

Connecting with Creation in Curve Lake First Nation

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Indigenous communities are at the forefront of the effects of climate change.¹ Likewise, Indigenous nations are well-positioned to advise governmental agencies and promote positive changes to the biosphere.² Unfortunately, there has been limited academic inquiry into how different and unique Indigenous nations understand human relationships with the natural world.³ Yet there have been recent efforts to incorporate Indigenous Knowledges and engage Indigenous stakeholders in conservation efforts (e.g.,⁴). There is also burgeoning literature on the benefits of human-nature connection regarding human and planetary health.⁵ Studies show that having a strong connection with the natural world is associated with increased levels of subjective wellbeing⁶ as well as eco-friendly or conservation attitudes and behaviours.⁷ The current research was conducted in collaboration with Curve Lake First Nation, an Anishinaabe nation in Southern Ontario. The project began as an investigation into the relevance of an existing psychometric nature connection scale, nature relatedness.⁸ However, it blossomed into a collaborative effort to develop community research methodologies and ethics and has provided novel insights into how individuals in the community understand connection with creation (the preferred term for the natural world in Curve Lake). Specifically, through research sharing circles—an Indigenist data collection method⁹—with local knowledge contributors (participants), we developed thematic descriptions of the community's concerns about connection with creation. We also detailed the priorities and potential opportunities for collaboration between the community and other entities with the goals of conservation and stewardship. These themes included, but were not limited to, issues with the way First Nations can acquire land to add to their reserve area, the historical impacts of unjust land seizures and limitations on harvesting activities and ceremonies, and the modern impacts of treaties on connection with creation. But the themes also included priorities for increasing connection with creation, such as further collaboration between the community and governments regarding protecting natural spaces, Indigenous contributions to game legislation, and hope for future generations to be engaged in traditional land-based activities. We also explored what it means to be connected with creation in Curve Lake First Nation. To do this, we deductively coded the conversations with knowledge contributors into a Medicine Wheel framework. The Medicine Wheel is a multimodal and complex teaching tool used by many Indigenous nations across Turtle Island (North America;¹⁰). However, every nation and community have unique teachings about it. In the context of this research, we coded the knowledge shared about connection with creation into five distinct categories, representing the four directions of the Medicine Wheel and an additional central teaching, including how connection with creation is manifested mentally, physically, emotionally, spiritually, and through Mino Bimaadiziwin. Overall, this research project contributes to the growing literature on human-nature connection. It also promotes the importance of engaging with Indigenous communities in conversations about nature connection as well as conservation and nature-related well-being.

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