

Indigenous Fashionology with Riley Kucheran

Ologies Podcast

November 11, 2020

Oh hey, it's your neighbor banging on a saucepan with a spoon at 9am on a Saturday, Alie Ward, back with some Ologies for your ears! Let's get into it. Okay, first off, this is coming out a little bit late and I just want to say I'm sorry. It's been quite a week so it's coming out late on Tuesday. Thank you for your patience. Also, thank you Patrons for making everything possible at Patreon.com/Ologies. A dollar a month gets you in! Thank you to everyone for spreading the word and telling a few friends about an episode they might like. Thank you for rating it, and keeping it up in the charts, and for pouring out your hearts in the reviews (which I read when I worry that I'm smelly and nobody likes me) such as this piping-hot review from Very Tall Hobbit who said:

Instant favorite! Finding something that can simultaneously pique my curiosity, warm my heart, and make me snort-laugh is a tall order, and Ologies is that something!

Thanks Very Tall Hobbit and every single person who's left a review. I've really read them all. For realies. I don't deserve the praise, but I'll take it.

Okay, Indigenous Fashionology. You may have so much imagery already populating your imagination, I know. Cool your jets – we'll get there. But first off, 'Indigenous' comes from words meaning 'to be birthed'. 'Fashion' is derived from the Latin 'to make'. So 'fashionology', it's a real word; it means the sociology of fashion. It's not used a lot but it *is* used. So, people native to land, making things. That is what this episode is about. When I think fashion I think runways, flashbulbs, labels, money, and trying to run on the highest speed of a trend-mill. I was kind of nervous to talk to this ologist because I don't consider myself a person who's terribly on-trend or who gives a ton of fucks, but I do consider myself a person terrified of being judged by people in cuter clothes than me. I mean, aren't we all?

We became buddies on Instagram after he posted a very sweet comment about the Bisonology episode, mentioning that if I ever needed an Indigenous Fashionologist to holler. Which I did a few milliseconds later in his DMs. He has a bachelor's in the arts, a master's in communication, both with the focus of social justice and culture. He's now getting his PhD at Toronto's Ryerson University while being an Assistant Professor of Design Leadership at their school of fashion.

He's from the First Nation of Biigtigong Nishnaabeg, and his research involves Indigenous fashion as a tool for economic and cultural resurgence. He also looks like a model, but frankly that's just none of my business. I have a few epiphanies. He's amazing. Get ready for everything from first-row runway gossip, to fast fashion, to history, to cultural appropriation, to tanning, to uniforms, and more with Indigenous Fashionologist Riley Kucheran.

Riley Kucheran: Yes! Yes, it is a thing, I swear Fashionology is a thing. It's been used in a book before. I don't think a lot of people use it though. I think we just call ourselves fashion studies scholars and 'fashionology' hasn't really caught on yet but, I mean, now's the time.

Alie Ward: Now's the time! Now's the episode. How long have you been into clothing?

Riley: Forever! Forever. I think that from a very young age I was very interested in, I guess, what you could call the glamor of fashion. Which now, I think as a professor and as a scholar, I

kind of critique the glamor of fashion. But I was very enamored with it, you know, reading *Vogue* magazine and *GQ* magazine and seeing all these beautiful designs in the glossy pages really inspired me, especially as a queer person growing up in a rural community. It was an escape, so to speak. I've always loved fashion. I originally wanted to be a fashion designer and I was going to apply fashion school and it got to the point where I needed to submit a garment that I had sewed myself. [drumroll] And I was like "Oh, crap. I can't sew." And that's when I stopped; that's where the dream ended. So upsetting. So I thought I'd be a fashion journalist instead because I also love to write. I thought, "Okay, I'll study journalism in school and I'll get into the fashion industry that way since I might not be a designer myself."

Alie: What was it about sewing? Because I am miserable at sewing.

Riley: You just need so much dexterity! Like, my big man-hands can't handle the tiny movements. I've recently gotten into beading, beadwork, so I have been improving the dexterity. But yeah, it didn't click for me. I couldn't translate my visions into a made garment and so that was very frustrating. What I saw in my mind as a beautiful garment but I couldn't actually do it; draw it, and then design it, and then create it. Just knowing how much I did love to write and learn about history and things like that, I just thought that was the better way to go about it.

Alie: Was there something in you, when you realized that you could still have a life that involved fashion but have it be more broad and less technical, were you just like "AHHHH! I can do this!"?

Riley: I think so! I mean, it was for sure in graduate school that I actually realized that you could make a career out of critiquing fashion which is what I came to *really* love. It's kind of ironic that as a fashion studies scholar I'm kind of anti-fashion actually.

Aside: [slowed down, deep pitch] Wait, what? [back to normal] Okay, this has already veered right off course of my expectations and I love it.

Riley: Which we can talk about, but when I realized that you can actually critique the harmful practices... I mean, I was working in the fashion industry throughout school to support my school, and I was really getting the behind-the-scenes look at how much product there was, and how much waste there was, and this kind of hierarchical fashion system that has fundamentally shaped our relationship to clothing. Clothing has been reshaped because of the fashion system, and I realized, "Oh, you can actually do something to critique that and to try and dismantle that fashion system!" So that was my aha moment of, "Okay, here it goes!" It took me 8 years and the long way around to get back to fashion. But that was where the passion came from was understanding that you could actually change it.

Alie: Yeah and you wound up having a position of power to speak your voice more than be part of the system that you maybe didn't find completely healthy, right?

Riley: I think so. I was, as I said, very much enamored with the fashion industry. I started at a big corporate chain and I kind of worked my way up the ladder as many people do. And I think that for so long I was in that system and not really critiquing myself and my own practices; meeting sales goals and things like that. It was actually a few mentors of mine in grad school who related my passion for fashion with my interest in history, and sociology, and things like that, and that's when it all came together.

Alie: Oooh! This is a stupid question, but you're a smart person. [Riley laughs] When did clothing go from regional and cultural to commerce? Do we even know?

Riley: That's the big question! That's like, "What is fashion?" What is fashion? And of course it's a complicated answer. There's some general consensus that fashion emerged in medieval courts and with European trade. In my mind I'm always picturing Sofia Coppola's *Marie Antoinette*. [clip from *Marie Antoinette*: "I have enough diamonds."]

And it's these really fashionable aristocrats who are deciding what fabrics are "in" as merchants are bringing in new fabrics from around the world as trade increased. So that's where we start to see these regimented changes of styles. That's where we get this notion of seasons and seasonality and what's "in fashion" and "out of fashion."

It's because these rich, white aristocrats were deciding what was in fashion. And then we started to see these rapid, rapid changes. And since then it just kind of explodes. I think especially post World War II there's this explosion of what we might call 'mass fashion' in which fashion goes and becomes super popular and attainable by the masses, whereas it used to be the purview of the rich elite.

Aside: Sewing machines came on the scene around the Industrial Revolution in the late 1800s/early 1900s. And then in the 1960s mass fashion took off even more. But things got truly bananas after Y2K during the Lindsey Lohan-goes-clubbing-with-Paris Hilton years in the your-ex-boyfriend-burning-you-a-CD-of-Strokes-songs era. Those early aughts saw a rise in Boho-chic, and the demand for of-the-minute styles shot up to obsessive new heights. Styles constantly started flooding racks and our closets kind of became revolving doors.

Alie: It always strikes me that... I've never known how to talk about this, but it always strikes me that we have perfectly good clothes that suit our bodies that we just throw out for something that is going to be cool for 30 minutes.

Riley: Yeah, because there's a nicer style or a nicer pattern on this "newest" article of clothing. And that's why fashion is so damaging, because of that quest for novelty and what's "new" and what's "hot." It is just completely manufactured. It's so impractical, and you've seen the recent explosion of, even seasons! The number of seasons! Some brand names will release a new collection every month! It's no longer, "These are your winter clothes, these are your summer clothes." Do you need your new winter parka... No! Every single month, every single week there's new deliveries of products that we just don't need. The amount of clothing is just unfathomable. There's so much textile waste that comes from, especially, the fast fashion industry.

Alie: What exactly is fast fashion?

Riley: I guess you could consider fast fashion to be those major companies. I think of H&M and Zara. Really, it's changed the model. It's really quickened the pace of delivery of products. It's mastered the supply chain so much that the amount of product has increased exponentially. I think it's part of a gradual shift from what we might consider clothing made by the hand to manufactured, machine-made clothing. And I think that's exactly what Indigenous fashion and what the work I do is trying to tackle. It's actually moving away from that super-fast, heightened model where clothing is produced so cheaply that it's attainable by millions of consumers. I think fast fashion also does some damage because of how global it is. You can travel anywhere around the world and on the same high streets you see the exact same style.

Aside: A high street, side note, is like the main retail strip. In the US, we'd call this main street or the mall. But between cheap production and trends zipping around the internet in

a literal instant, evidently there's a pretty global consensus on what's cool right now and what's "so five minutes ago." Things have homogenized rapidly.

Riley: It's destroyed the diversity of local Indigenous clothing because it's so widespread.

Alie: And also labor practices... not the best.

Riley: Not the best, yeah! I think the Rana Plaza disaster in Bangladesh really did an incredible job of bringing awareness to these issues.

Aside: Just for context, this would be the 2012 factory fire that killed over a hundred workers and left hundreds more injured. It forced people to really confront the ethics of these labor practices and conditions.

Riley: It was kind of bubbling up. There were anti-sweatshop movements before then. It goes right back through history to the Industrial Revolution when people were raising these issues of just how devastating clothing manufacturing was. There's also reasons why those working conditions haven't improved. Rather than improving the processes in which we make clothing we've just sent the labor offshore. So rather than investing in the technology to produce better clothing, we've just kept the same old technology but moved it offshore to where cheaper labor can be exploited, really.

Aside: So what are some solutions to this? How do we pare down and not give a flippin' fig about being judged for wearing last season's lumpy, cerulean-blue sweater? Who has a good life hack for this? Well, boy howdy – Steve Jobs, Einstein, and Wonder Woman all had one thing in common, and it wasn't skin-tight leotards.

Alie: How do you feel about people wearing personal uniforms? Into it? Not into it? I read this article, maybe two years ago, about an advertising executive who was just fed up with trying to decide what to wear every day and so she just got seven white blouses with a little bow tie and five pairs of pants. And she just wears that.

Riley: Do it! Yes! Yes, ugh! Think of your closet! Think of how clean and simple! Like, "This is my Monday blouse, this is my Tuesday blouse." Beautiful. Yeah. For sure. I think if you can find staples that you know are made in a really sustainable manner, or if you're able to even identify who makes your clothes, that's the absolute best thing you can do, I think. But yeah, if you can find a staple organic cotton t-shirt that's made sustainably – even if it's local production, all the better – just go for that! If I could wear the same thing every day, I would.

Alie: Yeah. *[laughter]* I know, that appeals to me so much just as someone who has decision problems. And I feel influenced a lot by the outfit I'm wearing. If it's something that I don't really like it kind of makes my day "ech." But just having that predictability seems like such a relief.

Riley: Right, right. A lot of people say that fashion is like an extension of your body. Like it's an extension of your skin and it does that. So, it makes perfect sense that it affects you in that way. I think... that's why they call it the power suit. You can put on a suit and it just transforms your psyche and it gives you so much confidence. So yeah, clothing is really kind of magical in that sense.

Alie: How has clothing changed in First Nations and Indigenous cultures? When did we see a shift from garments that would be hand sown, and hand fabricated, and worn all of the time to this fashion movement?

Riley: Well, I think that you can really kind of trace that change by tracing colonization itself.

How I really got into this work was through researching clothing practices in residential schools, boarding schools, in the United States.

Aside: When Riley says boarding schools or residential school, he's not referring to a Connecticut finishing school for debutants. This is a reference to the rounding up of tens of thousands of Indigenous kiddos, starting around 1870, lasting over 100 years, until the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975, which allowed Indigenous folks to finally run their own schools.

Riley: I think that is probably where we see the most, kind of, concrete changes happening. Before the boarding school/residential school era we actually see documentation of Indigenous clothing practices changing almost immediately upon European contact. It's just incredibly unfortunate and disheartening that it was often this stripping of culture, to attack Indigenous diversity and Indigenous identity itself.

So when missionaries came over, they kind of had their preconceived notions of that idea of "the savage," and the implanted that notion onto us. They started removing our clothing and trying to impose Western-style suits, and dresses, and things like that.

So, it was for sure in that era of the boarding schools where young Indigenous students, kids, would have arrived at the school and literally their clothing would be stripped away from them and often destroyed and they would be forced to wear Western uniforms. That era is hundreds of years long. It's so devastating that so much of our clothing practices were literally taken away from us.

But obviously, pieces were held on to and families would keep traditions alive and teach skills to their children. It's kind of weirdly beautiful that although there was such abuse in that school system, that it was through that school system that a lot of Indigenous women learned how to sew. They would have taught their daughters and nieces how to sew. In that way, contemporary designers today have actually been able to fashion their own fashions and identity in opposition of all of that loss.

Alie: What about Indigenous clothing? How was it fabricated before industrialization?

Riley: Indigenous fashion is just so synonymous with land and land-based practices. So if you think of Plains Indigenous groups, that old adage of using every piece of the buffalo. It's very true that all of our clothing would have come from land and our harvesting and hunting practices. It would have been incredibly situational and contextual to a local Indigenous group.

I do want to say a disclaimer that I don't speak for all Indigenous groups. There is such a beautiful diversity there. It's even kind of hard to talk about Indigenous fashion while avoiding generalization. I mean, I can't even really speak to Anishinaabe or the Ojibway clothing practices, regions that I come from, because I don't know that history. That history was very deliberately taken away from us. So, you always have to bear in mind that Indigenous people aren't experts on everything and that they're often on this journey themselves to, kind of, reclaim these traditions and learn more about their own history.

Aside: As you can imagine, during this time of trying to eradicate their culture, a lot of oral history was lost.

Alie: What kind of history exists and has survived colonization?

Riley: It's so difficult because so much of the records of Indigenous design come from this anthropological tradition. Within that tradition there is very clearly white supremacist

beliefs about Indigenous culture. Indigenous culture was dying, so we have all these ethnographers, kind of, rushing to save or salvage Indigenous culture. So, we get a really, really interesting perspective, to put it lightly, on Indigenous clothing practices. You never get context. You get, "This is a dress from this tribe." You never get whose dress it was. You never get the significance of the dress, the family history, and how that history attaches itself to the clothing, and also contextualizes it within a society. You never get that sort of rich detail that about clothing.

And when you do, it's often just outright racist. [*"It is offensive."*] So, you have to be very, very delicate when you do go into anthropological records. There's like little tidbits of information, if you read missionaries and their journals of their engagements with Indigenous peoples. It's very, very limited. I am so hesitant to even encourage people to go in there and find it, because you won't have that kind of rich history.

I think there have been a lot of beautiful examples of bringing in Indigenous elders and knowledge holders into, say, a museum space, and letting them interact with the clothing. Instantly you start to get some of that richness. Then, of course, there's just no or very, very limited oral records in any institution collections.

It is incredibly limited what I have access to. Which is why so much of my work has just been visiting. I spend a lot of time traveling, or I guess I used to spend a lot of time traveling, just really getting to know communities and, I think, trying to explore the idea that Indigenous fashion exists, for one; that Indigenous clothing isn't static. What those anthropological records do is that it freezes Indigenous culture in a certain time. We get that kind of binary between traditional clothing and contemporary clothing, which is actually pretty harmful and I think that we should try and kind of unpack that because it's fair to say that Indigenous clothing has always been changing.

It's never been static. We've always been adapting as new materials became available, as we traded, first with other tribes and then with the Europeans who came to North America. So, it has always been changing. That's why you just need to spend as much time as possible with community members when you are doing this research. They'll be able to give you those richer details.

Alie: That must be so frustrating to... Well, I'll rephrase that because 'frustrating' is not even the word, but...

Riley: Infuriating!

Alie: Yes, thank you. The notion of having your people and your heritage talked about in past tense, when you are right there, must be devastating.

Riley: Yeah. It is, and I think that's why I am so passionate about my work and why I get passionate about other issues that are so related to my work, like cultural appropriation. It just strikes at my heart because it's my family who had those materials taken away from them. There's a very clear reason why I wasn't taught Ojibway traditional clothing practices, because of systemic racist and colonization.

So I think, yeah, it does hurt when people speak of Indigenous peoples as having only existed in the past. But I think you shouldn't feel shame or guilt because of that, because it really is our education system. Our curriculums were designed to ignore or delegitimize Indigenous histories. The whole notion of *terra nullius*, the idea that North America was empty and it was free for the taking, that was central to the colonizing mission. That turns up in all of our curriculum.

Even myself in high school, I learned nothing about my own Indigenous history or the Indigenous histories of where the school was located. It's almost not surprising that people still think of Indigenous people as vanishing. And actually, I think that fashion had a big role in that notion. There's this idea of the vanishing Indian, that Indigenous peoples were disappearing as North America was being colonized. That was kind of perpetuated through representation, through clothing practices like the image of the stereotypical Indigenous person on horseback in a loincloth and things like that. [from *The Lone Ranger*, 1956: "You notice something strange about Indians?"]

But that was a fabricated image. Obviously, it was kind of amalgamated from actual Indigenous practices, but this myth of the Indian was so pervasive and so central to colonization. So that's kind of why I homed in on fashion as a critical nexus of colonization. You needed to convince people that the land was empty. You need to convince people that Indigenous people weren't human. Once that was possible, then colonization could happen. I'm trying to unpack the world of clothing in that process.

Alie: I can't... So, where do you even start.

Riley: It's a lot. It's a lot. I know. It's so much.

Alie: I usually ask about, like, movies that get it right or wrong. And if you're talking about, like, a kind of fish, that's one thing, but movies that get it right or wrong with Indigenous... Like, how much fucking time do we have, you know?

Riley: Everyone gets it wrong.

Alie: Everyone gets it wrong! Are there any pieces of media that would be... That you feel, like, proud of? Any pieces of media that are made by Indigenous voices that have been given that chance to, sort of, try to erase colonist imagery?

Riley: A lot of my favorite Indigenous films are documentaries that, kind of, deal with the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. Alanis Obomsawin is kind of the matriarch of Canadian Indigenous cinema and so incredible. But I think, in terms of non-documentaries we're seeing a renaissance or a resurgence of Indigenous film right now, in all genres. There's some really incredible Indigenous horror films now and things like that where filmmakers are, kind of, playing with those perceptions. So, we are seeing a resurgence, I think.

One of my absolute favorite films is called *Angry Inuk*. It talks a lot about the sealing industry and how anti-seal activists have been so hurtful to Inuit communities because seal skins and sealing is so integral to Inuit livelihoods and culture. It's just... everything comes from sealing; clothing practices all come from sealing.

[Indigenous female voice from *Angry Inuk*: "I've never really met these anti-sealers face to face and I have some questions."]

Angry Inuk does a really incredible job of unpacking that long history of anti-sealing, and the questionable rise of that movement. Then also just includes some really, really beautiful parkas. Everyone in it is just wearing incredible Inuit parkas.

Victoria's Arctic Fashion is one brand that I love because it just... It honors those traditions and just creates some really, really beautiful pieces that are just... It's the most insulated coat you could buy, because you're wearing a seal over the top of you and they're designed for the Arctic.

Aside: So, that film is called *Angry Inuk* and I'll add a link to it my website. Also, I got a really great letter a few months back from a listener named Rachel [phonetic], and it was about the Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and she writes:

We recently had two opportunities to discuss an issue very close to our family when listening to both the Plumology (feathers) and the Nassology (taxidermy) episodes, when you and your guest experts discussed possession of feathers and the attached felonious consequences that come with them.

As an Indigenous family, it was an opportunity for us to stop and talk about the widely discussed topic of the fashion industry that is the most cited as the reasons for enacting on the laws. However, we also discussed the time period in which these laws were enacted. This was one of many tumultuous time periods for the Native American population and these laws were used often to arrest and prosecute Native peoples for the possession of feathers.

Raids were made regularly on gatherings and powwows and it's viewed by many as yet another way to destroy the spiritual life of our people. Even into the '70s and '80s, gatherings were held in remote fields and were kept secret for this reason.

Feathers are a gift from the creator for us. Carrying and gifting them has strong medicine power in our lives. There are messages and lessons to be learned in their finding. Forced assimilation from the past and the tearing away of spiritual practices has done incomprehensible harm and still continues today with the stripping of tribal recognition and destruction of sacred land and water. It's a well-known and long understood thing in our communities that these feather-related laws were often used as an excuse to arrest "upstart Indians."

Hahom, Wado, Thank you,

Rachel

Back at you Rachel, thank you so much for that. I'm so grateful for this letter from Rachel because it makes so much sense. With her permission I forwarded it to a few of the bird experts that have been on the show, the taxidermy experts, and none of us had heard this before. We were all blown away and so grateful to know this and get this context. I asked Riley too, like, "What is with up this?? I'm so mad about it!"

Alie: But the Migratory Bird Act wasn't actually put into place to protect birds, it was put into place to prosecute Indigenous folks who were using feathers in their clothing and in their regalia. Have you heard anything about that? Is that well known?

Riley: Wow, I did not know about that. It's actually bizarre, one of the reasons why Indigenous people can actually make and wear their own regalia in public is because of rodeos.

Alie: Really?

Riley: Yeah, when Buffalo Bill Cody was very, very big and when rodeo culture was exploding across the US and Canada, they needed Indians to play in their rodeo pageants. So literally, it was because of these Western rodeos which is why some of the laws prohibiting Indigenous people from wearing their own clothing were reversed because they needed Indigenous peoples to play Indians in those productions. ["Yikes."]

Which is so weird and problematic, but I think it just goes to show you how pervasive colonization has been and how recent it is that we have actually been able to practice our

own clothing practices. It's been very, very recent that we can actually start making and sharing publicly these kinds of beautiful creations.

Aside: And before you think this is just a thing of decades past, there are still restrictions put on Native students, barring them from wearing traditional regalia and items like eagle feathers for their graduation ceremonies. Still! In 2020! Now, what about for everyday wear, what is Riley seeing?

Alie: What about what's happening now? What about some Indigenous designers of clothing that you love? Can you tell me about what trends there might be or what you're learning about?

Riley: I've changed a lot of my thinking actually, since even talking about this subject. When I first got interested in Indigenous fashion, I think it was because of t-shirts. There's a lot of incredible Indigenous companies doing graphic t-shirts with some really powerful messages. There's one that I love that says, "Native Americans Discovered Columbus." It just does this beautiful switching, and it makes people think, and people have stopped me on the sidewalk to ask, "What does that t-shirt mean?" So I think Indigenous t-shirts, it's a really, kind of, accessible way to represent your culture and to start critical conversations, and I think that's really important.

But I think the kinds of Indigenous fashion that I'm more interested in now are really land-based and they come from within communities. I've studied a lot about the mainstream Western fashion industry and how damaging it is. I think that we shouldn't be striving to participate in that. This Indigenous fashion movement that's happening right now is bringing a lot of awareness to Indigenous clothing practices, and that's really beautiful and it's so important to support Indigenous designers. But what I don't want is Indigenous designers to try and enter that mainstream and start producing their clothing at unsustainable levels. I think the beauty of Indigenous fashion is how small it is and how slow it is.

Some of my favorite designers are really just based in the community. One person I really talk about a lot is Tania Larsson, who's Gwich'in and based in Yellowknife. They really involve their whole family and their whole community. When it's land-based, for Tania, it means that she works primarily with hides. Hide tanning is an incredibly beautiful process. It's very labor intensive. It takes so long to scrape a hide after it's been harvested. You have to scrape the fur off and scrape all the membranes off. It's a very smelly process and you're sweating by the end of it, and all you want is to shower, but you're often in the bush, so there's no showers. [*Very sticky*] It's just such a beautiful process.

When that process is happening, that's where culture is really being shared, because you're talking with people, you're scraping a hide for hours or days at a time. That's where you're sharing stories, and within those stories are all the beautiful values and lessons that shape Indigenous culture. When you focus on those land-based practices, that's when you tap into that culture, and you tap into your whole community, and you really support the whole community because it's not just one designer. It's the hunter, it's the tanners, it's the beadwork artists, it's Tania herself. She's really supporting this whole micro economy with her own label. I think that's the kind of Indigenous fashion that I want to encourage, is fashion that gets us back on our land because land is so essential to Indigenous culture and it's constantly being threatened.

So as much as possible, if youth can get back on the land and start engaging in these land-based practices, I think that is going to push Indigenous fashion to where it needs to be. It's

so far ahead of mainstream fashion. In the last couple of years, sustainability has become a key issue in fashion studies, but Indigenous fashion is inherently sustainable. It's inherently community-based, there's kind of like no room for waste, really, when you're in the bush and you're so dependent on land for your survival. So that's the kind of fashion that I'm really interested in right now.

Alie: What was the last thing you saw that just made you swoon?

Riley: Oh my god. There was a... I don't even know the beadwork artist. I will try and look it up, but they beaded a police car on fire. It's like a big patch, and this beautiful... Beadwork is so incredible and it can be so detailed. I think it might've been an LAPD police car that was on fire and it was beautifully beaded.

Alie: Oh my god. I was at that march.

Riley: Beadwork is especially beautiful because it's so topical and you can bead whatever.

Aside: Sidenote, your old DadWard *did not* set any cop cars on fire, 'cause that is not good for the environment. But I did attend a march or two in LA, masked, squirting hand sanitizer and sunscreen on any stranger who asked, but this got a giggle out of me because the imagery of using such an intricate, time intensive craft to depict something so chaotic, and then to use a collection of tiny beads to capture so much emotion, and frustration, and injustice boiling at the surface is so beautiful and deft.

Indigenous artists are using beadwork to express so much, and I'll link some artists on my site that sell beadwork, and also stickers that are photos of their gorgeous beadwork with powerful messaging.

Riley: When *The Mandalorian* came out everyone was beading baby Yodas because everyone kind of felt that Yoda was like a little mini elder, so everyone was beading Yoda. It's just so beautiful that beadwork can speak to contemporary issues and immediate, political issues and raise politics. I think that's another reason why Indigenous fashion is so special is because it's so political.

Tania Larsson, she showed at Indigenous fashion week Toronto last year, and one of her signature looks was this beautiful cape. On the back of the cape it said, "Protect the Caribou." And it just struck me so much because without caribou we don't have Indigenous fashion. If there's fracking and resource extraction happening on Indigenous lands and it's affecting caribou habitats, it means we can't harvest caribou. It means we can't eat. It means we don't have fashion. It's all so connected. Indigenous designers who are fluent in their culture and based in their communities just know how much everything's connected.

One of those phrases that we often repeat to ourselves is to honor all our relations, and that's what Indigenous fashion does. Every single part of the supply chain either comes from the land or is embedded in community values, and I think that's what's just so beautiful.

Alie: And it really hits home the difference between fashion as a consumptive commodity versus fashion as expression and fashion as a voice.

Riley: Yeah. We've been so removed. The producer and the consumer are so removed right now. You have no idea... I have no idea who's made 99% of my wardrobe, and that removal of the person, and removal of the hand, and this separation of producer and consumer, it's very deliberate. Fashion has been called the 'favorite child of capitalism' because of how fashion

was so important in introducing those cycles and creating our lust for novelty. There's such a difference.

You can imagine mainstream fashion practices that do a better job, but often they're reserved for very elite people who can afford them. If you think of a bespoke suit, in which you needed to visit a tailor a few times, and they're intimately measuring your body, and discussing fabric and fit, and changing those, that's actually an equally engaged process, where you're working with one person and it might even be a tailor that your family has used for generations. But that's just not available to most people, and I think it should be. Luxury fashion and the values within luxury of the hand, and quality, and longevity, I think those should be available to everyone.

Alie: Yeah, we are so far removed from who makes things that we put on our naked body. Like, what gets closer?

I have so many questions I want to ask! This is such a huge topic, I have so many QUESTIONS I want to ask you! Okay, I'm going to let Patrons ask some questions. I just want to hang out and talk to you literally all day.

Riley: Let's please some patrons.

Aside: Okay, but before we please them, let's throw some cash around! Each week we donate to a cause that the Ologist chooses and this week it's Dechinta: Centre for Research and Learning. It's a globally recognized organization, they have faculty that include northern leaders in the field of Indigenous Studies, Political Science, Environmental Studies, Law, Geography and Fine Arts. For over a decade, Dechinta has been a destination institution for students and researchers specializing in Indigenous studies from across Canada and internationally. To learn more or toss them a little bit of dough, there'll be a link to Dechinta.ca in the show notes. That was made possible by sponsors of the show, which I will mention now.

[Ad Break]

Okay, now let's seamlessly get through your questions.

Alie: Stephanie Enkel wants to know: How can non-Indigenous people support Indigenous fashion in culturally appropriate manners?

Riley: Right. Cultural appropriation is a massive part of the work I do. It takes up a lot of my time, but I think it's an important question. As much as Indigenous people, I think, are tired of talking about cultural appropriation... because every time it happens it's just a punch to the gut. It seems to happen every week or every month. But it is important to continue these conversations. I actually love when people ask because it signals that they have a more ethical approach to their clothing practices, and they're thinking about their consumption choices and in a conscious way.

You can think of cultural appropriation as a spectrum. On one hand we have outright theft, outright the exploitation of Indigenous designs by a non-Indigenous person or a company, and they're profiting from an Indigenous culture. On the other side, we have actual Indigenous cultural products produced by Indigenous people. I think as much as possible, it's obviously better to support Indigenous makers and Indigenous designers. Then there's kind of a gradient. From outright theft, there's cultural misappropriation and cultural appropriation, appreciation, collaboration.

Aside: So non-Natives, think of a big “NO” in red at one end of the spectrum. Those things would be: poorly made imitations, or Halloween costumes. And then toward the green light end: supporting artisans, and designers, and artists with respect, and *paying* them for their labor, and spreading the word about their work.

Riley: It’s very hard to draw a line and tell people, okay, “These are okay... This is not okay.” There’s a couple of things you can do to kind of ensure that your choices are more ethical and actually supporting Indigenous people. One is to follow the money. [*“Show me the money!”*] So if the money is going to a large corporation, like Urban Outfitters, who’s notorious for appropriating, avoid that.

As much as possible, try and build a relationship with Indigenous people. It doesn’t have to be a personal relationship. I think you can do some research and find some really great Indigenous designers who are putting themselves out there online and at festivals. I think when you have a relationship with an Indigenous person, you’re going to know that they would never sell you something that is a sacred item. It’s kind of been a double edged sword since Indigenous fashion has become more visible, it’s become more susceptible to appropriation because Indigenous people are putting their designs out there so generously and wanting people to actually appreciate and understand a bit more about Indigenous culture. It means these large corporations can just take it.

Aside: If you want to see some Indigenous design, and appreciate the artistry and craft, and support Indigenous artists, how do you know what’s on the green end of the spectrum? There are various annual markets, and the Department of the Interior website – I just looked it up – they have a list of them. Many are postponed until 2021 – cross your fingers, people – and others are online for the perusal, such as...

Riley: For example, the Santa Fe Indian Market is incredible. In the US and in Canada we have Indigenous Fashion Weeks in Vancouver, and Calgary, and Toronto. And the organizers of those events and those fashion weeks, they’re not engaging with non-Indigenous people who are appropriating. If you can support those artists and those designers who are involved in those festivals, you know that they’ve been vetted by the community, because that’s what we do. We’re always checking in; we’re asking people where they come from. There’s just been so many claims of Indigenous identity that are outright fraudulent, and people who aren’t connected to any community in any way.

You have to do a bit of research and you can’t just purchase the first thing that you see. You have to build that relationship, establish that trust. Then I would say, continue to support that artist. Like when we were talking about finding your wardrobe and investing in key staples, I think you need to do that. And one of the things that I would try to work on a lot is updating people’s perceptions of Indigenous cultural products.

You can walk into a mainstream store and buy a piece of faux or fake beadwork for, you know, \$10. But bead work, or any Indigenous cultural product, really, takes so much time. I’m trying to also change the notion that Indigenous cultural products are cheap. It’s actually a luxury product, when you think about all the time that goes into a piece of beadwork. It can take over a year for a very large piece of beadwork. You have to be prepared to fork out more money if you also want to buy Indigenous products. Which I think is not a bad thing. We should be honoring the time, and the culture, and just all that knowledge that is passed through these objects.

Alie: Absolutely. I feel like there was a moment at Coachella that brought a lot of cultural appropriation really kind of into the spotlight. Is that an American perception or was that kind of global?

Aside: Historical sidenote: this did make headlines in Native newspapers such as *Indian Country Today's* headline "Supermodel Uses Sacred Headdress to Get Totally Stoked for Coachella." And this was in 2014, two years after Victoria's Secret strutted a headdress replica down the runway via a European supermodel wearing a very tiny, fringed deerskin and [confused tone] leopard bikini. And this ensemble was layered with turquoise necklaces – which from my understanding is not even close to a cohesive appropriation, rather it's just a cobbled mishmash ripping off several distinct cultures. Kind of like if your least aware aunt made a casserole out of nopos, and oofs, and a couple of yikes.

Riley: But the headdress, yeah, it was such a pivotal moment in the cultural appropriation conversation. Dr. Adrienne Keene is at Brown University, and she runs the blog *Native Appropriations*. Since 2008, she has been documenting all of these horrible instances of appropriation by companies and at festivals. I think that constant pushing of the conversation really, really helped, but I think it had that side effect of making some people afraid to wear or purchase Indigenous products because they feel like they'll be piled on online if anyone ever sees a photo of them in anything Indigenous.

Alie: Oh, and I guess there's a big difference between purchasing something from an actual Indigenous artist and honoring that versus, like you're saying, finding something at Target that's beaded.

Riley: It actually becomes your responsibility to tell people about the beautiful, actual product. If you purchased a beautiful beaded necklace from the Santa Fe Indian market, it becomes your responsibility to be proud of that and to share that. When someone says, "Oh my god, that necklace is so stunning." You can say, "Oh, it is! It's this artist, they're from this nation, it's from this family." Then, *you* can actually take on that role of educating others. Everywhere I see Indigenous fashion, education is a part of it. It's tackling those stereotypes, but it's also, in the place of those stereotypes, educating people about real Indigenous culture.

Aside: Dr. Adrienne Keene is a scholar and an activist, and also a podcast host! She co-hosts *All My Relations*, and their episode #8 is Native Fashion, so I'll link that on my website; it's such a good podcast. I really enjoy Dr. Keene's work, and they were supposed to meet up during Indigenous Fashion Week of Toronto this summer, but that did not go down as planned.

Riley: And it was canceled because of COVID-19. I had been working on a symposium, so that in addition to the runways – which are so incredible and so different from any mainstream runways. I'll give you one example. In a mainstream runway, the front row is often reserved for the Anna Wintours of the world. You know, the elite of the fashion sect. At the Indigenous fashion show, the front row was reserved for elders. [*Alie coos and awes*] My heart, my heart!

It was just so beautiful and so different. It wasn't about being seen and seeing, and this elite, glamorous fashion week. It was so much about community, and supporting our traditions, supporting each other, and really coming together because in addition to not being able to wear our own clothing, we were outlawed from gathering. You couldn't gather in large groups because then you could talk to each other and strategize and be like, "Oh shit, how

are we going to fight back?" Now that we're actually able to gather and able to create these beautiful events and fashion weeks to just learn from each other, that's just so beautiful.

Aside: This year, of course, due to covid, Indigenous Fashion Week Toronto will gather online. There are so many great panels and symposiums; some are moderated by Riley himself. That will be November 26–29, 2020, and I'll put a link to that on the episode page at AlieWard.com. Also, Patron Bailey Sperling is a first-time question-asker and also a fashion student! What advice does Riley have for designers in general, or better yet...

Alie: And I was going to ask too, advice for Indigenous designers. Any words you would want to share with them? Or resources?

Riley: My words of encouragement would be that you're for sure not alone. One of the defining features of the fashion system is that if you're not in a big company, you're an individual entrepreneur. Most of the designers I speak with, they are their marketing team, their production team, and their entire sales force. It's one person doing everything in a small fashion business. I think that's actually so counter to many Indigenous values of community, and sharing responsibilities, and how everyone in a community has a different role to play.

So, I think if an Indigenous designer wants to start a fashion business, for example, I would suggest that they involve their community as much as possible. Those aunties and the grandmas, they have all the skills and they have all the knowledge, so if you can involve them as much as possible and then make your fashion business work for your community.

Bethany Yellowtail is an incredible, LA-based designer, but it's not just her. It's a whole collective of Indigenous designers. I think those collective models, cooperative models, is something I'm very interested in because Indigenous fashion can be an economic driver in communities because everyone's so involved. As much as possible, reach out. There is this growing Indigenous fashion movement. Reach out if you can. Attend a fashion week if it's near you.

Alie: Or online?

Riley: Or online! I think, just reach out because there's no reason why young Indigenous designers should be doing it on their own.

Alie: Heather Densmore had a question about the role of color in Indigenous clothing. Are colors created in a traditional way? Are colors used in a way to convey deeper meaning than maybe we see in fast fashion?

Riley: Yes, absolutely. It is specific to Indigenous nations, so I can't speak for one color for all Indigenous groups. Actually, this is an area of research that I'm so excited to dive into when I'm able to start visiting communities again. I want to track how different communities perceive different colors. What I do know is that every color will come with a story, and it's through those stories that we transmit our values, our morals, and our ethics.

For example, there's a story about why the raven is black. The raven is often seen as a trickster character, so within that story there's all these values and lessons about being a good person, how to live in a good way so as to avoid the dangers that Raven gets into that turned Raven black. Every community I've visited so far has a different reason why Raven turned black, but there's always those stories and lessons.

It's so interesting that all of our aesthetics come with so much knowledge. I mean, it makes perfect sense that, because so much culture was transmitted orally, that we would use a

color to be an inspiration for a story. So yeah, I'm so excited to dive into colors and to understand them more. That's a future research goal.

Alie: Yay!

Aside: This next question is from Patron Sikwani Dana, who is Penobscot, and a high school teacher, and science communicator, and I follow her on Instagram and her photos of off-the-grid life in Maine are super gorgeous. Anyway, she asked:

Alie: They say: growing up, they went to many Native basket and jewelry shows. Their dad makes birch bark baskets, and they've always felt that it's important for non-Natives to buy our things to support us. In contrast, when I see non-Natives wearing our jewelry, my brain instantly thinks they're appropriating our culture, even if I know they bought it from a real Native. Their question is: why is my brain doing that? *[laughs]* Also, follow up question is: How do we work on pressuring, or maybe educating, Native artists to get sustainable materials rather than buying plastic beads or plastic feathers?

Riley: Right. Well, I actually think that it's not their brain doing that. I think it's their heart. I think it's that gut punch; it's that heartstring that is being pulled. It's like an ancestral memory. It's knowing that so many of your ancestors were not able to do that or they had their Indigenous jewelry taken away from them, and you feel that pain. I think that's probably why it'll always be a bit weird when non-Indigenous people wear Indigenous products. That's perfectly okay. There's nothing wrong with that. I guess I might also offer that there are Indigenous fashions that remain in the community.

Aside: So sacred stuff: hands off, people! If you wouldn't steal someone's wedding dress and wear it to an EDM festival in the desert, don't do it with Native stuff.

Riley: There will be certain items that are specific, remain within our culture, and are not sold. There are many, many things that should not be commodified. So I think taking solace in the fact, I would hope, that what is being sold and what is being worn by non-Indigenous people is totally fine. It's supporting a community economically. The more sacred items are being kept for our own community. The traditions are being maintained.

Aside: In a non-fashion sense, I'm just going to use this opportunity to drop a big old bundle of white sage into the convo and give you the heads up that before you go smudge-sticking, or buying big heaps of dried sage, think twice. A lot of wild sage has been overharvested for commerce, and it's a sacred and medicinal plant for many Native populations.

Also, as long as this is a PSA: even if you mean so well by saying someone or something is a spirit animal, leave that term to our Indigenous friends. I'm only telling you this because I know you'd want to know.

Riley: I do agree that it's so important to encourage Indigenous artists to use more sustainable materials. It's probably going to be a very controversial opinion of mine, but there has been this explosion of bead work, and I think it is so incredible. But I do agree that using plastic beads and feathers that have been produced in faraway places and have traveled around the world, we need to minimize that as much as possible.

Commodification for commodification's sake, and to make money at events, things like that, a lot of Indigenous people are rightfully tempted to do that. It's because of systemic marginalization that puts them in that position where they need to sell things with questionable origins. That's exactly why I encourage taking a luxury strategy, or thinking

about your goods as highly prized, highly valuable goods and demanding fair prices for them and really just abandoning those cheaper products.

It's within our culture to be sustainable. It's inherent, so producing or manufacturing things that are not sustainable goes against our culture. Even though it might represent our culture or teach people about our culture, I think it's counterproductive if those practices are unsustainable.

Aside: I hadn't even thought about bead materials until right now. Before plastic strolled along into our lives for the next several thousand years, beads were of course made with Earth stuff, such as dried berries, bone, shell, and teeth. Nowadays, there's glass beads. They're a little heavier and more expensive, so if you're making jewelry or buying it, know that the price does deserve to go up based on materials. And if you choose non-plastic, wear it with the knowledge that after your dead, it won't live inside a turtle nose for 150 years. Sorry to bum you out. Let's get cute.

Alie: Joseph asks: I would love to hear you talk about land-based education and your thoughts on its role in cultural resurgence. P.S. I love you.

Riley: Oh my god. That's my partner.

Alie: [*endearing tone*] Yeah, I thought so!

Riley: He is such an *Ologies* fan. He's like the *Ologies* biggest fan. When he first found it, he's like, "One day, I know you're going to be on *Ologies*." I was like, "Oh, my heart."

Alie: [*laughs, general excitement*] That makes me so happy! He seems like a good one.

Riley: I think he's in the other room making sure the cat doesn't make loud noises. [*laughs*]

Aside: I love him. I love them.

Alie: I just wanted to read Joseph's because I think that's so sweet. Joseph loves you.

Riley: [*laughs*] Yeah, Joseph loves me, and he asked about land-based education, which has such a special place in my heart. I was so fortunate to... as a master's student, I applied for a grant and was able to travel to Dechinta, which is a center for research and learning that's entirely land-based and community-based up in Dené territory, near Yellowknife in the Northern regions of Canada.

Aside: So, what is land-based fashionology education?

Riley: It's the methodology of creating Indigenous fashion. It's just so incredible when you get students on the land, in the bush, where they don't have access to their cell phones. They don't have access to junk food. Really what we're doing on the land is modeling decolonization. We're really trying to imagine what a decolonized future would look like by trying to build it.

Literally, we are building camps, maintaining the fire, collecting water, chopping wood, and so much hard work that just goes into being able to live off the land through time-honored traditional practices. It really changes your perception about the amount of work that goes into everything. I was talking about hide tanning, and we do a lot of hide tanning on the land. It gives students a new perspective about what it takes. The amount of interpersonal conflict that comes up speaks to the amount of governance that's needed.

When we're working, sometimes scientists will visit. We're analyzing the land and connecting the dots to climate change. It's such a hands-on experience. I'm just so fortunate.

It changed my whole life, really, getting that land-based experience. We're seeing these land-based programs all over North America, and so I highly encourage, especially Indigenous youth, to look into these programs. They are life changing.

Aside: Big shout out to my cousins Boyd and Lila Evans in Montana, who you may remember from the Bisonology episode. Lila is of the Blackfeet Nation, and they've donated a buffalo in the past to young Native students to learn about butchering and hide tanning, and I just think that's very cool. They are a cool pair.

Speaking of mens, and womens, and everything in between, Patrons Sam Daniels, Genesis Cabrera, and D. B. Narveson had questions about gendered clothing and Jenifer Lowe asked: Many Indigenous cultures have up to five genders recognized. How is this reflected in their clothing?

Alie: One last Patreon question I wanted to ask. A few people asked about notable gender-based differences in design, or material, or function. Do we see as much of a binary in Indigenous fashion or no?

Riley: This is also a question that the answer would have changed with colonization. One of the first practices that was purposefully attacked and outlawed was Two-Spirit gender diversity amongst Indigenous people and it was actually because of clothing. When missionaries came over, they would have noticed people who looked like men wearing clothing typically worn by women. It was that crossdressing, that different type of dress practice that actually identified people and made them susceptible to be attacked by colonizing forces. So, for sure, there wouldn't have been as rigid gender binaries. There are Two-Spirit scholars who are looking into roles of clothing, but I do know that gender binaries would not have been as strict.

Aside: If you're not familiar with the term Two-Spirit, it means a person who has the spirits of more than one gender and is said to be blessed by the Creator to experience life in that way. So beautiful! And I'll put a link on the show page on my site of some Two-Spirit authors you may enjoy reading! Okay, this next question was asked by Patron Laurence, and it's spelled with a U, so I am going to enjoy saying [*exaggerated faux French accent*] Laurence.

Alie: I typically ask about flimflam to debunk, but jeez louise, where does one start? [*laughs*] All of it, essentially. But any big myths in terms of Indigenous clothing that you would love to erase from people's minds?

Riley: Well... Yeah, it's kind of upsetting just how much I have to try and convince people that Indigenous fashion exists. In fashion studies in particular, fashion came from Europe, and everything else was dress or costume. There was this hierarchy established where only certain elite people in Paris and London established fashion codes, and everything else was clothing, and it wasn't worthy of a designation of fashion. I would like to tackle that myth and say that there are multiple fashions. Fashion is not just the mainstream industry that we all love to hate. There are fashions that exist in all communities.

One of the myths that we try to tackle at Ryerson, the school of fashion where I teach, is that young people in Indigenous fashion shouldn't strive to be this star designer. There's this notion of going to an art school, getting discovered by a luxury label, and becoming this major international celebrity designer. That path is just not realistic. It's actually problematic because it feeds into this hierarchical system. Instead, I would encourage young fashion designers to start their own companies, work with their own communities, and turn

to local production. As much as possible, we need to really be abandoning this fashion system and starting to create our own.

Alie: Ah, that's such good advice too. What's the hardest thing about your job? The thing that you are irked most about? Whether it's from something really petty to something huge.

Riley: Well, the emails aren't great, but the racism is probably worse. [*exuberant laughter from both Alie and Riley*] I had to. It is the worst thing about my job. It's very timely given the climate right now. The racism is so systemic, and it's all those beliefs about the vanishing Indian, and Indigenous fashion not existing, and this superiority of certain fashions and other things being denigrated. It's so tied to racism.

I think the industry is showing signs that it *wants* to change, at least. It's hard because the system is so powerful. How can you actually change an entire system? That's why I encourage Indigenous designers to start thinking about their own systems and not playing into the mainstream industry. It is just so damaging and so racist. I think a lot of us are kind of fed up with the fashion industry. So, fashion is the worst thing about my job.

Alie: [*laughs*] Which must be so hard for you to explain if someone just sees fashion in what you do. They're like, "Oh, let's talk about the latest Comme des Garçons."

Riley: Like, "Trends!" I'm not like a trend forecaster. I mean, I teach in the business stream of the school of fashion. I'm interested in entrepreneurship, social economies, and scaling up designers. There is so much to fashion. I think a lot of people are curious about materials themselves or fabrication, but fashion is such a big part in such a big industry. There's so many facets to fashion. [*"It's complicated."*]

Alie: Who knew that that was a job, too? It seems like you landed in your perfect job.

Riley: Yeah. I think it's very serendipitous. I do put a lot of faith in the universe and ancestors who open doors. It does seem like I just had *the* mentor who encouraged me, I had *the* experience, and I met *the* right people at *the* right time at a school of fashion that was really paving the way in terms of thinking about sustainability and alternative fashion systems. They have been so welcoming of me, and they were so devoted to incorporating anti-racist fashions and Indigenous fashions into our core curriculum. It does a disservice to fashion students when they don't get to experience that.

One of my favorite assignments that we give to first year fashion students is called a wardrobe assignment. They have to interview someone, and we actually encourage them to interview someone from their family, about something in their wardrobe, what goes into their wardrobe, and maybe their favorite pieces.

My favorite assignments always come from students of color who interview their grandpa or something like that. Their grandpa's talking about all of these amazing clothing practices and then they say, "Oh, then I started wearing suits. I gave up my traditional clothing. I don't know why, but I became less interested in these bright fabrics. I started wearing gray suits all the time." To see students start to unpack that and ask, "Well, why do you think you stopped wearing that?" It's always connected to representations and trying to advance careers at the expense of diversity of clothing.

I'm so amazed when students are becoming part of diverse fashion movements. There are now Black fashion weeks and Indigenous fashion weeks all over. That's where I think we should be heading.

Alie: Oh, that's great.

Aside: I knew none of this before this interview. [*exasperated sigh*]

Alie: It feels like just bringing awareness and dismantling a system that is essentially built from aristocracy, and from waste, and from consumption, and from alienation and erasure.

Riley: Yeah. It's like flaming garbage. It's all of it.

Alie: I definitely think "The emails are bad, but the racism is worse" needs to be stitched on a pillow or needs to be beaded on something. My god. [*laughs*] What about the best thing? What do you love the most about what you do or about Indigenous clothing? Anything.

Riley: Well, I'm so inspired by the youth. The youth are alright, Alie Ward, let me tell you. [*laughs*] They can so clearly see colonialism, and they can so clearly imagine decolonization. I think my generation was especially attuned to environmental issues, and I think this next generation of Indigenous youth in particular are just fed up. They're fed up with colonization. They can see how our current systems are obvious inheritors of colonial systems. They're fed up, and I think they're ready to start building and rebuilding their own worlds.

I am so inspired when I get to a community and see that from such a young age. I think it's also incredible that my job includes spending so much time out on the land. To be a graduate student, and now to be a professor, who gets to spend time in the bush, and chopping wood, and learning from elders by a fire with bush tea. It's incredible that my office hours happen out on the land, so to speak.

It says a lot about our education systems. If we can imagine an Indigenous graduate education, it would be very different from our colonial PhDs and master's degrees. It would be so community focused, and you would learn from elders over a lifetime rather than spending time in the classroom. I'm just so grateful to be part of a school and to have mentors, and that I'm in a department that supports that research. It just speaks so much that they support Indigenous fashion, and they see it as a legitimate field of study because that's very recent. It's very, very recent that people would even consider something like this worthy of study.

Alie: Oh, I'm sure there's going to be people that want to follow you. Hit you up. Ask questions.

Riley: I hope! That is my dream. There is so little written about Indigenous fashion. Literally one or two dissertations I can find in libraries and one really great book called *Native Fashion Now* by Karen Kramer at the Peabody Essex Museum. My dream is that every Nation could have a fashion scholar. I think that's what we need. That's what I'm so excited for, is really these international and inter-National collaborations that can come forth because it's such a beautiful, robust field.

Alie: And how can people find you to stan you, essentially?

Riley: [*laughs*] I am on Instagram and Twitter @RSKucheran. Yeah!

Alie: Oh, I'm so excited about this one! I could just sit and talk to you for days.

Riley: The feeling is mutual. I was more nervous/excited for this interview than I was for my qualifying exams.

Alie: No! [*wild laughs*]

Riley: Like, this is a bigger deal. [*fade out*]

So, ask smart people unfashionable questions. And wear whatever you want, whenever you want to. Thank you to all of the Indigenous writers, creators, artist, activists, and designers out there using your work to lift up fellow Native voices and to educate so many of us.

Links to Riley's social media are in the show notes, as well as a link to learn more about the land-based education programs, and so much more. Follow Riley and check out links at AlieWard.com/Ologies/IndigenousFashionology for more resources on Indigenous art, markets, and more.

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Professional assistant editing by recreational boyfriend Jarrett Sleeper. And of course lead editing by the always-in-style Steven Ray Morris, who hosts podcasts *See Jurassic Right* and *The Purrrcast*. Nick Thorburn wrote and performed the theme music.

If you stick around until the end of the episode, I tell you a secret and this one is that it finally got cold enough in LA to turn the heater on, and you know that first time you turn the heater on in the winter and it burns off all that weird dust that's been accumulating? I don't know... I love that smell. It smells like burnt dust, 'cause it's burnt dust. But it's always like, "Oh! Here we go! Winter." Anyway, stay safe. We've got a lot of work to do, Amurica. Let's do it. Okay, berbye.

Transcribed by

Madison Campbell

Scott Metzinger

Isabel Burns

Your pal Aska Djikia, on the unceded and occupied territory of x^wməθkwəyəm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) and Səlílwətaʔ/Selilwitulh (Tsleil-Waututh) First Nations

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[All My Relations podcast: Native Fashion episode](#)

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Designer [Bethany Yellowtail](#)

[“Indian Feathers and the Law”](#)

[Kimberly Jenkins](#), Riley’s Ryerson colleague

[Beads Against Fascism](#)

[Indigenous Exit Bookshop](#)

[Resources for Native artists](#)

[Santa Fe Indian Market](#)

[More Native and Indigenous Markets in the US](#)

[More organizations supporting Indigenous artists](#)

[More on Dechinta](#)

[List of Indigenous art markets](#)

[White Sage commerce](#)

[“Supermodel Uses Sacred Headdress to Get Totally Stoked about Coachella”](#)

[Victoria’s Secret appropriation look](#)

For comments and inquiries on this or other transcripts, please contact OlogiteEmily@gmail.com