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## What Indigenous Futurity Can Teach Us about Healing Sexual Violence for Minoritized Students in Higher Education

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### ABSTRACT

Critical scholars of sexual violence in higher education have highlighted the inequities and gaps that Minoritized students face in their search for support after experiencing violence on campus. As described by critical scholar Harris (2020), “healing often mitigates negative outcomes that stem from experiencing sexual assault” (pp. 249). In this article, I first explain the importance of understanding spatial geographies in the context of sexual violence for Minoritized survivors on university campuses. Second, I explore the concept of spatial futurity broadly, specifically Laura Harjo’s scholarship on Indigenous Futurity, as a guiding framework to transform experiences of violence into tools of action and healing. Finally, I discuss the healing experiences of Minoritized sexual violence survivors from a qualitative study that utilized Indigenous Research Methods and focused on Harjo’s concept of Emergence Geographies to explore research and practical implications for sexual violence response in higher education for Indigenous and other Minoritized students.

**Keywords:** sexual violence, healing, minoritized students, higher education

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*“Futurity is an action; it’s practice. The actions we take today enact our relatives’ futurity: We both live out the futurity architecture of our ancestor relatives and frame a futurity for our future relatives.” - Laura Harjo (2019, p. 34)*

Responding to and preventing campus sexual violence in higher education has become a national debate due in part to a highly contentious political education climate in the United States. With statistics showing that one in five women students and one in four

Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming students will experience sexual violence while in college, institutions are contending with how to approach the prevention of campus sexual violence (Moylan, et al., 2020). More specifically, institutions are grappling with how to support the hundreds of Minoritized student survivors left to navigate the impacts of such experiences at their institutions (Cantor, 2020; Moylan, et al., 2020; Moylan & Javorka, 2020)<sup>1</sup>. The purpose of this paper is to create a space for the *radical healing* of Minoritized sexual violence survivors to be centered and to bring insight to interventions and practices that center the needs, retention, and persistence of Minoritized undergraduate and graduate students. As described by Harris (2020), “healing often mitigates negative outcomes that stem from experiencing sexual assault, such as depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety, substance abuse, low academic achievement, and revictimization” (p. 249). If universities and colleges are committed to supporting equity efforts that empower Minoritized student survivors to thrive, institutions need to prioritize healing of Minoritized student survivors. This can include creating spaces and places where Minoritized student survivors belong and feel connected to their healing, communities, and holistic futures.

In this article, I first explain the importance of understanding geographies in the context of sexual violence for Minoritized students on university campuses. Understanding the history, spatialities, and identities of students on campus is critical to understanding how universities respond to sexual violence policy making, support services and prevention. Second, I explore the concept of spatial futurity broadly, specifically Laura Harjo’s scholarship on Indigenous Futurity that incorporates *Radical Sovereignty, Community Knowledge, Collective Power, Emergence Geographies*, as a guiding framework to transform experiences of violence into tools of radical action, healing, and resilience. Finally, I discuss the healing experiences of Minoritized sexual violence student survivors from a recent qualitative research study in relation to Indigenous Futurity focusing on Harjo’s concept of *Emergence Geographies*, to explore research and practical implications for sexual violence radical healing in higher education.

## **REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

Sexual violence can be defined broadly, encompassing experiences of non-consensual activities and abuse such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, relationship

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I intentionally capitalize the word Minoritized to emphasize the process of minoritization of students who identify with non-dominant identities. They are not passively or inherently marginalized by their multiple and intersecting identities, but experience minoritization by active policies and systems shaped by colonial legacies, structural inequities, racism, and other forms of oppression at higher education institutions that shape student outcomes and campus climate. I emphasize Minoritization as an ongoing process of white supremacy and settler-colonialism. Capitalization choices throughout the paper are intentional and may depart from APA guidelines.

(domestic/dating) violence, and stalking. Although much of the research and discussion on campus sexual violence response has centered the coping and psychological impacts of sexual trauma of white cisgender woman, there is an emerging body of literature centering healing through body-based modalities, peer support, and connections to community for Minoritized student survivors (Harris et al., 2021; Karunaratne, 2023b). More specifically, emerging research focuses on how sexual and relationship violence can compound with other forms of trauma, such as racial and intergenerational trauma, which can impact healing and learning for Minoritized students (Gómez, 2020; Karunaratne, 2023a.)

The movement against campus sexual violence has beginnings rooted in the histories of sexual and racial violence in U.S. higher education as they are deeply connected to settler colonization, slavery, and white supremacy (INCITE!, 2016). Historically, white colonizers have utilized sexual violence as a genocidal tool to remove Indigenous peoples from their land and disenfranchise Indigenous communities in the U.S. (Simpson, 2014). Enslavers perpetrated sexual violence to terrorize enslaved Africans and used sexual violence to threaten Black communities, which continued past the formal abolishment of slavery (McGuire, 2010). The elimination of sexual violence has long been a part of the greater gender and racial justice project given that postsecondary institutions have legacies of this violence while also harboring spaces that have catalyzed students to change and address these issues (McGuire, 2010; Wilder, 2014).

The Anti-Rape Movement in the early 1970's included a wide range of conscious-raising activities as part of the second-wave feminist movement where white, college educated women came together to advocate for community and university responses to sexual assault on- and off-campus (Jessup-Anger et al., 2018; Shepp et al., 2023). Acknowledging that second-wave feminism and the Anti-Rape Movement lacked an acknowledgment of intersectionality and an analysis of how race, gender, class, sexual orientation, and ability intersect to create varying experiences of oppression and domination for Women of Color, the movement nonetheless set the foundation for later campus organizing in higher education (Crenshaw, 1989; 1991).

## **Sexual Violence in Higher Education**

Critical scholars argue that the harm that student survivors experience on college campuses is a direct result of carceral feminism and neoliberalism in higher education (Bernstein, 2012; Collins, 2016). Carceral feminist strategies, described as projects that emphasize the use of law enforcement and legal strategies to advance the rights of women experiencing violence, often do not acknowledge the structural oppression of state-sanctioned violence on Women of Color, trans people, and disabled people. Instead, carceral feminist responses focus on “catching and sanctioning offenders” (Shepp et al., 2023, p. 11), rather than acknowledging conditions of harmful institutions that perpetuate violence (Bernstein, 2012). Neoliberalism is defined as an economic ideology that prioritizes the “privatization and commercialization of public institutions” (Kezar, 2004, p. 431). In higher education, neoliberal systems dehumanize students as they are seen as consumers of products meant to provide economic values to institutions and corporate powers within compliances structures, including response systems of

sexual violence (Gonzalez et al., 2014; Hurtado, 2021). Neoliberalism in higher education “puts institutional reputation before its duty to care for each student’s fundamental right to a caring and educational environment” (Hill & Naik, 2021, p. 267). Colleges and universities center mandatory reporting policies, promote investigation practices that deeply re-traumatize students, practice performative measures that focus on their marketability to consumers (i.e., donors and potential students), and avoid liability without addressing deep structures of oppression that *cause* violence on campus (Shepp et al., 2023). Essentially, institutions put financial efficiency against human values, causing harmful effects on students. This prioritization has larger impacts on Minoritized students seeking radical healing at their institutions and in their campus communities.

Understanding the experiences of Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors necessitates an understanding of *why* minoritization of these students occurs in higher education. Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors are students who identify with non-dominant social identities that are systematically Minoritized by structural systems of inequities in higher education. These non-dominant identities can include, but are not limited to Black, Indigenous and Students of Color, Students with Disabilities, and students who identify as LGBTQ+, Undocumented, and holding other non-privileged identities. As Dache-Gerbino (2017) explains, space and place:

Minoritized students are impacted by the racialized spaces, geographical locations, and colonial histories of their universities and experience their learning in these realities: The colonization of knowledge and landscapes—the soil cultivating US higher education systems are embedded within the histories of US cities, developed, and re-developed through 400 years of domination despite waves of resistance. This is evident in the US’s investment in chattel slavery, Indigenous land occupation and genocide, and austerity federal and state policies contributing to geographies of bondage for people of color (p. 369).

Space and place take on a more powerful meaning for Minoritized student survivors because many experience sexual and relationship violence in their place of learning and employment. This can include college classrooms, university-owned residence halls and apartments, research labs, alumni spaces, student organization spaces, and local community places where students, staff, and faculty cultivate community. Student survivors experience violence in the context and intersections of their Minoritized identities, histories, and geographies. Often Minoritized student survivors must navigate accountability, justice, healing, and conceptualizations of safety in the same places where their victimization occurred (Harris & Linder, 2017). They might seek support services found at counseling and sexual violence advocacy centers, cultural equity centers, relationships with faculty and classroom curriculum, and physical locations like land and water-based spaces that facilitate healing. Ginwright (2015) defines healing as a:

A process to restore health resulting from harm or injury. Harm can either be psychological, physical, or both. Healing in this sense focuses on recognition that

harm results in a psychological, spiritual, cultural injury. Healing is an explicit process for restoring individuals and communities to optimal health (pp. 38–39).

Critical scholars of sexual violence research in higher education have highlighted the inequities and gaps that Minoritized students face in their search for healing and support after experiencing violence (Harris & Linder, 2017; Harris, 2020). Some argue that heavy compliance and risk aversion policies, race evasiveness interventions, and dominant paradigms of healing have driven institutions' response to Minoritized campus survivors. Dominant paradigms of healing can be conceptualized as frameworks solely focused on colonial western notions of treatment, including but not limited to talk therapy and psychiatry. In this paradigm, "healing" is often relegated to an individual mental health illness often pathologized and disjointed from holistic, cultural, and socio-ecological understandings of support and community (Linder et al., 2024). This view of healing often fractures ancestral lineages of healing and fragments holistic aspects of individuals (i.e., mental, spiritual, physical, emotional, communal) and does not address historical and continued violence perpetrated by harmful campus climates and other institutional dynamics. Acknowledging the current gaps of sexual violence response in higher education for Minoritized students, I center the praxis of Futurity as a lens for how student survivors are healing and persisting in higher education.

### **Futurity and Indigenous Futurity**

Futurism(s) has had a long history of imagination and manifestation within several historical and contemporary contexts. *Afrofuturism* has its beginnings in the North American Black Arts Movement of the 1960 and 1970's among various literary figures and musicians. Afrofuturism can now be described as a Pan-African project focused on an "applied, theoretical, critical and transdisciplinary approach" to Black humanity and the future of African people (Anderson & Jones, 2016, p. ix). Afrofuturism creates spaces for Black people to "renarrate the past, present and the future of the African diaspora" (Ramírez, 2008, p.186) in the context of adduction, slavery, displacement, and alienation. Toliver (2022), in her description of forms of Afrofuturism and technologies, centers Black spirituality as "it makes space for alternative truths that uplift our connections to the land, our histories, our community, and ourselves" (pp. xxii). Other scholars have articulated and elevated other forms of futurism within the context of identity and community.

Chicana scholar Ramírez (2008) introduced the concept of *Chicanafuturism* (having borrowed theories from Afrofuturism) and explores the ways in which "new and everyday technologies, including their detritus, transform Mexican American life and culture" (p. 187; see also Ramírez, 2004). Chicanafuturism questions the "promises of science, technology and humanism" (Ramírez, 2008, p. 187) for Chicano/as and other People of Color while reflecting on diasporic experiences of colonial and postcolonial histories. Disrupting harmful narratives of Black, Indigenous and People of Color and finding imaginaries of solidarity, other scholars have further developed concepts of futurity to find connection among culture production. Interdisciplinary English scholar Taylor utilizes Latinx Futurism as an "aesthetic and political

movement” inspired by Black counterparts to “reclaim the right to tell our own stories” (Taylor, 2020, p. 31). Latinx Futurism provides spaces where Latinx People can resist imperialist hegemonic narratives of race and identity while utilizing music, like hip-hop, and other forms of mixed media as a method of decolonization. Futurism is an act of survival and resistance, and for Indigenous communities, futurism is a concept that has always existed.

*Indigenous Futurism*, defined and conceptualized in multiple ways, can be broadly understood as the futures created by Indigenous Peoples. It centers ancestral knowledge and ways of knowing in shaping past, current, and future specialities. Dillion, an Anishinaabe scholar, coined the term Indigenous Futurism in describing her own tribal understanding of the narratives and processes of “returning to ourselves” (Dillon, 2012, p. 10) when making sense of colonization within her Anishinaabe community. She describes Indigenous Futurism as “discarding the emotional and psychological baggage carried from [colonization’s] impact and recovering ancestral traditions in order to adapt in our post-Native Apocalypse world” (p. 10). Indigenous futurism is shaped by past, present, and futures uniquely situated in the lived experiences and epistemologies of Indigenous People within their own particular context. It is created through multiple technologies, narratives, genres, and spaces. Indigenous Futurism is an intergenerational, relational, and holistic tool to process and heal multifaceted forms of trauma while actively building and creating a world that centers Indigenous values, spirituality, wellness, and joy.

Harjo (2019), an interdisciplinary Mvskoke scholar of Geography, provides insight into Mvskoke Futurity by describing Futurity as a “conventional reckoning of time and future, and pushes us [Indigenous People and other People of Color] to create right now – in the present moment – that which our ancestors, we, and future relatives desire” (p. 4). An Indigenous mapper and cartographer, Harjo, in her book *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity* (2019) conceptualizes and employs practical tools for futurity and operationalizes knowledge in several ways through shared energy, kinship, felt knowledge, and responsibility. Her framework “enacts theories and practices to activate ancestors’ unrealized possibilities” (p. 5) and leads us to act on “living out the futures we wish for in a contemporary moment, and the creation of conditions for tomorrow” (p. 216). Harjo conceptualizes these everyday practices and spatialities through four principal areas: *este-cate sovereignty* (Indigenous kinship), *community* (and body) *knowledge*, *collective power*, and imagining of and accessing *emerging geographies*.

*Radical Sovereignty* (este-cate sovereignty) is defined by Harjo as a sovereignty that predates current understandings of tribal sovereignty and is the understanding that community “already possess self-determination, power, and agency, and enacts these elements on the daily basis” (pp. 217). Harjo argues that radical sovereignty does not wait for the government or institutions to give sovereignty and agency to community but instead sovereignty can be built through community building processes that center the most vulnerable and unseen, and other living relations (i.e., plants, earth, waters) in communities. *Community Knowledge* and production empowers community members to “recognize settler-colonialism and oppressive structures in community through understanding the relevance of their own experiences and family narratives” (p. 217). Harjo argues that by recognizing the ways in which community “speaks” through

stories, narratives, videos, accounts of space and place, ritual, and ceremony, we can center and elevate a broader context for understanding the “who, what, where” of social change. This process and transformation is often not centered in Western knowledge and systems.

*Collective Power* builds upon the aforementioned concepts and moves these concepts into collective action. Harjo (2019) states, “we must find freedom, emancipation and empowerment in multiple spatialities, such as at the scale of the physical body, coalescing with others into a stomp dance spiral that connects to the stars, or in the collectivity of social movements” (p. 218). Harjo pushes us to see and make visible the profound ways in which community continues to fight for social change without permission or western capital resources but with relationality, positive energy and safe spaces (p. 219). Lastly, focusing on *Emergence Geographies*, Harjo calls into power the untethering of notions of space and place from prescribed areas of spatial geographies (i.e., land, poverty, diaspora, boarding school) “because this delineation proscribes possibilities, placing limitations on the possibilities that can manifest and where they can manifest” (p. 219). Harjo situates *Emergence Geographies* as the space where the four tools of futurity come together to operationalize the past, present, and future humanity of Mvskoke People and can serve as a teaching tool for other Communities of Color to learn and enact.

### **EMERGENCE GEOGRAPHIES: A TOOL FOR HEALING THE PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE**

For purposes of this paper, I focus on Laura Harjo’s concept of *Emergence Geographies* as a tool of futurity for understanding how Minoritized student survivors enact futurity as healing within the context of higher education. Harjo described *Emergence Geographies* as a tool of futurity that can be practiced in four unique ways: concrete, ephemeral, metaphysical, and virtual manifestations. Concrete geographies are concrete spatialities bounded in or fixed to a particular place or jurisdiction, which can include communal spaces, reservations, and sacred geographic areas. Ephemeral geographies are community convenings that assemble and disassemble in certain moments. This can include community groups that convene in various places for social, political, or ceremonial reasons. Metaphysical geographies are the active communication lines with ancestors and relatives who may or may not be present in physical form. An example of these communication lines is seen in the ways Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) invoke community action and remembrance although the missing women and girls are not physically present. This can also include practices that draw up memories of ancestors that invoke a spatiality across time and space. Virtual geographies emerge from information and communication through technology. This can include the assemblage of people through phone calls, video chats, conferencing, social media, listservs, and online groups that allow connection and counter storytelling (Harjo, 2019). I argue that Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors engage in radical healing by enacting these spatialities across their communities, space, place, and time.

## **Research Design**

The following stories and narrative inquiry bring into the conversation the experiences of nine Minoritized campus sexual violence student survivors that participated in a qualitative study focused on space and place-based healing. Understanding how campus survivors of sexual violence make meaning of their coping and experiences of healing, and more specifically, how students conceptualize space and place on campus is essential: these insights can provide increased understandings of identity, structural violence, and how white supremacy and colonization are built into higher education institutions that shape healing. In sharing their own lived experiences, Indigenous Women, and other Black and People of Color, can make meaning of their past and future, while underlying the critical emotional and community knowledge that is often *felt* in ways of knowing, relations, and connections to identity, ancestry, land, and healing.

Utilizing an Indigenous Research Design, the research methods and protocols were guided by important principles grounded in Indigenous ways of knowing, values and perspectives. Indigenous researchers center research processes and spaces that are non-intrusive, led with deep listening, are purposeful, and are shaped by intergenerational learning, ancestral wisdoms and knowledge sharing (Smith, 2012). Indigenous Research Methodologies honor Indigenous communities and ways of being, placing respect, reverence, responsibility, reciprocity, interrelatedness, and synergy at the center (Archibald, 2008; Smith, 2012). Wilson (2008) describes Indigenous Research Methodologies as a process of relationality with people and deep accountability to environment, land, cosmos, and Indigenous epistemologies. Utilizing an Indigenous Research Design centered my own identity, positionality and epistemology as an Indigenous Woman of Color, practitioner, and researcher within this work. Some participants in the study shared similar identities and epistemologies, while non-Indigenous students shared similar connections, values, and relationships that honor Indigenous ways of knowing in many ways. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Anishinabekwe scholar Kimmerer (2013) offers perspectives on the power that Indigenous storytellers and people have in sharing knowledge that preserves ancestral and embodied understandings, teachings and lessons of relationality with earth, humans, land, and waters. Kimmerer and other Indigenous scholars remind us that not all stories and knowledge can or should be shared to honor and protect what is sacred to individuals, relationships, and ancestral practices. These methodologies and teachings help me understand that stories are “not mine to give, or yours to take,” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. Preface). When braided and woven together, these healing stories “allow us to imagine a different relationship, in which people and land are good medicine for each other” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. Preface). Indigenous Research Methodologies and epistemologies can teach, hold sacred, and honor lessons for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people when centered in these positionalities.

## **Participants**

The research study included nine self-identified Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors who had experienced sexual violence during high school or in



college. Identities of the participants varied regarding race/ethnicity (Latinx, Central American, Indigenous, Sri Lankan, White), gender (Women, GenderQueer, Nonbinary), sexuality (Queer, Bisexual, Heterosexual), ability (Disabled and Neurodivergent), and other minoritized identities (first generation immigrant and systemic impacted students).

### **Data Collection Methods**

The students participated in one virtual interview, one place-based walking interview, and a photo elicitation activity. The data corpus consisted of field reports, reflective memos, transcripts from two-part semi-structured interviews, and photographs taken by the students themselves. Students were invited to share with me a location on- or off-campus where they engaged in healing that incorporated ancestral knowledge, somatic relationships, and connection to land and nature (Fernandez et al., 2021). Utilizing a photo elicitation method grounded in critical and feminist frameworks and known to support survivors in their healing process (Christensen, 2017), participants were asked to take images of the place or space of their healing. Part of creating a “sacred” space for the participants was incorporating their own healing practices and knowledge within the research process, acknowledging that the research space itself serves as tool of empowerment, voice, and healing (Karunaratne, 2023c). My goal was to create trauma-informed and healing-centered spaces by opening and closing virtual and walking interviews with students grounded in their own identity-based knowledge and practices. I invited students to share ways we could incorporate their practices before, during, and after the research process to preserve their wellbeing and experiences of healing.

### **Data Analysis**

The use of composite narrative vignettes and storytelling to highlight the experiences of Minoritized student survivors is grounded in the robust tradition of Indigenous storywork and narrative inquiry. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012), Māori scholar, teaches us that “the story and the storyteller both serve to connect the past with the future, one generation with the other, the land with the people, and the people with the story” (p. 166). Indigenous storywork requires that researchers engaging in the making and telling of stories commit whole heartedly to listening deeply to research partners and ourselves. Engaging in storywork considers the essence and values guiding these stories, and if given permission, ensures that stories are told to others for learning (Archibald, 2019; Toliver, 2022). Narrative vignettes and storywork “create space in the mind, heart, body and spirit to be open to questions and feelings that arise from stories (holism)” (Toliver, 2022, p. xviii). It allows the storyteller to consider connections between the storyteller, story listener, and story (Toliver, 2022). Narrative profiles and vignettes also allow researchers to “present participants in context, clarify intentions, convey a sense of process and time,” (Seidman, 2013, p. 128) and through telling stories, researchers *with* participants narrate how human beings “make sense of themselves and their social world” (p.128; see also Bazeley, 2013). Data analysis consisted of thematic analysis to identify themes within participants’ narratives using

the four areas of *Emergence Geographies* in Harjo's Futurity framework (Ravitch & Carl, 2020). In using composite narrative vignettes within these contexts, I hope to share the stories of Minoritized campus survivors responsibly by centering their *felt* and lived experiences with radical healing and making meaning of their conceptualizations of futurity.

### **Positionality**

I am the daughter of an Indigenous Oaxacan father and Honduran mother, both of whom migrated to Los Angeles, California in the late 1970's. Concepts such as relationality, ancestral knowledge, traditions, and care of our families, relatives, and community are strongly cultivated among my family and community. I center my ancestors and elders continuously, as they have shaped and continue to shape my positionality and understanding of the world in relation to others. I first was introduced to the experiences of sexual and relationship violence as experiences we witnessed and heard about among our families, friends, and community. As someone who experienced a sexual assault my sophomore year in college, these stories and perspectives became even more relevant to my positionality and the ways in which I approach my research and practice with Minoritized student survivors of sexual and relationship violence. Experiences and bodies of knowledge such as colonization, settler-colonialism, white supremacy, racism, sexism, patriarchy, historical and generational trauma, and intergenerational healing have given me the language and frameworks to deeply understand why sexual violence is perpetuated at various socio-ecological levels, including at higher education institutions. As a sexual violence educator and advocate with over 10 years of experience in higher education, my experiences confirm that Minoritized students are targeted for violence and experience high rates of sexual violence, as noted in prominent studies (Cantor et al., 2020). Minoritized student survivors face enormous barriers in accessing healing and support on college campuses—some choosing to drop out of college or experience severe challenges on their way to graduating because of systemic and carceral violence in higher education (Linder et al., 2024). After several years in the campus advocacy field, I have come to understand the spatialities, compliance culture, and risk mitigation facets of institutional responses to sexual violence in higher education. These responses heavily focus on legalistic policy and non-restorative practices that often re-traumatize students and communities on campus and do not address or change the structural violence that perpetuates harm (Lorenz, 2022; Collins, 2016; Jessup-Anger et al., 2015). I position myself as an Indigenous Woman of Color and scholar-practitioner to explore how institutions can better support Minoritized student survivors of sexual violence on college campuses through implementing trauma-informed and healing-centered policies, practices, and interventions that create futures for wholeness.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The following section centers three composite narrative vignettes that provide insight into how nine Minoritized campus survivors enacted Futurity through

Emergence Geographies. Composite vignettes are helpful in highlighting key aspects of phenomena while preserving confidentiality and anonymity (Ravitch & Carl, 2021). They are each followed by thematic discussions of how minoritized student survivors engaged in radical healing through Emergence Geographies including concrete, ephemeral, metaphysical, and virtual manifestations. Pseudonyms are utilized to protect the confidentiality of the participants.

### ***Ruby's "Space of Resistance"***

I met Ruby at the campus botanic garden in the afternoon right before sunset. A place no one seems to know where to find, unless you've been there. A place discreetly hidden among the high tower buildings that surround it. We spent the afternoon tracing the path through the garden chatting about classes, our hobbies, and the ups and downs of their time on campus. As a third year STEM student, navigating courses as a first-gen student has been overwhelming for them, but they are "making it happen." The garden is their escape. I understand why. I find myself surprised at how quickly my worries and "mental to-do list" dissipates the deeper we walk into the garden. I take a deep breath and smell the sage nearby. Ruby takes me to the garden pond where they visit the turtles weekly. They have grown to cherish these tiny animal relatives deeply. We find ourselves giggling and smiling as Ruby points to a tiny, brown turtle trying to climb over a larger turtle in search for the last minutes of sunlight. Ruby is non-binary. They experienced sexual violence as a young adult and since then have navigated other instances of violence as a student on campus. After experiencing harm at a young age and again as a student, their healing journey has been experienced in varying ways and has impacted their emotional and mental health. Anxiety and other diagnoses have heavily impacted the way they build and cultivate safety. Part of Ruby's healing has been connecting with other students and survivors on campus who can relate to their experience of being a Queer survivor. A space that heavily facilitated Ruby's healing is a political space of convening, "Queer spaces," as they describe the HIV prevention student organization that they are a part of. The space engages in health promotion and HIV advocacy. Ruby passionately explained to me why as we sat in the garden. They were empowered knowing that the organization and work they are engaged in is part of a lineage: a "legacy of queer, BIPOC survivors" who actively work toward dismantling oppression and helping community. Ruby feels seen in all their identities, holistically and affirmed in one space, at their intersections. Not having to choose one identity or the other and "different than what the institution makes you do, choose." The transformation of violence into advocacy and the history that reminds them of community solidarity is one that keeps them connected to healing. "I can have a voice, feel safe, and developing my competence and confidence in space that affirms me is healing for me." We spend a couple of hours in the garden and before we leave, they show me their most special space in the garden, their Dragon Blood Tree. Ruby is very knowledgeable on plants in the garden as they participate in educational workshops on plant caregiving during the summer. They share that the Dragon Blood Tree is unique for the red blood-like sap that seeps when a tree branch is cut. Ruby shared with me that it became their healing tree after they spent the summer volunteering at the garden connecting with other LGBTQ peers on campus:

I loved this tree when I found out that if you cut a tree branch from it, not only will it bleed but it will grow back two other branches from the cut branch. For me, it means resilience, that even if you cut this tree, it will grow back twice as strong and more beautiful!

Ruby reminded me in that moment of the radical healing that the space of nature provides for survivors. With time and the “right energy and nutrients,” for Ruby, healing means growing stronger and more resilient with the right space and people.

In this vignette, Ruby discusses their connection to both ephemeral and virtual geographies of resistance. A political space of “Queerness” and liberation allowed Ruby to connect with their queer community during the COVID-19 pandemic virtually until the return of in-person learning and community building. Ruby describes how the convening of their queer peers within the context of LGBT health advocacy, allows them to form a sense of identity, a sense of belonging to others and something “greater than themselves.” Harjo describes these geographies as purpose and work tied to the restoration of future relatives. Ruby’s practice of futurity is felt through enacting a vision of social justice for Queer People with HIV. Virtual technology like the group’s social media platforms and communication software like Zoom allowed Ruby to actively feel connected to political spaces during the time of remote learning. Many participants in the study connected self-purpose and futurity in relation to projects and extracurriculars. Adri, a campus survivor who grew up in the foster care system, channels her radical healing and connection through advocating and creating programming for other scholars impacted by systemic violence. Allison, a Queer Central American campus survivor, feels empowered and assertive when she is advocating for neighbors in her community at the Tenet’s Rights meeting: “witnessing people, together, be empowered in situations that can feel very powerless, reminds me of my own agency and will to change my own circumstances.”

Harjo describes virtual geographies as a way to enact connection and futurity for people that may be in different physical locations. Virtual connections in the vignette above allowed Ruby to create educational campaigns for the student organization during the COVID-19 pandemic and allowed them to feel the “energy” of other student survivors and peers even though they were physically isolated back home due to COVID-19 restrictions. Ruby felt that the peer connections positively kept them connected to feelings of excitement, hope, and a “space to come back to” when returning to campus. For Ruby, futurity allowed them to envision a return to campus grounded in the support and belonging of their queer peers and advocacy work alongside their academic goals on campus. For Jo, a Non-Binary Disabled student, virtual technologies allow them to feel connected to community from their space of safety and healing—their apartment: “As a disabled person, it’s hard to navigate accessibility with wanting to feel in community with others.” Jo shared that navigating their anxiety during the COVID-19 pandemic was most helpful due to technology. Jo could continue to connect and experience other students from their computer while being surrounded by artwork and artifacts that grounded their identity and allowed them to resource memories when feeling overwhelmed by stress and coursework. Ruby and

other participants also enacted concrete and metaphysical emergence geographies when connecting with plants and animal and other living relatives to support their healing. The second vignette allows us to learn more about these geographies.

***Gizelle: “The Garden of My Ancestors”***

It was a sunny afternoon as I was running to meet Gizelle in person on campus for the first time. I had met her over Zoom the previous week and was excited to learn about her healing space. I had just escaped a near head on collision with a student on a scooter (on their way to or from class I imagined), while walking through a student resource tabling fair in the quad. Walking through a building hallway, I arrived at the hidden campus garden. Winded and out of breath, I sat down on a bench overlooking a pocket of greenery. The garden was surrounded by enormous trees, branching and hovering over students laying on the grass. Some reading their books on blankets and others eating their afternoon snacks. On the bench, I laid my head back to look at the sky, grounding myself into the space. Tracing the clouds of different shapes, I took a deep breath. Feeling a gust of chilly wind shoot up the back of my neck and hearing a strong rumbling as the wind pushed the tree branches, I told myself I had arrived at a special place. A pocket of earth, soil, fresh air, and a stillness hidden away from the campus chaos and traffic. I offered a prayer of gratitude. As I looked down from the sky, I noticed Gizelle’s bright pink crocheted top as she walked up to me. Gizelle’s dangling flower earrings were beautiful, a representation of her Indigenous and Mexican identity. As a first-generation, sixth year student, Gizelle looks to be familiar with the garden as if she has spent a lot of time here. We find a patch of grass and sit. As we begin to converse, the world around us disappears and it is just the two of us in the garden. Immersed in the elements, she fidgets with her fingers and pulls at the frays of her ripped jeans. She begins to tell me about her experiences as a Queer Student of Color on campus. Gizelle shares with me the deep psychological and emotional impacts of a sexual assault she experienced her first year on campus. Diagnosed with PTSD and other mental health conditions, Gizelle took several leaves of absence to recover, heal, and regain a sense of self. She has persisted and shares with me that she will not give up on her academic aspirations. Her healing place is a garden situated away from the campus chaos and away from a campus culture that reminds her of “that past experience.” As I sat with her, I watched as the wind pushed a strand of hair into her eyes, she smiled and giggled as she tucked it behind her ears. She gets lost in her thoughts for a moment, in a faraway gaze she looks across the garden in silence. Her gentle, kind voice tells me that this garden and its inhabitants teach her how to take care of herself. They allow her to remember and feel connected to her parents’ garden and trees back home, a connection back to her abuelitos [grandparents] home. The sun teaches her about taking in the sun so that her skin and Vitamin D deficiency can take in medicine. The sounds of birds and stillness in the garden allow her to regulate, slow down, whisper, and help her heart slow down. As she says this, I realize what she means. I hadn’t noticed how many students had left the garden. “Being in community with another living thing (plants and trees), teaches and reminds me to tend to myself,” she shares. Gizelle used to come here often after her experience of violence, a ritual. After leaving campus and now returning to finish her last course, her goal is to reclaim

her belonging to this campus. The institution harbors a painful history for her, but nature has taught her otherwise. As she looked around the garden, she shared,

Being a survivor, all you have is yourself sometimes. A lot of the time we are reduced to our bodies, sometimes, you'll resent your body, and you'll feel like it's not yours. But I think connecting with nature, connecting with this space and other campus survivors, you're feeling like you're not limited to your body.

I ask her how she feels now and what healing and this place means for her. She shares,

Now I walk about standing up straight, feeling comfortable taking up space, versus years ago. But even some days still, I don't. Some days I'll just want to hide. But it's been about feeling comfortable in my own skin. I tell myself, I belong here.

We spent another hour in the garden. She pointed out and taught me patiently about the different flowers that were falling amid a chilly winter on campus. I learned many things about Gizelle, the garden, its inhabitants, and its healing power that day.

Gizelle's vignette provides insight into how concrete and metaphysical emergence geographies continue to support healing and persistence on- and off-campus. The garden is a concrete place that Gizelle frequented and will continue to frequent as she completes her academic journey on campus. The garden for Gizelle harbors possibilities and "daily rituals that create futures" as Harjo (2019) mentions (p. 213). Surrounded by trees, green grass, and other plant relatives, Gizelle engages with land and water-based healing to regulate her body, mind, and spirit amidst the chaos and uncertainty that surrounds her.

Many campus survivors, like Gizelle, engage radical healing in concrete spaces of nature and the lessons that plants and animals teach us. "Plants teach resistance," Adri shares, adding:

For example, when I see the plants on campus I can relate to them; many were brought and planted here, it's not their native habitat but they are surviving. They are figuring out how to grow, how to survive, they are resisting and adapting. I'm not from here [campus] but we're trying to survive, I relate to plants in that way.

Similar to Adri, other campus survivors shared that concrete geographies like gardens and green spaces allow them to learn about sacred lessons of change and transformation through simply observing, walking through and being in relation with a particular plant on campus. Maya shares:

See this palm right here [as she points to one palm in the garden], those little stick things on top of the palm, they weren't that tall last time I was here. Healing for me is like that...a person can't really come back in the same way because of what happened. This plant will never be the exact same as the first time I saw it or the second time, but at its core, it's the same plant, the same feeling and the same vibe and it will keep changing. And that doesn't make it any better or worse.

Concrete geographies offer campus survivors spaces of nurture, cultivation and body-regulation that facilitate inwardness and reflection in community with other living things.

Gizelle and other campus survivors keep an active relationship with parents, grandparents, and ancestors in the garden as they draw upon them in memory to actively remind them of home, a “safe space of love and support.” Gizelle described her experience of feeling isolated and small on a large campus and at the same time “feeling like everyone was watching her.” She said that, now, she does not feel alone in this feeling as she has built community with other survivors who also feel the same way. In Gizelle’s case, her *lineage and relationality* is the metaphysical space that enacts futurity. She can feel and channel “energy” and the “energy of others,” including survivors, to ground, connect, and minimize the impacts of trauma responses. The practice of going inward to resource spirituality and relationships with land speaks to her commitment to radical healing in action. Participants shared similar stories of their grandparents when sitting in their spaces of healing. Maya shared that her healing space on campus reminds her of her grandmother’s ability to use ancestral knowledge and practice to help plants grow—memories of rituals that she uses to resource her grandmother’s assertiveness and wishes for herself:

My grandma will tie ribbons on trees as an invitation and wish to bear more fruit, it just so happened that the following year the tree gave an intense amount of fruit and we had to share the harvest with so many families so they wouldn’t go to waste. She reminds me to ask for my fruits.

For Maya and others, concrete spaces like gardens, cultural centers and other spaces of lineages allow students to channel ancestral resilience, a sense of purpose, and belonging to metaphysical geographies. Minoritized students continue to enact and create present and future spaces of healing on campus cultivated and practiced in multiple geographies. There are Minoritized students that do not engage in radical healing on campus due to the continuous violence on campus. They enact healing futurity in other ways which we can learn from the last vignette.

### ***Karla: “Healing is Not Here, But There”***

Karla arrived at a local park near campus as she was getting off a phone call with her mother. Her mom lives in Central America, she shares. “I’m so sorry I’m late, I couldn’t get off the phone with my ma [mother], you know how it is.” She giggles at my head nod as she puts the phone in her pocket. I laughed knowing very well how hard it is to end a phone call with my ma. She’s always asking me last-minute questions about what I ate today, how class went, chisme [gossip] she heard from my Tia [aunt]. Karla is a fourth-year student hoping to graduate in the next several months. As a first-generation immigrant and formerly undocumented student on campus, her experiences of violence and healing are complicated in relation to space and place on campus. We find a bench near the kids’ playground and start people watching. “I love people watching. Watching kids play, hearing people talk to each other and wondering what

they are thinking is something that I find myself doing a lot,” she shares as we sit and hear the voices of little kids playing from afar. “It reminds me of my primos [cousins] back home and of my childhood, I think that’s why I do it.” As we continue to chat, Karla shares with me what it has been like being a student on campus. She describes her sense of belonging to campus as being very limited due to the geographical, siloed, and structural elements and history of the institution. “The campus doesn’t feel safe to me or like I belong. I could never feel connected to school spirit stuff because everything is so white, expensive, and feels so foreign to me.” Recalling our previous conversations about her prior experiences with violence and reporting, she mentioned that when she heard about campus sexual violence resources, she hesitated. “I don’t trust the campus police, especially when it comes to being undocumented. The hiding of reports, and the connections to ICE” were all reasons for her not trusting the university. These feelings were more impacted when student organizations and certain experiences in the classroom had her “choose” what identities she had to forefront. “I didn’t belong to a Latinx org because they didn’t want to include my Queer identity, so I dropped out.” As we chatted about her queer identity and where she feels the safest, she shared that her healing space is back home, in Central America. Now that she has residency, traveling back home to the warm, tropical place where her family and community reside is where she feels safest and happy. “Walking down the streets of my pueblo [town], seeing the neighbors that watched me grow, even if I don’t remember them, it makes me feel good.” Listening to music and dancing is where she feels the freest to heal. She finds small spaces for healing at her local parks and outside with trees, where she phone calls her mother and other siblings when she needs support. We chatted for some time before her phone rang again, this time, her sister calling her. Another relationship she cultivates and enacts often when she needs to feel love thousands of miles away.

Karla’s vignette and experience with healing off campus gives us insight into what Harjo (2019) mentions as practicing futurity and not waiting for “institutions” to give permission to engage in community healing in diaspora. Dache-Gerbino (2017) states that structural racism and neoliberal universities create environments that can disconnect and Minoritize Students of Color in the context of campus climate and sense of belonging. Karla is a student impacted by these dynamics along with her experiences of lateral violence from her fellow Latinx peers in excluding her queer identity. She and other students actively choose to engage in a combination of *Emergence Geographies* to resist the feelings of Minoritization from the institution itself and instead calls on the resources, places, and relationships that empower her to feel connected to a place that physically is thousands of miles away. For Karla, local community parks and green spaces remind her of the tropical places back home where fruits like mangos and platanos grow in her abuelito’s backyard and where lush green scenery makes her feel at peace and held in the warm air. Karla enacts a futurity connected to her lineage of ancestral space, and resources memories to make her feel connected and motivated to continue to work toward her academic goals and holistic wellness.

Campus survivors in their stories enacted futurity to cope, process and navigate ongoing minoritization due to systemic violence. Sofia, a queer Indigenous campus survivor, experienced chronic sexual harassment beginning at a young age that has



continued into her college years. Sharing that her body was sexualized from a very young age and experiencing ongoing sexual harassment on campus from other students and non-students, her body has become a concrete geography of safety noting that she cannot control the violence that occurs around her:

Reacclimating myself back to my body again has helped a lot and doing things that give power back to myself is important. I love and value my body, myself, all of me. I love me for who I am. Being compassionate to myself has been a really, really big thing that I've been working on.

Other campus survivors shared similar stories about engaging in body rituals that move feeling through the body, like dancing, helped them reclaim a sense of intimacy, micro decision making, and agency is how their bodies moved and felt emotions. Emergence geographies are enacted by Minoritized campus survivors to heal multiple dimensions of their holistic selves.

### **FUTURES FOR MINORITIZED CAMPUS SEXUAL VIOLENCE SURVIVORS**

There are several research and practical implications for utilizing Indigenous Futurity and other forms of futurity to address sexual violence in higher education. As seen through the above three vignettes, *Emergence Geographies* as a tool of Futurity provides a strengths-based and holistic analysis for how students are relationally creating space and place in the context of their healing, identities, and lived experiences as students. The framework of *Emergence Geographies* can provide a past and historical analysis of racialization and experiences of violence for Minoritized students. It situates their experiences to campus-specific historical legacies that shape institutional and structural climate, while also centering the voices of the most Minoritized of students in campus responses. Harjo (2019) tells us that in community building for Futurity, we must elevate vulnerable voices. Through this practice of elevating vulnerable voices, we can discover resources and relations that are working to create better futures and identify spaces and places that can help support future visions of wellness and hope for everyone.

Continuing to research space and place, futurity, and radical healing for Minoritized campus sexual violence survivors is critical to understanding how to prevent sexual violence in higher education and co-create spaces of persistence that actively build futures for many. It is also critical to further understand how centering healing can transform and sustain researchers who are survivors themselves (Hurtado & García, 2023). As I participated and connected with students in their healing spaces, I quickly realized how disconnected my body and mind could become navigating academic spaces in higher education. After finishing interviews with students outdoors and in gardens, I was more attuned to my own physical changes in moods and wellbeing, having experienced the holistic regulation that students were discussing in real time—a methodology of healing and lineage of wellness. Research methodologies that promote healing and seek holistic understanding of relationships between individuals, communities, and living relatives (i.e. plants, animals, etc.) can provide

restorative, generational, and lasting impacts on outcomes for student survivors, researchers and practitioners (Karunaratne, 2023c).

Indigenous Futurity and other forms of futurity create spaces for individuals to center, channel, and cultivate relationships to their plant, animal, and ancestral relations. Since white supremacy and neoliberalism shape campus climate profoundly, centering identity and environments in which Minoritized campus sexual violence occurs allows for critical scholars to explore how current policy and organizational structures in higher education continue to be implicated in the process of settler-colonialism (Dache-Gerbino, 2017). Through further analysis of the positionalities of these relationships, we challenge colonial violence by naming the spaces, places, and specific histories tied to Indigenous People in particular institutional contexts. In our pursuit of elevating holistic healing spaces and futures, researchers can provide further evidence to support the sovereignty of Indigenous People as rightful stewards of the lands institutions of higher education are built on while engaging in healing and community care.

Exploring practical implications for sexual violence response in higher education through a futurity lens has much to gain from the vision and relational conceptualizations that students are engaging in their search for healing, connection, and place-making on campuses. An analysis of *Emergence Geographies* of student survivors can give campus advocates and practitioners opportunities to better develop interventions grounded in identity, community, lineages of activism, and culturally affirming support. Title IX and other compliance-based structures can begin to expand their conceptualizations of the types of interim measures, support, and accommodations Minoritized students need to persist on campus. Practitioners can create spaces that engage student survivors to care for living beings through planting, working with animals, and reconnecting with nature places on campus. For example, in my previous role as a campus advocate and preventionist, we often co-created spaces with cultural departments and the campus community garden to introduce students and survivors to local native plant knowledge while learning about self-care, healthy relationships, and community care with each other. We actively touched soil (earthing) and harvested fruits and vegetables for sustenance together. In the vignette mentioned earlier, supporting the healing futurity of Karla may have looked like the institution providing financial support to allow her to travel back to her home country for cultural healing support from her community during her time on campus while simultaneously working to improve campus climate for Latinx and Queer students. It is critical that as we co-create and highlight the spaces and places of healing of students, we do not erase and continue to perpetuate the displacement of Indigenous People and their connection to ancestral lands on college campuses. Harjo and other Indigenous scholars urge us to continue to center relationality in the creation of these spatialities and community responses.

### **For Ancestors, Ourselves, and Descendants**

As students and I ended our conversations in their physical places of healing, they shared with me their reasons for participating in a study about healing from sexual violence regarding space and place. I share these words as an offering—visions of

current radical healing futures: “I’m healing for my future kids, future generations, for my ancestors and for my family. I don’t want them to hurt in the ways that I do,” shared Gizelle. She participated in the study “to show other survivors that they matter, our stories matter, that we are not alone and we’re here to help make campus safer by making ourselves visible. *We have power together.*” Minoritized students healing from sexual violence are living out futures collectively. Harjo (2019) shares that “we must see and make visible the profound and spectacular ways in which community is doing and being (acting, performing), and we must refuse to accept outsiders’ characterization of a community as apathetic” (p. 218). What Harjo and other scholars teach me about futurity is that Minoritized student sexual violence survivors are healing for themselves, their ancestors, and their descendants. They are using the *past* and *present* to enact change for *future* students and campus survivors *now*, “a future of freedom, emancipation and empowerment” (Harjo, 2019, p. 218) that *spirals to the stars* and transgresses generations, space, and time.

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