



Feast Centre for
Indigenous STBBI Research

Transcript of Episode 1 – Setting the Indigenous Sexual Futures Table

In Episode One, Doris speaks with Randy Jackson and Grace Dillion about how Indigenous Futurisms is integral to Indigenous sexual futures. Indigenous Sexual Futures is a term coined by the Feast Centre that delineates a vision for tomorrow's grandchildren that is sexually expansive, healthy, and safe. We consider Indigenous futurisms as foundational to the work we do at the Feast Centre for Indigenous STBBI Research moving forward. In the last decade, the Indigenous research community has embedded strengths-based approaches and are already leading the way into the future by prioritizing Indigenous ways of knowing and being in how we conduct research. The Anishinaabe word 'biskaabiiyang' is an Anishinaabe concept of 'returning to ourselves' and is now widely used as a replacement word for decolonizing the tremendously important work of Indigenous Futurisms. As a fluent Anishinaabe speaker, this word has a deep resonance for Doris, and she hopes it resonates for all of you listeners too. Kwa'Nu'Te, sung by Elder Catherine Martin. Intro/Extro spoken Anishinaabe word by Elder Gayle Pruden

(00:00 - 00:29) Doris Peltier:

Indigenous Sexual Futures is produced by The Feast Center for Indigenous STBBI research on the Ancestral Lands of the Mississauga and Haudenosaunee Nations within the lands protected by the Dish With One Spoon wampum. We acknowledge the ancestors of this territory, and we also acknowledge the lands and territories of all our guests.

(00:55 - 03:15) Doris Peltier:

You are listening to Indigenous Sexual Futures, a podcast storytelling series that is produced by The Feast Center for Indigenous STBBI research and yes, you heard the words sexual, STBBIs and research in my first sentence -- hope that caught your attention. But you also heard the word Feast which is what we hope to do with all of you through this podcast storytelling series. You should also know that we are aligning this podcast series with a growing body of work by scholars, artists, writers and community in Indigenous Futurisms. You will have to listen to our series to learn more about what Indigenous Futurisms is and why we drop the word sexual into the middle of Indigenous Futurisms. Stay with us. Now, let's get started.

Adiniwemaaganidook. E-amakawaataagoowazid dizhnigaas, waawaashkesh nidodem. Anishinaabe n'dow. Hello and welcome to the first episode of Indigenous Sexual Futures. My name is Doris Peltier. I am Anishinaabe and your host for this podcast storytelling series. We are super excited to

be launching this first episode and we have two very special guests that have been invited to set the Indigenous Sexual Futures table for us. But before I introduce our guests, let's get ourselves ready by invoking through song the spirit of the feast. I invited Catherine Martin to offer up a song for us it is a traditional Mi'kmaw chant called *guano de* she tells us that this chant is sung at Mi'kmaw Gatherings or at feast. It's a beautiful way to start our Virtual Feast with all of you. Catherine is also one of our elders at the Feast Center. Let's listen.

[Music - 03:16 - 05:29]

(05:31 - 07:49) Doris Peltier:

Wela'lioq to the ancestors from the East for such a beautiful chant and *Wela'lin* to Catherine. Now, how is Indigenous Futurisms integral to Indigenous Sexual Futures? That is the question when we first considered Indigenous Futurisms as foundational to the work we do at the Feast Center moving forward. It is also about recognizing that the Indigenous research community has now embedded strengths-based approaches and Indigenous ways of knowing and being in how we conduct research. We have come a long way but we still have a way to go in resisting Colonial settler sexual discourses that introduce sexual taboo and stigma. There is a need to continually add to our toolbox for the next seven generations and Indigenous Futurisms is a key building block that we say, needs to be added. Finally, we welcome our two guests to the Indigenous Sexual Futures table. Our guests today are two Anishinaabe scholars. Grace Dillon is a professor in Indigenous Nation studies at Portland State University and is a key figure in contemporary conversations about Indigenous Futurisms. She also edited "Walking the Clouds: An Anthology of Indigenous Science Fiction". Joining her is Randy Jackson, Associate Professor at the School of Social Work with a cross appointment in the Department of Health, Aging and Society, at McMaster University. He is also the nominated principal investigator for the Feast Center. If you want to find out more about Grace and Randy, you can go to the Feast Center website and click on the podcast tab. To set the table I asked them both to tell us something about themselves when we began the storytelling portion on this podcast. Something that connected them to their lands. Let's listen.

(07:54 - 10:25) Grace Dillon:

There are so many stories to tell but I was very fortunate to be in a family of nine of us and we were Anishinaabe/Metis and just teeny tiny bit of Irish, but with many, many generations of Anishinaabe going way, way back to time immemorial, As we would say. I've been very fortunate also to grow up in a family and Tribal Nation communities where there was a real openness to terms that we now use that were not used when I was little because I'm a *Nokomis*, a grandma, things like gender fluid, which I realized, as that word or term came into being that I have always been that way myself, my daughter as well. Beth LaPensée who does Indigenous video games, Anishinaabe in-particular, and comic graphic novels. She too is gender fluid, and we have many Indigi-trans folks in my family. A nephew, a grandson, many cousins, aunties, uncles. I love the story of Auntie Dave that is told by Cherie Dimaline and I love the slight touches of Auntie Dave lifting his dress to go over part of bush and with those very slight moments I finding that out, and as we grew up -- we grew up very much in the woods -- and with Bay Mills Nation and then on the other side Garden River Nation, I was very fortunate to grow up in a pacifist-anarchist community which was native founded, my dad among them. We were very interested in [WORD] "loved today tomorrow and forever". That's the harmony that we held in our hearts and invited other peoples of other nations along with our Tribal Nations to join us and speak and think and talk and feast. Many, many moments of feasting.

(10:25 - 10:55) Doris Peltier:

Amazing! I think that's what we're doing here we are feasting and we'll find out what's at the table while we feast. We may discover some some special dishes while we sit here together and talk about the important things that we need to talk about. So I'm going to invite our other guest Randy to tell us a little bit about yourself.

(10:56 - 12:54) Randy Jackson:

Well I grew up in a Chippewa community and I later started calling it Anishinaabe because that just seemed much more easy and natural to me. It seemed to fit a lot better. I grew up in a family where I had three sisters and my mother and father, and we had a one bedroom house that we all lived in and my dad sort of expanded it over the years adding one room at a time as the family grew. It wasn't until I started doing my PhD work and I started diving in deeper into what is Indigenous Knowledge that I started to remember all the teachings my father had given me. He really was instrumental in passing a lot of that knowledge on to me. So we grew up, I think fairly traditionally, in the sense that our food was a very traditional diet. It wasn't until I left the Reserve at 16 and I started eating food that was sort of outside my culture. But I grew up fishing and hunting with my father and him teaching me all that, and my uncles as well, were part of that process. I was telling Doris this morning that I remember him waking me up at three in the morning to go check the rabbit snares that were out in-behind the house in the bush and teaching me how to be in the bush alone kind of a thing. I think the biggest lesson he gave me was this idea that the water, because I grew up on Lake Huron not far from Toronto, where I live now, but I grew up there and the water was centrally important to us as a people and my dad taught me how to respect the water and how to how to be in relationship with that water and it was those earlier lessons, I think, that sort of grounded me in relationships with everybody else that I was in relationships with. That relationship, that air, that first relationship I had that he put me in relationship to in the land and the water that was in front of our house was really really quite beautiful.

(12:55 - 13:53) Doris Peltier:

When we approached you Grace to be the first guest of Indigenous Sexual Futures, I didn't quite know how to reach out to you and I thought "I bet you she gets a lot of like cold calls from people, lots of requests and my email. I will probably be amongst a pile of 200 emails and so I wonder how I'm going to craft this request to to Grace Dillon because we've been reading a lot of your stuff and studying a lot of your work" and so I thought, "okay she's Anishnaabe, and I noticed where you were from and I've been to those communities," and I thought "okay, I'm gonna write to her as a Anishnaabe from one Anishnaabe to another" and I don't know if that's what caught your attention when I wrote from one Anishnaabekwe to another. That's how I started my email to you...

(13:54 - 13:58) Grace Dillon:

I loved it. That immediately caught my attention.

(13:58) Doris Peltier:

Did it?

(13:58 - 14:03) Grace Dillon:

Yeah, that was just...No matter what it was going to be.

(14:07 - 14:35) Doris Peltier:

[DORIS] We're so excited to have you here, Grace, with us. And Randy was the one that actually turned us all on to indigenous Futurisms. So maybe we should start talking about that. I'd like to ask you Grace, what is Indigenous Futurisms? You know, I might know a little bit and both Randy and I might know some. We've been reading. But our listeners might not know Indigenous Futurisms.

(14:36 - 17:21) Grace Dillon:

Indigenous Futurisms, and now I would add in futurities from the digital with Chase & Lewis and others in Concordia, Montreal where there is so much Indigenous digital work has done. And even futures at Macquarie University the center for Global Indigenous Futures, indicates a similar kind of thing. The reason why I called it futurisms is because Afrofuturism had been invented as a term but honestly it was a white man, [Laughter] he was one those cyberpunks [Mark Theory] so I wasn't so interested in that. But when Alondra Nelson as an African-American scholar and now working in the Biden Administration in fact with genetics she has a famous book on genetics as well. When she edited a special edition about Afrofuturism and they were all black school activists that were involved in it, and they were writing from their own standpoint, it just blew my mind! It was in a social text journal and there were many articles and I can certainly give that link for anyone to read. And I thought hey wait a minute, we don't just have Afrofuturism -- we have Indigenous Futurisms -- and I like the S on it because it pushes and amplifies our Tribal Nation Sovereignty since we had to fight for 30 years three decades in the U.N to get that S on the end of Peoples. That was a huge contentious debate because that meant that then if you're Tribal Nation, Indigenous Tribal Nation, went into what were supposedly other countries or nations, then it would become very problematic. That's what they were concerned about because that's true sovereignty. You know, you can cross any kind of imaginary border that's been created by other nations who want to swallow you up and act as very negligent foster parents [Laughter]

(17:27 - 17:50) Doris Peltier:

Yeah, so um I'll ask Randy the same question, but maybe because you turned me on to Indigenous Futurisms, Randy, and to Grace's work, and to other scholars out there that are doing this amazing work -- What was it about Indigenous Futurisms that really got your groove?

(17:51 - 21:04) Randy Jackson:

We have this thing called the Feast Center for Indigenous STBBI Research, and we have sort of three methodological approaches that we're using to help guide us in community-based research. We use decolonizing Indigenous methodologies, but more importantly, out of all of that, there was this strength-based perspective that we wanted to bring our work. I was getting very, very tired of endorsing -- I have been talking about this I think for the last 15 years or more -- about this idea that scholars tend to pathologize Indigenous Peoples and in fact it started to become the only thing that they were talking about when they talked about Indigenous Peoples, like what was wrong with us. And I really wanted to stop that. I really wanted to do something a bit differently. And so when we stumbled across Indigenous Futurisms it really spoke to me in a very deep way because instead of it being about our trauma it became about how we use our cultures, continuing in the present and into the future, and and that's where I think we need to focus. I don't think we need to focus...and we don't need to do that kind of research where we pathologize. I really want to focus on sort of the spiritual and cultural pathways that Indigenous Peoples use to promote well-being and health in their own lives, and how does that ...how do we develop programs and services that support that

development, and this was something that really came very strongly to me when I was doing research with Two-Spirit People of the First Nation here in Toronto, Ontario. We did a study on resilience and the resilience of Two-Spirit men living with HIV. We called it 'Two Shawls' and it was in that study that the idea of strengths became much more focused. The idea of resilience was something that got troubled in or problematized in that research because when we were doing our member checking back some a guy in the audience stood up and he said "you know what, I never wanted to be resilient in the first place" and I'm thinking right on right, absolutely. You know, of course not, and it was that one comment from that one person and in that one member checking that sort of propelled me forward into this. Let's look for strengths that are not resilient but our strengths that are grounded in our cultures. That to me was much more valuable work than supporting somebody to be resilient in the context of continuing colonization. So that's why we started doing work in this area and that's why your ideas around Indigenous Futurisms became very, very important to us. We wanted to learn more about that. We wanted to design our Research Center which is teaching scholars across the four pillars of health how to use Indigenous Knowledge in their STBBI research, and when I say STBBI, I mean sexually transmitted blood-borne infections. So that's sort of where I land with that.

(21:04 - 21:53) Doris Peltier:

I really like the usage of Anishinaabe words and concepts. That world view that you use to kind of elevate Indigenous Futurisms and lift it up. Particularly that word '*biskaabiiyang*'. When I was first reading, I thought '*biskaabiiyang*'. I had to think about it and I thought about it and I thought hmm ...I get it [Anishinaabe word].

But it took a while for me I had to reflect on it. I'm wondering if you could tell us a little bit about you know that piece, so people aren't just kind of thinking 'oh, they're just about the future... when the future is important'

(21:54 - 25:43) Grace Dillon:

Yeah that is actually what makes Afrofuturism, African futurisms, Indigenous Futurisms, Latinx Futurisms, LGBTQAI, Two-Spirit Plus Futurisms, and even in many cases Asian Futures. And is that we stand out as revolutionary and radical because we're not debating the binary of mind versus body, which is kind of the essence of the manifesto of cyberpunk and near future, kind of, scenarios. So for us, it's Body, Mind and Spirit, and that's why I got so excited Randy, when you mention that because I thought "oh yeah", and that stands out as very radical and revolutionary. And then what that means is well, there's one book here called 'Indigenous Futures of Transcending Past/Present/Future' because that's the way we live. We walk with our ancestors. Even as we pray to them we see and learn from our ancestors and they walk with us. We have Native slipstream kind of moments moments where we "yes!", in and out and in between. And so, I've started to say "instead of trying to provide a 'oh this is Indigenous Futurisms' because really it's the creatives that are creating and experimenting and just coming up with so many wonderful aspects of it. And I have to say that Indigiqueer Futurisms is very, very strong now and is often connected to our Global weirding and climate refugees. Largely black and brown peoples globally around the world that are being impacted. And I don't know that they're always dipping into queer ecology necessarily, which is an actual strand of biology that's very fascinating, but because we view animal nations, plant nations, and phenomenological peoples, which would be inclement weather in some cases, like the new pyro fires, the wildfires that are going on in California, where you actually form a new term

for it. Or where hurricanes are smashing into typhoons and other kinds of things that are just starting to kind of accumulate into phenomenological persons like our Thunderbirds, yeah, so this' just a part of it. I think John Readers said this the best. It's not a genre, it's a family that grows and extends with semblances or resemblances. And what you start seeing as you bring them together and read them at this point, I think I have two bookcases full of just Indigenous Futurisms collections, books, novels, comics . You know and then films are elsewhere but there's a lot out there a lot... and I'll stop there.

(25:45 - 27:46) Randy Jackson:

I just read Gregory Smithers, 'Reclaiming Two-Spirit', and he starts to map sort of all the things that are happening out in the world where two-spirit people and communities of two-spirit people and communities of two spirit peoples are starting to all the things that they're doing in terms of sort of living in their cultures in the present. So in other words, what he's saying is healing is happening now-- the future's happening now, right! And we can grow this. We can grow this and push it forward. I just love that idea! I love the idea that we can, how should I say that, how we can have this different vision of who Indigenous People are and how we can draw on our cultures, our strengths, our abilities to do that kind of work that's all already occurring out there, right. It's really ,really fascinating for me that that can happen in a context where I think the West often is invested in pathologizing this because it allows them, when they pathologize us, to continue to colonize us, right. We're sick, we're disorganized. We have all these, you know, I don't know how to say that, but it's sort of like if you're sick and disorganized then I must step in to help you. It sort of gives them justification for that and I think that Indigenous Futurisms sort of says to that, "well ,you know what, we are strong, we have a history of being strong!" We're here today, I mean we're recording this podcast on Orange T-shirt day or Truth and Reconciliation Day here in Canada. And it's fascinating that we've survived all of that, and we're here today, and we're strong, and we're creating futures for ourselves that are grounded in our cultures, that draw on our traditional teachings, and etc. And to create new programs that talk about that rather than talk about our pathologies.

(27:46 - 28:06) Doris Peltier:

So I want to ask the two of you to speak to how Indigenous Futurisms. You said this yourself, Grace, and and we kind of picked up on it that Indigenous Futurisms is integral to Indigenous Sexual Futures. What did you mean by that and maybe Randy could respond to that as well.

(28:07 - 32:40) Grace Dillon:

Well, it's interesting because I always go with the exciting stuff that is out there and this is a graphic novel called 'Surviving the City, Volume 2: From The Roots Up'. And all of this information I can give to put with the podcast...but Tasha Phillip (she/her/hers); she's Ininiw and Trinidadian. And then there's Natasha Donovan who's Metis and is the illustrator of this. And what is so beautiful about this book, to me, is this is made for anyone, actually, but it's told as a story of younger ones that want to find out about two-spirit and it's now. The only glitch for me in this story is that it is a Anishinabek community and there's Nish Elder who is very stridently against two-spirit or LGBTQAI2S+ and so what happens is a Cree Elder is brought in and follows the two-spirit, was a two-spirited -- the Nish Manidoo is a two-spirit, in our language. But I find this a very fascinating one since from my own family experience -- so we all have different experiences -- You know, I grew up as Nish Ojibwe Chippewa and we were very very welcoming of Two-Spirits. My sister, Faith, who has walked on, and was younger than me, and died way too young was Two-Spirit and [mishkiki].

And the Indigenous Futurisms -- speaking of pathologizing -- what I've noticed as a process, quite often is there will be an awakening, especially in why there is a lot of literature and why there's a lot of Indigenous Futurisms for preparing our young ones; our little ones. And can I get away with because you know Joy Harjo and others were thinking of skin thinking and then that was picked up for Indigi-queer Peoples and Two-Spirit Peoples. And this is a friend of mine that I love dearly and met long, long ago. And I will just read very quickly what she says:

"these three poems are as much about the body of our homelands as the bodies of ourselves", which already Randy and you, Doris, were talking about in terms of Aku (land) and Nibi (water) and how that's integral, right, to our own bodies and the way we treat our own bodies. "Our lovers and [Gulf South Indigenous post-contact Indigenous peoples these lands are Louisiana Creole Choctaw Tunica biloxy Hallmark Creek latinidad mestizos] and many other tribes and communities folks whose culture and memory are intimately tied to the humid waters of our boats, like the southern Gulf spaces we call home from Florida to Louisiana and even Oklahoma we know the power in the wind and water from the fury of hurricanes, where the center of peace lurks in the eye of the storm to the swirling winds of thunder beings as they twirl counterclockwise across the red [kokosu] Canadian and Oklahoma Rivers into the low Plains. Love is sensual, empowering, devastating graceful and as resistant as the lands and ancestors we call home."

And I don't know if it would be okay to read just one of her poems

(32:40) Doris Peltier:

Sure.

(32:41 - 34:49) Grace Dillon:

Give a kind of sense... Okay so I'll go with Salt Lick:

"They say some of our people fell from Sky. Others crept from inside Earth and so others came crawling up from beneath the waves of the Gulf onto shores they rose like alligator people. This was our emergence narrative. How naturally you coax the waters from inside the easy falling rain from the ducts of my eyes, slithering tongue [proboscis], spreading nectar on lips, fluids slipping greedily from the crease of my thighs in pleasure, in pain you pull waters from me -- heavy and thick with salt, licked and dried. I wonder if there was any pun intended when you told me your people were fishermen, oystermen, because you shock me so very well with hard worn fingers practiced in the art. Sucking Briny fluids from mother of pearl's shells locating my pearl every time. You were the salt and bone of home. Your touch taste of thrall draws me into old wire crab traps, locks me down to wait for you. The knuckles of your hand scraping my flesh creates a call and response leaping from your blood into mine. It shuffle steps of Gulf Breeze Rhythm older than this myth called time. This wind carries voices singing magnetic cries of fishing streams and human thick rains, we move with the fury of a hurricane until limbs weep like Spanish moss than fluttering ripple till again you coax the tides the need to rise as you swirl away, leave me again in the devastation."

(34:50 - 35:06) Doris Peltier:

Wow that is a powerful poem and very sensual and it's...it's Nish eroticism.

(35:08 - 35:18) Grace Dillon:

Yes and this is in *LaPensée*. Relational Constellations, Sovereign Traces Volume Two, graphic novel collection.

(35:19 - 35:28) Doris Peltier:

Wow, wow. That's, uh, that's really powerful. Is most of her writing... does she write eroticism that's connected...

(35:28 - 35:47) Grace Dillon:

There is a whole range of...along with Indigenous Futurism but there's just a loving sensuality, I would call it, that runs through her wording at all times and she is a beautiful, beautiful person.

(35:48 - 35:54) Doris Peltier:

Thank you for sharing that. Miigwetch. Randy?

(35:55) Randy Jackson:

Yes, Doris?

(35:56 - 36:28) Doris Peltier:

[DORIS] When we think about Indigenous Sexual Futures it's expansive right... Sex, sexuality, is expansive. Like we don't necessarily have to be talking about the disease or, uh, the explicit in terms of talking about sex ...it's very expansive. Like we could talk about gender, we could talk about the poetry, eroticism, pleasure, so many things. What's the expansiveness of how you see it when you think about it?

(36:28 - 37:51) Randy Jackson:

Well, you know, with the Feast Center where culture and healing is something that's centrally important to the work that we do. I shared that story about my father and him putting me in relationship to the land and how those teachings that he gave me about how to be in relationship to the water that was in front of the house that I grew up in, was something that could be translated and applied in other areas of my life including healthy sexuality, healthy sexual relationships, and as I recover that knowledge, because it sort of buried somewhere still, right. It starts to speak to me about how sexuality and the future is really about the connection we have with the land and how we need to put ourselves back in relationship with the land if we're not there already and live our sexualities in that kind of a way for me sexuality and its connection to the land are really, really important. When you write it, it sort of wants me to get involved in land back movements. It's a really an expansive kind of approach to thinking about sexually. It allows us to talk about colonization and what it's done to this but more importantly it allows for this conversation about traditions and how we can use those now and in the future moving forward.

[MUSIC]

(37:57 - 40:51) Doris Peltier:

Chi Miigwetch to our two guests, Grace Dillon and Randy Jackson. Now as we wrap up, I want to share some of my big takeaways from our two guests. The biggest one for me is the usage of the Anishinaabe word '*biskaabiiyang*'. This is an Anishinaabe concept of returning to ourselves and is now widely used as a replacement word for decolonizing in the tremendously important work within Indigenous Futurisms. As a fluent Anishinaabe speaker. I quite like that. It has a deep resonance for

me and I hope it resonates for all of you listeners too. Another takeaway is on how important it is for us to move away from pathologizing Indigenous People when we do research. Rather, we need to look for strengths that are not about resilience, but strengths that are grounded in our cultures. For me, this pushes back against the overusage of resilience as the fallback or conclusion when it comes to Indigenous people. I have an Anishinaabe word that replaces the overusage of the word resilience, but that is for another podcast. Grace also acknowledged the many creators that are creating and coming up with so many wonderful aspects of Indigenous Futurisms. She no longer has to say this is Indigenous Futurisms with one definition. I suppose. By saying this, we at the Feast Center, along with many of you who are involved in STBBI research or in delivery of programs, you too can also be creators that build on Indigenous Sexual Futures. This is quite exciting moving forward. We will continue exploring this through this podcast. We need to wrap up this baby now. I hope that you enjoyed our podcast. To be quite honest, I had some anxiety in producing this first podcast. Podcasting is storytelling and I just have to keep reminding myself that I am a storyteller. We, in fact, are all storytellers. Research too is storytelling. In closing, we would like to acknowledge our funders, The Canadian Institute of Health Research, for making yet another aspect of the Feast Center possible. Thank you for tuning in. This is Doris Peltier, your host, signing off. Baamaapii....Miigwetch.

(40:55 - 41:12) [Outro]: It's all the healing that's taking place and we as Anishinaabe People have these sacred items that Creator left us that we can share with the world in our healing journey for ourselves and everybody else that walks with us equally.