

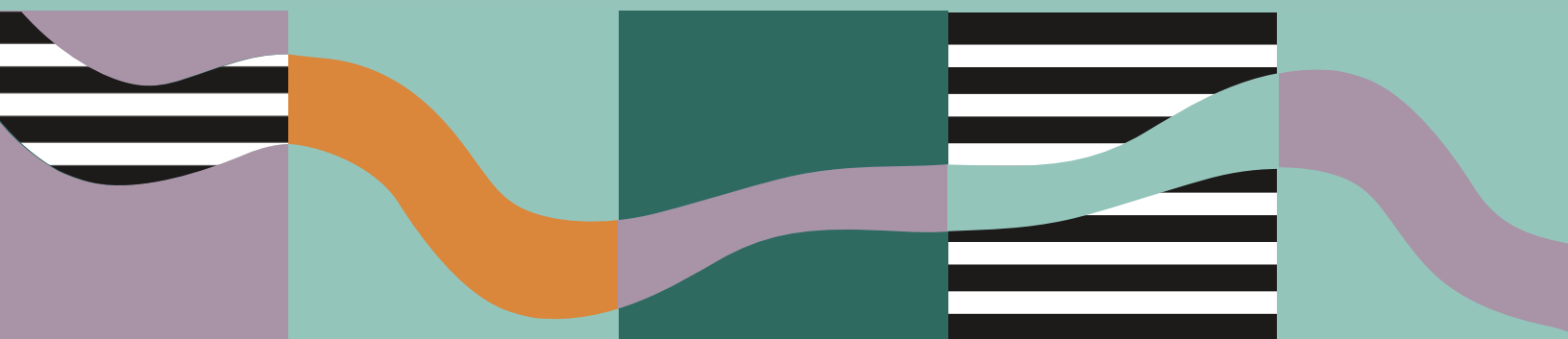
SEPHORA + NWAC

# HONOURING INDIGENOUS BEAUTY

**2021**

REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON INDIGENOUS BEAUTY

Hosted by the Native Women's Association Of Canada and Sephora on  
October 19, 2021



NATIVE WOMEN'S  
ASSOCIATION OF CANADA

+

SEPHORA CANADA

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## THE SEPHORA AND NWAC INDIGENOUS BEAUTY PROJECT

Report on Findings Related to Best Practices and Investment Opportunities for Indigenous Women



# INTRODUCTION

On October 19, 2021, the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) began a conversation on Indigenous beauty—an historic conversation that will contribute to decolonizing beauty standards and uplifting Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. Input from the conversation will also help shape a deeper understanding of ways to help heal Indigenous women who experience issues around self-esteem and trauma.

The findings of the Roundtable, outlined in this report, are striking. Throughout the Roundtable, we heard from Indigenous women and gender-diverse people about their experiences and identified a reoccurring theme: Indigenous women and gender-diverse people are negatively impacted by colonial beauty standards and feel that they are poorly portrayed in the media and in marketing campaigns. We also found that Indigenous beauty cannot be portrayed in an “one-size-fits-all” approach—it must represent the diversity of Indigenous cultures and experiences.

The first National Roundtable on Indigenous Beauty was co-hosted by NWAC and Sephora Canada in an effort to understand how Indigenous women and gender-diverse people perceive their own beauty and how depictions of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people by mainstream society can be changed to better represent the diversity of Indigenous beauty and to more accurately portray Indigenous women.

The concept of hosting a national roundtable came about because Sephora, a national upscale retailer of

personal care and beauty products, included in its long-running We Belong To Something Beautiful campaign a video portraying the beauty of Indigenous women to mark Indigenous History Month. This campaign was the first campaign dedicated to National Indigenous History Month and, overall, received a positive response. However, through this campaign, Sephora also recognized the need to enhance opportunities for further representation. In feedback from the campaign, Sephora was told that Métis women, Afro-Indigenous women, and gender-diverse people, as well as plus-sized and disability communities, did not see themselves reflected in the advertising campaign. This response called for the diversity of Indigenous identity and beauty to be better recognized.

Subsequently, Sephora Canada and NWAC held a meeting to discuss the campaign in attempts to learn what could be done better, and what the beauty industry in general needs to know, as it attempts to meet the needs and expectations of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. After discussions, it was decided to host the Roundtable, the first of its kind ever organized in Canada.

The Calls for Justice outlined in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) called upon the media to ensure authentic and appropriate representation of Indigenous women. And it called for all Canadians to create time and space for relationships that support and embrace differences with kindness, love, and respect.



## The findings of the Roundtable will build on the work of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG).

This Roundtable may ultimately serve as a foundation for future media campaigns, thus ensuring that representations of Indigenous beauty in the media and marketing campaigns are reflections of the beauty that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people see in themselves and in each other. In addition, NWAC is committed to continuing this conversation and acting to decolonize beauty standards. Using the initial input from this Roundtable, NWAC will hold more focus groups on Indigenous beauty and will introduce programs through the Resiliency Lodge to provide support to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

This report will describe the findings of the Roundtable and outline recommendations for moving forward in decolonizing beauty standards and ensuring a diverse representation of Indigenous beauty to ensure future representations of Indigenous beauty by mainstream society encompasses the diversity and beauty of Indigenous identity, culture, and resiliency.



# BACKGROUND

## HISTORIC REPRESENTATIONS OF INDIGENOUS BEAUTY



The National Inquiry into MMIWG outlined, in detail, the historic sexist and racist representations of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ people.

Rooted in colonialism, “the Euro-constructed image of Indigenous women mirrors Western attitudes toward land of ‘control, conquest, possession, and exploitation’” (MMIWG, 2019, p. 386). Early colonial representations of Indigenous women were rooted in exoticism, hyper-sexualization, and assimilation in the ‘Queen’ and ‘Indian Princess’ stereotypes that colonial powers attributed to Indigenous women. However, as Indigenous Peoples began to resist colonization, this narrative quickly shifted. Indigenous women were portrayed as ‘Squaw’, literally meaning dirty and unworthy. This stereotype was used to justify the subjugation of Indigenous women, the removal of children through the Canada’s child welfare system, and violence.

Through these stereotypes, regardless of which one is being projected onto Indigenous women, girls, or gender-diverse people, “they are sexualized and deemed accessible to white European men for consumption” (Ibid). The media, the National Inquiry found, continued to perpetuate these tropes through the misrepresentation and under-representation of Indigenous women, girls, and gender-diverse people in the media. These stereotypes continue to cause harm to Indigenous women to this day.

The combination of negative representations of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people and a lack of media representation have contributed to the ongoing genocide of MMIWG2S. It is therefore paramount that we see increased representations of Indigenous beauty in the media that are led by Indigenous women and gender-diverse people and seek to change existing narratives.

This need is reflected in the National Inquiry’s Calls for Justice—and there is a role for everyone in this discussion. The government, media outlets, corporations—and all Canadians have a hand in implementing the Calls for Justice. [Please see below for key actions:](#)

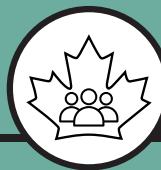




## ALL GOVERNMENTS

**2.7** We call upon all governments to adequately fund and support Indigenous-led initiatives to improve the representation of Indigenous Peoples in media and pop culture.

**18.19** We call upon all governments, service providers, and educators to educate the public on the history of non-gender binary people in Indigenous societies, and to use media, including social media, as a way to build awareness and understanding of 2SLGBTQIA issues.



## ALL CANADIANS

**15.2** Decolonize by learning the true history of Canada and Indigenous history in your local area. Learn about and celebrate Indigenous Peoples' history, cultures, pride, and diversity, acknowledging the land you live on and its importance to local Indigenous communities, both historically and today.

**15.4** Using what you have learned and some of the resources suggested, become a strong ally. Being a strong ally involves more than just tolerance; it means actively working to break down barriers and to support others in every relationship and encounter in which you participate.



## ALL MEDIA OUTLETS & CORPORATIONS

**6.1** We call upon all media, news corporations, and outlets, and, in particular, government-funded corporations and outlets; media unions, associations, and guilds; academic institutions teaching journalism or media courses; governments that fund such corporations, outlets, and academic institutions; and journalists, reporters, bloggers, film producers, writers, musicians, music producers, and, more generally, people working in the entertainment industry to take decolonizing approaches to their work and publications in order to educate all Canadians about Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people. More specifically, this includes the following:



- i. Ensure authentic and appropriate representation of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people, inclusive of diverse Indigenous cultural backgrounds, in order to address negative and discriminatory stereotypes.
- ii. Support Indigenous people sharing their stories, from their perspectives, free of bias, discrimination, and false assumptions, and in a trauma-informed and culturally sensitive way.
- iii. Increase the number of Indigenous people in broadcasting, television, and radio, and in journalist, reporter, producer, and executive positions in the entertainment industry, including, and not limited to, by:
  - providing educational and training opportunities aimed at Indigenous inclusion; and
  - providing scholarships and grants aimed at Indigenous inclusion in media, film, and music industry-related fields of study.
- iv. Take proactive steps to break down the stereotypes that hypersexualize and demean Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA people, and to end practices that perpetuate myths that Indigenous women are more sexually available and "less worthy" than non-Indigenous women because of their race or background.

# ROUNDTABLE

## WHAT WE HEARD



It was evident prior to this Roundtable that there is an urgency in addressing the misrepresentation and under-representation of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people in the media.

What we heard at the Roundtable on Indigenous beauty reinforced this sense of urgency.

The Roundtable on October 19, 2021, drew over 200 participants from across Canada with diverse backgrounds. At the Roundtable, there was representation from First Nations, Métis, Inuit, Afro-Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. Over the course of the Roundtable, we also heard from Indigenous women and gender-diverse people of varying ages, sizes, skin tones, and lived experiences. All the women and gender-diverse people we heard from throughout the course of discussion held unique stories and provided valuable insight on the diversity of Indigenous beauty.

Although the conversation was wide-ranging, there were some topics where attendees consistently outlined similar experiences and recommendations. It became clear, over the course of the two-hour discussion, that the impact of mainstream society's interpretation of beauty has weighed heavily on the self-perceptions of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. Much needs to be done to ensure representations of Indigenous beauty do not continue to perpetuate this harm.



Below are some key points made at the Roundtable. These comments were voiced consistently throughout the two-hour dialogue:



1. Because of colonial beauty standards and portrayals of beauty in the media, Indigenous women and gender-diverse people struggled with seeing themselves reflected in traditional beauty standards when they were young.
2. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people represent a broad spectrum of skin tones, backgrounds, racial intersectionality and body types - there is no singular form of beauty. Their beauty is diverse.
3. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people experience discrimination because of the way they look.
4. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people value the beauty of their Elders and want to see their beauty represented in mainstream society.
5. Many Indigenous women and gender-diverse people were made to feel they were not Indigenous enough because of their looks.
6. Beauty comes from within.
7. Beauty is found in Indigenous cultures.
8. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people want to see diversity in advertising and campaigns that depict Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.



## IN THE WORDS OF PARTICIPANTS

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"What beauty means to me would be healing within and around. And, embracing all our scars and our trauma, and moving forward through that in a good way."

"I just wanted to stress for those who don't have the voice, or for those who are scared to just reach out, to be your Indigenous self no matter what you look like."



"I'm very Indigenous presenting which is good when I'm with Indigenous people, but then also I get the racism from the Indigenous community because I am Afro-Indigenous. So it's almost like I'm not Indigenous enough. But I don't take that on myself. I think that's where the beauty comes in, where I do wear my beadwork, and my ribbon skirts, and I have my long hair. And when I do those things I'm more outwardly showing the love and desire that I have for myself, the beauty."

"IT IS **IMPORTANT** FOR EVERYONE TO KNOW THAT **INDIGENOUS** LOOKS MANY DIFFERENT WAYS"



## IN THE WORDS OF PARTICIPANTS

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"It is important to show Indigenous beauty in an **AUTHENTIC WAY**. We must not sensationalize, we must acknowledge the past, while also showing resiliency and strength."

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**"INDIGENOUS BEAUTY IS DECOLONIZING CONVENTIONAL BEAUTY STANDARDS, ACKNOWLEDGING THAT BEAUTY DOES COME IN ALL SHAPES AND SIZES, ALL TYPES OF SKIN TONES, ALL TYPES OF HAIR."**

**"I THINK BEAUTY** is found in our experiences and if Sephora wants to showcase our Indigenous beauty I think it's important to showcase our matriarchs and our trailblazers. I believe those beautiful creases on a Kokum's face represent a life well lived and show experience. Seeing our people in their true element, either on the trapline or on the catwalk being their true self, that is beauty."

"Since I didn't see myself in media growing up, it's why I think it's so important for me to be so unapologetically Indigenous and Two-Spirit ... proudly Two-Spirit and queer, creating art on my face and on canvas that reflects my identity. The features I was once insecure about, I now use makeup

to draw attention to. My partner openly admires my dark brown eyes, and I wouldn't want it any other way. I made the journey to accept my role in my community. I love myself inside and out, and it truly shows."

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM

## WANEK HORN-MILLER



Waneek Horn-Miller, Mohawk from Kahnawake Mohawk Territory, is a retired Olympic athlete and activist. Waneek was a member of the Canadian women's water polo team that won a gold medal at the 1999 Pan American Games, and co-captained the Canadian team at the 2000 Sydney Olympics. Graduating from Carleton University in 2000 with a Bachelor of Arts, her water polo prowess also led to being recognized as Carleton's Women's

Athlete of the Year from 1994 through 1997.

Prior to her athletic career, Waneek first gained public attention while behind the lines of the Oka Crisis in 1990 when she was stabbed by a Canadian soldier's bayonet. This near-death experience was a turning point in her life, as the incident fuelled her dreams to compete at the Olympic Games.

After retiring as an athlete in 2008, Waneek began working with the Assembly of First Nations as the IndigenACTION Ambassador to develop a National Indigenous Sport, Fitness and Wellness Strategy that aimed to attract Aboriginal youth to higher education by building self-esteem and emphasizing a balance

between education and sport. She also was the assistant chef de mission for Team Canada at the 2015 PanAm Games.

Waneek is the host of her own health and wellness show on the ATPN network and tours the country as a motivational speaker. She is also an ambassador for Manitobah Mukluks, the world-famous Indigenous-owned footwear brand that has been worn by well-known models and actors. Recently, Waneek was named one of Canada's most influential women in sport by the Canadian Association for the Advancement for Women and Sport and Physical Activity.

## HERE IS WHAT WANEK HAD TO SAY AT THE ROUNDTABLE ON INDIGENOUS BEAUTY:

**ONE OF THE GREATEST** things I think about being an Indigenous woman is being raised among women and families of women who understand that beauty is something that only grows with age, and grows and grows ... I've always felt bad about the fact that, in the non-Indigenous world you're most beautiful when you're in your 20's and then it is kind of like a flower that's going away over generations and over the years. Whereas I feel very lucky that we do honour the beauty of our Elders. So, I love the fact that this discussion is being led and facilitated by our beautiful Elders.

Ever since I was a little kid, I've had short hair because I was an Olympic athlete and I spent six hours a day in the pool. Having long hair wasn't feasible, and my mother kept my hair short all the time. And I would get made fun of and called all these things, and she would say, 'you know what, you're going to decide what flavour of Native you're going to be, you're going to create your own new flavour.' And I always remembered that we have that ability to create that flavour. How you're going to reflect who you are as a Mohawk is what you do, your actions that we walk in this world.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM

## EDLER ALMA BROOKS

Elder Alma Brooks is a Maliseet Grandmother from St. Mary's First Nation in New Brunswick who has been working with NWAC's Resiliency Lodge as an Elder providing counselling and support to Indigenous women. Elder Alma was an elected Band Councillor prior to working with the Maliseet Grand Council and the Wabanaki Confederacy. Elder Alma was also acting President of the New Brunswick Native Council for 18 years. Elder Alma's work is informed by traditional ways of

knowing, including advocacy work to protect local lands and waters from environmental threats and providing support through traditional knowledge and practices. This has led her to participate in raising funds for the Wabanaki Environmental Defence Fund, and to taking part in forums such as the Honouring Indigenous Women's Wisdom Delegation to the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues (UNPFII) and the KAIROS Gendered Impact: Indigenous Women and Resource Extraction Symposium.



### ELDER ALMA SPOKE ABOUT INDIGENOUS BEAUTY AT THE ROUNDTABLE, SAYING:

**I BELIEVE** that the ideal state of health, well-being, and ultimately beauty for Native women requires a close connection to the Earth and living in harmony with the environment in which we find ourselves. Colonization has done a number. They put us through a meat grinder. And so it's not surprising to come across some of the conditions we find in our

community today, which require a process of really reprogramming ourselves ... We were put here for a reason; we will have a purpose here. Our well-being, our inner beauty, depends on what we think about ourselves. So I think that's where we have to begin. And that will be reflected in the outer beauty, by both young and old women.

Over the course of the Roundtable, we heard many recommendations for moving forward in decolonizing beauty standards and ensuring a diverse representation of Indigenous beauty. We have compiled all recommendations into core recommendations for representing Indigenous beauty in mainstream media:

## 1. Representation of Indigenous beauty must encompass the diversity of Indigenous cultures and experiences.



Seeing the power and beauty of our Elders reflected in future campaigns would be incredibly powerful.

There was an overwhelming call for diversity and inclusion in future campaigns that highlight Indigenous beauty. Participants called for increased representation of First Nations, Inuit, Métis, Afro-Indigenous, and 2SLGBTQQIA people—highlighting and celebrating the diversity of Indigenous cultures, communities, and experiences.

Participants also wanted to see the inclusion of varying ages, lived experiences, skin tones, and sizes. Ensuring that there is plus-sized representation and a celebration of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people of varying skin tones is essential. Further, there is a strong desire to celebrate Indigenous Elders. Seeing the power and beauty of our Elders reflected in future campaigns would be incredibly powerful.

Finally, participants have asked that the beauty of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who are apart of the disability community are celebrated in future campaigns. Celebrating the beauty of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people who live with disabilities is important to highlight, especially in efforts to break away from the one-size-fits-all approach of colonial beauty standards.

Indigenous women and gender-diverse people grew up without seeing themselves reflected in beauty campaigns. That needs to change. Indigenous women and gender-diverse people made it clear at the Roundtable that they want to see themselves represented in future campaigns on Indigenous beauty. This requires that future campaigns include a wide variety of Indigenous cultures, communities, sizes, skin tones, ages, and experiences that make up the definition of Indigenous beauty.

## 2. We must see Indigenous beauty, in all of its diversity, respected and honoured.



The celebration of Indigenous beauty we are experiencing today is powerful, but it was not always like this. In the past, colonial perceptions of beauty were imposed on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. We saw the harm this has caused to Indigenous women and gender-diverse people over the course of the Roundtable discussion.

Because of the harm these perceptions caused, discussions surrounding beauty can be difficult and it is even more important to approach campaigns highlighting Indigenous beauty with respect. Throughout the Roundtable, participants called for respect, both of colonial history, as well as of the diverse experiences of Indigenous women and gender-diverse people.

### 3. We must see increased representation of Indigenous beauty in the media.

Throughout the Roundtable, we heard Indigenous women and gender-diverse people requested increased representation of Indigenous beauty. It is important that Indigenous women and gender-diverse people see themselves reflected in the media. In order to see that, we need significantly more representation.

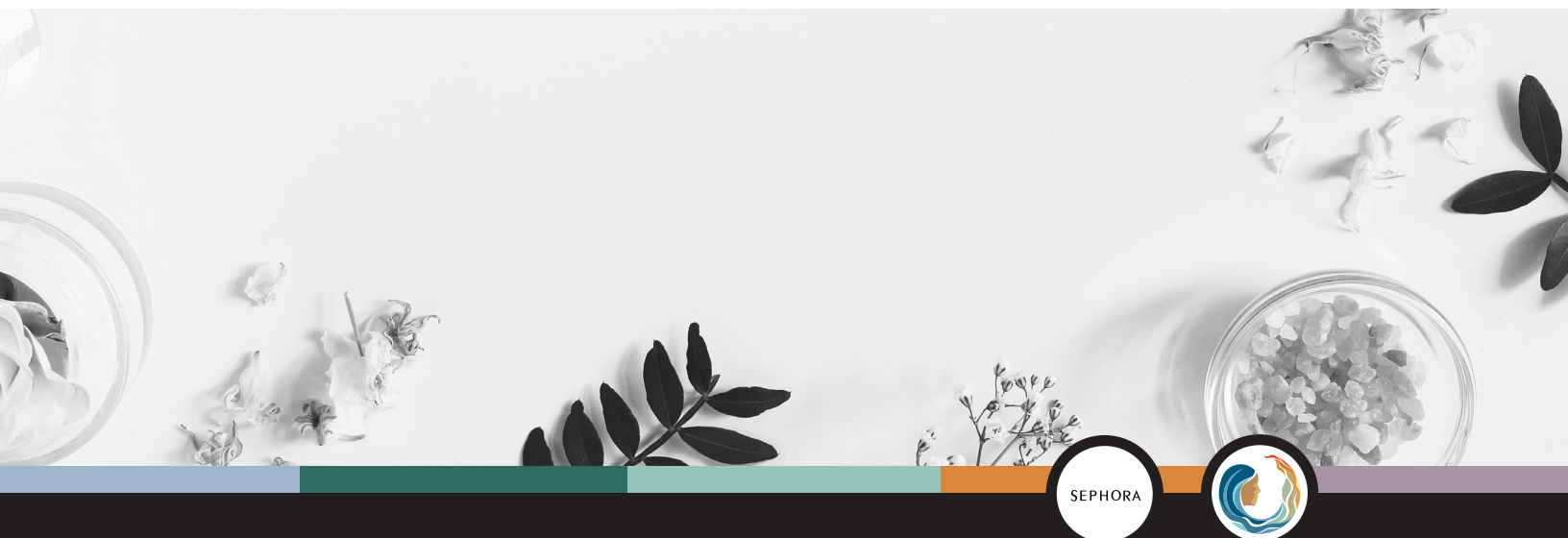
Increased representation also contributes to the erasure of colonial perceptions of beauty have had on Indigenous women and gender-diverse people. By changing the narrative and celebrating the diversity of Indigenous beauty, we can decolonize beauty standards together in order to prevent Indigenous women and gender-diverse people from experiencing racism and discrimination based on their appearance.

While this Roundtable engaged in an historic discussion, this is only the beginning. NWAC is committed to engaging at a deeper level on conversations surrounding Indigenous beauty and continuing this historic conversation.

NWAC is also committed to creating programs, led by our Elders, specifically on Indigenous beauty to enter into a healing journey with Indigenous women and gender-diverse people that addresses the harm done by colonial beauty standards. Run through our Resiliency Lodge, an Elder-led healing space, we will be able to provide support from coast to coast to coast.

Indigenous women and gender-diverse people are standing together to decolonize beauty standards and write our own definition of Indigenous beauty—one that accounts for a diversity of culture and experience.

*We look forward to continuing this historic conversation with you.*





What beauty means to me would be healing within and around. And, embracing all our scars and our trauma, and moving forward through that in a good way.

The word 'beauty' is defined by Merriam-Webster as the quality or aggregate of qualities in a person or a thing that gives pleasure to the senses or pleasurably exalts the mind or spirit. This definition leaves the meaning open to many interpretations of what can be beautiful. As an Indigenous woman in the 21st century, to put meaning to Indigenous beauty is to look at all aspects of what it means to be Indigenous. Because as we all know, no one of us is exactly the same despite having an identical background. Each one of us views the world in our own eyes, and this is my take on Indigenous beauty.

When I read the words, Indigenous beauty, what comes to mind is the defining face, carved from Mother Earth. It's the brown skin that wraps each and everyone of us to remind us that we come from the bountiful earth. I recall being the little chubby girl with a bad '90s haircut, who loves Barbies, trying to love herself in a colonized world that wasn't made for someone like her. When I think of the term Indigenous beauty, I think of the women who have come before me and those who will shine on after—my grandmother and her great-granddaughter. A woman who once had her braids cut as a child, and now here's a young girl who's born into a world that tells her it's okay to be herself, but that there is a right way to do it.

I feel content with myself and the world. I feel beautiful knowing I still stand today and I have a strong voice that can be used to make a difference.

I feel beautiful being surrounded by the men and women of our people who come in all forms. I feel beautiful knowing there are many versions of me that have grown with the world and still try to hold onto those values that our grandparents have instilled into our DNA.



Another aspect of Indigenous beauty I wish to touch upon are the modern-day visuals we have of beauty. Aesthetics or fashion are what the Western world has put on as high importance. As someone who has never taken an interest in makeup or clothes, nor has my mother, I feel an obligation to stop the cycle in its tracks and teach my daughter about fashion and beautification. There are many ways for her to style and glam herself without feeling insecure every time she's not wearing products or the cutest clothes. I want her to know that she is beautiful physically, spiritually, and mentally. I want her to know that it's okay to take a look of your own, as she has many role models for that lesson. Her goth aunties, gay uncles, straight brothers, and glam sisters will forever be there for her when she has a moment of weakness and feels that she doesn't belong or isn't beautiful enough. Her grandparents will still love her and make her feel welcome when she challenges their notions of simplicity. The world today is more than just a filter.

When we wear makeup, we see that visually in the mirror. When we put on our shoes and go out, how we feel inside is what really matters. So, with this relationship, is there any work around that kind of thing, that self-care, that self-image programs available?



Thank you for participating, putting this on, thank you for everyone involved. You can't say any of this without feeling it in the heart. You want to cry, but it's actually healing at the same time. Alma, growing up, for me, I didn't feel like I was beautiful because I didn't look Caucasian. We were all raised to think you had to look a certain way. I feel like everyone my age had those feelings. Not that you wanted to die, just that you didn't know how to cope either. It is very difficult to be in this environment and not have any support but now I feel like we do have more support. I didn't realize that I needed my own healing from that until I had my own daughter. She taught me so much I could never imagine actually. It's really hard to explain. I just want to say thank you to everyone.

This is an extremely emotional topic because it hits right at the core of you if you're being told by the world around you that you're not the definition of beauty and there's no way you can possibly attain it. You can't change the colour of your skin. You can't change any of that.



Indigenous is not a colour. Not all of us have brown skin, not all of us have brown eyes. Some of us have blue eyes, green eyes, and some of us are dark-skinned, with curly hair. Some of us are light-skinned with blonde hair. Indigenous is not a colour. I've always felt that way because some of us don't feel Indigenous enough, so we don't reach out to our spirits, our culture, our background because we're too scared that we don't look the part. We don't want to be known as someone who's looking for somewhere to be that they shouldn't be. I just wanted to stress that for those who don't have a voice or for those who are scared to just reach out, be yourself, be your Indigenous self, no matter what you look like.

### I FELT UNWORTHY FOR YEARS

My mother being a residential school survivor and knowing what was said to her, and knowing what was put into her head, and having her do that to me as well, I felt unworthy for years until I started picking up my bundles that I received as a young girl, my traditional bundles. Being Anishinaabe Ikwe in the Treaty Three area and so close to Winnipeg and the systemic racism that our women just feel every day, it took me a long time to find that beauty in myself. For me it is being Anishinaabe

and being connected to Mother Earth and being connected to our grandmother water and trying to walk in a good way, in tune with my teachings and in tune with carrying my bundles in a good way ...

I have a vision that our youth, someday, will never feel what our generation feels. And this is a good sign. It means having these discussions with mainstream society and media and embracing it. And that's how I feel our change will come. Sephora having taken the initiative to have this roundtable is really empowering for us, for Indigenous women.

Beauty to me is diversity. A lot of folks have said it before me, the way that our community looks is like an old United Colors of Benetton ad, and if we want to really present Indigenous communities in ads and things like that, there's people who look Asian, there's people who look white, there's dark skinned people like myself who look Indigenous. Not everyone's skin looks the same, so really highlighting the realness of the community to me is Indigenous beauty, and also taking into consideration our past. A lot of us like myself are intergenerational residential school survivors and so being able to see our Elders and seeing differently abled folks in our community reflected in ads is really helpful and important.

To me, I think beauty is the feeling you get when you put your beadwork and your moccasins on, and you're braiding your hair. I know I always feel so confident when I have my bling on and when my hair is braided. I think there is also beauty in our matriarchs and our Elders. It would be really awesome to have our Elders reflected in some ads. I think the resiliency and strength of our people to have gone through what we've been through, and now here we are and we're speaking with Sephora about Indigenous representation. I agree with what everyone else said about diversity. I think that's beautiful.

For me, beauty is about integrity and courage and shouldering the responsibility of that for our communities, to have the courage to do so. It's not so much about the result, but the means to get there. And a courage to show your colours, to show your voice, resiliency, and to be strong.

To me, Indigenous beauty is in the resistance and much of that resistance is a rejection of colonial white culture. We see that in the beauty of our Elders and our beading. Bear in mind, my resistance is on my Métis side. To me, it's pushing back on a conventional culture that tells us we have to look and act a certain way. It's not just resistance against white culture, it's also resistance within our own ranks of what's expected of someone who's Indigenous. I heard a lot of women who echoed the notion that not all Indigenous people are dark-skinned. That's true. We know that but that is also resistance; being who you are, embracing that part of yourself. Whether you are young, old, white, brown, or black, it doesn't matter. Indigeneity and beauty of Indigeneity is in resistance to what we are being told we have to be.




When I was at university ... I had lunch with my friend and she said, 'You are absolutely glowing.' She said, 'I can't figure out what it is, but you are just reverberating your aura, you're shining.' And I thought, 'Wow, I wonder what that is.' And then I realized later, it's kindness. It's that kindness that comes from deep within our ancestral DNA that makes a person beautiful. It's just that one simple thing.

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I would like to speak on the part of dark-skinned Natives. I'm very dark skinned. I've always been bullied since I was a young girl to pretty much this age — I'm 33 years old — it took me many years, probably not until when I was 18, that I started accepting that. Yes, I'm a dark-skinned Native. I'm still going to go walking out there proud with my dark skin; my daughter is also dark-skinned.

To me it doesn't matter about the looks. One big thing about Indigenous beauty is what I look for in everybody, their spirit. Once I notice a person has a beautiful spirit, then anything about them that I see looks beautiful to me. I just started wearing beaded earrings, ribbon skirts, and a kokum scarf.



I'm really big on encouraging the youth, especially the Two-Spirit youth, to figure out who your spirit is and from there, you can be who you want. That encourages you to be beautiful. If you are at peace with who you are. I'm the type of person who looks for respect rather than attention. If you're beautiful wearing all makeup, if you're beautiful wearing less clothes, I'm praying that they have peace inside and that it's not so much for attention but more out of respect. I like to encourage if the person is beautiful.

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**D**o you guys remember when you bought your first Sephora product. And it went from drugstore brand to 'I made it. I got Sephora.' I got this Sephora lip gloss and I feel so bougie now and it really got me thinking about how we belong to something beautiful. It just got me thinking about the sense of belonging, which is basically gaining acceptance and attention and support. And just to be accepted as a member of a group. And I do know that the price point for products, it's a little bit up there and I just bring myself back to my 15-year-old self to say, 'Oh my goodness, I can't afford those products.' But I just so desperately wanted them because it meant that I would belong to this classier demographic who could afford Sephora makeup.

Indigenous beauty is uncolonizing conventional beauty standards and acknowledging that beauty does come in all shapes and sizes, all types of skin tones and hair types. I think it is important to acknowledge. But also, that acceptance. For myself, growing up as an Indigenous woman, I had many years where I wanted to look other than Indigenous. It took a long time for me to get back, to reconnect with my culture and my community. What I started realizing was that the acceptance, I had to reframe it from what I saw in the world. My acceptance when I was a young Indigenous woman was that I had to look a certain way. I had to be a certain way. I just did not fit the mold. I'm five-ten [5 foot 10 inches in height], plus-sized, and a little bit lighter than some of my sisters.

Eventually, I started realizing that acceptance starts from within myself, and I hope it goes into my community. My intent is to see beauty within my community, but I am also mindful of my impact.

As I continue on this journey, I want to make sure that beauty isn't just skin-deep or within ourselves, but also within our communities. Beauty within our culture is our community, our family, and our nationhood. I think that is important to say.



It took a long time to be where I am right now, where I am comfortable in my skin. I no longer try to fit into what is accepted into mainstream society. I try to find things that work for me now. I use different products in a different way than another person would because of the way my hair and my skin is.

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**I HAD TO GO THROUGH DECOLONIZATION** coming up to my 40th birthday because I was having a lot of anxiety about turning 40. Society tells us that our value as women is tied to our physical appearance or our aesthetics, which is not true. I had to call myself out on that and start looking at it through an Indigenous viewpoint.

Our Elders are sacred. It is an honour, and our worth increases as we get older. For me, that was transformational in how I started looking at my own beauty. When I think about the most beautiful people I know, it has nothing to do with looks. I know that doesn't help a makeup company ad. They are really kind, respectful, authentic, and trustworthy people. They make me feel safe. They are strong and resilient. They live their life in a good and an authentic are healthy. They are constantly growing and evolving as people. Those are the people who I know in my life. That is what I strive to be. I don't strive to look a certain way.

I am a fitness person. Society tells us as women we need to be skinnier, not be too large, take up less space, be quieter, be less aggressive and confrontational. That is not true either. That is another decolonization process that I'm trying to be conscious of. It's okay to take up space, whether that's emotional or physical space.

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I wanted to share that growing up I felt bad about who I was and how I looked because I looked more white than what the typical Indigenous girl was supposed to look. I was told by the outside world that I wasn't Indigenous because I didn't look the part. I was the blond-haired, blue-eyed girl among others with darker skin, brown eyes, and black hair. That really hurt my soul. That was something that I carried with me over the years. It really affected my identity and how I saw myself. It took me years to tell people that I was Indigenous because it was something that I only told people that I really trusted. I knew that I would face the same racism that saw my sisters and aunties and others in my family face. I was told I could be spared because I didn't look like the typical Indigenous girl.

THAT  
REALLY  
HURT  
MY SOUL

Because I felt like I didn't I fit in, I didn't practice my culture.

It took me a long journey to healing to be proud of who I am, to be proud to be Indigenous inside and out, no matter what that looks like. Today, I really feel beautiful ... when I hear the drums playing, singing traditional songs, and teaching my daughter the teachings that were taught to me. I feel beautiful when I participate in our ceremonies and when I speak my language—something that I worked very hard to learn over the years. I now have more confidence to be proud of who I am, and I accept the way I look inside and out.

Speaking strictly to Sephora, I've never been in a Sephora store in my life. I've peeked in the store in the mall a few times, but I've never actually walked into a store because I didn't see myself in their products. I've never used their products. I'm hoping in the future, when women look at your stores and your online presence, that they will be able to see themselves and that beauty is the confidence, strength, and resilience that we possess to be proud of who we are.



Being a light-skinned Indigenous Ikwe, I never felt like I fit in anywhere. I was always told by my Indigenous peers that I was too white and by my non-Indigenous peers that I'm a dirty Indian. It was very hard to hear, to learn to love myself knowing I didn't fit anywhere. To this day, I am in counselling, working hard on my self-love. How we view ourselves has such a huge impact on our successes in life. I'm so thankful we are having this discussion, to become more self-aware.

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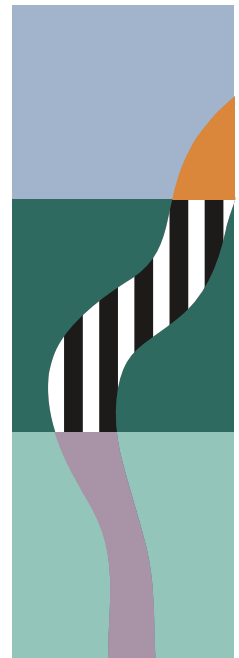
Growing up I didn't see many Indigenous faces in media or anywhere. When we did, it was widely talked about. Like when Susan Aglukark started singing, my family was all over it and how great it was. We didn't see any Indigenous representation in mainstream media until more recently. We are seeing more. I couldn't relate to those people because I didn't grow up like that. I grew up not feeling good about myself. I didn't feel good about myself until later in life.

I'm 40 years old. I feel more beautiful now than I did when I was younger and I was wearing makeup. I've learned that from confidence in myself, which comes from being honest and from being connected to Mother Earth, my children, my family, and my community.

This confidence comes from different things, like wearing my florals, making and wearing ribbon skirts with my family, and wearing beaded earrings. I knew I would be going into meetings with all non-Indigenous people and I said, 'I'm here. They want Indigenous and I will show them how Indigenous I am.' I would make the big, beautiful, beaded earrings and wear them proudly. I think we're going places, but I think we need more Indigenous representation in mainstream media.

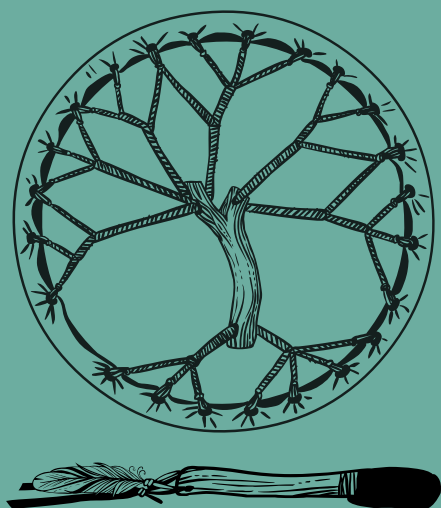
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Indigenous beauty is going back home to yourself. I can only speak for myself, but I feel like there are Indigenous folks who are disconnected and who may have not grown up around their traditions. When I was growing up, I had no idea where I fit in. I was an urban Indigenous foster care kid trying to figure out where I wanted to be in this world or how I could see myself. There were not many people like me, because there were not a lot of Indigenous people around.





**T**raditional Indigenous beauty was something I wanted so badly to be part of. Not seeing it be represented anywhere, and I felt ashamed of the stereotypes and everything I heard growing up, even from my own family. Lateral violence is unfortunately something that we have to deal with. Just trying to figure out our identity and walking in this world in a good way and looking towards traditional beauty as something that was from a long time ago, but you can't see yourself in it because you've never grown up in that identity.



When I say going back home to yourself, what I mean is forgetting all the noise, the distractions, and society's standards. I believe that beauty standards are ridiculous and unattainable. When we look to social media, where we see Sephora products, beautiful Indigenous and non-Indigenous women, and Two-Spirited folks, what beauty stands for now is not realistic. For me going back home is going back to that traditional sense of not the way it looks, but that feeling. When you are home to yourself, you get to celebrate your wins. You look in the mirror and you might see scars, light skin, dark skin, or different coloured eyes. It's about celebrating who you are in this moment and being proud of how you walk in this world. Traditionally, a lot of us have similar values and we go back to the land, traditions, and ceremony. These are all the things that connect us to who we are.

Going back home means celebrating you, your ancestors, and the future generations. It means starting to decolonize our mindset of what beauty is now, to understand how we can incorporate traditional beauty standards, and to feel proud of who we are today in this colonized world. It means growing up to walk in a good way. We need to show the younger generations a sense of pride, coming back home to themselves, and feeling that connection to the land, their culture, and ceremony. That's what Indigenous beauty represents.

A woman or a man in their regalia and looking proud is one way of representing Indigenous beauty, but it's also from the other side with people like me, who didn't feel like they fit into any of those groups, not even my own, and feeling like I belong. I think Indigenous beauty is incorporating traditional beauty and honouring people for who they are. Beauty is within, but until you can look within to find that beauty that we all hold inside, it is that light that carries us through. We all need to find that light that we have within. Once we're able to do that, we can shine and share that with the world. It is important to help others feel safe enough to find their own light.

## WE ALL NEED TO FIND THAT LIGHT THAT WE HAVE WITHIN.

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Growing up, I'm ambiguous, so I was able to move through society differently than some of my cousins who are mixed African-American with First Nations. I'm mixed African-American, First Nations, and a bit of Polish, but I'm much more fair-skinned. Growing up I didn't see myself, but now I don't see them.

The way they talk about it, they've faced lateral violence. I have cousins who are 12 and 13 living in our First Nations community in northern B.C., and they get picked on for the way they look because they don't see themselves. It's great to have diversity and inclusion within these beauty campaigns, but I would love to see younger people as well, like people who are 12 and 13 coming into their own. I think they should be able to see themselves now, not role models that they will grow into later.

Having more influencers is great, but I love the idea of having real people who may not be known as well, such as people who [are] artists, practice traditional ways, or are from the West Coast, not just from the Prairies or the East coast.

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In terms of physical appearance, I was raised to be modest and not draw attention to my appearance. However, physical appearance wasn't shunned or shamed because taking care of personal hygiene matters. I was taught that beauty is associated with moral character. Poor manners are ugly. Helping others and service to the community are beautiful.

In terms of how Indigenous women in society are viewed, there is a narrative that Indigenous women are victims and are widely portrayed in mass media as highly sexualized. While this narrative is common for women in general, there's a disproportionate number of murdered or missing Indigenous women. This means that projecting physical attractiveness as Indigenous women in our society poses a higher level of threat of physical or emotional harm. As a result of my upbringing, and in response to how Indigenous women are portrayed typically in the media, I ask Sephora to learn about the history of Indigenous Peoples and use their platform to educate others, thereby helping to change the narrative about what true beauty is and how to honour it respectfully.



I went to a school where there wasn't a lot of Indigenous kids. For me, being Afro-Indigenous, I hung out with the black students, and dressed and acted a certain way to fit in and to have a feeling of safety. I am very Indigenous presenting, which is good when I'm with Indigenous people, but I get racism from the Indigenous community because I'm Afro-Indigenous so it's almost like I'm not Indigenous enough. But I don't take that on myself. I think that's where the beauty comes in.

I wear my beadwork, ribbon skirts, and long hair. When I do those things, I am outwardly showing the love I have for myself. It's the beauty of sharing and showing outwards. I also know that because I'm Indigenous presenting, that's okay for me, but other people might not see that as Indigenous beauty.



Everyone has different body types, hair types, skin colour, so for me it's definitely the smile. It's the showing of the love. It's showing your colours and your beadwork. When I'm going to meetings, to work, and accepting awards, I always have my earrings and my medallion on. Even if I'm wearing more Western, colonial clothing, I'm still adding those colourings and those beadworks into my everyday appearance. It's really showing your spirit. Indigenous beauty is encouraging other women as well. It's seeing the beauty from our Elders, showing the long grey hair as strength and the years of knowledge that they have. That's so beautiful to me. It's allowing the matriarchal spirit to move within you and to show outwards.

More recently, I've been seeing more powerful Indigenous models and actors, which is nice because they look like me. I also know that I don't look like other Indigenous people. Maybe I can speak on Indigenous beauty because I have the stereotypical Indigenous look, but I know that's not for everyone. It was really important for me to come here today and say that it's not the beauty that's on the outside, but it's what's coming out and sharing your story and your true spirit. In the past, in the media, I didn't see anything. Or it was offensive, sexualized, or the cowboys and Indians. That's not how we wanted to portray ourselves. I'm very thankful for this movement. Indigenous beauty is powerful. Indigenous beauty is about Indigenous youth. It empowers me as an urban Indigenous youth.

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I don't see a lot of Indigenous women and men in commercials representing beauty products, not even older people. It's mostly young people with one body type. The whole world is not like that.

When I grew up, there wasn't anything out there to get into modelling and acting for Indigenous women. That's what I tried to do earlier on in my life, but there was nothing out there, so I just gave up. Now there is an acting school for Indigenous people, and Aboriginal people going on the fashion runway and making their own clothes. I think that's really awesome.

We need more Indigenous role models of any age and type of body.  
No matter how they look, they are still **BEAUTIFUL**.

Our women, our babies, girls, young girls, women, mothers, aunties, grandmothers, Elders, clan mothers

Our connections, our spirituality, our ceremonies, our traditional clothing, our beadwork, our baskets, our cradles and moss bags, our homes

Our nurturing, to our families, our babies to their sustenance from our bodies

Us as portals, that we hold the strength to bring beings from the spirit world to this

Our skin tones, from fair to dark

Our scars, our body art and tattoos, our long hair or short, our eyes

The way we walk on Earth, our journeys, our growth and healing

Our ways to give thanks

Our energies, our auras, our flaws

Our Two Spirits and trans as well

Our spirits who are low, who struggle with addiction and mental health

There is so much beauty among us, inside and out

*Nya:wen kowa*



## BEAUTY TO ME IS ... CONFIDENCE.

Confidence in oneself and abilities. This comes from feeling secure in many aspects of your life, such as culture, sociability, skills, talents, etc. Having a sense of identity and being able to strongly uphold that is where beauty truly lies. Being raised outside of my culture has resulted in a sense of not knowing who I truly am, and without knowing who I am, how can I feel proud and confident, and secure in my identity. Our Indigeneity has been challenged and questioned—and continues to be. Indigenous looks many different ways, and it is important for everyone to know that Indigenous looks many different ways. Having a picture in your mind of how Indigenous should look is damaging to us who don't look that way.



My remarks on beauty are that everyone is beautiful, and it does come from within. But when you can find that inner peace and find what makes you happy, you are even more beautiful. Be confident in who you are, and that strength will resonate for others as well, because they need it as well.

Yes, an ad featuring our elders and our youth in all their glory would be fabulous.

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**MY DAD AND GRANDMA RAISED ME.** My beauty was valued in the way they spent time with me. Grew up away from rez. Didn't know I was different till I was in kindergarten. When I found out I was Anishinaabwe, my teachings did not centre on beauty. They centred on experiences. Due to those experiences I learned to see the beauty not only in myself but in my environment. I love being outdoors any time of year because I am fascinated with Mother Earth's ability to change and come back year after year looking refreshed. So, for me, Indigenous beauty goes beyond the physical human body.

Growing up I was raised in a foster home. The home taught me to hate myself and to hate Indians. Beauty has been a struggle for me, but I am finding who I am now. I was not allowed to look at Indians as a part of who I am—social media I would dare to look at—or talk to anyone. If I did, I was abused.

A very long journey...

I'm now 40 and I have been really finding myself. Actively involved in Indigenous and NWAC; join in a lot of events. What I learn I teach others who want to learn more. I now know I have a beautiful soul and no one can take that from me ever.

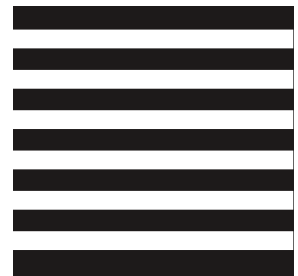
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In terms of physical appearance, I was raised to be modest and not draw attention to my appearance. However, physical appearance wasn't shunned or shamed because taking good care of personal hygiene matters! I was taught that "beauty" is associated with moral character. Poor manners and disrespect are "ugly" whereas helping others, service to the community, and humility are "beautiful".

In terms of how Indigenous women in Canadian society are viewed, there is a narrative that Indigenous women are victims and are widely portrayed in mass media as highly sexualized. While this narrative is common for women in general, there is a disproportionate number of murdered or missing Indigenous women. This means that projecting physical attractiveness as an Indigenous woman in our society poses a higher level of the threat of physical, emotional harm.

As a result of my upbringing, and in response to how Indigenous women are portrayed typically in the media, I ask Sephora specifically to learn about the history of Indigenous Peoples, then use their platform to educate others, thereby helping to change the narrative about what true beauty is and how to honour it respectfully.



I am Mohawk Turtle Clan from the Six Nations of the Grand River community. I was born in 1989 and grew up not having any visual Indigenous women role models. I have dark skin, hazel green eyes, and very curly hair. Many times I got the statement of 'well you don't look Native, you look more exotic, you look more foreign, you look like you're from the islands like Bahamas or Caribbean'. I grew up idolizing JLO, particularly in her role in the movie Selena; I always connected more to the Latino culture because of not having a role model, and also growing up in a time when we didn't have many Indigenous film, tv, etc. readily available to me. Growing up I also tanned very easily and would get teased by my own people about how dark I got and my grandma told me before she never wanted to tan or get darker because it was seen as dirty or going back to that notion of dirty Indians. As I grew up, I began to embody my curls and love the body I am in. I am still working on this, being confident and not coming off as too arrogant or self-centred and allowing my truest self to shine through.



I didn't like hearing the notion that because I looked "exotic." I couldn't be Native, but I also don't like that idea of being exotic because it puts us at risk, it objectifies us and puts our safety at risk.

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I don't think I realized until I lost my husband that beauty comes from within. It comes from our hearts, in how we heal, how we love, and how we forgive. When I was younger, I thought beauty was how I styled my hair, my body size, how I wore make up—realizing that was not important now that I am older.



**BEAUTY** is when your life has been turned upside down and you find the strength to continue and to find the beauty in life in yourself, in your thoughts, and in your prayers. I think beauty is found in our experiences and if Sephora wants to showcase our Indigenous beauty, I think it's important to showcase our matriarchs and our trailblazers. I believe those beautiful creases on a Kokum's face represent a life well lived and show experience. Seeing our people in their true element, either on the trapline or on the catwalk being their true self. That is beauty.



## BOOZHOO, WAABAANOOKWE INDIGO, WAUSHASK NDOODEM, MITAANJIGAMIING NDOONJI ...

Indigenous beauty to me means honouring our bodies as the physical vessel for our spiritual beings. I was always ridiculed by others for being skinny because our family was very impoverished growing up. But my personal beauty is in my smile. I never felt represented in traditional media because I am pale, blue-eyed, and have blonde hair. Speaking on this in a traditional sweat lodge, I was told the spirits don't see colour. I also wanted to mention that the medicine wheel embodies all four colours of humankind: red, white, black, and yellow. Miigwech.

Aanii, what an amazing workshop. I'm feeling a little too overwhelmed to speak but still wanted to share. I've had so many thoughts as people share their stories and experiences. I think about Disney's Pocahontas and that image of her standing, her side profile and hair blowing in the wind. She looked so strong, but not like me. Like many others have commented, I have lighter skin and was never "Native" enough but also too white. So always struggled with that. At the same time, realizing the actual history of the Pocahontas story and being angry with how it was romanticized. I also appreciated the comment of the use of filters and agree with the potential harm of them. Of photos being photoshopped to cut out arms, hips, cellulite, etc. As I've gotten older, I've become more confident in myself, but I still struggle with getting older, noticing my skin changing, jowls becoming more pronounced, etc. I really do appreciate how much more people are embracing their Indigeneity and owning their space. It's been very empowering. TikTok has also been an interesting medium in allowing Indigenous content creators to show their art, humour, journey, etc.

Indigenous beauty encompasses the many stories and cultural teachings of our Elders. It challenges colonial understandings of beauty and radiates diversity. It is inclusive of different skin colours, body types, sizes, ages, sexualities, and conceptions of beauty. It is grounded in holistic healing practices, and strengthened by inner courage, resistance, and resiliency. It surpasses common racial stereotypes and unapologetically challenges what is termed 'accepted' beauty standards.



As an Indigenous woman, I have always struggled to identify with beauty campaigns and ads. For decades, campaigns, ads, and media representations of Indigenous women have always been saturated by racial stereotypes created by the colonial state. I feared stereotypes, and instead of overcoming them, I denied them and the culture that defined me. It caused years of struggle and subsequent years of acceptance. These media portrayals have greatly impacted my ability to find myself, to establish my identity. Even now, I struggle to accept my strong Indigenous features as beautiful. While it is fair to say that all women are impacted by the intangible beauty standards set by social media, as an Indigenous women, I believe we are disproportionately impacted by these conceptions of beauty. The lack of diverse representation in media has had a lasting impact on our ability to accept our beauty. And for me, it has had an impact on my ability to proudly accept my culture, my identity, and my beauty.

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As an Indian residential school survivor (Muscoweqan), a human trafficking survivor, and a student in medical aesthetics and skin beauty, this Indigenous beauty roundtable webinar has brought more healing for me within. I honour every single Kwe who sat at this webinar roundtable. Gitchi-Megwiitch.

**INDIGENOUS BEAUTY** is the feeling you get when you do that little thing that makes you feel beautiful ... like cooking or gym or learning to hunt by your parents. I also feel beautiful when I wear my Indigenous bling or a little lipstick. I look forward to seeing what comes of this.

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It's an awesome start for Sephora to participate on this subject of indigenous beauty! Hopefully we can reach more people. It sounded to me like a very emotional subject! So many women have so much else to concern themselves! I know my grandmother didn't have a moment to dream of having a makeup kit! I don't envy women who can't leave the house without makeup! It just wasn't a priority in my upbringing!



The stories shared really resonated with me. I am also a fair Indigenous woman and relate to the stories shared about not fitting into a specific group, or as I have been told before, "I am able to walk both sides of the bridge." As a child, it was quite discouraging to feel as though I did not belong anywhere. Growing up with a mother who has dark skin, black hair, brown eyes, and myself as a blonde-haired, green-eyed girl. I would constantly get questioned, feeling as though I had to prove that I was Indigenous or that my mother was in fact my mother. In Western society, I would be made to feel defensive that I was not white enough.

Indigenous beauty to me means being your authentic self and embracing all aspects of yourself. I would like to thank you again for putting this event on. It was eye-opening as well as comforting knowing there are others like me who have felt the same discomfort. Indigenous is not colour, beauty is not society's standards. I am proud to be an Indigenous woman.

I am a 47-year-old mother of four children. My youngest is 14, she has spina bifida. This topic of beauty is something we are always challenged with because of social media, Western ideologies of beauty. I have always been aware that I have to teach my little girl about self-confidence. I have been a community leader, advocate, spokesperson for my fellow women from my Cree community. Raising a little girl who isn't always able to walk—she uses a wheelchair at times, but doesn't like to draw too much attention to her disability—has been extremely challenging at this time. One of the grandmother's (spirit guides) name is Wawesisò iskwew. She is the grandmother who nurtures our spirit to dress, to fix themselves up. This grandmother, I have learned to give offerings to her, so she can help my little girl. Self-confidence is very important to me. I dress in my finest clothing; I wear my jewellery with pride. Because I have to feel good, daily—to be able to deal with my responsibilities.






**THANK YOU** so much for allowing me to participate in this session. It has made me realize I am not alone. I am not your “typical” Indigenous woman. I have red hair, blue eyes, and light skin. And I do get hurt when I am told I am not Indigenous. I am looking forward to seeing how this roundtable discussion will help the “typical Indigenous look” be a thing of the past.

So far, I've had a wonderful time listening in; so many powerful conversations being had. My perspective comes from someone who is Cree, Two-Spirit, and from Treaty 8 territory. I am 24 and a self-taught makeup artist. My dream is to work in film and television for my craft, especially on Indigenous actors and models.

I am also quite passionate about media representation of Native people in general. I'll be honest, in media I've never really seen myself. I didn't connect with the stereotypical representations of Native people in media, but especially the ones being portrayed as jokes. I saw Native women being sexualized and seen as mythical, other-worldly beings with wind-blown hair, such as Pocahontas or Tiger Lilly from Peter Pan. They were seen as objects and trophies for the white male characters to claim. Since I didn't see myself in media growing up, it's why I think it's so important for me to be so unapologetically Indigenous and Two-Spirit. Looking back, I think subconsciously I felt I was being told I should be invisible, make myself small and not take up space. As a child I loved Barbies and Bratz dolls, dress-up, and playing with my mother's makeup kit. However, I didn't look like the other girls in my class who met more western standards of beauty. I was brown, had wild, dark curly hair, a downturned nose, brown eyes, and bushy eyebrows.



I found myself getting pushed into a tomboy role. I was told I couldn't like pink or pretty things. I discovered makeup and fell in love with the artistry of it when I was a teen. Though at first it may have been out of insecurity, I later truly began to appreciate the art form. I allowed myself to truly be who I am—proudly Two-Spirit and queer, creating art on my face and on canvas that reflects my identity. The features I was once insecure about, I now use makeup to draw attention to. My partner openly admires my dark brown eyes, and I wouldn't want it any other way. I made the journey to accept my role in my community. I love myself inside and out, and it truly shows. I unapologetically love feminine things and pink. I wear makeup every day regardless of my pronouns for that day. On days I am bare-faced, I do my skincare routine to nourish and cherish the beautiful features the Creator gifted me. I feel brave and protected when I'm wearing my makeup and a ribbon skirt with my beading. I feel like I've carved out my own space in society. I'm making a point to live my life as the person I wish I had seen on screen/print as a child. Hopefully, even one Native kid can see me in public and be inspired to express themselves through their makeup and style.



While I am appreciative of how Sephora is beginning to expand its representation of having Native models in its campaigns, I too echo the sentiment that I wish they could show more of us in the future: to have Indigenous models all year round instead of one month; to show us in all our different skin tones, hair types, and body sizes. Reducing our presence in their media to just one month can come off as performative and I truly hope the June campaign was the beginning for a positive change. I am choosing to remain optimistic for the future, though I appreciate the floor for open dialogue and our voices being heard. Indigenous isn't a one-size-fits-all. We are still here and deserve to be visible in media. I'm all here for companies wanting to be on the right side of history!

## THIS AFTERNOON WAS BEAUTIFUL.

Thankyou and NWAC for creating a safe space for everyone's words. I'm thankful for this discussion.

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Media spaces/representation has impacted me. I am a dancer, I always loved fashion and beauty, and living in Toronto I have always felt beautiful. It's my surroundings and people who try to fog my mindset and that's how I feel. I have brown/tan skin, born and raised in Toronto and the diversity the city it holds but and I suppose when I walk into a Sephora store or any store, is feeling at peace when I shop, and possibly even looking at the marketing and advertising within the store and even employees, customers to feel like I am not the only one or similar. I went into PR and media such as creative writing just so I can amplify and support Indigenous people and sisters. A lot of things is what is going on in current media is Tik Toks, and the beautiful regalia and jingle dresses. We are more than that. We often talk about walking in two worlds and when I go out into the world, depending on how I feel, oftentimes I decolonize my outfit whether it is using makeup or beaded jewellery. It's the medicine and Elders that guide me to walk a good path and how I am thinking about the 7 generations that are up and coming. I don't have any children yet, but I am constantly thinking about them but just by being Indigenous especially brown and black Indigenous because in the recent years we are just getting that in a couple of years—because young people are pushing forward for that representation.

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I think that beauty is reflected in media and art. Where art takes on an ethnographic presence, therefore it is important to show Indigenous beauty in an authentic way. We must not sensationalize, we must acknowledge the past, while also showing resiliency and strength. Indigenous beauty is authentic and strong. In reference to some comments made today: I believe that social media can have a positive effect on educating and producing change, especially around the perception of Indigenous culture and beauty. I felt a bit during the discussion there were a lot of negative comments on social media. While I do think there are damaging effects, I also think it can be a very helpful tool.



We are so happy that we were apart of the first roundtable discussion on Indigenous beauty. One topic we thought could have been discussed in a deeper context, when looking at the decolonization of beauty, is the inequity of being held to a different standard than non-Indigenous. More precisely, when we choose a more natural look, it can be perceived as laziness or being unkempt. We would like to see a portrayal of Indigenous women that shows resilient, strong, and multi-aged women.

I am Woodlands Cree from Treaty 6 territory. Listening in on the discussion today has made me feel really emotional because I felt in my heart on a deeper level, I grew up on reserve and was always teased for being light-skinned with green eyes and lighter hair. My father has dark skin, brown eyes, and brown hair, and my mother is light-skinned with dark hair and brown eyes, as well as my siblings. I was teased from community members as well as relatives. They would call me moonwawh, which translates to “white person”. Although I was bullied, I had always had a deep connection with my culture and grew up traditional.

My family moved to the city when I became a young teen, and I felt the beauty standard of the higher society and did not fit in. I always thought of myself as a rez girl. I was out of place in a big world —not being accepted on reserve and in the city. The past two years I have moved back home and reconnected with my family and community. I am pregnant at the moment and the most important thing to me is to raise my daughter in love and culture, to learn where she comes from and be accepted as a nihew iskwew. I have learned myself to be beautiful in my own way and my culture has really helped me accept that. I feel most beautiful in ceremony with my ribbon skirt on surrounded by my people and medicines. Beauty to me is to be connected to yourself in a loving, respectful way.



## AS A SIXTIES SCOOP SURVIVOR... I'M LEARNING TO LOVE MYSELF

First off, Indigenous beauty comes from within. Our kindness, our humility, our relationships to ourselves and our family, our nature. I think it's also about all sizes, all shapes, all different styles. It would be nice to highlight people, regular people like teachers or coaches or nurses. I think having Indigenous role models and breaking down stereotypes are important. I have lost a lot of my Indigenous culture and been learning about it and teaching it to my daughter. As a Sixties Scoop survivor, I've always felt bad about myself and wanted to be blonde and blue-eyed. I feel bad that I did that to myself for so long, but as I'm getting older, I accept and love myself. I'm learning to love myself and that means taking care of myself by practising self-care. Wearing makeup or taking care of skin and care is about connecting to oneself and being proud of ourselves. I think also having makeup easily accessible and have it like a journey of healing. Maybe we could all get together and try on makeup.

As an indigenous woman beauty was always a struggle for me to see in myself. My mother went to residential school and also married a Caucasian man. Because of this she not only lost her culture but her status until 1982. We did not grow up in our reservation. We grew up in Prince Rupert, B.C., but would still visit our village, Lax kw' alaams, from time to time. Like one of the speakers mentioned, that she was too light for her people but too dark for the other community. I always felt like an outsider being of mixed cultures and not knowing either cultures at all. I felt I was too Indian in our home in Prince Rupert and not Indian enough in our village. So now at the age of 53, I feel I am just beginning to learn of my Indigenous heritage, and I love it so much! Beauty for me is like what Lisa had mentioned—a kindness, a gentleness, standing tall in who we are, that is beautiful. I love to wear makeup as well and appreciate all beauty.

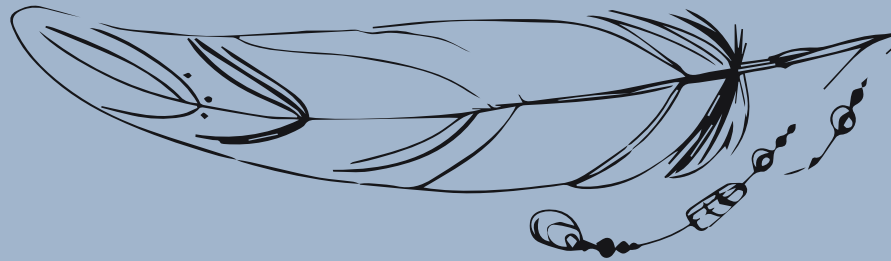
What does Indigenous beauty mean to me? It means being able to be who you are and be proud of the skin you are born in, no matter tone, size, age, hair and eye colour, on or off reserve, etc. As many said, beauty does start deep within us and growing up off the reserve with all white classmates, it was tough to find at times. I am so lucky to have been raised by a strong Indigenous mother who always danced to her own beat and taught us daughters to do the same. I personally don't like leaving the house without lipstick and earrings on, not because anyone told me I had to but because that is what gives me confidence and makes ME feel good. I have always believed—to each their own—so if you like makeup, wear it and if you don't, don't wear it. That goes for clothing styles, accessories, tattoos, etc. Outer beauty is about yourself and making yourself feel special and good within, not about anyone else.



## HOW HAS REPRESENTATION OF INDIGENOUS WOMEN

in the media impacted me? I'm almost 42 now. Growing up there weren't many Indigenous women in the media. Those in tv shows and movies were usually portrayed as victims or "dirty Indians" and lesser to the other women. But one woman in media I did look up to as a child/teen and, still do, is Buffy Sainte-Marie. She reminded me of my mom—strong, confident, beautiful inside and out— and never seemed to let anyone tell her how to dress or act. I really admire that and am grateful we have more Indigenous women/Two-Spirit actresses, models, artists, singers coming out all the time and showing their pride and not afraid to show who they are, no matter what they choose to look like. We are still here!!

To Sephora, I would love to see a campaign featuring our Elders, also, some Indigenous MUAs [Makeup Artists] working with products by Indigenous brands. I think it's great they have brands by Rihanna and Selena Gomez, but I think there's always room for more diversity.



## I AM WHAT IS CONSIDERED LIGHT SKIN. I attended residential school

in Saskatchewan (one of the last in Canada) and am 33 years old. Because I was so light, when I would tell people I attended residential school, it was as if no one ever believed me and would completely discount my experience because I didn't look Native enough to have had a traumatic experience. I was considered "lucky" by some. My beauty standards have always been very confused.

Aside from this, to speak more to the beauty industry aspect and purpose of this discussion, I would like to bring up the concerns around how it is the beauty industry in itself that has been a large contributor to being self-conscious and contributing to the colonizing beauty standards and beauty ideals for us growing up. I believe that this industry is the heavy hitter that holds the majority of power to help our youth and future generations' ideals of beauty. It is this industry that contributed so significantly to the acceptable beauty ideals and standards in the first place.

Sephora holds one of the largest amount of influence in what is acceptable beauty, and while the intentions in the past were not intentionally damaging, I think it is important to acknowledge this and to be better. The future is in our youth, and we must teach them what powerful inner love, acceptance, and inner beauty is and can be.



The only comments I wanted to leave for Sephora are the following: I think that is to very important to include Indigenous women in your advertising campaigns. Promote natural beauty, and perhaps have Indigenous women show their beauty routines and how they can incorporate their culture using Sephora products. As a Métis person, I would love to see Métis women in these ads—perhaps wearing their sashes.

I think beauty radiates from someone who is kind, respectful to themselves and others, I want to say modest as well. A little makeup doesn't hurt anyone either, when done well. It enhances one's beauty.



Indigenous beauty is embracing our history, our strengths, and pride to become confident matriarchs within our communities.

I'm the owner and operator of IskwewBeauty, where I work as an esthetician and makeup artist. When I can help make someone feel better about themselves through nails, skin care, or makeup application, it brings me great happiness to see their faces light up. Many of my non-Indigenous clients ask, 'what does "iskwew" mean'? And I tell them "woman". A word so simple, and yet they hear the beauty behind the meaning.

I got into the beauty industry because as a young teen I struggled with acne. I wore makeup to cover up my blemishes and hide imperfections. I would read magazines to find tips for skin care, products to try, makeup that would last all day without making me feel greasy. I wouldn't leave the house if I didn't have some kind of makeup on. I never considered myself "beautiful" like how I see my friends or popular kids. It wasn't until I was about 19 or 20 that I started to embrace my features. I learned more about skin care, how to apply makeup. I then went on to do my training for esthetics, and over the years I've continued to learn and keep up with the trends in the beauty/personal service industry. I love makeup because you can be as creative or simple as you want. Now that I am older, how I look is not as important and I try to focus on the confidence I feel within myself.



I think these discussions are important to have because many youths, and some adults, haven't found their own beauty and confidence within themselves. We must empower each other by showing the world not everyone is the same, you don't have to be or look a certain way, you can embrace your individuality. That will in the end help stop negative stereotypes people have against Indigenous Peoples. Beauty comes in all forms, and like Alma said, beauty comes from within.



**I GREW UP OFF RESERVE.** We were the only Anishinaabe family. We faced racism and discrimination. I used to wear long sleeve shirts and pants in the summer so that I wouldn't get any darker.

I have 2 children. I'm hoping and praying that they don't have to go through what I went through. We immerse them in the culture and teach them to be proud of who they are. I used to get backhanded compliments: 'You're the prettiest Native I've ever seen'.

I've always been mistaken for other cultures: Asian, Hawaiian, Mexican, etc. I've never felt more beautiful than when I wore a ribbon skirt, the very first one that my mother ever made. I've worn makeup since grade 7/8. I'm now 38 years young. This is the first time that I've ever felt comfortable to go out in public without makeup. I'm not sure if this newfound confidence came with age or motherhood. When I got my first grey hair, I panicked. After thinking about it more, I loved it. I earned that grey hair. I plan on aging naturally.

I've always felt pressure, as a woman, to look good, especially the postpartum bounce-back. However, I gave myself a full year, after giving birth, before I started exercising again. I was very gentle with myself. I love my body and I am grateful for all of the things that it does for me.

In the past we were not portrayed accurately. Often, we were sexualized. I am thankful to have many more Indigenous role models these days: Ashley Callingbull, Autumn Peltier, etc. There's Native TikTok. Our culture is getting out there now.

I really love these sessions because they show that you aren't alone. I really could have used this as a young Indigenous girl living off reserve.

## BEAUTY TO ME IS VERY HARD TO EVEN THINK ABOUT.

Being raised as a light-skinned Native in the urban setting, I was taught not to admit I was Indigenous, or I would be taken away and that being Indigenous was ugly. I did not know why as a child. Growing up I understood. My grandmother and all her siblings were in residential school and my mother is part of the Sixties Scoop. I understand why we didn't tell anyone we were Indigenous because my mother was scared. All of this made me scared, and because of that I hid who I was. I was ashamed, embarrassed, lost, and confused. How can someone feel beautiful with all of these feelings?

I feel beauty is whatever you make it. It is inclusive, it's culture, love, freedom, honesty, strength. There is so much more that beauty can be. I found beauty when I embraced my culture: joining community groups in my area; becoming a mother; showing my daughter the beauty of the world and what I can share with her; teaching her that everything and everyone is different in their own way.

Representations of Indigenous figures in my childhood were not a thing. The first time I saw an Indigenous figure, I was in shock. I was not sure what to think. But I am so happy I saw that beautiful soul—the pride they carried in them and to think that one day I could be just as beautiful as them.

I think if we all looked at the world through a child's eyes, things would be much simpler. We would not need to justify who we are as a People; we could just all be. My daughter was playing at a park and there were kids making fun of another child. My daughter was 5 years at the time. With so much strength, she said, "don't be mean to that boy! You do not know them or where they come from so you should not talk rudely about them." And that right there is the first beautiful Indigenous figure I saw. This brought tears to my eyes. This is the beauty I love.

LOVE  
FREEDOM  
HONESTY  
STRENGTH

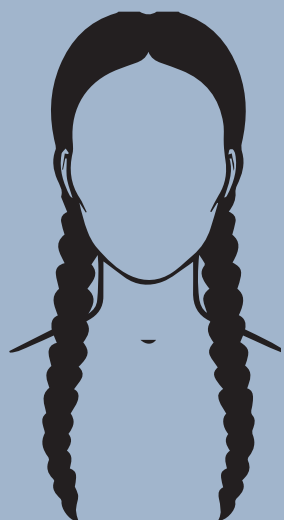


## IT WAS GREAT TO HEAR EVERYONE AND WHAT INDIGENOUS BEAUTY

means to others. I did have a chance to speak yesterday but as I was laying down last night, I had another thought.

Indigenous beauty was always a bad thing for me. I hid my whole life to avoid unwanted attention—attention from my mother's boyfriends and their friends mostly, uncomfortable in my own home and my own skin. I didn't want to be beautiful most of the time and on the occasions when I made myself look and feel beautiful, there would always be someone to make me feel ugly again or that I wasn't supposed to be making myself up.





I am teaching my children different. I encourage them to do things that make them feel good about themselves. We don't invite anyone into our home or our lives if they make my children feel the need to hide or that they're not good enough already.

INDIGENOUS BEAUTY IS WISDOM, LOVE,  
RESPECT, BRAVERY, HONESTY, HUMILITY,  
AND TRUTH ALL ROLLED INTO ONE.

Indigenous beauty has to start from the inside.

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Beauty is an expression of who we are as Indigenous Peoples ... all of us—men, women, Two-Spirit. We can all be beautiful. We have skewed views of beauty because we have been sexualized. We believe that in order to be beautiful we have to be sexy. I believe that if we begin to heal from intergenerational trauma and internalized racism, we can learn to be beautiful without being seen as sex objects.

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Beauty is all about inclusion. There are many of us who are “in between” or not the stereotypical look (whatever that is) and we get excluded from either one group or another. Being inclusive of everybody is paramount to letting people be accepted for who they are and what they look like. This lets them truly be who they are and want to be. Finding inner peace and happiness allows you to glow from within and let the superficiality of beauty shine through. But being accepted and included and being confident to let others in and accepting of who they are as well is what makes beautiful people.

I have really been thinking about this and feel what a horrible world we live in and at the same time what an absolute fabulous world we live in because we can have these kinds of conversations. All we can do is learn and heal from them. But we have to be careful and not segregate ourselves into a box. Acceptance of who we are and who everyone is, is important, and we can't forget that as well. For if the world was vanilla then we would miss out on all the other flavours as well. Variety is the spice of life, so take up space, make yourself as loud as you want, but always walk gently on the land and be kind and inclusive. I LOVE those statements—my new mantra.

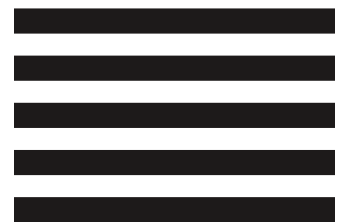
Indigenous people in the beauty industry would make the world feel brighter. I grew up in the city and in the early '90s where there wasn't a lot of Indigenous representation, only the negative. I grew up in a white-dominated school. My skin isn't dark and I am very pale, but you can tell that I am a First Nations woman. My old best friend was white with big blue eyes. There was always a divide between us though because of the beauty industry, racism, and our different ways of being brought up. I couldn't understand why I couldn't be or look like them. Short story: I ended up hating myself. I had an eating disorder, I was abusing drugs and alcohol from 15 to 21 because I grew up on television, what the media portrayed and who people told me I was. I never had good role models, but I don't blame them ... just I wish I would have seen more Indigenous representation growing up.

I'm grateful for now though. I'm grateful that the youth will be able to see others who look like them and positive role models to look up too. I would love to see various First Nations, Afro-Indigenous, Two-Spirited, and Elder representation. This would be a beautiful thing to see. I'm tired of the exclusion ... we need a healthy community.



I am from a small community in Yukon Territory. I grew up around strong, Indigenous women and never felt weird about my looks until about 12 years of age, around the same time Britney Spears, Christina Aguilera, Jessica Simpson, Mandy Moore, and just about every woman in the media, who were blonde, blue doe-eyed, very thin. This was portrayed as beautiful. I am light-skinned but don't look like that. I also don't look like my mom or grandma who are very much Indigenous-looking. I struggled since to claim and embrace my own beauty. I then developed acne and it killed my dreams of being a makeup artist. At the time I felt like no one would want some scarred-up face staring at them; 'what did I know about beauty if I looked like that', is how I felt.

I screamed when I saw this opportunity. I love Sephora and have always wanted to have a career in makeup and fashion. Instead, I listened to all my doubts and played it safe hiding in offices, wishing the whole time I was living my dreams. The Yukon doesn't have makeup stores. Before online shopping, we relied on seasonal trips to the city to stock up on all our Sephora and other makeup needs or the classic selections at Walmart or Shoppers Drug Mart. I feel like Sephora is on the right journey by exploring the diversity of what beauty and makeup are; allowing our presence too has been so healing and uplifting. I think there is more to explore and discuss, especially with the youth and Elders. I am so grateful to have had the opportunity to join this roundtable. I was in tears knowing that I was never alone, even tucked away in a tiny town way up North, that all over Canada, women were growing up with the same feelings of 'what about me, where do I fit in here?'





# SEPHORA + NWAC

## REPORT OF THE NATIONAL ROUNDTABLE ON INDIGENOUS BEAUTY

Hosted by the Native Women's Association Of Canada and Sephora on October 19, 2021

