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Exploring the Effectiveness of Métis Women's Research Methodology and Methods: Promising Wellness Research Practices

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[See table of contents](#)

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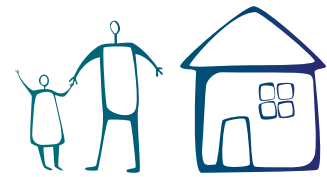
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Article abstract

In this article, we share our experience conducting research with Métis women as Métis women researchers. We engaged in promising research practices through visiting, ceremony, and creative methods of art and writing embedded in what we identify as a learning-by-doing practice. Through collaborative and Indigenous relational methodology, we sought to support a culturally safe, nurturing space where Métis women could learn from one another and express Métis knowledge about the specific roles and responsibilities of Métis Aunties within our respective kinship system. This inquiry into the roles of Métis Aunties included a creative art and writing dialogue event in the Métis river community of St. Louis in Saskatchewan, attended by women who were Métis Aunties or nieces. The purpose of the event was to learn more about our Métis Aunties, building on Dr. Kim Anderson's (2016) extensive research on women's roles in the governance, care, and wellness of our healthy/balanced kinship systems. We chose this specific region because of its historical significance to Métis people as a river place, and our own personal connections to Métis families in this area. We share our processes in learning with and from other Métis women in order to contribute to the growing literature on relational approaches to research.



Exploring the Effectiveness of Métis Women's Research Methodology and Methods: Promising Wellness Research Practices

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Abstract

In this article, we share our experience conducting research with Métis women as Métis women researchers. We engaged in promising research practices through visiting, ceremony, and creative methods of art and writing embedded in what we identify as a learning-by-doing practice. Through collaborative and Indigenous relational methodology, we sought to support a culturally safe, nurturing space where Métis women could learn from one another and express Métis knowledge about the specific roles and responsibilities of Métis Aunties within our respective kinship system. This inquiry into the roles of Métis Aunties included a creative art and writing dialogue event in the Métis river community of St. Louis in Saskatchewan, attended by women who were Métis Aunties or nieces. The purpose of the event was to learn more about our Métis Aunties, building on Dr. Kim Anderson's (2016) extensive research on women's roles in the governance, care, and wellness of our healthy/balanced kinship systems. We chose this specific region because of its historical significance to Métis people as a river place, and our own personal connections to Métis families in this area. We share our processes in learning with and from other Métis women in order to contribute to the growing literature on relational approaches to research.

Keywords: Métis women, Métis Aunties, Indigenous relational methodology, kinship systems

Promising Research Practices

Indigenous methodologies in research are governed by a “value-guided approach that comes from Indigenous beliefs, values, cultural protocols and ethics, community, story and oracy, and conceptualizing and sharing” (Kovach, 2019). Although Indigenous methodologies is emergent in academia, Kovach (2005, 2009) reminded us that such an approach is an ancient, living practice reflected in Indigenous-centred protocols in and with our communities and our land. Practices based on respectful protocols and ethics, such as gifting, food, visiting, prayer, and situating ourselves, are done because “we value relationship” (Kovach, 2019). We too believe that relationality is at the heart of our work, which draws attention to Indigenous women’s contributions to family, land, and community wellbeing (Absolon, 2011). Too often undervalued, this contribution inspires a research methodology that considers holism, complexity, creativity, identity, gender, process, generosity, responsibility, space, kinship, and relational accountability. As part of our effort to better understand our kinship roles and responsibilities, we wanted to learn more about Métis Aunties and their contribution to Métis kinship systems¹. To do this, we (Gaudet and Dorion) co-facilitated a creative dialogue event in the historical Métis community of St. Louis, Saskatchewan, chosen because of our relationship to this land and its people. In this article, we share our methodological process and the research methods that, for us, reflect Métis women’s ways of knowing and being.

This article also brings attention to decolonial approaches to research. By decolonial, we mean what Shawn Wilson (2008) called *research as ceremony*, based on a set of kinship relationships and accountability for each other’s wellbeing. The research presented in *Keetsahnak, Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters* (Anderson et al., 2018) has also inspired us to consider and enact Beverly Jacobs’ view of decolonization, which is, “at a very practical level ... taking our power back” (p. 32). These understandings of decoloniality have brought us, as researchers, back to our own communities and to Métis women’s stories, with an epistemological grounding in learning from our Aunties.

We came together to learn alongside other Métis women using particular learning-by-doing methods and methodology. Coming from different communities in Saskatchewan, we recognize the differences stemming from our own individual histories, social influences, teachings, languages, and kinship systems. We agree with fellow Métis scholars who have expressed, in reference to their methodological process, that Métis identity is complex and fluid, and that “there is not one Métis identity, thus, not one Métis methodology” (LaVallee et al., 2016, p. 170). This recognition extends to the community of diverse Métis women with whom we worked through visiting, art, creative writing, and circle methods as part of the creative dialogue event to learn about our kinship roles and responsibilities as Métis Aunties and nieces.

1 We acknowledge that not all Métis people apply an accent to the word Métis. Given the diversity of French Métis, Scottish Halfbreed Métis, and Métis-Cree involved in this project, we recognize our stance in this particular community. We are using an accent on Métis to acknowledge its use in the St. Louis community, and we recognize that we do not speak for all Métis.

Our research process incorporates our individual gifts, working with and learning from Elders, and practicing cultural protocols and community responsibilities. The methodology of the *visiting way*, known also as *keeoukaywin*, (Anderson, 2011; Flaminio, 2018; Gaudet, 2019; Kermoal, 2016; Makokis et al., 2010; Simpson, 2014), situates our research as ceremony (Wilson, 2008). In this article, we share our experiences of this process to present the intentional efforts of a Métis visiting methodology that allows us to engage with each other as researchers and community. Intentional, because our shared purpose is to work towards “*mino-pimatisiwin* ... holistic health and wellness” (Anderson, 2011, p. 7). We want to foster wellness in ourselves, as Métis women, but also in our families and extended kinship.

Situating the Research

The village of St. Louis, Saskatchewan is a historical Métis community on the South Saskatchewan River with deep roots in the Red River settlements. It is located northeast of the Métis community of Batoche and the site of the 1885 Northwest Resistance. The settlement layout of St. Louis was based on the river lot system, which reinforced a Métis way of life, as the long, narrow lots allowed close proximity to family and kin in addition to providing water and lumber access for each family (Payment, 2009).

In the late 19th century, “three families, the Bouchers, Bremners and Boyers” (St. Louis Local History Committee, 1980, p. 53) established the first river lots in the St. Louis area “in the customary manner” practiced in Red River (Mailhot & Sprague, 1985, p. 8). They were soon joined by other families from Red River, all of whom would have travelled by Red River carts. At the time, Métis were fleeing their homes in Manitoba to seek refuge and resources because of increasing racial prejudice and the loss of their land resulting from changes to the *Manitoba Act*. The transfer of Rupert’s Land to Canada fueled the Métis people’s fight for political, cultural, and land rights, and led to the displacement of Métis families, some of whom would make a new home in the community of St. Louis. There has been little contemporary research about the strength of kinship systems in this area.

While our research is focused on St. Louis, the local Elders speak of their important relationship to small, nearby Métis kinship-based settlements along the river, including Boucherville, Lepine Flats, LeCoq, St. Laurent, Batoche, Coulee des Touronds, and Petite Ville. North of the river, the Anglo-Métis settlements of Halcro and Red Deer Hill created a community (Code, 2008). St. Louis and the surrounding area are embedded with knowledge gathered from numerous river crossings, through which flowed diverse people engaged in trading, hunting, gathering, and visiting. The Métis communities are connected through kinship relations and geographical proximity.

The social and economic contributions of women in their traditional position of authority have received little attention in the dominant narratives about the Métis. Recent scholarship, however, has begun to address the absence of women’s voices, stories, and experiences (Adese, 2014; Anderson, 2011, 2016; Anderson et al., 2018; Dorion, 2010; Fiola, 2015; Flaminio, 2013, 2018;

Kermoal, 2006, 2016; Leclair & Nicholson, 2003; Macdougall, 2010). Leclair and Nicholson (2003) described the “damaging misconceptions and stereotypes, especially for women” who identify as Métis (p. 57). Macdougall (2010) noted that women have often been absent from stories of the Métis trade economy, and that, when present, they are usually portrayed as “assistants” who helped process hides or simply helped the men. Her research highlighted women’s crucial contribution to the functioning and wellbeing of Métis society and its economy. Anderson’s (2016) work in the reconstruction of Native womanhood delved into women’s traditional role in politics and their spiritual power. Our own research aims to add to this conversation by sharing our methodological approach as well as some of the creative work of the women who took part in the event. In the next section, we situate ourselves, and describe our relationships to each other and to the community of women who participated in this research. We aim to give voice to our stories as Métis women researchers coming together to navigate the colonial terrain.

Situating Ourselves as Métis Women Researchers

As important as it is to describe the location of our collaborative research, it is equally important to situate ourselves in relationship to this place and to each other as Métis women.

Janice Cindy Gaudet: My interest in learning more about Métis women’s knowledge has brought me back home to Saskatchewan. The St. Louis area has been home to four generations of my Métis lineage and to my extended kinship relatives. It is good to be back in Saskatchewan, working with other Métis women and grassroots movers and shakers. For this project, I offered Leah tobacco as a way to ensure an ongoing relationship of reciprocity, respect, and caring through this particular collaboration. We initiated our research in ceremony. We recognized that we did not have these Auntie teachings in our own families and communities, and had felt this absence in our own lives as women. With a home base and relatives in St. Louis, my friendship with Anna has also grown over the years through the *way of visiting*. We both lived in Ontario, working on our doctorate program, and now our research has brought us together to invest in Métis women’s wellness.

Leah Marie Dorion: I acknowledge myself as River Métis with roots in the historic Métis community of Cumberland House, located in the Saskatchewan River Delta. I come from a Métis family with strong matriarchal leadership, and I have witnessed the challenges involved in keeping our family members connected to our Elders, cultural traditions, teachings, and extensive kinship system. I have personally turned to the Aunties in my life for guidance, spiritual support, and teachings about how to carry out the various roles in my family system such as a cousin, Auntie, and mother. Living in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and being connected to the St. Louis Métis people all my life, I embraced this opportunity to connect with women from another branch of the Saskatchewan River system. In recent years, I have worked with Métis communities across Saskatchewan using creative arts, poetry, oral storytelling, and learning-by-doing models to spark conscious conversation about what it means to be Métis in contemporary society.

Anna Corrigan Flaminio: I locate myself in my mother’s Métis community of St. Louis, Saskatchewan, and I was raised in the city of Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I have worked with many Indigenous communities in the areas of law, health, and justice, but I am happy to be once again living near the South Saskatchewan River. I am honoured to have known my two co-authors for a number of years. I met Cindy at a special Métis community event and we recognized our common kinship connection to the local Métis community, as well as our common research goal to highlight Indigenous knowledge, including Métis ways of wellness and visiting. I met Leah as a high school student in Prince Albert, Saskatchewan. I have maintained a connection with her, and followed her career as a Métis educator, scholar, and nationally recognized visual artist. I was honoured to learn from these two Métis teachers as they co-facilitated the unique Auntie event in St. Louis, and I continue to learn from them in our joint Indigenous health research on the topic of Métis women’s wellness in the St. Louis/St. Laurent/Batoche areas.

Stories of Aunties in the Literature

In this section, we focus on research by female Indigenous scholars as part of our decolonizing approach. It is often claimed, and is being increasingly shown through research, that “Indigenous women are the unrecognized backbone of our communities, who build social support networks and keep our culture intact through their ... relevant educational institutions and keep our languages alive” (Settee, 2011, p. v). One of the less recognized roles of women is that of Auntie, though it is well-known in many Indigenous communities, including Métis communities. In making Aunties more visible, we hope to draw attention to relationality in Indigenous women’s complex kinship roles. Coming to know by remembering Métis Auntie knowledge is an epistemological foundation that guides us in how to live with each other. Anderson (2011) explained, “As a member of an urban Indigenous community, I also try to find ways that I can be a good ‘auntie’ to the families of the heart that we create in these settings” (p. 178). Her extensive research on life-stage teachings and traditional kinship systems spoke of women’s roles and responsibilities in each life stage. Through her work with Elders, in which she refers to them as “aunties” and “uncles,” we learn that they “carry responsibilities for teaching me and helping me learn what I need to know” (Anderson, 2011, p. 32). She referred to the uncles and aunties as an *interpreter generation* because they had a relationship with land-based ways of knowing, and could translate this into a contemporary context (Anderson, 2011). Simpson (2014) explained how in Nishnaabe epistemology, coming to know “takes place in the context of family, community, and relations” (p. 7). In this context, it becomes natural to once again call on our Aunties or grandparents when we face a problem (Simpson, 2014).

McKenzie (2011) credited her two Aunties for saving her life by listening deeply, without interfering or offering advice: “They were just there to listen to me, and after I finished sharing, Auntie started laughing, she said something funny, and we ended up laughing. You know, I didn’t even think about suicide after that” (p. 93). Campbell’s (1973) autobiographical *Half-Breed* described the strong and

resilient women who helped her, including Aunt Qua Chich, who would bring strong horses to help plow the fields. Alex Wilson (Anderson et al., 2018) spoke of her Auntie’s support under changing life circumstances: “When it was time for me to leave our community to go to university, my aunt led the ceremony to see me off” (p. 163). Wilson’s Auntie provided her with a bundle that she could draw upon for strength. “Ceremony formalized what I had grown up knowing: That I was loved, that I was a spiritual being, and that I was important to this world” (p. 163).

McAdam (2015) demonstrated how kinship connections are embedded in *Nêhiyaw* laws, and asserts that “the role of *nêhiyaw* women needs to be revitalized,” (p. 58) as it is “connected to the lands and waters; they are protectors, defenders, and teachers as well as knowledge keepers” (p. 58). Campbell (2017) discussed the importance of returning to *wahkotowin* principles—our responsibilities and obligations to our relations, both human and non-human. Our shared aim through our own research is to promote what Settee (2011) described as “the heart of the concept of *wakohtowin*, the betterment of all our relations” (p. iv). Our research methodology of visiting with each other and with other Métis women, Elders, and the community strengthened our experience of living within what Shawn Wilson (2008) referred to as *a set of relationships*, and more specifically, a set of women-centred relationships.

Our Research Methods

Our research approach, based on relationality, flowed naturally, intentionally, and intuitively. Our process was grounded in our relationships with one another and with other Métis women in the community. We did not plan each step and phase in advance; the process unfolded organically as we knew and trusted each other. We understood our own roles and responsibilities as ethical researchers, and our place in the community. There was no interfering, shaming, or imposing of values and beliefs on one another. We all understood that when tobacco is laid and prayers are made, the work begins. We already trusted in these ethical ways of practicing research as ceremony, and valued the methodology known as *the visiting way* (Gaudet, 2019). We also understood the layers of oppressive systems that have harmed our families, communities, and lands, so we wanted to assure and to model safety and strength in our ways of being and doing. We shared a concern for the loss of Métis women’s knowledge. And we recognized that culturally appropriate space is important, as is working with local community knowledge and highlighting their strengths and long-standing community efforts.

In order to ensure a culturally appropriate space for the project, we worked with a local Métis artist and entrepreneur, Christine Tienkamp. Christine and her husband’s leadership with the emerging Métis cultural centre in St. Louis and their community-based approach in hosting, planning, and producing the yearly River Road Festival have brought people together to celebrate the vibrancy of the Métis community. Christine opened the centre to host our first Métis Women’s Relations Art and Writing event to honour our connection to Aunties and *Mataants* (the term for Auntie in the Michif language of the St. Louis region). The purpose of the River Road Festival is to celebrate and transfer Métis culture, so the spirit of the space was inviting, already lively and loving. The space had

received local Métis community members, artists, Elders, teachers, entrepreneurs, and their kin and friends. The grounds, well-tended by Christine's mother, Louise Tournier, greeted us as we walked into this once abandoned building. Physical space is an important consideration. Gardens, flowers, and beauty greet us before we enter our homes to be with one another. We recognize this as a Métis women's method of caring. We believe that this space set a high standard of integrity and respect. The old, common, lingering memory of feeling inadequate and ashamed as a Métis person could not permeate this space. Christine and her family have created a welcoming visiting space for the celebration and sharing of Métis culture.

A team of five Métis women generously rolled up their sleeves to take on unique roles and responsibilities for the half-day Auntie event, part of a broader Métis Relations research project. Christine took on an administrative role, promoted the event through Facebook, and created a poster that was printed in the local newspaper. The event was also promoted among our own relations who lived in the area. Elders who did not have Internet access were contacted in person and invited to attend.

A circle of 12 Métis women from different family, community, and spiritual/religious backgrounds came together, representing both Aunties and nieces. Métis diversity was apparent, and was respected. The women came from families who identified as Métis, French-Métis, English Halfbreeds, and Métis-Cree, with diverse faiths—Catholic, Anglican, and what is often referred to as Traditional. Their ages ranged from 35 to 81. No specific age requirements were put forward, but upon reflection, we see the need for future events to be more focused on young women because they can provide a contemporary perspective on the role of nieces as well as the responsibilities involved in younger women becoming Aunties.

The minimal \$2,000 budget covered space rental, Elder and artist honorariums, gifts, art supplies, and home-made food prepared by a local Métis couple. We were transparent with the community as to how the funds were being distributed. The three researchers shared responsibilities and divided tasks according to each of our skills. Tools for documenting the event included an intake questionnaire, a final evaluation form, and consent forms. We began by reviewing and discussing the informed consent process and asking whether participants wanted their art, poetry, and names used in publication. We explained that this project is connected to a potential research grant to highlight the importance of Métis women's knowledge and stories. The women were patient and generous, and helped each other in filling out the cumbersome consent forms that are required for university-led research. We also shared with the participants how this process would be valuable as a way to consult with local Métis women on potential future research interests.

The guests were welcomed with gift bundles made by local artists. The circle included a designated Elder, who was an Auntie of one of the researchers. The multi-use space was filled with Métis culture in the form of art, music, and dance that reflected a Métis kitchen-feel. This space connected all of us, and offered a relaxed and fun atmosphere. We felt an ease and safety that enabled us to remember and to share what being an Auntie meant, and what our Aunties meant to us. We recorded our shared learnings as a way to document our research.

Learning-by-Doing Methods

We believe that learning-by-doing as an Indigenous methodology and pedagogy exemplifies our sovereign expression as Métis women. By this, we mean activating our Métis self-determination by engaging our hearts, bodies, voices, and minds, visiting with and learning from each other, and sharing our stories. Other Indigenous scholars have discussed the significance of a learning-by-doing approach to research as inter-related with Indigenous pedagogy (Absolon, 2011; Restoule & Chawwin-is, 2017; Wilson, 2008). Symbolic art and creative writing highlight the strength of Indigenous understandings of kinship, love, and family responsibility. These methods offer a way to generate meaning that is inclusive of the *self-in-relation* (Absolon, 2011). As Simpson and other researchers who apply Indigenous methodologies have shown, “the self is woven throughout the process, linking self to methods” (Absolon, 2011, p. 70).

Lavallée (2009) described her method of Anishnaabe symbol-based reflection as an arts-based method grounded in Indigenous values and beliefs. She highlighted the relational elements that guide her method, a holistic approach that is fluid and intentional, and can advance Indigenous ways of knowing in research. Similarly, we kept our creative process open-ended in order to honour Métis women’s ways of meaning-making, their experiences, memories, and vantage points. Many of the women had never participated in learning-by-doing methods through creative writing and art as a way of expressing their experiences. As a result, we had several beautifully composed pieces that were as diverse as the women themselves. Each piece prompted storytelling about food, family, faith, relationships, healing, and resurgence, as in the following examples:

Faith

My Faith keeps me honest.

My Faith is simple.

My Faith is great.

My Faith supports me.

Future Aunties

Don’t go missing.

Dance with those you love.

Live with your sisters.

Freedom is yours.

Take it and offer it.

This is your generosity.

Back to the Fire

Through trauma and pain of generations family once lost, is found again.

New strength and courage to bring our Aunties back home, to the ancestral fire,

That still burns with a healing flame.

Each woman produced a creative writing piece guided by a layered approach: First, the participants were instructed to list 20 words that reflected our knowledge of Aunties. We were then asked to choose ten of these words and list them on another page. From these ten words, we chose the five that most spoke to us. From the five, we created sentences, and gave titles to our poems. Next, we transformed our poems into visual storytelling through painting. Some of the poems were shared

in the circle, and we reflected together on the meaning of being an Auntie or niece. For a second arts-based activity, paints and canvases were provided, and we were invited to reflect on symbolic images that represented *Auntie* from our own vantage point. Because many of the women were not experienced with painting, poetry served as an excellent warm-up before transitioning into visual expression. As an instructor of visual art, I (Leah) know how to promote a sense of ease when playing with art materials. Playfulness, laughter, fun, and risk-taking are part of the process, and all the women helped each other. The paintings seemed to offer another layer of knowledge about our Aunties. Together, we remembered the importance of *Auntie*, a role that is often overlooked within families because of the predominance of the nuclear family structure. We discovered how the role of Auntie is connected to other family members as the women shared stories about themselves as Aunties and nieces. We recognized the interconnection of Aunties to others within Métis kinship systems, and the unrecognized and unseen work of Aunties in caring for Métis families. We have included several of the women’s illustrations to complement our description of research methods (Figure 1, Figure 2, and Figure 3).

Figure 1

Painting by Christine Tienkamp, St. Louis, Saskatchewan. September 15, 2017



Figure 2

Painting by Louise Tournier, St. Louis, Saskatchewan. September 15, 2017



Figure 3

Painting by Joan Sinclair, Fiske, Saskatchewan. September 15, 2017



In our debriefing, we (Cindy and Leah) concluded that community-engaged research needs to be done, as mentioned above, using a layered approach. This involves learning in steps, learning by modeling, teaching in layers, talking with one another, and learning from one another. This layered approach would have been a methodology and pedagogy used by our Elders when *keeoukaywin*, or Métis visiting ways, were still at the heart of the teaching and learning of life stage roles and responsibilities. Many of us are relearning our Métis cultural knowledge, so layered approaches help us to avoid reproducing shame-based systems of learning and misrepresented knowledge, which disconnect us from our lands, our hearts, and from each other. Using learning-by-doing methods, the women shared and received skills and techniques for self-expression using artistic materials, and employed these methods within a Métis social context. The circle method further supported our aim of giving voice to Aunties, as each participant was given space and time to share their personal experiences based on their own stories as Métis community members from their respective family context.

The Circle Method

Figure 4

Setting up for a Circle at the River Road Festival, St. Louis, Saskatchewan. September 15, 2017



The circle method allowed us to begin our process in prayer, to introduce ourselves, and to set a foundation for the exploration of *Auntie*. We woke our senses with a turtle rattle talking stick, a sacred ceremonial tool. The circle provided an uninterrupted space where we could reconvene after each creative learning-by-doing activity, to share and to prepare for the next step (Figure 4). As Leclair and Nicholson (2003) explained, “our circle works hard to recreate our

individual and collective Métis women’s authorities” (p. 63). Elders, they pointed out, teach that the circle works to remind us of our responsibility to share and preserve our stories for the next generation. Lavallée (2009) described her use of *Sharing Circles and Anishnaabe Symbol-Based Reflection* in her research in order to foster a sense of belonging and community. Absolon (2011) spoke of the *learning circle* as a part of her methodology for sharing and exchanging ideas and experiences, in addition to being a gesture of reciprocity in research. For our own project, the circle brought us together as Métis women from six different communities, reflecting the diversity of Métis identities and histories.

Final Reflections

Although we discuss our process throughout this article, we want to finish by highlighting how important it was for us as Métis women researchers to be with other Métis women, some of them our own relations. Our comfort and ease with one another extended to comfort, safety, and trust in sharing our vulnerability as being, ourselves, subjects in the research. We learned that, having endured so much difficulty for generations, Métis women's ability to maintain traditional knowledge and wisdom is a testament to their resilience and strength in the face of adversity. By strengthening our relationships with other Métis women through ceremony, we have begun to better understand our familial matriarchal role models, and, just as important, to identify our own lives with theirs. Placing value on Métis Aunties helped us to recognize the complex set of dynamics and systems needed to uphold healthy and loving relationships.

It was important to acknowledge the contribution of the women. We mailed thank you cards and photos to the participants, as well as a newsletter that highlighted their poetry and featured a photo montage, reflections on the day's events, and a biography and image of the too often unrecognized Métis matriarch from the community, Caroline l'Espérance (1842-1900). To assure historical accuracy, this article was reviewed with Christine from the Métis cultural centre in St. Louis in addition to two community Elders, also respected Aunties.

This project came out of our visiting work, which brought attention to the role of Auntie as a form of Métis women's knowledge. This began a conversation about exploring Métis kinship roles, more specifically, Aunties. The project has resulted in a furthering of Métis kinship from a women's perspective. By gathering as Métis women and listening to each other, we have revalued women's ways of knowing and doing. This has helped us to see the value of research from Métis women's perspectives, and to build on the strengths of existing community wellness practices.

The women expressed the importance of learning about Métis adoption practices, traditional songs and food practices, ways in which Aunties take care of themselves, the impact of intermarriage on our communities, and Métis laws and ethics of visiting. We recognize as a result of this preliminary research that it is quite likely that Aunties have played a significant role in the wellbeing of our Métis families and communities, but that more research is needed to better understand the life stage roles and responsibilities of Aunties.

Creative and ceremonial research is designed to slow us down, and to allow us time to reflect and be grateful for the beautiful Métis women in our lives, past and present. In co-writing this article, we (Cindy and Leah) came together in a comfortable environment for a writing retreat that was detached from daily responsibilities. We asked our community of women to pray for us to do things in a good way. We enlisted two local St. Louis Elders to examine our presentation of historical and contemporary community context for accuracy. Taking this time was essential to ensure that we continue to live the methodology of reflexivity, prayer, visiting, and centring ourselves in a spirit of relation with the Métis community.

We recognize the importance of multiple-use spaces from the beginning of the project to the writing of this article—the land, the community space, our home spaces, and the retreat space. Space is a co-creator in this process because when we learn-by-doing, we draw strength from our environment. Our Métis-specific methodology and pedagogy gave voice to Métis women, and assisted us creatively—visually and through words—to learn and share about our kinship roles and responsibilities as Métis Aunties and nieces. Our collaborative research as Métis women reflects a methodology that respects our unique gifts, histories, and creative epistemologies. Our hope is to continue to create spaces for sharing Métis women’s knowledge and caring ways in order to inform efforts in community-building, health, and wellness for our families and communities.

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