrated into an existing food system. Furthermore, Vantrease (2013) reports that, for some American Indigenous students at her university, there are mixed feelings associated with bannock. For example, the bread is symbolic of pride because of its association with sharing and community; however, bannock also serves as a painful reminder of the less-than-nutritious commodity foods that were delivered to reservations by government officials as a means to assimilate Indian tribes in the United States. Hence, the bread serves as a reminder of its associations to poverty and marginalization (Vantrease, 2013, p. 55).

Food selection is based primarily on choices driven by sociocultural values and factors such as social prestige and health, but also age, gender, education level, and employment income (Twiss, 2003). In addition, various cultures preserve specific meanings associated with food that are deeply personal, culturally-binding, and highly unique. According to Fischler (1988), food is complex and has a number of dimensions which can contain different meanings. Many people prefer to

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1 Aboriginal peoples refers to the descendants of the original inhabitants of North America. The Canadian Constitution recognizes three groups of Aboriginal people – Indians, Métis and Inuit (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2002). These are three separate peoples with unique heritages, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

2 Indigenous refers to any population that has experienced the fate of colonialism, that seeks self-determination, and that is distinct in its own right (Smith, 2012).
consume foods that are symbolically associated with their own culture in order to reinforce their sense of belonging (Cantarero, Espeitx, Lacruz, & Martín, 2013). An example of symbolism associated with food and culture are Métis families who, according to Barkwell, Dorian and Hourié (2006), enjoy consuming fresh bannock served with soups and stews. The scholars propose that the experience offers a sense of comfort and family connectedness. Essentially, understanding what food means to people is an opportunity to better understand and appreciate the differences between (and similarities within) cultures.

Our project proposes that the long-evolved food systems of Aboriginal peoples amount to a treasure trove of knowledge that is typically overlooked and undervalued. Examining these food systems has potential benefits for the well-being of not only Indigenous peoples, but also industrialized populations (Kuhnlein et al., 2006). Furthermore, exploring the meaning of bannock in Winnipeg’s North End (WNE), where the Aboriginal population is highest in the city, is important because bannock is more than just bread; it is representative of Aboriginal culture. Moreover, in Manitoba the proportion of Aboriginal peoples compared to non-Aboriginal people is greater than any other Canadian province (Statistics Canada, 2010). Although there are a number of articles about bannock in the popular press and scientific journals; to our knowledge, there are very few studies that seek a deeper understanding of the meaning of bannock through the lens of Aboriginal people in Canada.

Methods

This exploratory study used a qualitative, inductive approach. Adult male and female participants were purposively recruited through community-organizations, word of mouth, and advertisements placed in community spaces. All participants were Aboriginal/Indigenous and had knowledge of bannock, either through making it and/or consuming it. Consulting these “experts” allowed for the collection of unique and informed perspectives of food practices and their relationship to ethno-cultural (Aboriginal/Indigenous) identities (Bisogni, Connors, Devine & Sobal 2002). Ethical approval was granted by the Joint Human Research Ethics Board, at the University of Manitoba.

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (n=11) and 1 focus group (n=14 participants) were conducted using guiding questions. Questions were determined collaboratively with the staff of two community-based food organizations. Of the 25 participants (F=21, M=4) 8 were Elders¹ (F=5; M=3). Some of the Elders expressed emotions and told stories that could have only been captured through an interview process. The interviews and focus group took place in community-friendly spaces in Winnipeg’s North End neighbourhood, which has the highest proportion of Aboriginal residents in Winnipeg (Canadian Electronic Library, 2012).

The interviews and focus group were conducted by a trained interviewer, who is a member of the Winnipeg Indigenous community and who possesses insider insights into cultural meanings and practices; this enhanced data collection. However, residing outside Winnipeg’s North End, she also had outsider status, which positioned her as an informed questioner (D’Sylva & Beagan, 2011). Each interview and the focus group was 40 minutes in length, on average, and were digitally recorded and transcribed. Data was analysed thematically using an inductive, content-driven approach (Guest, G., MacQueen, K. M., & Namey, E. E., 2011). Transcriptions were reviewed by the researcher for initial themes, and then coded for first level codes. Concept maps were developed, and the data was further analysed for second level codes, which became major themes. Further analysis yielded subthemes. Analytical memos were kept throughout the process, and negative cases were noted where they emerged. A sample of coding and transcription were reviewed by two other researchers. Data were collected until theoretical saturation was reached and no new themes emerged.

Results

Bannock was part of most participants’ personal

An Elder is defined as an individual who has attained a particular status of honour, wisdom, and respect, regardless of age.
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by Monica Cyr and Joyce Slater

histories, and is still a commonly consumed food in Winnipeg’s North End (WNE) neighborhood. Participants had overwhelmingly positive perceptions of bannock as an important food for Aboriginal culture, and for building community.

Bannock Is an Important “Traditional Food” in Winnipeg’s North End Aboriginal Community

Our findings demonstrate that, for the Aboriginal people of Winnipeg’s North End, bannock is considered a Traditional Aboriginal food. Participants expressed a great deal of pride with respect to bannock, and felt that it has become a “traditional food” for Aboriginal people. All participants related stories of making and/or eating bannock as children, using phrases such as “it was always there” when describing childhood memories. Indulging in bannock whenever possible was common because of the bread’s delicious taste, which was viewed as another element that made the bread a favorite traditional food. In addition, the knowledge of making bannock was passed down by family members.

Bannock is Aboriginal bread. When asked if bannock was considered an Aboriginal bread, participants used phrases such as “it’s part of our native meals,” “it’s the traditional bread of our people,” and “it’s the way of our people.” A few participants said that bannock originally derived from Scottish settlers, whereas others understood that it was bread that had been passed down through generations. An Elder man stated,

Bannock came from Scottish people, and show[ed] it to the Aboriginal people, and they like[d] it, so the Indian people sort of picked it up and this is what they used because it is simple to make, cheap to make right, it’s not very expensive and they just basically took it as their own I guess. They make it a traditional way.

One participant recalled that her “kookum” (grandmother), who lived to be 120 years old, shared stories of eating bannock as a young girl. Some participants recollected watching people within their community make bannock over camp fires in cast iron pans, or wrapped around a stick. Others were unable to recall an exact memory of bannock’s presence beyond the fact that it was the bread that was always around. “My first memory, specifically no, it’s just something that was always there. It was on the counter fresh, it was on the table fresh, it was with every meal.”

The interviews also revealed that non-Indigenous “outsiders” identified bannock as a traditional cultural food. In particular, participants reported that in some instances bannock was banned because it was identified as an Aboriginal bread. Two Elder participants recollected a gap in their bannock consumption during their time in residential school as children. They stated that eating bannock was forbidden due to its Aboriginal connection. “I never seen bannock for ten months when I was in school, and I come home, when I come back to the reserve that’s when we had bannock,” and “when we were sent to the school, I never seen bannock there, nobody ever made bannock; they made homemade bread, white bread.” As adults, both Elders resumed eating bannock, and became teachers of bannock in their community. In addition, the same Elder referred to bannock as “pahkwêsikan,” a Cree term which was understood to mean “we are what we eat” (L. Cook, personal communication, May 20, 2014).

Many participants discussed positive childhood memories and relationships between families and bannock. One young woman reminisced: “It reminds
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me of being home. You know, like when I eat bannock, those two go together cause my mom always had bannock, she always made bannock. So it was just, you know that’s home…” Many stated that bannock had been a part of their life for as long as they could remember. One participant stated that they had “been eating it since day one” and another reported that “[bannock] was one of the first things I ever ate – that I ever cooked myself”.

Results showed that participants learned to make bannock from different teachers. While many participants learned from their mothers, bannock making was not solely matriarchal. Both women and men made bannock, and several participants recollected that their fathers taught their first lesson in making bannock. Others learned from extended family members such as grandparents or aunts. In addition, several participants reported that their families currently have a designated bannock maker.

Culinary technique and ingredients. Ingredients and recipes varied among participants. Some insisted that flour, water, salt, and lard are the original ingredients of bannock, and if the recipe is altered the product will no longer be authentic. One participant felt that Elders would not approve of veering away from the original ingredients. In addition, many participants believed that the one making traditional bannock did not measure the ingredients. Instead they would “eye-ball” the amounts. One man said about his grandfather:

He never could give me the proper recipe. I don’t think he actually knew it, it was all an eye thing to him, ya, like he’d been doing it so long I guess he didn’t use the measurements he just did it by eye.

Some participants reported various ways to prepare and serve bannock, depending on the individual making it; whereas others felt that bannock made with ingredients other than white flour, lard, salt and baking powder was not “traditional.” Conversely, a female participant contested that “white flour” is not a traditional ingredient, although interestingly she regarded bannock as traditional food. One man said bannock “goes a long way” because of the number of cut, or torn pieces it yields from a round loaf. Another participant stated that, cut properly, one can produce up to “…seventy pieces out of one bannock.”

Participants stated that, while bannock is a flat bread, it should be fluffy. Excessive kneading and over handling of the dough will result in hard bannock. As one woman put it, “You know some people make that mistake that they play with it, or knead it too long, and then when they put it in the oven, their bannock comes out hard.” Several participants preferred using their hands over utensils in order to handle the dough to avoid distorted consistency. Participants did not go into detail in regards to cooking methods.

Cultural pride and ceremony. All of the participants expressed pride in the association between bannock and Aboriginal cultural. For example, one Elder said, “And I’m telling my grandkids and whoever will listen, their friends you know I tell them, that bannock is a good food. It’s our staple food, like the rice is to the Chinese people.” The same participant went on:

Bread - white, store bought bread is not the way of our people, it’s not! Bannock is the way. It’s a staple food, it gives you strength it gives you energy. It just makes you strong. It’s so important to eat bannock, to have bannock.

Participants frequently expressed pride when talking about individuals who were able to make good bannock for a large number of people, and also teach about it. Bannock was found to be an important food for the community. For example, many participants identified individuals in the community who were well-known for making delicious bannock in large quantities, or for teaching many others in their community how to make the bread. Terms such as “bannock lady,” “bannock maker,” and “bannocologist” were used to denote the philanthropic work of participants who had these characteristics. One man stated, “I would make bannock wherever I go; I would make bannock for people. They called me the bannock maker, lots of people.” Another stated, “gatherings for native people - for sure there’ll be bannock there.” In addition, sharing bannock represented an aspect of Aboriginal pride. As one woman vocalized, “bannock
is considered bread that should be shared.” She went on to say that there is “Something to do with our people that likes to give it, like you know, to share it.” A strong element of pride, recognition, and community building was identified when talking about bannock.

Results also showed a link between pride and sustenance. Many participants expressed a sense of pride and appreciation because bannock often provided sustenance when food was scarce. One woman confided that bannock was the only food she and her sister had to eat at times because her family was impoverished; “it holds us…when we had no food a long time ago, my mom used to make bannock and buns…it used to fill us up at lunch when we came home…we didn’t care as long as it was bannock.” Many participants also reported that bannock was less expensive to make as opposed to buying bread, therefore it was often made fresh daily; “it goes a long way compared to a loaf of bread;” and “bannock fills you up faster than bread would.” In addition, most participants strongly expressed their love for the bread. For our participants, as long as bannock was present, a level of food security existed.

When participants were asked if bannock had any spiritual meanings associated with it, the majority answered that it did not. However, they did state that bannock was often present at ceremonial events in the community. Bannock was reported to be at pow wows, wakes, funerals, and sweat lodges. Some explained that bannock is often given as an offering during ceremonial events. For example, one woman remembered her mother placing bannock under a tree:

_Sometimes she puts whatever is left over too and puts it under the tree. That’s what she does, she gives bannock to the - I don’t know how to say it - to the Mother Earth. She gives it back to Mother Earth whatever is left over. She doesn’t just chuck it out, [she] puts it under the tree._

Another recalled that her grandson often would eat bannock before he sang because he believed there was a ceremonial connection between the bread and his ability to sing. She recalled him saying, “it gives me power, it gives me strength.” Yet another woman found she was able to overcome her fears and intimidation of making bannock only after she prayed for guidance.

**Bread with Purpose**

The frequency and location of consumption, and the versatility of uses, differed from one participant to the next. Bannock was described as multipurpose bread due to the number of ways it can be prepared, eaten, and shared. One woman explained, “I eat it whenever I get a chance, as soon as I can, and I try a piece a day” which was echoed by most participants. Another participant stated, “I try a piece a day. I try not to, it’s just so good! …it’s like, once you start you can’t stop.”

An Elder woman enthusiastically said, “Ya, I just go crazy about the bannock!”

Bannock is a staple food for many participants partly because of its inexpensive ingredients and ease of making, as well as its sensual qualities and delicious taste. As one woman said,

_You can make lots of it at one time, you can feed a lot of people, it’s so readily available and easy to make...lots of it...it can go around and feed lots of people. It’s uh, it’s a good thing, it can go with many foods._

Yet another participant said, “It’s a staple food for me…I’m teaching my granddaughters how to make bannock….it’s good food. I love bannock.” Accessing bannock was not a problem for the participants of this study because bannock is offered so frequently at family and community Aboriginal gatherings. In addition, participants recalled bannock often accompanied other “country” or “traditional” dishes, such as stews, soups, and wild meats. Eating traditional dishes is still a practice for many participants; however, they also reported eating bannock with “Western” and/or modern dishes.

Moreover, bannock was viewed as a highly versatile food which could be a main dish or a side dish. In addition to being fried or baked as an “everyday” food accompanying soup or stew, other uses were reported. Bannock was combined with other ingredients, wrapped on hotdogs for children’s birthdays, and even served as a dessert with jam. A female participant
list the ways in which her mother used the bread: “She makes bannock dogs, bannock tacos, bannock pizza pops, like you can do anything with bannock.” Another participant made bannock shepherd’s pie. It was also frequently altered when made for special occasions, adding different ingredients (e.g. yeast, berries). One participant referred to bannock with yeast as “different bannock.”

Bannock was felt to be superior to store-bought white bread; “it goes a long way compared to a loaf of bread;” “Bannock fills you up faster than bread would;” and “It’s cheaper than bread.” One Elder said, “Once or twice a week, especially if we’re gonna eat soup or if we’re gonna have fried fish, or meat or any kind of wild meat, I make bannock cause I can’t eat bread with my food, store bought bread, it’s not the way. . . . it doesn’t taste right, so I always throw a batch of bannock in the oven:”

Some of the participants interviewed in our study travelled back and forth from their home communities (reserves) to Winnipeg and reported that bannock is eaten frequently in both locations. Furthermore, participants identify bannock as an “accessible” traditional food in this urban neighbourhood, where other foods such as fish and wild meat are expensive or unavailable.

The Future of Bannock

Many participants expressed concern about whether bannock will continue to have an important place in Winnipeg’s North End among Aboriginal families. This was because interviewees expressed that they were too busy and did not have enough time to bake, and that youth have not learned how to make bannock at home. There is some teaching, however, happening in community centers, and a local bakery also makes bannock. Additionally, participants also relayed that bannock has an effect on their health.

Bannock and health. Several participants reported having diabetes and were advised by health practitioners to avoid bannock. While some reduced their consumption to an “occasional” meal, others refused to cut back on the bread. One participant stated, “I [have] been a diabetic for a long time, since I was fourteen. I still eat bannock, no-one’s gonna stop me from eating bannock.” Some felt it was an unhealthy food because of the high refined carbohydrate content; however, several participants reported substituting various ingredients in order to make it healthier. One participant used spelt flour and soy milk in order to keep the bread in her diet. Others reported having tried and enjoyed “half whole wheat and half white” flour mixtures. Some participants omitted salt, or used oils such as canola or coconut instead of lard, to make their bannock healthier. One woman said, “Bannock is so easy to make that everybody can make it and you can add anything you want to it, like you can make healthier bannock.”

Bannock and the passing on of knowledge. Participants felt that passing the knowledge of “traditional bannock” is important for future generations; however, several expressed concern that young people in the community do not know how to make it because it is not being made in many homes. A concerned Elder reported:

I’ve been here for a long time right, and a lot of people that are coming here. What amazes me, most of these young people, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, twenty, they don’t have a clue how to make bannock. And I asked “Don’t you guys do this at home?” No, they don’t know how to make bannock. And to me that’s really sad, you know!

In addition, not all participants had learned how to make bannock. One woman shared that she “always

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wanted to learn to make bannock!” A male participant reported that city life has impacted his ability to make bannock, especially challenges related to time.

The city [has] changed me. Since we came to the city, I don't bake as much as I used to and I don't make nothing hardly, like Tuesday I come here, I make it here, so other than that I don't.

**Bannock in community.** Neechi Commons is the name of an Aboriginal owned community bakery that offers bannock for sale and is known for donating loaves of day-old bannock to surrounding community centres, increasing the availability of the bread. One female participant reported eating bannock solely because it is served in the Women’s Centre she visits daily. “I come to the Women's Centre and they always have bannock here from Neechi's store.” Bannock making workshops are occurring in community centres in Winnipeg's North End, which many participants were pleased about. One woman stated, “I never made bannock. I’m not a bannock maker until I came here to Hope Centre.” These workshops were viewed as very important for passing knowledge and building confidence:

*I mean bannock baking has saved us in the community. It's like teaching the community. We have lots of young ones here who do not know a thing about it, maybe due to family dynamics and they have their reasons that we know, so for them to come in here and be able to bake the bannock is incredible for them, to get some self-confidence.*

**Discussion**

This study examined the role of bannock in the lives of Winnipeg's North End Aboriginal residents, as well as the broader community. Despite its links with Scottish settlers and colonization, bannock was found to be a highly versatile and a critically important food for participants and their community, and was associated with many positive childhood memories. These findings have important considerations for the Aboriginal community with respect to maintenance of culture and identity through food traditions, which contribute substantially to overall well-being.

**Pahkwésikan (We Are What We Eat)**

One of the major results of this study is that bannock appears to be a traditional bread and is very much a part of Indigenous identity in Winnipeg. This is likely because of the strong familial connections that were formed during the process of preparing, sharing, and eating the bread, historically and contemporarily. It was understood by the participants that learning to make bannock at a young age was representative of positive familial connections. Despite impacts of colonialism, strong family bonds are a distinctive characteristic among Aboriginal families (Shantz, 2010). The participants in this study felt that bannock affirmed who they are, as it provided the comfort of knowing they would be fed, even in times of limited food resources. They did not feel that bannock was imposed on them even when they were directly asked. In fact, for participants, making and eating bannock has become a way individuals proudly identify themselves as “Indigenous.”

Furthermore, bannock has been transformed over time and, as such, embodies Aboriginal values. “Incorporation” may explain how bannock (ironically, introduced by European settlers), has been transformed into a traditional food that symbolizes what it is to be an Aboriginal person in Winnipeg in the 21st Century. Claude Fischler (1988), a social scientist and anthropological food expert, eloquently states “to incorporate a food is, in both real and imaginary terms, to incorporate all of its properties: we are what we eat. Incorporation is a basis of identity” (p. 279).

In the social sciences, there is plethora of literature on how food is selected, and then becomes an integral part of one’s identity. For instance, research done by Cantarero, Espeitx, Gil Lacruz, and Martín (2013) determined that food is selected based on a number of characteristics including; whether or not food is edible, if and how it can be cooked, the relationships that form due to eating, and lastly the behaviours that relate food to eating. Identity stems from these food selections, conveying “meanings such as cultural belonging, social prestige, health, etc.” (p. 889). This implies that food selections provide meaningful
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insight into understanding cultural identity.

Similarly, bannock held various meanings, most of which have positively impacted our participants. Not only does food describe identity, but it also effects to what extent a person is willing to go in order to keep that food in their diet. For instance, Bisogni, Connors, Devine, and Sobal (2002) describe conflicts that arose for participants of their study who reported consuming foods that were forbidden, or best avoided due to health complications; however, despite potential health consequences they chose to continue eating the foods with which they identified. This same resistance was exhibited by a participant in our study when describing her experience of continuing to eat bannock despite being diabetic, and despite her doctor advising against it. It was clear that the participant places high value on maintaining bannock in her diet as it represents a part of who she is.

There is little literature that discusses when bannock was first introduced to the Aboriginal communities. It likely arrived with early colonial immigrants. According to Maudlin (2007), larger numbers of British immigrants, which included a constant influx of Scottish settlers, emigrated to Canada, specifically to Nova Scotia, after the American War of Independence (1830s – 1850s). Nonetheless, participants acknowledged that bannock was Scottish bread given to the Aboriginal people during the time of settlement. Regardless of its provenance, participants acknowledged that bannock has become absorbed into the cultural food practices of Aboriginal people, which makes bannock traditional for the participants in our study. This is consistent with Alison Bell’s (n.d.) position, as she fittingly described bannock as the ‘Aboriginal Staff of Life’ because of its cultural transformation from Scottish settlers to Aboriginal identity (para. 1).

Simply put, bannock is a traditional Aboriginal food because the participants in our study say it is, despite its ties to early colonialism. Currently, there is no accepted definition of Aboriginal “traditional food;” however, one definition suggests that traditional food, or country food, is defined as “wild-harvested foods such as wild meat, fish, birds, sea mammals, berries and other plants” (Power, 2008, p. 95). In all probability, bannock may have become a traditional food as a result of sharing knowledge with Scottish settlers. After all, Aboriginal people had a strong tradition of sharing medicines, lodging, hunting and other pertinent knowledge with non-Aboriginal people. When Aboriginal families were forced onto reservations, which caused a significant loss of culture, the disconnection from the land and traditional foods negatively impacted Aboriginal communities across Canada (Vantrease, 2013). The expropriation of land resulted in lofty gestures made by government agents who would deliver low nutritional refined foods including ingredients to make bannock, which inevitably left families food insecure (Shkilnyk, 1985). What began as a friendly exchange among European settlers and Aboriginal communities resulted in future generations of despair for the latter families (McLean, & Goulet, 1985). Bannock appears to have emerged from this hardship as a symbol of survival, positive identity, and pride.

**Bannock in the Big City**

The growing urbanization of Aboriginal families, in centres such as Winnipeg, has provided a juxtaposition of cultural revitalization and the breakdown of culinary skills. For instance, our study showed that there is a concurrent “revitalization” of bannock in the community through workshops and classes offered at community centers. In Canada, there is “cultural revival” sweeping throughout Aboriginal families and communities, restoring what has been disrupted in traditional culture, visions, and ultimately, health (Ross, 2014, p.2). Cultural languages, customs, and traditions are flourishing and becoming reestablished once again, and food is central to this movement. This study demonstrates that bannock is part of this revitalization. It has been argued that Aboriginal urbanization is a means of further disconnecting the people from their cultures and traditions (Senese & Wilson, 2013). Contrary to this notion, bannock is still consumed in both urban and rural locales; and therefore, it has maintained a traditional role within Aboriginal families.

Concern expressed about the diminishing “passing
on of knowledge” of bannock to youth reflects the concern in the rest of the community about culinary de-skilling, and the impact it has on health, well-being, and identity (Lang & Caraher, 2001). Blackstock (2001) observes that food is an integral component of one’s identity; and for centuries, nations, communities, and families identify with foods which are often unique to their own culture. Furthermore, he suggests that food holds special meaning and therefore should be passed down, otherwise a part of our history is at risk of being lost.

Unfortunately, the escalating consumption of highly processed foods, fast foods, and soft drinks has resulted in loss of cultural food knowledge around the globe, and is associated with growing rates of obesity and poor nutritional health (Monteiro, Moubarac, Cannon, Ng, Popkin, 2013; Swinburn et al., 2011). In addition, families have become bogged down with busy schedules which further threaten family traditions within the home unit. For instance, some participants rely on bannock’s presence at community events as a way to ensure access to the bread because it is not made at home as often anymore; if not for such opportunities, it is uncertain whether bannock would be consumed as often.

For Winnipeg, and its large population of Aboriginal families, incorporating relevant food teachings in the formal kindergarten to grade 12 curriculums would be very meaningful. This goes beyond just learning how to “cook” bannock. This would contribute to “Indigenizing” the curriculum, and would serve as an opportunity to bridge gaps among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. To “Indigenize” includes focusing efforts on the present and moving forward, away from terms such as “colonization” that are painful reminders of the past (Smith, 2012).

The Darker Side of Bannock

Although participants expressed a love for bannock the bread reminded some participants of painful memories. Those who were sent to the colonial residential schools were not allowed to eat bannock because it was viewed as Aboriginal food (TRC, 2015). Two female participants in our study recall that bannock, along with other cultural foods, was strictly forbidden while they were in the custody of the Indian Residential school system; it was only when they returned to their communities that they were able to eat bannock with their families. Laforme (n.d.) states (as quoted in Rogers, Degagné, Lowry, Fryer, & Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2014) that a number of tragedies stemmed from Residential schools and government oppression. He states that the systemic introduction of Reservations and Residential schools (1880s and 1960s) began the familial, cultural and spiritual breakdown that swept the communities of Aboriginal families across Canada. Residential Schools were one of many ways in which the Government of Canada and the church sought to take care of the “Indian problem;” attempting to eliminate any traces of Aboriginal culture. These damaging effects were reaffirmed on June 2nd, 2015, in Ottawa by Justice Murray Sinclair, the Chair of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission, who stated during the executive summary of the landmark report that, “The Residential School experience is clearly one of the darkest and most troubling chapters in our collective history. Canada clearly participated in a period of cultural genocide”(as cited in For the Record, 2015).

Furthermore, Aboriginal peoples’ of Canada are impoverished as a direct result of colonization and marginalization and as such, rely on inexpensive foods and ingredients, such as the ingredients in bannock, to survive (Bhawra, Cooke, Hanning, Wilk & Gonneville, 2015; Elliott & Jayatilaka, 2012). For Aboriginal students at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, “fry bread” (similar to bannock), is considered a commodity food because it, along with other ingredients, was provided by the Government as food rations and serves as a reminder of colonialism (Vantrease, 2013). At the same time, the students of the University of Wisconsin-Madison identified fry bread as symbolic and representative of Aboriginal identity. It is a reminder of the widespread diseases, such as diabetes, that plague their people, and more importantly, it is a reminder of the government’s ploy to eradicate Aboriginal identity. Food deprivation has long been disregarded by government officials, and poverty continues to strike Aboriginal communities. In a recent Podcast, Ian Mosby, a University of Guelph historian, states that:


Food has often been used as a weapon against Aboriginal people and when you look at something like bannock, white settlers feel a lot of guilt, because this is food we see as being imposed on Aboriginal people and reflecting this problematic colonial relationship. (Mosby, 2015).

Clearly, food, and in this case bannock, is intertwined with the socio-political and economic history of Canada’s first peoples, and as such, its role is varied and complex. Results of this study suggest that bannock may be a ‘food of resistance’. It is ironic that in spite of the government officials’ attempt to eradicate Aboriginal culture indefinitely, in part through the introduction of cheap food subsidies such as flour and lard, bannock has become a “signature food” for Aboriginal people; and it is still being consumed, and transformed in Winnipeg’s North End today. This is evident in the ongoing healing process that is underway as culture, stories, and foodways are honored, including the making of bannock.

Bannock Provides Sustainable Well-being

This study shows that despite its provenance, bannock continues to embody important Aboriginal traditions, values and food security, which are key to individual, family and cultural well-being. The challenge is to support formal and non-formal education initiatives to ensure that the knowledge of bannock, and other traditional foods, is passed on to future generations in culturally appropriate ways. This includes sharing practical knowledge of how to make bannock, such as recipes and culinary techniques, as well as sharing the spiritual and philanthropic teachings that accompany the making and serving of food.

For this study’s participants, making and eating bannock has been transformed to embody Aboriginal values. As such, bannock is an important part of contemporary Aboriginal culture for many Winnipeg’s North End residents. Participants knew that the bread had been passed down throughout generations and that it was symbolic of home. Intergenerational teachings about the bread have been contextualized, shared and passed on mostly by watching how the bread was made by immediate and extended family members. Childhood memories of food are important and significant because they are a link between “familial wisdom and insights into cultures” (Waxman, 2008).

In addition, sharing bannock was considered to be a philanthropic gesture, which is a distinguishable characteristic of Aboriginal cultural food security, and social belonging. As stated by Elaine Power (2008), “Cultural food security’ is an important component of food security because it is more than just eating food to abstain hunger; rather, it is about the social holistic well-being garnered from the bonds that are formed through sharing” (p. 95). Furthermore, bannock was often enjoyed at community events and ceremonial functions. In fact, several participants made lighthearted jokes when referring to community gatherings where bannock was sure to be present.

Future of Bannock

This study found that the future of bannock has an element of uncertainty in terms of its potentially negative impact on health, as advised by health providers. In particular, bannock may negatively impact individuals with diabetes, a disease that affects a disproportionately high number of Aboriginal people (Hackett, 2005). However, as this study shows, people are continuing to “renew” and “revise” bannock to suit contemporary lifestyles and tastes. This mirrors trends in other “traditional” foods such as “western” breads which were once a simple wholesome food, and are now full of fibre and flax, chemical preservatives, or even gluten free. Although several participants preferred to keep the “original” recipe, Blackstock (2001) advises that, in today’s health conscientious society, it is important to consider alternative ingredients in order to prevent consequential impacts on health. He suggests that people “consider healthier substitutions for some of the ingredients in [the] traditional recipes” (p. 4). This is supportive of the participants’ decisions about maintaining the bread in their diet, as well as their willingness to experiment with healthier recipes. This is particularly important for health practitioners to take note of because bannock is an important part of Aboriginal culture, values, and identity. Therefore,
suggesting healthier ingredients instead of advising to entirely eliminate consumption of the bread is a more respectful approach.

In Canada, federal and provincial governments, ministers of health and educators alike are working toward promoting healthy habits for Canadians including creating healthy eating initiatives and strategies, both of which nurture the importance of cultural environments (Public Health Canada, 2011). By the same token, nurturing cultural environments can extend to support strategies that reintroduce and increase culinary skills within families and communities. For some study participants, making bannock was an opportunity to share more than just a recipe with kin; it was an endeavor that combined rich discussions, fostered social relations, and enhanced a pleasurable eating experience – which, after all - is the basis of a healthy cultural environment. As Joyce Slater (2013) put it, cooking is not dead, but rather in desperate need of revitalization. Slater argues that cooking skills and nutrition literacy can equip today’s youth, and tomorrow’s leaders, to make better eating choices, to eat healthier, and to enjoy food in a holistic manner - the way food was meant to be enjoyed.

As Canada continues to support immigration and multiculturalism, there will be much to learn from one another, including Canada’s First Peoples. As Blackstock (2001) states,

*food is a fundamental aspect of our humanity and this common bond is a good place to start learning about each other’s culture. Symbolic among the First Nations, Inuit, Métis, and settlers, bannock bridges many cultures and is not only a favorite food of native peoples, but of all Canadians. (p. 53)*

In addition, by engaging with Elders and Aboriginal organizations that have wisdom and expertise to share, teachers can become culturally competent in order to teach about Indigenous foodways. Similarly, teaching strategies that are useful and specific to curriculum should be organized in postsecondary teacher training. The blending of Aboriginal and Western approaches to teaching and learning in a respectful manner honours both ways of “seeing things differently” (Ross, 2014, p.2). Such approaches increase the likelihood of promoting well-being in students and the wider community.

**Conclusion**

This study, the first of its kind, examined the importance of bannock in an Indigenous community, and has revealed how traditional foods can take on new meanings, values, and significance over time, and become integrated into Aboriginal culture and identity. This study contributes to the growing literature attempting to understand the deeper interaction that Aboriginal people have with food.

We believe that bannock will survive as an important Aboriginal food not only because it symbolizes identity, past and present struggle, and familial connections, but also because it is so delicious, affordable, and accessible. Hence, encouraging the use of “traditional foods” in modern contexts is important for food security as a determinant of health and sustainable well-being. Indeed, celebrating bannock as an important Indigenous food tradition. The cultural teachings it embodies are vital to urban neighbourhoods, such as Winnipeg’s North End, where other traditional foods, such as wild fish and wild meat, are expensive or unavailable.

Results of this research will be of interest to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers and community members and organizations, and add to the growing discourse and scholarship on traditional Aboriginal foods and health.

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This article originally appeared in
This art based research study is situated within an Indigenous research methodology. The goal of the research was to first, document the voices of Urban Aboriginal people with Type 2 diabetes and secondly, to bring together these voices into an updated oral format using the medium of radio.

Four principles that grounded this research were Indigenous research paradigm, drawing from Indigenous scholars, critiquing the Euro-Western biomedical worldview of health, and reciprocity. Using an Indigenous research paradigm meant situating who I am as a Nahayowak (Cree) woman who used prayer, medicines and talking with Elders to carry out the research. Second, I ensured the bulk of the reference sources were Indigenous writers. Third, the research was undertaken knowing that health is situated in a colonial Euro-Western biomedical worldview and if the health of Indigenous people is to improve I must assert Indigenous ways of doing research; and finally, any work I do must have a component of reciprocity where knowledge and pragmatic tools, podcast of radio documentary, must be given back to not only the academy but to students and Indigenous community members.

Reciprocity must be seen as the ‘gold standard’ in any work that Indigenous scholars do when working to change the situation of Indigenous peoples. The theoretical underpinnings of this research are four aspects of self, visually represented in the Nahayowak Medicine Model by Ghostkeeper as the mind, body, emotions and spirit.

I was motivated to do this research when I found out 50% of my relatives had diabetes and when the Canadian Diabetes Association in 2002, and again in 2015, stated there is still a stigma associated with diabetes that prevents Aboriginal people from disclosing their diabetes.

For this study there were seven Indigenous people who agreed to participate because they also wanted to create a space for other Aboriginal people to be able to talk about diabetes without shame or guilt. They hope their story will allow others to share their diabetes story. The interviews became a radio documentary that ensured views were broadcasted about Indigenous people living with diabetes from an Indigenous perspective that was directed toward other Indigenous people.

Moneca Sinclaire is a member of the Opaskwayak Cree Nation (OCN) who currently lives in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Her health career began as a Nutrition Educator then the areas of renal dialysis, diabetes and cancer before moving to Toronto to complete her PhD studies. She is currently a Project Coordinator with the Debwewin-the truth of our hearts study at the University of Manitoba at the Faculty of Health Sciences. Her mother, from OCN influenced her to be a social activist as she remembers her mom sending out hundreds of letters to have Leonard Peltier released. Moneca is also a self-taught artist that was inspired by watching her paternal grandmother make exquisite art pieces from household objects, such as making garland from candy wrappers. She often heard her grandmother say, “The Earth can’t take so much garbage.” She is also a mother to a son and an auntie to many of her friend’s children. Her passion is to empower people to be able to live their lives to their fullest potential.
Obesity is a growing public health concern, due to its wide-ranging associated health outcomes, particularly type 2 diabetes. Research regarding causes of obesity has pointed to changing dietary patterns in the population; specifically, sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) intake has been consistently and positively associated with obesity. As such, the World Health Organization and numerous Canadian health organizations have recommended, and are advocating for, the implementation of a SSB excise tax in Canada. Several countries, including seven American counties, have introduced a SSB tax, but despite lobbying and discussion, no Canadian provinces or territories have introduced this tax to date.

The National Aboriginal Diabetes Association has been approached for their endorsement but there are numerous concerns with respect to this proposed policy, which have been purposefully and persistently dismissed by large Canadian health organizations. First, a SSB tax is known to be regressive, meaning it places a higher burden on lower income individuals and families. Second, issues of water quality, high food costs, food insecurity, and ‘food deserts’ afflicting Canadian Indigenous populations, both on- and off-reserve, may create tensions with a SSB tax that make behaviour change more challenging and may be stigmatizing. This stigma is likely to be compounded by existing weight and diabetes-related stigma, which is rooted in the personal responsibility framing of both conditions. Third, given the federal governments’ commitment to building nation-to-nation relationships, this needs to be reflected through tax policy.

The National Aboriginal Diabetes Association has partnered with Dr. Natalie Riediger and others at the University of Manitoba, Indigenous scholars, Ms. Monica Cyr and Ms. Myra Tait, and other Indigenous community organizations to explore a SSB tax further. This research has been funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

Our research includes examining
i. Indigenous perspectives on a ‘Health-at-Every Size’ approach to guide our work in redressing stigma;
ii. legal considerations with respect to a SSB tax, informed by treaties and the tenets of nation-to-nation relationships;
iii. the costs and availability of both SSB and non-SSB in different jurisdictions (on- and off-reserve), according to their inclusion/exclusion in existing SSB taxes globally;
iv. changing patterns of SSB intake in Canada, off-reserve, according to socioeconomic status and Indigenous identity;
v. the views of Indigenous peoples, on- and off-reserve, of a SSB tax.

We look forward to updating everyone on our research progress as it unfolds. If there are any Indigenous students who are interested in funded undergraduate summer research opportunities on this project or to pursue a Masters thesis project in this area, please contact Dr. Natalie Riediger. (Natalie.riediger@umanitoba.ca)

Dr. Natalie Riediger is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Food and Human Nutritional Sciences and CIHR Early Career Investigator (2018-2021). She completed her PhD in the Department of Community Health Sciences, University of Manitoba in February 2015 earning the Governor General’s Gold Medal. Dr. Riediger’s research areas of interest include food and nutrition policy, food security, social nutritional epidemiology, Indigenous health, and health equity. She utilizes a variety of research methods, including community-based participatory approaches, qualitative-, quantitative-, and mixed-methods. Specifically, Dr. Riediger conducts analysis of Statistics Canada datasets (Canadian Community Health Survey, Canadian Health Measures Survey), and linked USDA health and food systems data.
The symposium offers Elders, community members, youth, students and researchers the opportunity to share ideas about Indigenous health research. This year’s theme explores the importance of centring the Indigenous voice in health research and the critical role that language plays in disrupting colonial narratives.

Abstracts for presentations are welcomed from university and community-based researchers, students and others who are engaged in research or knowledge translation projects relevant to the health of the region’s Indigenous communities. Abstracts for presentations will be accepted until September 7, 2018. For submission guidelines, please visit our website.

Registration for this event is free and open to all. Please register by October 12, 2018.

For more information about registration and abstract submission, please visit umanitoba.ca/healthsciences/indigenous/institute/research/index.html, email IndigenousSymposium@umanitoba.ca or call 204-789-3250.
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