“This is about (Native) Women’s Rematriation”: Indigenous Methodology Storying a Rebirthing of Kinship and Balance Across Women’s Work and Life Roles

by

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Abstract

Native American women play a pivotal role in unraveling patriarchal influences, which have far-reaching gender implications in their traditional social systems and organized labor. Much of what is understood about their life roles is in the context of Western labor statistics and economic indicators, which compare data, such as vocational and economic trajectories, to non-Native American values. Contributing to the growing number of Indigenous-based epistemologies and methodologies for working with communities who have experienced colonization and exploitation in academic science, the current study centered on the paradigm drawn from the author's Indigenous worldview and understanding of the Menominee Theory of Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan (Menominee Good Way of Life) as its epistemology and research methodology. Using an Indigenous framework allowed the author to situate Native women's gendered experiences in pre-colonial gender norms and U.S. historical context into their understanding of wellbeing which provided inroads into how research and vocational psychology understand the intersection of social, economic, and work disparities they face.

Guided by Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan ethical protocols and Native American women knowledge guides, the author invited 15 Native American women (knowledge holders) from the Midwest to share stories about their life roles. Following the request of the women knowledge holders, their stories, along with the author's in-between space experiences and meaning-making, were weaved together to form one personhood called Nētekaeh (my sister). The findings are presented across four seasons and describe Nētekaeh's trajectory of resilience and growth in her understanding of life roles and include (a) Sīkwan (spring): Rebirthing women's kinship brings awareness about their experiences, (b) Nēpen (summer): Cultural resilience serves as an opportunity to restore balance, (c) Takuakōwew (autumn): (i) Women's

voices and knowledge must be recognized and honored and (ii) We must address issues of safety that concern women's wellbeing, and (d) Pepōn (winter): Reflecting on our sources of knowledge leads to new beginnings. These seasonal markers highlight women's gifts of wisdom that teach us how their life roles are shaped by cultural identity, values, and resilience, which set the stage for their vocational identities and allow them to strategize around barriers toward community wellness and cultural survivance. Implications for clinical settings, outreach/policy/consultation, and Indigenous methodologies in research are provided to advance the understanding of Indigenous self-determination in their conceptualization of wellness.

Contents

List of Tables and Figures

Glossary of Terms[1]

Original Instructions emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependence between humans (Shawanda, 2023). I grew up learning about the seven Grandfather teachings which guided our values and behaviors. The teachings of Love, Respect, Bravery, Truth, Honesty, Humility, and Wisdom were painted on large white boulders along the main highway on my reservation, serving as reminders that these teachings ensure we are living in a good way.

All my relations refer to the interconnectedness of all creation and understanding that humans are just a part of a larger system of relationships. This teaching helps us to remember to maintain balance and harmony with other animate and inanimate, the metaphysical and Spiritual beings with whom we share this world.

Indigenous ways of knowing and doing refers to the complex and sophisticated teachings that Indigenous peoples receive by all elements in nature (e.g., all relations) and relate to specific places and ecology.

Next seven generation thinking is a belief that our actions today have implications for the next seven generations of people. We are taught to be respectful and mindful of how we treat Mother Earth and all our relations so that our future generations can move forward and thrive.

Relationality is a central concept that informs our critical thinking about our ethos as individuals from specific nations, and reinforces critical thinking about the *shared* boundaries with our relations (e.g., inter-tribal; Wildcat, 2023). This concept also helps us to know ourselves and our

[1] Terms are intentionally placed in order of how they relate to each other (i.e., rather than placed in alphabetical order), so as to build understanding from one concept to the next.

responsibilities to all our relations where view and *feel* all aspects of the world (e.g., Father Sky versus sky, Mother Earth versus earth) as our kin and thus bridges and strengthens our relationship and is accompanied with responsibility (e.g., the researcher is not the expert but rather *relies* on the knowledge learned from all creation, traditional teachings, guides, and knowledge holders).

Indigenous people refer to the preexisting peoples who lived in a particular place prior to contact by settler populations (e.g., Europeans) all over the world who are most often fighting to maintain and remain culturally intact on their original homelands. In this project, it includes Native American women living in Wisconsin. The term Indigenous is inclusive as it encompasses those who share cultural or racial identity but does not hold the legal context of American Indian which relates to Federal Law.

Encircling refers to the process where community members work to establishing an Indigenous process of authenticity and credibility to the work in order to develop reliability and determine a process or project as valid and meaningful (Wilson, 2008).

Turtle Island refers to the contiguous land base known as North and Central America and stems from various versions of Indigenous people's creation stories that describe Mother Earth being formed on the back of a giant turtle. This is an inclusive term that signals the refusal and rejection of artificial borders set by settler colonizer that otherwise divide and cut across ancestral territories.

Euro Western refers to people who are of Western European decent and can trace their descendancy to Western Europe. This term is often used to understand the differences between Indigenous worldview and Western European worldview (e.g., cultural, social, spiritual).

Acknowledgements

I will be forever indebted to what I was given by my grandparents, including my gramma Edwardine, my namesake, who I never knew but loved through stories. My grandparents taught me about love, the good kind, the kind that is deeply compassionate and respectful. They did everything for their family, and they were so proud of all of us grandkids, proud of our parenting, our community work, and our value of always being home or making sure we came home as often as we could. Before she passed, my gramma talked to me about my doctoral studies. She said, "Go all the way, go as far as you can, and then come home." I am also grateful for my family, from my youngest baby cousin to all my aunties and uncles, with their 'big aunty love' as one of the women in my study described. I am grateful to my parents for supporting my lifelong love of reading and learning, especially my dad for raising me in the woods. Watching him navigate the rivers while trout fishing, hunting for berry bushes deep in the forest, and hunting wild game, I learned about the value of home and what it can provide. And to my little sister, I cannot thank you enough for always believing in me and standing by my side through everything. Thank you to my older brother, the kindest soul you'll ever meet, and my older sister, whose creative side is something I have always admired. To my nieces and nephews, Aunty loves you all so very much. I was very fortunate in many ways to have grown up on the reservation; this is where my roots are and the basis for this project. Love you all.

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Dedication

For nec-Metaēhmosak, my fellow Indigenous women, who have persisted before me in the past seven generations, and those whose teachings and gifts will continue to guide this life work for the next seven generations.

Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Historical Context of Colonization within Native American Communities in the U.S.

Native American peoples in the U.S. face persistent experiences of discrimination and racism, include structural racism and trauma resulting from historical U.S. events and colonization. Colonization is described as "the displacement and undermining of societies, including their values, cultures, beliefs, and ways of life by outside peoples" (Weaver, 2009, pg. 1552).

Colonization describes the U.S. government-led legislation which spanned over a 500-hundred-year period (e.g., land dispossession through genocide and forced removal, assimilation via removal of children to boarding schools) upon the first peoples of America by European settlers (Gone et al., 2019). Colonization resulted in genocide and loss of culture, cultural knowledge, traditions, land, and identity among Native American peoples. Ensued from colonization, the mental, physical and social impact on health was cumulative (Comas-Díaz, et al., 2019; Gone et al., 2019).

The trauma associated with colonization was the synthesis of historical oppression and ongoing cultural, spiritual, and psychological disruption following genocidal and brutal assimilation tactics. Proximally, colonization introduced never before experiences of oppression, discrimination, and resource scarcity and led to present-day forms of complex trauma and deep poverty (Gone, 2013; Leonard et al., 2020; Poupart, 2003). Native American scholars and leaders recognize that government-sanctioned boarding schools that sequestered children were a root cause of contemporary and persistent mental health issues (e.g., post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, substance abuse, and suicide) among Native American communities (Charbonneau-Dahlen et al., 2016; Gone, 2013). The social pathology of colonization included the

intergenerational transmission of trauma and stress, and led to homelessness, poverty, substance abuse, suicide, and economic and mental health disparity for Native American peoples (Smith, 2005). Assimilation, internalized oppression, and stereotyping reinforced racism and structural discrimination that had enduring individual, family, and systemic impacts, including poor access to quality healthcare, resource alienation, and poor education (Fryberg et al., 2018; Gone et al., 2019).

Gendered Implications of Colonization

In addition to the historical events that impact and threaten the well-being of Native American communities, colonial supremacy and Christianity introduced ideologies about gendered labor roles and social class systems to Native American communities (Child, 2012a). Before colonial contact, many tribes were matrilineal, balanced, and egalitarian, meaning that economies were based on the value of the contributions of their members for the benefit of family, clan, and community (Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn, 1995, Child, 2012a; Smith, 2005; Weaver, 2009). Women played central roles in traditional Native American social systems and organized labor. They held property rights and were decision-makers year-round within seasonal economies (Child, 2012a). The esteem for femininity went beyond people; Native American communities believed their economy was based on nourishment provided by female-gendered earth (Child, 2012a). Elder women carried primary cultural responsibilities (e.g., transmitting cultural knowledge) which ensured the well-being and sustenance of communities (Child, 2012a; Weaver, 2009).

The effects of colonization on gender roles were supplanted with patriarchy's colonial ideologies, which undermined and upended Native American women’s rights to inheritance, power, and wealth within social structures (i.e., coloniality and Christianity displaced female

leadership with male subjugation over women; Cornet, 2001). Simultaneously, the devaluation of Native American male roles (e.g., protectors, hunters) led to the demarcation of traditional equal gender roles among Native American peoples. Internalized male powerlessness and acceptance of the domination over women (Weaver, 2009) led to a cascade of gender-based interpersonal violence and structural sexism, which were found to be rampant in many tribal communities (Peters et al., 2015; Weaver, 2009).

Although tribal self-determination and education policies of the 1970s ended white government supervision (Pickering, 2004) and facilitated self-governance, the long-standing and deliberate atrocities by the U.S. government left devastating implications on tribes and Native American peoples (for review, see Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn,1995; Deloria, 1994; Newland; 2022). This included impacts on tribal economies that continue to have far-reaching gender implications for Native American women (Whitney Mauer, 2017). Today, Native American women are overrepresented as heads of household in single-parent homes, which had disproportionately higher poverty rates on reservations (Burnette & Zhang, 2019). This in turn further exacerbated gendered trends in overall economic wellbeing within tribal communities (Burnette & Zhang, 2019).

Native American Women's Life Roles

In the context of historical colonization, trauma, and oppression, Native American women today play a pivotal role in unraveling patriarchal influences (Ficklin et al., 2022). The growing rates of Native American women in wage labor, such as leadership positions, had increased their influence in their communities (Kuokkanen, 2011) and has positioned them well in the fight against their social, political, and economic marginalization (Dennis & Bell, 2020).). In turn, Native American women have led the way in enhancing educational,

economic, and cultural opportunities for their nations (Staniland et al., 2020).

Brave Heart and colleagues (2016) discussed their own intersecting life experiences as Native American women. They highlighted how they and other women take on critical roles, such as researchers, to combat the impacts of historical trauma in their communities. As a group of Native American women and women allies, they described the unique accumulative impact of experiencing personal and family trauma and exposure to secondary trauma in their work. These women demonstrated a deep understanding of the widespread psychological impacts of historical trauma, which led to constant concern for those with whom they interact (e.g., research participants). As such, Native American women have restored their roles as cultural carriers and caretakers through kinship within the context of historical trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2016) and were finding ways to meet the needs of their families and community (Clark, 2002; Gambrell, 2016).

Native American women hold many life roles simultaneously. For example, themes from qualitative studies have shown that Native American women were viewed as leaders and healers and were integral to tribal wellness (Maracle et al., 2020; Taylor & Stauss, 2008; Pickering, 2004). Women hold these roles in the context of historical trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2016). Native American women also serve as caretakers, mothers, and sources of strength to each other, especially as they navigate other life roles and leadership within community and work-related organizations (Taylor & Stauss, 2006). The pursuit of education, paid work, and career development occur alongside Native American women's varied life roles. Yet, limited research exists regarding how Native American women make decisions regarding work and career within the context of their life roles.

Understanding how Native American women network and build support structures and

visibility for their career aspirations was found to be crucial to combat policies that hindered their sense of control between work demands and family needs (Clark, 2002; Gambrell, 2016). Native American women who experience adverse family factors (e.g., single-parent household) were less likely to have economic opportunities (e.g., retain property in divorce, receive social assistance) than Native American men, which contributed to mental health disparities (Davis-Delano et al., 2021; Young & French, 1995). In addition to enduring painful processes in their life roles, including experiences of racism and exclusion and oppression in academic and work settings, Native American women struggled to allow themselves to focus on personal care amidst high levels of community suffering (e.g., high rates of community violence, MMIWG; Brave Heart et al., 2016).

Taken together, Native American women created ways to meet the needs of their family and communities through structural and social change (e.g., establishment of grassroots coalitions such as MMIWG2s). They persisted in multitasking in the home amidst racism and oppression that affects all facets of their lives (Clark, 2002). The accumulative impact of stress and trauma Native American women experience motivated them to seek education and economic healing modalities (Brave Heart et al., 2016; Davis-Delano et al., 2021). However, they climbed an uphill battle. Research spanning nearly a century found that Native American communities and women have been impacted by unequal opportunities in the K-12 education and post-secondary system, which has dire consequences for their work experiences and career development later in life (National Academies of Sciences, 2021). Therefore, there was a need to explore a nuanced understanding of Native American women's work experiences and the ways in which they navigate work and life roles.

Native American Women's Career Development and Work Experiences

A recent U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Current Population Study reported that Native American people participate in the U.S. labor force at lower rates than the national average (60.3% and 62.8%, respectively; Allard & Brundage, 2019). Gender disparities in pay and educational rates yield steeper gaps. For example, despite having higher educational attainment than Native American men (Burnette & Zhang, 2019), Native American women were less likely to participate in the labor force and were paid lower hourly wages as compared to Native American men (Allard & Brundage, 2019; Burnette & Zhang, 2019). Finally, Native women were paid at lower rates compared to White women, and were among the lowest paid across racial and ethnic groups (American Association of University Women [AAUW], 2016; Burnette, 2017).

Continuous shifts among myriad life roles constrain women's well-being and has been documented to contribute to overload, depression, and detrimental health outcomes (Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2004). While Native American women took it upon themselves to find ways to organize cultural practices into wage work, their efforts did not necessarily contribute fiscally to tribal economies thereby forcing them to carry multiple paid and nonpaid work roles (Pickering, 2004). In a phenomenological study, Gambrell (2016) explored the meaning of why and how four Lakota women made sense of their leadership. The perspectives among the Lakota women articulated the connection between cultural assimilation and gender challenges in their communities. For instance, while they viewed the role of education as a means toward cultural revitalization and community healing, they highlighted the implications of patriarchy as a hurdle and trial to their career paths (Gambrell, 2016).

Factors that Contribute to Native American Women's Paid Work Experiences

Relationships and community prioritization play a critical role in Native American

women's work and satisfaction with work. They allow women to mentor and support each other (Staniland et al., 2020) as shared identity and values led to connectedness (Lips-Wiersma & Morris, 2009). Drawing on community knowledge provided comfort and validation as women took on challenging career trajectories (Staniland et al., 2020). Community knowledge has been shown to be integral for Native American women who in turn integrated that knowledge into their work practices (Bearskin et al., 2016). Haar and Brougham (2013), for example, examined career satisfaction among 172 Indigenous Māori employees and found that workplace cultural wellbeing was significantly associated with career satisfaction above and beyond other factors (e.g., human capital, socio-demographics, organizational sponsorship, and individual differences) and that collectivistic orientation was a moderator of the relationship between workplace cultural wellbeing and career satisfaction for women and men (Haar & Brougham, 2013). Similarly, Dabdoub and colleagues (2021) tested worker job satisfaction on cultural factors among a Native American sample in the U.S. Cultural and family factors uniquely and positively contributed to job satisfaction above other factors and meaningfulness of work was positively associated with job satisfaction (Dabdoub et al., 2021). Similarly, themes from a qualitative study examining 'fit' among 16 Indigenous Māori business academics (9 women, 7 men) revealed that among participants, the presence of Indigenous values and aspirations in work and education contexts positively shaped their career decisions and enactment, particularly when there were direct links to community-based work and local priorities (Staniland et al., 2020).

Navigating racism through bonding, sustaining indigeneity, and seeking inclusivity among peers have been demonstrated to aid women in becoming socialized in non-Native American work environments (Brayboy & Morgan, 1998). Embodying cultural and family identity in the workplace appeared to be a critical factor that promoted greater relatedness to

work roles regardless of education level and work type (Portman & Awe, 2001). Native American women sought mentoring roles in work that enabled them to find cultural congruence and pass on strengths to future generations (Taylor & Stauss, 2006).

Workplace-culture match was a critical factor that allowed Native American women to persist within workplaces, positively contributing to cultural healing and wellness in their communities (Gambrell, 2016). For instance, Native American women perceived a higher sense of community when they felt supported by their employer (i.e., when they received family support and flexibility; Clark, 2002). A sense of community and relationality with co-workers was demonstrated to be related to Native American women's higher intrinsic value in their work, which increased their ability to persist (Al-Asfour et al., 2021; Gambrell, 2016).

Taken together, there was evidence that Native American women in the U.S. engaged in meaningful cultural and leadership roles within the world of work (Maracle et al., 2020; Taylor & Stauss, 2008), which serve as a protective factor in their career navigation (Staniland et al., 2020). Their ability to persist in the face of cultural incongruence in the workplace and in their lives was critical for the wellbeing of their communities (Gambrell, 2016). Research has explicated the importance of workplace cultural wellbeing and career satisfaction (Haar & Brougham, 2013) and demonstrated the implications for long-term career choices (Staniland et al., 2020).

However, there continue to be gaps into an understanding of the barrier's Native American women in the U.S. face and their outcomes (e.g., how they respond to cultural, social, and work demands; Staniland et al., 2020).

Work-Home Interface: Challenges for Native American Women

Native American women navigate work barriers to break glass-ceiling effects (Burnette

& Zhang, 2019) in ways that allow them to attain cultural well-being and work satisfaction (Hunt, 2022). Nonetheless, the previously stated gendered barriers and familial obligations counterbalance their efforts to succeed in work and career (Clark, 2002; Whyman et al., 2021). Accordingly, pay disparities, work inflexibility, and structural racism in workplaces strain them, contributing to health outcomes and putting employability at risk (Adamsen et al., 2018; Clark, 2002; SteelFisher et al., 2019).

Numerous studies highlighted barriers Native American women face as they navigate workplaces and manage the interface of work and family. There were unequal gender roles across paid (Burnette & Zhang, 2019) and unpaid work. The perceptions within Native American communities that "moms 'mostly pull[sic] the weight'" was a norm and implies that childcare and financial management were primarily a women's role (Mckinley et al., 2021, p. 290). In workplaces, racism and gender discrimination experienced by Native American women contributed to internalized inferiority (Machuca et al., 2014; Taylor & Stauss, 2006). These experiences forced Native American women to employ strategies to overcome incongruence with cultural values and work expectations (Metzger, 2022; Staniland et al., 2020). This, in turn, contributed to women sacrificing personal recreation and care to family obligations (Brave Heart et al., 2016) resulting in overburden and feeling taken for granted or unappreciated (Mckinley et al., 2021). The mental health and emotional toll of chronic multitasking led to stress, fatigue (Clark, 2002; Mckinley et al., 2021), higher rates of death by suicide (Young & French, 1995), and lower participation in the workforce (Allard & Brundage, 2019). As compared to Native American men, Native American women were less likely to report having work flexibility even after controlling for the number of dependents and parent status (Campbell & O'Meara, 2014). This inflexibility forced Native American women to prioritize their family and community needs

over personal, economic and educational goals (Maracle et al., 2020).

Colonization, structural racism, and sexism (Al-Asfour et al., 2021) coupled with barriers to engage in decent work (e.g., transportation, education opportunities) forced Native American women to engage in non-wage work to ameliorate home and community conditions (Pickering, 2004). Evidence suggests that Native American women who engaged in non-wage community work (e.g., wild ricing, sewing) experienced fulfillment (Berman, 2003; Kuokkanen, 2011; Pickering, 2004). However, prioritizing non-wage work posed risks to women's employability and financial security (Clark, 2002; Pickering, 2004). In this way, Native American women may have felt forced to choose between social roles (e.g., cultural engagement that was critical to future generations and their wellbeing) and paid work (Pickering, 2004). Stigma and the devaluation of non-wage work exacerbated poverty and works against strengthening community wellbeing (Whitney Mauer, 2017).

Taken together, Native American women face persistent barriers that impede their ability to live safe and meaningful lives (Malcoe et al., 2004; Weaver, 2009). Their traditional ways of living and subsisting as women have been supplanted with oppressive systems of colonialism (Child, 2012a). Moreover, colonial heteronormative heterosexual work concepts have reshaped their contributions, creating multiple and conflicting types of labor that were reinforced through capitalism (Cornet, 2001, Burnette & Zhang, 2019). Policies aimed at improving the vocational lives of Native American woman have yet to capture the nuance of their experiences (Cornet, 2001). To understand their ways of living and working as Native American women, research must be framed within Indigenous knowledge systems and include a decolonizing and feminist lens (Pickering, 2004; Smith, 1999). This study sought to fill these gaps by centering Indigenous methods and Native American women through storytelling.

Summary and Purpose of this Study

Existing research has described the lasting impacts of colonization and the settler state on Native American communities in the U.S., explaining disparities in substance abuse, violence, death by suicide, and social concerns (Malcoe et al., 2004). The longstanding impacts of colonization that have led to internalized oppression coupled with the ongoing undermining of Native American culture and lifeways within dominant cultural work policies contribute to Native American womens' continued gendered oppression and discrimination (Brave Heart et al., 2016; Davis-Delano et al., 2021). In response, Native American women have paved the way for leadership and education to contribute to developing culturally congruent family practices while upholding their social and cultural roles (Brave Heart et al., 2016). Drawing from the process of carving a meaningful career (Staniland et al., 2020), this study aims to explore Native American women's storying of their persistence as they carry work, social, and cultural roles onto future generations.

Research Question

How do Native American women make sense of their work options, choices, and trajectories?

Aims and Scope

The findings of this qualitative study centered Menominee Theory, Omaēqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan (Menominee Good Way of Life) contribute to the growing number of Indigenous-based epistemologies and methodologies for working with communities who have experienced colonization and exploitation in the academic sciences (Walters et al., 2009). Using an Indigenous Storywork methodology and condensed conversational and story analysis to learn about how Native American women make sense of their life roles in the context of their work

choices help provide inroads into understanding and changing the impact of these phenomena on the economic and work disparities they face. Moreover, situating their gendered experiences in the context of pre-colonial gender norms and integrating U.S. historical context into the current understanding of wellbeing builds knowledge of cultural relevancy in research and vocational practices while promoting resilience through policy shifts and systemic interventions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Current Conditions and Disparities

More than 575 federally recognized sovereign tribes[2] exist in the U.S. (U.S. Department of the Interior, 2022) with over 100 state-recognized tribes (Office of Minority Health; [OMH], 2019). The 2020 U.S. Census Bureau statistics estimate there were 331.9 million people who reside in the U.S., with American Indians and Alaska Natives (AIAN) making up approximately 9.7 million (2.9 percent) of the total U.S. population. The 2010 Census found that the majority of AIANs (78 percent) live outside of tribal lands compared to 22 percent living on reservations (OMH, 2019). Approximately 27.5 percent of the total AIAN population were under the age of 18 (as compared to 18.6 of non-Hispanic Whites).

While the total count of AIAN grew by 86.5 percent (compared to 7.4 percent total U.S. population increase) in the 2020 Census, estimates indicate that AIAN were undercounted by approximately 5.6 percent (Press, 2022a). Undercounting AIAN populations within census data and peer-reviewed outcome data creates challenges for capturing the disparities they face. In turn, AIAN populations experienced underfunding of needed resources to address those disparities (Press, 2022a). Despite the complexity of capturing accurate data across tribes and the negative historical perceptions of race data (e.g., racialized social ranking; Strmic-Pawl et al., 2018), it was critical to review the current data on Native people to track social inequalities.

Educational attainment rates in 2019 showed that 84.4 percent of AIANs had at least a high school diploma, with 20.8 percent having earned at least a bachelor's degree, and 7.6 percent having earned an advanced graduate or professional degree (as compared to 93.3, 36.9,

[2] Native American was used as a collective term. Native American persons in this paper referred to the Native Americans, Alaska Natives. Indigenous was used to refer to specific contexts and citations (e.g., Indigenous Māori of New Zealand or methodologies). There was a great deal of linguistic and cultural diversity within and among the Indigenous nations of North America and globally.

and 13.9 percent of the non-Hispanic white population, respectively; OMH, 2019; Semega et al., 2020). Although educational attainment increased among AIAN individuals, they remain the lowest across K-12 and higher education (i.e., there was a 39.3 increase in AIAN who earned bachelor's degrees and 52.1 percent increase in AIANs who earned graduate or professional degrees since 2010; U.S. Census Bureau, 2021). Additionally, poverty rates among this group continue to be dramatically high. In 2019, the median household income for AIANs was $49,906, with 20.3 percent living at the poverty level and a 7.9 percent unemployment rate (as compared to $71,664, 9.0 percent, and 3.7 percent for non-Hispanic white households, respectively; Semega et al., 2020).

Health Disparities and Health Care Inequities Within AIAN Communities

Inequities in health care affect AIANs in detrimental ways. AIAN's rates of coverage increased following the American Affordable Care Act (ACA; 3.17 percent increase in public health insurance, 1.24 percent increase in private health insurance), with higher increases in expansion states (6.31 percent increases) than non-expansion states (Frerichs et al., 2022). While AIAN health coverage rates have significantly improved since the ACA, they continue to be among the racial groups most impacted by racial disparities in healthcare coverage (Frerichs et al., 2022). Further, AIANs have specific considerations that contributed to ongoing healthcare disparities, irrespective of their healthcare coverage.

Statistically, 14.9 percent of AIANs lack health insurance coverage (compared to 6.3 percent of non-Hispanic whites) and rely on the Indian Health Service (IHS). IHS is housed within the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. In 2019, IHS provided health care to approximately 2.6 million AIANs and 42.1 percent of the total AIAN population relied on Medicaid or public health insurance coverage (as compared to 34.3 percent for non-Hispanic

whites; IHS, 2019). Health projections for 2020 found that AIAN had an average life expectancy of 78.4 years, with 81.1 years for women and 75.8 years for men (as compared to 80.6 years for non-Hispanic white people, 82.7 for white women, and 78.4 years for white men; IHS, 2019). Due to medical healthcare underfunding at the IHS and frequent experiences of medical discrimination, AIANs contend with poor health outcomes and limited access to adequate health care (OMH, 2019).

Historically, AIANs' experiences of cultural barriers and geographic isolation have prevented them access to adequate health care. Over time, these barriers have contributed to the leading diseases and causes of death among AIAN, including: heart disease, cancer, unintentional injuries (accidents), diabetes, and stroke (IHS, 2019). Moreover, AIANs had a high prevalence and heightened risk factors for mental health and suicide (Ahmed & Conway, 2020), unintentional injuries, obesity, substance use, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), teenage pregnancy, diabetes, liver disease, and hepatitis. Complexity in diagnosis and treatment led to comorbidity and chronic disease (Ahmed & Conway, 2020). AIANs were overrepresented in alcoholism mortality rates; estimates suggest they were 514 percent higher than the general population (139 percent and 71 percent, respectively) and that AIANs had the highest rates across all racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. In addition, the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics estimate that suicide rates were two times higher among AIAN communities as compared to the general U.S. population (Curtin & Hedegaard, 2019). Suicide was found to be the second leading cause of death among AIANs and Native teenagers' rates of suicide were 2.5 times higher than any other group in the U.S. (Curtin & Hedegaard, 2019).

In combination, AIANs disproportionately high rates of lifetime substance abuse (Lipari et

al., 2013), suicide, violence, and anxiety/affective disorders led to high rates of violence and poverty (Duran et al., 2004; Gone & Trimble, 2012). These stressors also contributed to elevated rates of mental health disparities within AIAN populations (Kong et al., 2018). Intergenerational and on-going traumatic experiences created layers of complexity in treating and addressing disparities (Ehlers et al., 2013; Guenzel & Struwe, 2020).

Historical Impacts: Imperialism, Colonization, and Assimilation of Tribes in the U.S.

Christianity and European colonization have had devastating effects on the Native American Peoples of North America (Deloria, 1994). The Westward expansion of what is the present-day U.S. resulted in the genocide of several hundred tribes and the near annihilation of many more. It is estimated that approximately 100 million Native American peoples were murdered during several hundred years of conquest, which led to a demographic collapse of thousands of distinct tribes and the loss of cultures and languages (Deloria, 2003). The history of colonization is among the most sobering themes underlying the establishment of the U.S. that nearly decimated an entire populace of Native American people. Colonization was the catalyst for the changes and disparities that continue to impact tribes.

The plight of Native American women and girls began with imperialistic efforts that prompted U.S. coloniality and assimilation (Meriam, 1928). A brief discussion of the sequence of Christian theology and imperial conquests is described in the section to follow. This history elucidates how settler-coloniality set forth various assimilation tactics that explain Native American women's current demographic disparities (Meriam, 1928; Skewes & Blume, 2019).

Colonization: 1700s-1800s

Christian religion and western history are inseparable and explain colonization, exploitation, and genocide of Native American peoples in North America over the last 500 years

(Deloria, 2003). European Christians who arrived in North America were the impetus of the widespread belief in the "international legal principle" known as the Doctrine of Discovery (Doctrine; Miller, 2011, p. 329). The Doctrine gave Christian nations the inherent right to claim and exploit lands throughout the fiftieth and twentieth centuries (Miller, 2011). The term Terra Nullius, meaning "land that is null, void, or empty," applied to lands occupied by non-Christian people and allowed English colonists to evoke "first discovery," permitting European legal claim, through military means, to seize and title Native American occupied territories (Deloria, 2003; Miller, 2011, pp. 333–334; Newland, 2022). Growing out of principles from the Doctrine of Discovery, Manifest Destiny reinforced political rhetoric which assumed "divinely ordained destiny" to U.S. conquest over American land in 1854 (Miller, 2011, p. 332).

The subjugation of Native American people in the Americas was the beginning of coloniality that persists in the U.S. (Deloria, 2003). Colonization took place between the 1700s and early 1800s through land annexation, removal policies, and violence by European settlers and the U.S. military (Peters et al., 2015). While the latter part of the 1700s attempted to establish boundaries and peace between settler-colonizers and Native American people, the 1800s brought war and violence. For instance, the Sand Creek Massacre of 1862 is a prominent example of the violent and genocidal tactics of the U.S. military who brought inhumane and undignified war tactics that left entire encampments of Native American men, women, and children dead in their attempt to humiliate and control Native American leaders (Deloria, 2003; West, 2021). The 1860s brought gold miners to California who would host "Sunday shoots" wherein white people would massacre entire Tribal villages to procure land in search of gold (Deloria, 1994, p. 5). The need for ongoing superiority of the "American Story" required eradication of Native American existence, thus promulgated the assimilation period (Wheelock,

2006).

Assimilation: 1800s-1900s

After over a hundred years of warfare between the U.S. and Native American tribes, widespread assimilation efforts began in early 1800s by the U.S. government and Christian churches. Assimilation was largely perceived as a religious project in its early stages although there were many political tactics involved (Deloria, 2003). The rise of mythic narratives of savage Native American people were used to convince settler Americans that Native American people were a barrier to capitalism, industrialization, and the future of America (Meriam, 1928; Wheelock, 2006). The [General Allotment] Dawes Act, which lasted from 1887 to 1933, was the major federal policy aimed to solve the "Indian Problem" (Wheelock, 2006, p. 117). The primary goal of the Dawes Act was to assimilate Native American people into mainstream American society through land ownership (e.g., allotment) and citizenship opportunities. President Jefferson, as cited in Newland (2022) asserted in 1803:

> To promote this disposition to exchange lands which they have to spare & we want, for necessaries, which we have to spare & they want, we shall push our trading houses, and be glad to see the good & influential individuals among them run in debt, because we observe that when these debts get beyond what the individuals can pay, they become willing to lop th[em off] by a cession of lands (p. 22).

This began a two-fold approach for White Americans to acquire more Indian land. As a result of a series of events, including the Dawes Act, by 1955, the Native American natural land base had dwindled to approximately 2.3 percent of its original size (Dunbar-Ortiz, 2014).

Federal Indian Education Policy

While land seizure was resolved by the Dawes Act, a single piece of legislation,

assimilating Native American people proved to be more challenging (Wheelock, 2006). In response, in 1819, U.S. congress allocated funds to enlist Christian missionaries to oversee and enact assimilation policies within religious schools (Newland, 2022). These policies focused on the destruction of Native American culture and assimilation into a rigid profile of Americanism (Wheelock, 2006; p. 120). In particular, Congress voted to provide annual payments to missionaries for the education of Native American people (Fritz, 2017). During this time, ongoing conflicts between settler-colonists and Native American tribes were disseminated and portrayed intense and brutal frontier conditions. As a result, American attitudes toward Native American individuals worsened and contributed to a push for more stringent tactics (Szasz, 1999). This, in turn, sparked Congressional allocation of more extensive education funding (Szasz, 1999) and represented the beginning of the federal education of Native American people, better known as the boarding school period.

Lasting from 1801 to 1969, the boarding school period is the most well-known and systematic route to total assimilation of Native American children (Newland, 2022). One prominent figure in the boarding school era was Methodist General Henry Pratt who founded the first official boarding school in 1879, Carlisle Indian Industrial School in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Pratt believed in the education and Christianizing of Native American people. According to Malmsheimer (1985), Pratt used a militant approach to educating Native American children insofar as to treating them like "soldiers" (p. 59). Pratt believed that "barbaric qualities" of Native American life should be replaced with "character of civilization" including "competitive," "industrious" "Christian" and "individualistic." Further, children should become "obedient," and "march[sic] in line with America" (Pratt, 1964 as cited in Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 55). Despite critiques that his efforts were failing (e.g., Native

American children were returning to their Native American cultural life after aging out of the boarding school), Pratt's efforts at Carlisle were nonetheless viewed as a success by Congress and boarding schools proliferated. A secondary benefit to Pratt's efforts were that parents of children in Carlisle tended to be "more cooperative" (i.e., compliant) toward reservation government agents (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 62). Pratt claimed his approach to eradicating Native American "barbarianism" would take him no more than 500 schools and one generation to eradicate the "Indian" from the man (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 55). By 1969, there were more than 400 American Indian boarding schools across the U.S.

Pratt's militant approach to education at Carlisle established standard practice and treatment of Native American children. While Pratt argued that Carlisle produced positive results, his proof of "transformation" of Native American children were largely and nearly exclusively based on "before and after" photographs which he circulated to prove to Americans that "Indians" could be educated (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 63). In reality, his assimilation strategies were more insidious and beyond mere physical characteristics. For instance, Native American children of culturally diverse tribes were brought together at Carlisle and made to believe they were one. In many cases, children from warring or enemy tribes were taught to view themselves as the same as their "hereditary enemies," which caused confusion and mental turmoil (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 69). Moreover, the forceful indoctrination of White standards in classroom curriculum communicated to children that they were an inferior race. In one example, Pratt engrained representations and "othering" of Native American children from a "white perspective" by displaying and objectifying "artifacts from various tribal cultures" within history teaching lessons (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 72). However, this approach did not appear to have the desired effects as Pratt's writings described Native American children as

seeming to enjoy discussing the Native American leaders in textbooks who were portrayed as heroes fighting against the American military (Malmsheimer, 1985). Concerned that details about “Indian heroes” would deter his assimilation efforts (Malmsheimer, 1985, p. 71), Pratt intervened to the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). In 1890, a BIA policy went into effect regarding the first omitted and biased adaptation of Native American history in textbooks that stated, “The Indian heroes of the campfire need not be disparaged, but gradually the heroes of American homes and history may be substituted as model and ideals” (Prucha, 1979, pg. 198, as cited in Malmsheimer, 1985).

Problems regarding the conditions of Carlisle and other schools were well-known (e.g., lack of food, over-crowding, physical abuse; Meriam, 1928). Soon stories also began to surface regarding the impact of health conditions (e.g., high rates of trachoma) in children. By the 1910, many boarding schools were deemed to be in poor condition and overcrowding but Congress failed to approve much needed funds. Moreover, Native American children who returned home struggled with the deleterious identity effects and found they neither fit into either reservation life or White society (Szasz, 1999). According to Malmsheimer (1985), Pratt problematically explained the “retrogression” of his ex-students as the result of “heredity and environment” (p. 55). In 1926, under pressure by reformists, the U.S. Department of Interior commissioned the Brookings Institute to survey and report on the "economic and social conditions of the American Indians." (pg. vii). This report, later known as the Meriam Report, is an 872-page report entitled “The Problem of Indian Administration.” The Meriam Report was published in 1928 and the findings shone a spotlight on the conditions facing Native American people. For example, the report highlighted problems with overcrowding, insufficient food, improper treatment and healthcare of children. The report also exposed a significant

finding that preadolescent children were forced to work long hours tending to gardens or kitchen work to meet the funding gaps in the school system. Meriam (1928) cited several instances of harsh punishment of students by school staff when staff became discouraged by children's unsuccessful conversion to Christianity. Regarding family and community life of Native American families, Meriam (1928) asserted:

> "The tendency [of the BIA] has been rather toward weakening family life and community activities than toward strengthening them. The long-continued policy of removing Indian children from home and placing them for years in boarding school largely disintegrates the family and interferes with developing normal family life. The belief has apparently been that the shortest road to civilization is to take children away from their parents and insofar as possible to stamp out the old Indian life." (p. 15).

The reports of the poor health condition of children after spending time in boarding schools contrasted reports wherein children were observed to "possess[sic] beautiful pearl white teeth" upon first entering Carlisle, thereby indicating that children had lived a healthy lifestyle prior to boarding school (Malmsheimer, 1985).

The Meriam Report (1928) documented that the federal education policy, which aimed to assimilate in boarding schools, had lasting detrimental emotional and developmental effects on parents and children and Native American communities. The BIA was also criticized for eradicating Native American economic systems, asserting this tactic is a root cause of poverty within Native American communities (Meriam, 1928). The boarding schools were cited as paving the way for health disparities, the spread of disease, and high rates of death by disease. The boarding schools resulted in the first documented incidences of broken homes and marital discord (e.g., single mother homes) endured by Native American families. As well, the erosion

of families and kinship networks led to the first reported victimization of Native American girls and women by White men. Meriam also cited incidences of White physicians who were intentionally providing "dope" to Native American adults as a means to "separate wealthy Indians from their money" (Meriam, 1928, pg. 111).

Taken together, the Federal Indian Education Policy contributed to lasting detrimental impacts within AIAN communities and families. The absence of parent-child relationships when children were removed from their families and homes left children unprepared for future parenthood and led to the instability of relationships in ensuing generations (Meriam, 1928). The suppression of Native American culture led to internalization and erosion of cultural identity (Deloria, 2003). Despite these findings and underlying need to abolish the Federal Indian Education Policy, the Meriam Report (1928) supported the on-going education of Native American children and presented recommendations for improved oversight of their education. However, due to corruption in the BIA along with ongoing poor management of Native American affairs, the boarding school era was officially termed in 1969 during the Kennedy administration (Malmsheimer, 1985). For decades following the termination of the boarding school era, Native American people have actively fought to re-establish sovereignty and oversight of their communities while calling for apologies and reconciliation by the federal government and the Vatican for the genocide and inhumane treatment of Native American people (Press, 2022b).

More recently, an uncovering of mass burial sites at residential schools in Canada set forth renewed efforts to learn about the reality of what Native American children and their families faced as a result of the Federal Indian Education Policy (Sinclair & Cochrane, 2021). This triggered efforts in the U.S. to locate thousands of missing children reported on tribal

documents dating back to the early 1900s (Newland, 2022). In 2021, the U.S. Department of Interior, spearheaded by Interior Secretary Deb Holland, led an investigation into federally run Indian boarding schools. In April of 2022, the first volume of that investigation was released. In May 11, 2022, during press conference introducing the report, Sec. Deb Haaland stated, "For more than a century, tens of thousands of Native American children were taken from their communities and forced into boarding school run by the U.S. government." The report confirmed that the U.S. government directly targeted Native American people, including Native Americans, Alaska Native, and Native Hawaiian children, in the pursuits of the policy of cultural assimilation that coincided with Indian territorial dispossession (Newland, 2022). In other words, the report affirmed the displacement of Native American people from their ancestral lands and the forcible suppression of their culture and identity between 1819 and 1969. As iterated in the Meriam Report (1928), Newland (2022) reaffirmed the boarding school system induced manual labor and vocational skills and used various means of enforcement, including corporal punishment “such as solitary confinement; flogging; withholding food; whipping; slapping; and cuffing…the school system at times make older Indian children punish younger Indian children” (p. 8). The summary asserted the consequences of federal Indian boarding school policies, including the effects of intergenerational trauma caused and inflicted on children as young as four years old, were predicted to persist (Newland, 2022). The report confirmed that over half of the federal boarding schools were staffed or paid for by religious institutions and that among 408 federal schools, the number of children who died were estimated to be in the tens of thousands (Newland, 2022).

Continued Impacts of Colonization and Systemic / Religious Discrimination

Further complicating health concerns were documented high rates of ongoing

discrimination and racism of Native American people, which had serious health and social implications. Discrimination and harassment affect a significant share of AIAN people. Findling et al. (2019) compared the differences in health outcomes in a nationally representative study of 342 Native American and 902 White adults by examining correlates between experiences of discrimination and health outcomes. The authors (2019) found that Native Americans experience disproportionate rates of systemic racial discrimination, regardless of socioeconomic (e.g., geographic or neighborhood) conditions. These experiences of discrimination led to a variety of detrimental impacts for AIAN individuals, including negative experiences and access to quality health care, lowered employment opportunities and security, increased police brutality, and more frequent court interactions (Findling et al., 2019). In addition, findings indicated that Native Americans were more likely to experience interpersonal violence (e.g., racial slurs, microaggressions) and nearly one in six reported avoiding health care due to experiences of medical discrimination (Findling et al., 2019).

Internalized colonialism and religious misconceptions about AIANs shape the views of people working in systems (e.g., criminal justice, schools) that affect AIANs. AIANs were disproportionately criminalized due to stereotyping and status-linked attributions held by prosecutors, judges and other criminal justice personnel that led to high incarceration rates among Native American people (Ulmer & Bradley-Engen, 2019) and led to significant disparities in the criminal justice system (Redner-Vera, 2019). Despite case law overturning discriminatory school board probation of long hair among AIAN males (Zahniser, 1994, p. 217), resistance and discrimination about perceptions of AIANs due to wearing items of cultural significance (e.g., long hair, regalia) continue today (Masta, 2018). In 2019, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) and the NCAI Youth Commission passed a resolution in

support of students' rights to wear regalia at graduation ceremonies stating "despite steps forward in recent years, many schools continue to bar Native students from wearing items of cultural significance, resulting in damage to sacred items and trauma for graduating students." Additionally, AIANs were more likely to experience ecological threats regarding cultural and religious ties to bodies of land, water, and ecological systems which perpetuate ongoing dismissal and criminalization of their fight against energy extraction into or near their Tribal lands (Steinman, 2019).

U.S. Economic Structure and Implications for Tribal Economies

In the U.S., the government's role in the economic structure is complex. While the U.S. is considered to have a mixed economy[3], consisting of capitalism and a free market (Nickolas, 2022, August), there is evidence that capitalism is the prevailing force in current conditions. For instance, elements of capitalism had harmful effects on the economic well-being of specific populations in the U.S. (Azmanova, 2014) which must be economically situated in community assessments of well-being. This section will briefly describe the economic structure of the U.S. and the role of capitalism on the economy and social well-being on Tribes in the U.S. While not an exhaustive discussion, this section situates the health and social factors of tribes with the context economic barriers they face. Finally, it is not within the scope of this paper to detail the intricacies of the economic history in the U.S. and its role in the globalization of capital power; however, it was critical to link how economic structures have historical and present-day

[3] The U.S. economy was described as a mixed economic structure, meaning it contained elements of two types of economic systems: free-market and capitalism. Whereas a free-market economy described an exchange of goods and services without government oversight, capitalism prioritized the creation of wealth, personal ownership of property, open competition, and individual incentives (Nickolas, 2022, August). In the U.S. economy, the federal government interacted with corporations and the private business sector to ensure equity on return (e.g., regulations of minimum wage laws, corporate taxes, and tariffs; DeMarzo et al., 2005). While this mixed structure allowed for economic freedom for private individuals, there were arguments that corporations are allowed to self-regulate making their practices unclear (DeMarzo et al., 2005) and the impact on communities, complicated.

intersecting impacts on tribes (Guedel & Colbert, 2016).

The federal government's roles in the U.S. economy and tribal affairs were complex and evolving (Guedel & Colbert, 2016). While the U.S. government regulatory oversight ensures economic power opportunity for all individual to participate as commodity producers and in free trade, there has been a globalization of financial power which have favored certain elite groups and led to such complex international asset building that tribes were among the majority who suffered in the economic downturn (Azmanova, 2014). Additionally, there is uncertainty in the government's ability to successfully advocate and regulate labor that impacted individuals at the community level (Sell, 2020). For example, economists have directly implicated capitalism with the downturn in livable wages, lack of universal public services, unaffordable housing, job scarcity, and carbonization were considered disruptive of capitalism and too complex (Azmanova, 2014). In addition, the complex and exploitative history of racism in the U.S. added tension to the debate about the merits of capitalism, wherein the class divides were reinforced, persisted, and grew within such an economic structure (Tourse et al., 2018). Finally, it disproportionally impacted certain racial and ethnic groups in the U.S. As this divide grew, the elements of capitalism that promoted inequality painted an ominous picture: that social health is less pertinent than maintaining the elements of a free-market wherein accessibility to private property and wealth is for the wealthy elite, who in turn used that power to exploit the rest (Loscocco, 2017; Tourse et al., 2018).

The direct effects of capitalism had psychological implications and were documented as the driver of suffering, including work factors such as the development of a competitive work culture that has not produced employment growth (e.g., long-term employment), and racism and sexism (Loscocco, 2017). In the U.S., what began with the idea of innovation (e.g., the industrial

revolution) as a way to revolutionize and transform the economy into free trade and supply and demand, led to a hyper-focus on profits and prioritizing supply and production over human and environmental well-being (Sell, 2020). In turn, these factors have led to long-term impacts on health outcomes, class division, and poverty. In addition, capitalism has increased structural inequalities in ways that was hard to distinguish and combat at the federal level (Loscocco, 2017). For instance, technological advancement and the globalization of productivity and labor created job scarcity and precarity in the U.S. workforce which only exacerbated health outcomes and equity (e.g., lack of employment opportunities and employment benefits, increase in rates of underemployment; Sell, 2020).

Taken together, individuals who persisted in living in lower income levels suffered disproportionate health inequalities, including higher rates of depression, stress, and mental health symptoms than those living in the upper classes. In combination with other critical effects of colonization, the economic implications make it apparent that Tribes face an uphill battle. Nonetheless, understanding the economic and development barriers they face, alongside the factors of social health that were impacted, allowed insights into pathways for improving their economic and social infrastructure (Austin, 2013). Finally, exercising tribal sovereignty and self-determination in politics are predicted to redress the historical policies that led to current conditions and offer an opportunity for reimaging a new and more balanced economic system (Guedel & Colbert, 2016).

Situating Native American Women and Violence Against Native American Women

Violence against Native American women has become normalized in their everyday experience (Longstaffe, 2017). Historically, violence against women and girls was sanctioned and targeted by the federal government through the process of colonization and assimilation

(Joseph, 2021; Whyman et al., 2021). While those policies have since ended, Native American women continue to face enduring societal and institutional racism that were a root cause of disparities they suffered (Palmater, 2016). Simply, Native American women's story of survival is saturated with violence and has gone unheard for many generations and Native American movements that address violence against women's bodies were recent and illuminate a harsh reality (Whitebear, 2019).

Native American Women: Current Conditions

The 2000 Decennial Census reported that Native American (reported as AIAN on the report) women made up approximately half (50.8 percent) of the total Native American population with 34.8 percent of women being over the age of 18. In that same dataset, approximately 40 percent of the AIAN population consisted of family households with children under age 18 (comparatively, the entire U.S. population reported 33.4 percent of families consisted of families with children under 18; U.S. Census Bur., 2000). AIAN had higher rates of single mothers of children under 18 than rates within the total U.S. population. Contemporarily, Native American women remain the center of their family unit and were found to be tasked with maintaining family structure even in the absence of a husband or father (Liddell et al., 2021). Native American mother's roles exponentially increased as they carried their families while tasked with preserving cultural traditions (Liddell, 2021). Extended family, including single women (e.g., aunties) and grandparents often shared the responsibilities irrespective of household marriage, but their roles become more important in the context of single mother homes (Collins, 2016).

Violence Against Women and Girls

Violence against AIAN women and girls has gained national attention due to the

alarming sexual violence and murder rates, sparking a nationwide missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls (MMIWG) campaign (Joseph, 2021). Alarmingly, a report on behalf of the National Institute of Justice found that AIAN women were two to three times more likely to experience violence than U.S. women of any other race, with four out of five reporting being a victim of violence (e.g., stalking, sexual assault, domestic violence) and 84 percent reporting lifetime violence (Rosay, 2016). Sexual violence affects nearly one-third of AIAN women and has led to nearly 13 percent of deaths by suicide among those impacted (Rosay, 2016). Native American women were found to be the only racial group to be more likely to experience assault by a male of a different racial or ethnic background (Eason et al., 2018; Rosay, 2016). Federal jurisdiction issues were implicated in the staggering number of unprosecuted cases and increase the likelihood of ongoing perpetration of Native American women (Eason et al., 2018). In order to understand the risks (e.g., gender-based violence) that intersect with Native American women lives, an examination into the historical context of tribal and federal jurisdiction is warranted.

History of Tribal and Federal Jurisdiction Issues

Traditionally, tribes administered justice by consensus using ancient laws and customs to define their processes (e.g., peace-making, elder councils, sentencing circles) and outcomes (e.g., restitution) that satisfied the victim and their family (National Tribal Justice Resource Center [NTJRC], n.d.). However, by the 1880s the U.S. Department of Interior determined tribes were incapable of determining their own appropriate sanctions and thus established the Court of Indian Offenses which limited tribes' authority to oversee lesser crimes (NTJRC, n.d.). Consequently, jurisdiction complications became impediments to social and economic development, particularly concerning serious crimes, misdemeanors, and domestic relations

(Meriam, 1928). In 1934, the *Indian Reorganization Act* was passed to allow tribes to officially establish their own courts and enact their own laws. However, a 1978 Supreme Court ruling known as the "*Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*" (*Oliphant v. Suquamish,* 1978) determined that tribes did not have jurisdiction over non-tribal members and criminal cases involving non-tribal members occurring on tribal lands. The decision created a barrier to exercising tribal sovereignty and subjecting tribal communities to greater non-containment and increased risk of lawlessness (*Oliphant v. Suquamish Indian Tribe*, 1978). In effect[4], it caused a growth of crime that continues to grow steadily over time (Brewer, 2021) at disproportionate rates as compared to rates within the rest of the nation (U.S. Department of Justice [DOJ], 2010; DOJ, 2019). Due to the limits to authority and prosecution of violent cases occurring on tribal lands against Native American people, the *Oliphant* case is cited as the precipitating factor in the disparities that were predicted to persist over time (Brewer, 2021; Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). There are estimated to be approximately 275 tribes and Alaska Native villages that currently operate a formal tribal court system ranging from Western-style to traditional processes.

Jurisdiction Ramifications Impacting Native American Women

Given the jurisdiction issues described above, structural concerns led to rates of violence against Native American women. Presently, Native American women experience the second highest rates of homicide, rape, and sexual assault (Rosay, 2016). Ninety-six percent of Native American women described their attacker as non-Native American (Rosay, 2016) and this was one factor that impeded effective prosecution and response to those crimes (Bachman et al., 2008).

[4] The areas under Tribal jurisdiction include lands defined as "Indian country" under 18 U.S. Code, Section 1511. Indian Country includes land within Indian reservation boundaries in the state, dependent Indian communities, and Indian allotments.

While federal attorneys (e.g., Federal Bureau of Investigations [FBI]) have prosecutorial authority over such violent crimes, they declined more than half (59 percent) of referrals involving Indian victims in 2019 (DOJ, 2019). The DOJ (2019) cited a lack of sufficient evidence that a crime was committed, inadequate resources to investigate reports of crimes, and lack of jurisdiction as factors which led to declinations. As cited in the same 2019 report by the DOJ, "The 2009 Senate report accompanying [Tribal Law and Order Act] TLOA acknowledged, "[d]eclination statistics...likely reflect difficulties caused by the justice system in place" (pg. 3).

The degree to which government systemic problems contributed to injustice for MMIWG victims was astounding. There were more than 5,000 documented cases of missing and murdered Native American women with two-thirds of those cases occurring between 2010-2018 (MMIW; (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). From the DOJ 2019 report cited above, the Violence Against Women Reauthorization Act of 2013 (VAWA, 2013) fulfilled the need to address child abuse cases and authorized sexual assault response teams (SARTs) to coordinate community response to sexual violence in hopes of improving prosecution rates. However, in 2019, 60.7 percent of crimes declined for federal prosecution involved physical and sexual assaults, with unknown data specifically reporting the impact against women. Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk (2018) requested missing persons data across state and national databases from the year 1900 to 2017; results showed that across 71 U.S. cities, 96 cases involved "domestic and violence, sexual assault, police brutality, and lack of safety for sex workers" (p. 6) with approximately half of the perpetrators being non-Native. Further, 25% (128 cases) were missing persons, 56% (280 cases) were murder cases, and 19% (98 cases) had unknown missing status.

According to Lucchesi and Echo-Hawk (2018), between 1943 and 2017, 506 cases of MMIWG were identified in urban areas with ages ranging from one year to 83 years old and

27% were victims under age 18. Concerns regarding the poor processes of tracking cases and updating databases were also cited in the 2016 report by (Rosay, 2016) UIHI (2016). Specifically, they found poor quality of reporting (i.e., poor record keeping protocols) and lack of reporting by law enforcement as demonstrated by data[5]. Issues of racial misclassification and poor collaboration between law enforcement and tribes indicated a pattern of undercounting and under documentation of cases. For instance, in the same 2016 report, UIHI found that 5,712 cases of MMIW were reported in 2016 alone but that only 116 of those cases were logged into DOJ databases. The problems inherent in processing and tracking cases proliferate in media attention to women and girls. Specifically, a content analysis of media coverage showed that more than 95% of cases involving MMIW were not covered by national or international media (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). The vulnerability of Native American women continues to impact their roles and function in tribal societies (Cross, 2021).

Coloniality's Impact on Native American Women and Violence

Colonialism has been instrumental and complicit in the systemic oppression of Native American women. Stereotypes, sexualization, and fetishization of Native American women have been engendered in Western social structures in ways that relegate their reports to law enforcement as nonurgent (Monchalin et al., 2019). Reconceptualizing Native American women's experiences in the context of colonization allows a better understanding and enables opportunities to challenge the perpetuation of coloniality in their communities (Clark et al., 2021).

Until recently (e.g., Newland, 2022), discourses of healing from intergenerational trauma

[5] The Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) grants any person the right to request access to federal agency records or information.

and addressing Native American disparities were constructed as Native American "problems," requiring "cultural" solutions, rather than examination in the ongoing failure to provide Native American women in the U.S. with the social, economic, and cultural supports they require in society (Jeffery & Nelson, 2009, p. 92). Due to myriad social, political, and economic issues, recognizing how the rise of gendered status and stereotyping in the context of settler-colonialism was critical to understanding the contemporary concerns that Native American women faced (Trahant, 1995). Social inequalities and health disparities (i.e., social determinants of health) among Native American women must be situated as the result of long-standing political and economic arrangements created by the U.S. government that caused disparate access to resources. Consequently, the significant harm Indigenous women and families have endured has manifested in several forms of violence that were difficult to distinguish and combat. While several forms of violence occur directly (e.g., sexual and physical assault, murder) and structurally (e.g., jurisdiction issues, inadequate government database processes), lateral forms of violence has been traced to coloniality and oppression (Whyman et al., 2021).

Lateral Violence Faced by Native American Women

Given the unique experience of colonization and the continuation of multiple forms of oppression in Native American communities, lateral violence was found to be a common yet understudied concept (Whyman et al., 2021). Lateral violence describes aggression that occurs within oppressed societies (Bombay et al., 2014; Fanon, 1963; Freire, 2000) who were entrenched in unequal power relations (Langton, 2008) due to patriarchal domination (Poupart, 2003). It occurs when people from colonized communities internalize the beliefs and attitudes of the oppressor, which led to negative self- and cultural-perceptions (Fanon, 1963, Freire, 2000). According to the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC; 2011) report on social justice,

lateral violence was linked with low self-esteem and violent behaviors. Perpetrating behaviors of lateral violence included bullying, gossiping, feuding, shaming, and blaming other members of one's own social group as well as having a "lack of trust toward other group members." (Bombay et al., 2014, p. 2).

Much of the current literature about lateral violence has been in the context of Aboriginal communities in Canada and Australia. In these reports, lateral violence has been traced back to the widespread neglect and abuse by boarding school staff (e.g., teachers, school administrators; Bombay et al., 2014). On behalf of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, Bombay and colleagues (2014) conducted a preliminary study of abuse among student survivors of residential/boarding schools in Canada. They asserted that "residential schools have been suggested as the primary cause of a cluster of behaviors known as lateral violence thought to be prevalent within Aboriginal communities" (p. 2). In their review to examine the psychosocial effects of lateral violence among Indigenous people, Whyman and colleagues (2021) determined that lateral violence has significant effects on one's identity and wellbeing. While they were unable to find prevalence rates, lateral violence was found to be common and normalized among Aboriginal communities (Whyman et al., 2021). Jaber and colleagues' systematic literature review (2022) on the experiences of lateral violence among Indigenous women showed the complexities of lateral violence among Indigenous women. In particular, women reported being both victims and perpetrators of lateral violence, which led to far-reaching and harmful effects to their wellbeing (Jaber et al., 2022). Other studies have shown that shame, guilt, rejections, and poor self-esteem result from experiencing or perpetrating lateral violence (e.g., Bennett, 2014; Monchalin et al., 2019). Further, lateral violence was associated with heightened rates of suicide (Jaber et al., 2022) and poorer wellbeing (Clark, et al., 2016). Lateral violence and marginalization largely

eroded familial connections in Native American communities making it difficult to guard against the impact of lateral violence within families (Poupart, 2003). Furthermore, lateral violence impacted women within workplaces and communities and results in victims removing themselves from their community groups or settings (Jaber et al., 2022).

Lateral violence was further perpetuated in the media through sexism and objectification of Native American women (Cross, 2021). Tracing the insidious nature of cultural violence as it occured in media has more recently been associated with adverse psychosocial impacts. Anthropological accounts of Native American women and their subordinated roles led to gendered stereotyping whereby women were presented as Indian princesses or nameless "squaws" (Yasaitis, 2003). While the origin of the term squaw was less clear, Native American scholars agree about its inappropriateness and its contribution to the degradation of Native American women. Furthermore, terms such as squaw and Indian Princess engender stereotyping and victim-blaming, which contributes to ongoing objectification and heightened rates of violence against Indigenous women (Baskin, 2019; Yasaitis, 2003).

Cross (2021) conducted a quantitative examination into how objectification impacts Native American women in the context of colonization and violence against women. In this study, Haslam's (2006) model of dehumanization and vignettes were used to examine how objectification impacts acquaintance rape, using a random sample of 71 men and 77 women across three conditions. In the first condition, the type of objectification NA women experience was assessed by asking participants to focus on positive and negative physical attributes of a photo of a NA woman (experimental condition) and White woman (control condition). Participants were then asked to indicate the degree (1 – disagree strongly, to 5 – agree strongly) to which each of the 32 item words, pertaining to animalistic (e.g., human uniqueness such as

ambitious, ignorant) and mechanistic (e.g., human nature such as friendly, timid) dehumanization, matched each woman's personality. Finally, three control variables regarding the women's age, attractiveness, and affect were measured. In the second condition, participants were primed, using a scrambled sentence task containing 23 phrases, about the hypersexualized NA women "squaw" stereotype (e.g., "bones cheek high pretty" became "pretty high cheek bones", p. 21). Together, three stereotypes of NA women (e.g., "promiscuous", "immoral", and "seductive", p. 22) were included in this condition. Participants were asked to rate the difficulty in the scrambled sentence tasks to assess for awareness of the stereotype. Participants then completed the objectification measure and control questions from study 1. To assess for consequences of objectification, participants in condition three completed the same objectification tasks (experimental condition = NA; control condition = White) as studies 1 and 2. Additionally, participants read a vignette about two people (e.g., Kaitlyn Begaye and Brayden Johnson for the NA condition or Kaitlyn and Brayden for the White condition) who experienced an acquaintance-rape scenario and were asked to rate (1 – strongly disagree to 7- strongly agree) the degree of blame, responsibility, and harm attributed to each woman across both vignettes. Finally, participants were asked to indicate which race each woman belonged to.

Cross (2021) found significant associations between the women's race and how she was objectified. Compared to the White woman, participants regarded the NA woman as lacking in unique human traits such as emotionality or cognitive depth. The NA woman was objectified to a greater degree than the White woman, and the stereotype attached to the term squaw led to a unique form of objectification of the NA woman. For example, the White woman was viewed as a sexual being whereas the NA woman was viewed as more object-like. However, there were no significant differences in the degree that the NA and White woman were blamed in the rape-

acquaintance scenario and that male participants were more likely to victim-blame, regardless of race. Cross (2021) suggests NA women had fewer positive depictions and therefore, were more likely to be undervalued consistent with stereotyped perceptions articulated about them historically and presently.

In a similar manner, mascots (e.g., Native American nicknames, logos, and sports characters) and the fetishization of Native American women (e.g., eroticized versions of Disney's Pocahontas and Indian Princess costumes worn by non-Native women during Halloween) have been linked with poor psychosocial effects for Native American people (Davis-Delano et al., 2020). In a comprehensive review of empirical research in this area, Davis et al. (2020) showed that Native American mascots, which occur primarily in schools (e.g., 2,000 teams in the U.S. use mascots depicting Native American characters), generate prejudicial attitudes and stereotyping among non-Native people toward Native American people (Fryberg et al., 2008; Mackay & Mackay, 2020). Furthermore, mascots were linked with a number of racialized experiences such as racial slurs, microassaults, and discriminatory practices in schools that led to the various social problems Native people face (Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Roholt, 2017).

Taken together, Native American women experience many forms of violence across their lifetimes which subject them to higher rates of homicide, degradation, domestic violence, mental health and substance abuse issues (Lucchesi & Echo-Hawk, 2018). Several factors, including jurisdiction issues and lack of community resources (Anderson & Parker, 2009; Bachman et al., 2008), leave Native American women struggle to feel safe. This in turn impacted how women seek support in community and employment settings (McKinley et al., 2021; Whyman et al., 2021). Furthermore, the threats against their physical, emotional, spiritual wellbeing left Native

American women feeling isolated (Whyman et al., 2022) and contributed to high rates of poverty (Whitney Mauer, 2017). Given the alarming statistics of violence and the evidence pointing to internalized abuse and lateral violence occurring in Native American communities, it was evident that Native American women's situation was complex and warranted fuller understanding.

Native American Women's Roles within Families, Tribes, and Community

Thousands of years prior to European contact, Native American women were a part of sophisticated social networks that spanned across the American continent (Sanger et al., 2019). They engaged in intercultural ceremonial and social gatherings, exchanging goods and ideas with allies from diverse tribal cultures (Sanger et al., 2019). These findings, along with reports of positive health, emotional well-being, and bonded family and kinship networks prior to colonization (Meriam, 1928), indicate that Native American women lived meaningful and busy lives pre- and post-colonization (for examples, see Liddell et al., 2021; Peters et al., 2015; Gambrell, 2016). Moreover, Native American women were part of communal, egalitarian systems with highly organized seasonal economies and networks where individuals engaged in an equal division of labor across age and gender (Child, 2012b; Sanger et al., 2019). Given the association between colonization and violence against Native American women, it was critical to understand Native American women's roles in the context of their familial and communal systems. It was critical to consider Native American women's roles through a nuanced lens that captured their unique experiences and insights within the context of their own tribal histories (Liddell et al., 2021).

Native American Women's Roles Within Families

Native American women have been constrained by colonization and patriarchy in ways

that impact how they carry out familial roles. Liddell et al.'s (2021) ethnography explored the impact of patriarchy on Native American women from two southwestern tribes in the U.S. Using the historical oppression and resilience and transcendence (FHORT) model. They examined qualitative data from a larger mixed-methods study that included several sources of data (e.g., field notes, interviews, and focus groups) with participants (N = 436; 287 were female, 147 were male) whose ages included youth ages 11 to 14 (n = 114), adults ages 24 to 55 (n = 147), and Elders ages 56 years and older (n = 105). Themes that emerged in their findings highlighted expectations Native American women hold about themselves and the perception others in their community hold about them, including their role as mothers and caretakers, role models, and centers of their family (2021). Themes also showed that Native American mothers hold their families together in many ways, including as primary caregivers, nurturers, and sources of emotional support. Native American mothers were viewed as sources of strength in their homes in the face of adversity. For instance, women tended to take on the tasks of absent fathers and were often the primary financial provider of their homes. Emotional attuning was perceived as an inherent trait of mothers wherein one woman noted that her mother "always seem[ed] to sense" when she was feeling down (p. 365). While effects of patriarchy were present, there was gendered resilience to women's ability to weather risks of adversity (e.g., community violence, substance abuse). Several participants described Native American mothers as being "the glue" in their families (p. 366) with one participant sharing "the role of the mom is to keep the family [together]" (p. 366). Mothers described their primary roles as keeping their families bonded was a driving motivation for them. Native American women described pressures for child-rearing disrupted their personal goals to obtain an education. Moreover, they expressed frustration in the gendered expectations of work and family egalitarianism across the lives of men and women.

While Native American women were the primary financial providers of their families in many cases, this did not preclude them from home and family expectations (e.g., caregiving and mothering). Native American women in this study expressed their strain in multitasking home responsibilities on accessing economic and work opportunities. Nonetheless, the role of decolonizing patriarchy combined with ensuring intact families were critical factors in deciding to center familial roles.

Based upon their findings, Liddell and colleagues (2021) posited that the forcible separation of families by U.S. systems (e.g., boarding school, child welfare) played a vital role in their dedication to motherwork. Moreover, the roles mothers root within their families was demonstrated by the significant loss and breakdowns that occurred when they were absent. For example, multiple participants in the study described the impact of their mothers' deaths, wherein familial ties and bondedness were broken down (Liddell et al., 2021).

In an ethnographic analysis of Indigenous women from multiple rural, federally recognized Indigenous reservation communities in the southeastern U.S., Burnette (2018) examined the factors that led to overcoming intimate partner violence (IPV). Burnette (2018) sampled 49 Indigenous women from a larger pool of participants across two samples: Indigenous women who experienced intimate partner violence (IPV) and professionals (including

Indigenous and non-Indigenous male and female professionals) who worked in a professional capacity within tribal organizations serving Indigenous women who experienced IPV (n = 20 and 29, respectively, ages ranged from 22 to 74; M = 40). Themes indicated that the majority of women across both subsamples highlighted bidirectional support between roles as mothers and individuals (Burnette, 2018). For example, one participant described her role as a mother in giving her the courage to leave her abusive relationship. Another participant expressed

her strength directly coming from motivation to protect her children from the intergenerational effects of IPV. Among professionals, one male participant shared the strength he learned from his mother in childhood, who taught him the wrong of "putting [his] hand on a female." He also indicated positive intergenerational effects of being raised by his mother, sharing, "the way you raise your kids, it's going to show later on in years...teach them to respect people." (pg. 54). All participants discussed familial connectedness as a critical factor and shared examples wherein women (e.g., mothers, sisters, grandmothers) played a central role in their ability to overcome IPV. Along with the examples highlighted above, one participant shared that extended family gatherings were instrumental in fostering unity and connectedness, "Every Sunday my grandmother would cook and we would go over there and eat..." (pg. 54). Moreover, grandmothers sharing their trials in overcoming IPV by upholding non-violent values helped Indigenous women had a sense of cultural foundation and matrilineal traditions (2018).

Native American Women's Positionality as Leaders Within their Communities

Collective forms of helping were found to be a common trait of Indigenous systems and were embedded in wellness practices, especially for Indigenous women (Heidebrecht et al., 2022). Indigenous women engage in community leadership roles in ways that curtail the effects of colonization. In a qualitative investigation, Gambrell (2016) interviewed four enrolled Lakota women (ages 36 to 75) who lived on their reservations for at least five years to explore Lakota leadership characteristics. The women in the study varied in their leadership roles over time. They all held formal and informal leadership roles at the time of the study. Leadership roles included formal roles such as tribal government and tribal research organization and informal roles such as Elder, grandmother, ceremonial leader, and language holder. It was common for the women to have held both forms of leadership that coincided in varying ways throughout their

lifetimes. Through qualitative analysis, four primary themes emerged in their leadership style, including the importance of understanding Lakota traditions and ceremonies, pursuing advanced degrees, becoming bicultural, and finding ways to navigate gendered barriers resulting from assimilation. All four Lakota women believed that maintaining strong spiritual and ceremonial leadership qualities were critical. They asserted spirituality grounded their decision-making and considerations of the collective, such as enhancing relationships and rapport in the community and thoughtfulness for their children's future. Similarly, biculturalism was a strategy they viewed could counteract government policies and practices that impact their communities. Education and allyship with non-Native American people were believed to be critical for developing complex skills to overcoming the devastating effects of colonization the Lakota people face (Gambrell, 2016).

With regard to gender, these four Lakota women had encountered gendered challenges as they navigated roles that confronted societal challenges (Gambrell, 2016). Understanding their tribe's historical context engendered empathy, particularly for their male counterparts. For instance, all four women described the unique ramifications that Native American men endured including that settler-colonizers forbid Native American men to engage in their traditional familial role. Men were forbidden to practice traditional hunting and gathering activities and instead forced to accept government food subsidies and supplies, resulting in disempowerment and internalization of helplessness and hopelessness. The Lakota women viewed the loss of Native American male roles in their families as a primary factor that explains the disparities they face in their community (e.g., substance abuse, poverty, and unemployment). In the women’s view, the rates of addiction and domestic abuse among men directly affect the destruction of indigenous male identity loss and disempowerment of their traditional roles. Thus, "women

needed to step up and help the people, help the nation." (Gambrell, 2016, p. 300). Another prominent finding was that women believed in the strength and resilience of other women. One woman, Sa'pa, optimistically observed, "Women can get things done quietly, without having to be too overbearing and assertive...we can be gentle. We can be strong. And women have faith in the people." (p. 303-304).

Through her examination of Indigenous women from the Mississippi Band of Choctaw Indians (MBCI), Burnette (2015) highlighted the unique contributions of Indigenous women in the face patriarchal colonialism that contribute to resilience and community. Burnette (2015) examined the complex and intersecting experiences of resilience and oppression of Indigenous women from the MBCI. The MBCI was a traditionally matriarchal society, and women held prominent roles such as laborers and leaders, alongside caregiving and childrearing. Amid significant changes brought on by patriarchal colonialism, Choctaw people experienced disruption to their farming economy, that led to a loss of work roles for women and increased risk of sex trafficking by white settler-colonizers (Burnette, 2015). A prominent aspect of MBCI women today was their reported ability to overcome patriarchal colonialism in ways that enhanced their economic and social conditions. For instance, their tribal nation currently consists of numerous successful businesses making their economy one of Mississippi's largest employers. Burnette (2015) described women's leadership roles as uplifting their status back towards egalitarian traditionalism wherein women were elected to top council positions in their nation.

Taken together, Native American women facilitate support and resilience across their familial and tribal networks in varying ways. While Native American women described the toll of navigating hurdles to heal their communities (Gambrell, 2016), they drew strength from fellow women, their gender identity, and for some, their roles as mothers (Burnette, 2018).

Native American women's voices highlight the connection between cultural assimilation and colonial gender challenges as underlying causes of their communities' social disparities (Keway, 1997).

Interface of Work and Family

Work and family were found to be important intersecting domains for many people (Boyar et al., 2008). Scholars have previously described the tension between work and family in the context of work demand and family demand (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Combined effects of work demand and family demand had direct two-way effects between work and family, particularly among individuals with high family centrality (Boyar et al., 2008).

There was evidence that resolving intergenerational aspects of colonization has created family conflict in ways that led to trade-offs in work and family needs. For instance, Native American women have asserted their prioritization of family and social roles (Gambrell, 2016), which led to poorer economic outcomes for Tribes (Liddell et al., 2021). Furthermore, work roles may not allow adequate flexibility Native American women need to fulfil cultural, social, or extended kinship roles, which strain family domains. In general, family and work domains among Native American women were understudied.

Evidence Regarding Work-Family Interface among Native American Women

There were important cultural considerations relevant to Native American people's perspectives on work and life priorities that must be considered in the context of Native American women's life roles. Clark (2002) examined sense of community and sense of control at work and the mediating effect of personal/work factors and work-family conflict among 151 employees (77 participants were Native American) from two Native American organizations. Clark (2002) reported that Native American employees were less likely to have family-

supportive supervision and flexibility in their jobs than were non-Native American employees (p = .06). Further, simply being Native American was significantly related to experiencing a sense of community (β = −.13, p < .05). Moreover, family-sensitive supervision (β = .23, p < .01) and intrinsic value of the work (β = .50, p < .05) positively and significantly associated with Native American employee's sense of community. Conversely, sense of control was negatively related to work/family conflict (p = .05). Likewise, sense of community was negatively related to work/family role conflict (p = .07). Sense of community and sense of control mediated the relationships between personal and work conflict by a small margin. Taken together, results suggest that increased sense of control (e.g., supportive supervision, work flexibility) may play an important buffering role in coping with work-life conflict.

Focusing on extended family networks influence Native American peoples work decisions may be important in developing organizational support for their communities. Haar and colleagues (2012) examined the influence of Māori people's (N = 197) extended family networks and found it was a critical factor in their work decisions. A prominent finding in their study involved the influence of extended family as a contributor to turnover. For instance, despite the impacts of work-family conflict on their quality of life, Māori employees were more likely to experience job dissatisfaction and consider leaving their positions when their family became negatively impacted. Haar et al.'s (2012) findings validate the importance of family and collectivistic values and theorize about the additional challenges Māori employees face when prioritizing family needs, particularly when they were constrained with work obligations.

Similarly, cultural and family values emerged as a positive influence on work outcomes and job satisfaction in Brougham et al.'s (2015) examination of Māori employees (N = 172). As Māori employees reported higher collectivist cultural orientation, they were more likely to

benefit from family-work support and report higher workplace culture satisfaction. were understood in the workplace reported better job outcomes and satisfaction with their work. Work-family benefits and workplace outcomes also emerged in Brougham et al.'s (2015) examination of Māori Indigenous employees. For example, work-family balance improved cultural outcomes among Māori employees (Brougham et al., 2015). The authors (2015) assert that workplaces providing enriching jobs which support family and cultural values were more likely to see better workplace cultural outcomes for their Māori employees.

Family values and cultural support reinforce the communal lifestyle with Indigenous communities (Brougham et al., 2015; Clark, 2002; Haar et al., 2012). While studies have shown Indigenous employees were faced with compromising their family values or social obligations when work constraints arise (Brougham et al., 2015), there was evidence to show positive effects when workplaces support cultural principles (Haar et al., 2012). The sense and belief that Indigenous people were expected to support their community and extended families indicated they view a sense of community as an extension of their self-identity which was not easily compartmentalized across Euro-centric life domains (Christiansen et al., 2019). Native American women faced more workplace discrimination leaving them vulnerable to work-family balance conflict (SteelFisher et al., 2019). There was a need for Native American women to have access to culturally supportive and safe work environments.

Julien et al. (2017) qualitatively investigated work-family conflict among Indigenous people (N = 56, 33 were woman, 23 were men) in Canada. A critical theme that emerged was the importance of familial, cultural, and spiritual prioritization over work among Indigenous participants. Despite organizational efforts to promote work-life balance, participants expressed frustration about the interpersonal tension that arose when prioritizing family, culture, and

spirituality. On women shared “Family doesn’t mean the same thing…This issue is very challenging” (p. 171) with another woman expressing the importance of extended family, “a cousin lives with family but you feel like they’re your brother…lots of Native people didn’t get raised by their biological parents” (p. 172). Moreover, the legacy of colonization was shared by participants in explicit and implicit ways. One woman described mistrust regarding her White supervisor, she admitted “if you’re a residential school survivor, you won’t open up…You are more likely to call in sick instead of telling the truth (aunt was sick and she needs to visit with her)” (p. 172). Spirituality was found as critical in balancing work and life. Establishing physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual balance was embedded in cultural healing practices that likely took up more time than what is allowed by an employer. One woman articulated, “we have always been taught that we need balance...between physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. You can’t do that in a workplace; you can’t do that strictly at home. So you need to be able to go to community events, and reconnect with elders… So what are you going to choose: if you have to go to a sweat lodge, you may have to go on a Friday and take the day off. I think that a lot of [Indigenous] people do think about those things…and we put these things ahead of making money” (p. 174).

In the absence of supervisor support, participants were more likely to express feelings of marginalization and less committed to her organization. One woman expressed strain in competing obligations between work and culture, “[human resources] policies don’t take into account if you’re asked by an Elder to go somewhere on short notice” (p. 175). In these situations, participants expressed professional consequences which led to seeking other employment opportunities. One woman shared frustration about the differences in priorities, “In the case of non-[Indigenous people], if a child is sick, they’d arrange care but come to work. For

[Indigenous people], family comes first – I would stay home with the sick child" (p. 171). This sentiment was shared in the context of bereavement, "(My supervisor) doesn't get it, his ears are closed. I need to work within the constraints of (my employer), I couldn't take the extra days I needed to go to a funeral" (p. 176). In contrast, flexibility that allowed for more balance between work and family, cultural, and spiritual roles was critical and led to higher feelings of support and satisfaction with their organization. Moreover, organizational support, such as employee assistance programs and supervisor flexibility, was observed as helpful. One woman perceived her supervisor's flexibility between roles was a sign of compassion and shared core values.

Among the many challenges Indigenous employees face as they navigate work and life roles, there appeared to be a general lack of understanding between the roles Indigenous employees carry and the expectation held by their non- Indigenous employers which suggests Western work practices were found to be simply ineffective (Julien et al., 2017). While Julien et al (2017) acknowledged some benefit to supervisor flexibility and organizational support, failing to support culturally congruent values led to counterproductive work outcomes for Indigenous employees. Moreover, organizational support was culturally nuanced and required respect of Indigenous culture in ways that otherwise threatened the wellbeing of Indigenous employees and their families and communities. According to Julien et al. (2017), organizations should be responsive to enriching work and life, particularly where it pertained to the role of flexibility and related organization policies. Examining the role of genuine flexibility for all employees was predicted to improve their sense of fairness in how they were treated in the workplace.

Native American women were found to have specific factors that present barriers to their work and family interface. For instance, cultural revitalization was critical for reclaiming a Native American mothering status (Liddell et al., 2021). In combination, these findings

suggested that Native American women face several factors that point to cultural repercussions to engaging in formal work roles that may offer insight into employment disparities. For example, pressures to assimilate to non-Native American organizations and employers (Julien et al., 2017) led to motivations to choose work close to homeland/territory and family and community (Burnette & Zhang, 2019). Such factors presented obstacles to gainful employment across various sectors (Beaudoin et al., 2021). Moreover, when Native American women chose to live and work on reservations, they faced lower income earnings than men (Burnette & Zhang, 2019); this finding holds despite women's education level (Staniland et al., 2020). The complex social relationships of Native American women created important cultural implications in weighing decisions regarding work and family and further eroded intercultural relations and decolonizing norms (Deschênes & Arcand, 2022; Liddell et al., 2021).

Moreover, there was evidence that some Native American women may have chosen not to work or they opted to seek self-employment though government-supported and social networks (Todd, 2012). For instance, Liddell et al. (2021) found that many women were compelled to choose their mothering roles over work or educational attainment, particularly when those opportunities posed risks to the wellbeing of their family (Burnette & Zhang, 2019; Holton, 2015) and may have forced them to develop a self-employment orientation (Todd, 2012). Studies further highlighted how Western notions of work created tension between social, cultural, and spiritual obligations in which Native American women struggle to separate (Liddell et al., 2021). There was an implication that work was conceptualized primarily as paid labor, however, woman appeared to be busy in some relevant (e.g., cultural, social) capacity that oriented them toward wellness. In one aspect, less about work among Native American people was understood in the context of the gig economy, but perhaps women were finding

socially/culturally congruent ways of contributing financially or economically. Therefore, examining similarities across the way women view and engage in work, irrespective of employment, was needed.

Native American Women and the World of Work

Native American Women's Roles in Healing and Leading

According to Maracle (2018), Indigenous communities went from "people with crippling problems to communities that are slowly healing and reshaping our future" (p. 373). Maracle recounted that much of the reshaping was due to Indigenous women having developed institutions to bring communities together toward healing (Maracle, 2018). The birth of the Indigenous healing movement occurred over the past thirty years when Indigenous communities established visions of cultural revitalization and reawakening, much of which was led by Indigenous women (Maracle, 2018). Underlying current data regarding Indigenous women's educational attainment and labor force participation was a story of vision and goals, which quietly developed over several decades (Gambrell, 2016; Maracle, 2018).

To understand the world of work among today's Native American women, it qa critical to acknowledge the Native American women leaders who shaped the landscape for other Native American women, Tribes, and future generations. Since the 1970s, countless Native American women throughout the U.S. have worked hard to re-establish the rights and sovereignty of Tribes. Those women leaders have profoundly impacted Native American women who came after them, reinforcing next-seven-generation thinking (Deyhle & McCarty, 2007) which ensures decision-making of today must consider the well-being and welfare of the next seven generations, and in doing so, pay gratitude to those who sacrificed before (Whitt, et al., 2001).

To pay gratitude and recognition, it was fitting to briefly describe some of the Native

American women leaders whose work continue to profoundly influence the lives of all Native American communities (Shotton, 2018). The Menominee Restoration Act of 1972 was led by Menominee tribal woman, scholar, and political activist Ada Deer. Following her fight to restore her Tribe's federal status, Ada became the first Chairwoman of the Menominee Tribe and the first Native American woman in Wisconsin to run for U.S. Congress and serve as Interior Secretary of the U.S. (McCue-Enser, 2017). Wilma Mankiller was the first Native American woman to lead her Tribe, the Cherokee Nation. Among her many accomplishments, including her fight for Native American rights with the American Indian Movement, Wilma earned a Presidential Medal of Freedom for establishing collaborations between her Tribe and the federal government (Brando, 2021). In a career spanning over 50 years, Beatrice Medicine of Standing Rock Lakota (Sioux) was a scholar and political activist who fought for Native American language rights and the exploitation of Native American people in anthropological research. Beatrice's scholarship included concepts within Critical Race Theory (CRT), including the way in which racialized education policies and practices shape students' resilience, determination and fight to reclaim their Native American rights to survivance of lives, language and future generations (Deyhle & McCarty, 2007). In turn, emerging CRT tenets, such as Brayboy's 2005 tribal critical race theory was viewed as an "answer back" to Beatrice's contributions (Deyhle & McCarty, 2007; p. 211). Eloise Cobell of the Blackfeet Nation was known for her tireless work with presidential administrations to bring financial compensation to 500,000 Native American people following two decades of U.S. trust mismanagement (Gingold & Pearl, 2012). Despite years of litigation beginning in 1996, and threats against herself and family (Masten, 2012, August 15), Eloise led a full investigative lawsuit aimed at correcting trust account balances. In 2009, the U.S. government reached an "unprecedented settlement" of $3.4 billion in trust reform

(e.g., tuition support for Native American students) with $1.5 billion in direct payment to Native American people (Gingold & Pearl, 2012; p. 191). Lisa Poupart of the Lac Du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Anishinaabeg is currently an associate professor of First Nations Studies, Women and Gender Studies, and Humanities at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay. Her scholarship focuses on Native American intergenerational and historical trauma. In 2018, she established the first-ever Doctorate Degree in Education in First Nations Education at the University of Wisconsin Green Bay centered on culturally responsive Indigenous pedagogy (Bodilly, 2018). Stephanie Fryberg, from the Tulalip Tribes of Washington States, dedicates her scholarship to social representations of race, culture, and social class. In 2011, she testified before the U.S. Senate Committee on Indian Affairs on the detrimental psychological impact of stereotypes on Native American people, particularly youth (Stolen identities, 2011).

Her work has had ripple effects across the U.S. and resulted in dismantling several sports teams' mascots (e.g., Washington Commanders national football team; Fryberg et al., 2021).

Taken together, these Native American women, along with many others, highlight themes of determination and community. The roles of Native American women leaders who have become well known have inspired a surgency of women in politics and leadership across the Tribes in the U.S. Today's workforce of Native American women are marked by women as culture and language revivers and intergenerational trauma healers.

As evidenced in the brief biographies above, Native American women are reflected as visionaries of change. As informal leaders, they establish community-based agencies, which led to developing programs for housing, substance abuse treatment, employment, and others (Maracle, 2018).

Native American women attended to community needs and challenged the tension between

Western gendered leadership norms and Native American values. In a longitudinal study, Straus and Valentino (2002) examined gender trends in leadership roles in a Chicago Native American community organization and found that Native American women's unpaid volunteer roles became embedded into the organization such that they ultimately transformed into to high paying salaried positions, with many becoming formal leadership roles. Indeed, Maracle (2018) asserted that it was common for Indigenous women leaders to traditionally serve the people and that integrating their life roles (e.g., volunteer and community) into organizational behavior plays a critical role in shaping communities. Turning to Indigenous women leaders of the future, Maracle (2018) presumes hope. She assertED that although colonial powers resulted in Indigenous women distancing themselves from one another, Indigenous women paved the way in developing healing practices in their communities (Maracle, 2018).

Formal Education and Career Pursuits

From a colonial and capitalistic lens, education was viewed as a vehicle for individual prosperity (Shotton, 2018) and economic growth of communities (Mackey, 2013). Despite policies aimed to close education gaps, Native American people in the U.S. continued to report lower attainment rates across all other racial groups. Between 2010 and 2021, Native American students held the lowest rates of post-high school education (e.g., Associate's degree or higher) across all other racial groups (Department of Commerce, 2022). The National Center for Education Statistics (2020) reported that between 2018 and 2019, Native American students received a mere .5 percent of all bachelor's degrees conferred, .5 percent of Master's degrees conferred, and .4 percent of Doctor's degrees (including Ph.D., Ed. D, M.D., D.D.S.) conferred. Scholars support policy aims to close education gaps within Native American communities as an important avenue in increasing Native American women’s labor participation and improve Tribal

economic conditions (Keo et al., 2019). However, motivations and feasibility for pursuing educational attainment and paid work may be unique among Native American women.

Some evidence suggested that motivation to pursue education and attain credentials may have been unique within Native American communities. For example, Turner et al. (2019) found that Native American students' interests were significantly associated with the support and guidance they received from parents, teachers, and friends which played a role in their ability to persist through barriers. In turn, students' efficacy and interests improved their academic achievement and career exploration (Turner et al., 2019). Motivations for women and girls also may have varied. In an interview with Susan Mastan, founder and co-president of Women Empowering Women for Indian Nations, Holter (2015) suggested that women's motivation for higher education are their way to "turn[sic] around our economic status for our entire family" within one generation (para. 4). Mastan described building "dreams and hope" of her children after loss resulting in colonization (Holter, 2015). Native American women also may view attainment of college degrees as a direct positive contribution to tribal economies and development that will create opportunities for future generations (Holter, 2015).

Studies have shown that Native American women's motivations for work were linked to a sense of community. Wood and Davidson (2011) described Indigenous woman as having push factors that exemplify their willingness to help their community escape poverty. For example, Pearson et al. (2014) described social and economic motivation as primary factors for Australian Aboriginal women who aimed to improve the living conditions of their community. Shotton's (2018) qualitative exploration of the role of Indigenous women scholars among 13 Indigenous women seeking doctoral degrees found that relationships and community building were prominent motivators. Kinship among women scholars was critical in fostering mentorship and

community and enabled the women to persist in attaining their degrees. Another theme that emerged was an orientation toward impacting future generations and tribal communities (Shotton, 2018). Specifically, these Indigenous women scholars viewed their roles as interconnected to building on past generations toward responsibility to foster opportunities for future generations. One woman, for example, found comfort in her view that extending knowledge for the future was critical; she said, "this gives me courage that my work is part of something greater and I don't have to feel like I'm alone…" (p. 88). Indigenous women helping women was cited as a vehicle for succeeding through academic barriers because the women believed that a doctoral degree was a means to move their Nations forward (Shotton, 2018). In turn, Indigenous women agreed that their commitment to other Indigenous women scholars should aim toward a focus on Tribal future generations.

Native American Women's Experiences of Career Development

Few studies have explored the meaning-making of Native American women in the context of their varying work and career experiences. Results suggested that Native American individuals described work motivations and choices in ways that differed from conventional career theories (Goodwill et al., 2009; Juntunen et al., 2001). In addition, Indigenous women described social motivations and ways of coping with barriers to make meaning of their career and work decisions despite facing setbacks (e.g., discrimination, rural economies; Morgan, 2015).

In a qualitative investigation with 18 Native American women and men, Juntunen et al. (2001) explored the conceptualization of career and career choices or career development (sample ages ranged from 21 to 59; 11 participants were women, seven were men). In order to understand the differences in career concepts, Juntunen et al. (2001) conducted interviews, which

resulted in developing questions regarding the "living in two worlds," as well as the "desire to make a contribution to one's tribal community" over self and the discussion around "satisfaction" that would be derived (p. 276). Findings revealed that "Success as a collective experience" (p. 278) was a prominent theme. One woman shared that in addition to providing for her children, success will allow her to "contribute to…Native Americans," adding that her success would mean success for her family and community. Success and personal satisfaction were deeply embedded in the degree to which participants contributed to serving others and positively influencing the next generation. Many participants attaining college degrees described the importance of returning to their homelands to give back to their communities. They trusted that the needs of their community would help guide their career choices (e.g., selecting a profession or area of focus). Another important theme that emerged related to success was a desire to earn to "provide for the needs of the family" (p. 279). Participants also emphasized "finding happiness" versus earning money and material possessions (p. 279). One participant differentiated financial motivations as something that perhaps "a White person or drives some people…success is to accumulate as much money as they can." In contrast, this participant stated that among Native American people, "they don't…care about money…They have different motivation factors" (p. 279). Supporting family and community engendered goals for attaining education, and a lack of support was the primary barrier to achieving goals. Moreover, experiences of gender and racial oppression, such as feeling "[held] down by White people," created obstacles to career opportunities (Juntunen et al., 2001, p. 280). Finally, moving between two worlds led to more flexibility in coping with cultural differences and was primarily experienced by participants in formal education, such as college (Juntunen et al., 2001).

In a qualitative investigation with seven Aboriginal women, Todd (2012) explored the

role of social capital (ages ranging from 20 to 30) following their transition to entrepreneurship. Several themes emerged, describing their experiences that led to decisions including how they leveraged social and capital support to start and sustain their businesses. Participants shared their experiences of work, including times in which they experienced underemployment. For example, one woman's frustration about "working under other people who didn't have the same trust in [her] abilities" that she held for herself (p. 12). Another participant described feeling limited in the lack of available work options which led to poor quality of work, stated, "I could see that some people would be doing a job just for the money and how unhappy they would be" (Todd, 2012; p. 11). According to Todd (2012), women's orientation toward self-employment developed through resources such as role modeling. One participant shared the inspiration she drew from seeing others "being fueled by their passion and being able to make a living off of what they do" (p. 12). Others drew inspiration from education or received encouragement from other local business owners. Transitioning into entrepreneurship required support from others, and one participant shared about the risks: "You have to sink or swim…I learned from that…from being pushed…learning from doing" (p. 12). Unfortunately, several obstacles stood in these women's way, including financial problems (e.g., poor credit histories, lack of collateral, or business experience), which frustrated them about being poorly equipped for self-employment. In contrast, others who had skills from education and training described the benefits of developing business plans and marketing skills. Similar to themes revealed in Juntunen et al.'s (2001) interviews, all women were invested and motivated to positively impact their families and communities, particularly ensuing from intergenerational effects. For example, one woman shared that she "mainly want to help our Elders, parents, with their healing" (p. 14). Another shared about her ancestors who "struggled for survival; they came from a place of living

without" (p. 14). Moreover, the women described personal development that arose from the resilience of their ancestors and community, whom they viewed as critical in learning resourcefulness. Women also developed a sense of empowerment in reaching their potential despite internalized trauma effects. In summary, Aboriginal women's persistence in deciding and ultimately transitioning to self-employment was complex and unique in leaning on internal and external sources of support and mentorship and women were motivated toward positively impacting their communities (Todd, 2012).

In a 2015 qualitative investigation, Morgan examined the everyday experiences of rural Indigenous women's precarious work experiences. This study described how precarious work undermined Indigenous women's cultural knowledge of salmon-work while racializing (paid lower wages than their White male co-workers) them, rendering their experiences invisible. Morgan (2015) interviewed 20 Indigenous women (ages ranging from 21 to 60) cannery workers and found common themes emerged related to developing bonds around their collective struggle for economic survival (e.g., making ends meet). Several social concerns arose from her study involving precarious work conditions (e.g., on-call work, high job competition in market-work), limited local resources which strained financial wellbeing (e.g., closure of affordable grocery stores and childcare), and discrimination experiences due to racism and ageism. Themes emerged wherein women described their work abilities being undermined due to their cultural and traditional knowledge of salmon canning, ultimately reducing their value as Indigenous women based on their race. While the social conditions described above limited participant's socioeconomic resources and left them in precarious work conditions, Morgan (2015) noted that they all expressed pride in their work and did not express a desire to mobilize to transform and change their work conditions. Moreover, Morgan (2015) found that women developed informal

networks as a strategy for persisting. One participant viewed her role as benefitting her son, who will see their mother doing work typically reserved for men. She asserted, "I will be teaching him how to work, and once I have seen so many of our Native people, they get pride once you teach them something." (p. 169). Together, the women developed reframing strategies that affirmed their work. One woman viewed being at the cannery as a healthy break from mothering, stating, "My kids are nine and seven, and you've got to get up before 9 am and cook, clean, cook, clean. You've got to come to work to relax" (p. 169). Together, the bonds women formed enabled them to find ways to make ends meet (e.g., sharing overtime hours) in such ways that they looked forward to returning to their work companions' season after season (Morgan, 2015).

In an effort to understand the contextual and personal factors that go into career decision-making and an understanding of the benefits and challenges Indigenous women face during their career trajectories, Goodwill et al. (2019) explored the experiences of ten Indigenous women (ages 26 to 33) who attained career success. Participants endorsed several themes. Developing their career trajectory was described as important in their early career thinking. Participants shared about adverse life circumstances that disrupted their career pursuits or created barriers (e.g., children or child-rearing). Many viewed these experiences as opportunities to reflect on personal values and led them to appreciate their career outcomes. For example, one woman shared about career-limiting racialized perceptions others made about her, "Oh, you're First Nations. You must be doing a degree in First Nations studies," to which she responded, "Well, no, I'm interested in other things" (p. 40) All of the women expressed pursuit of education as fundamental to their process. Several asserted that education helped them achieve their career goals. A prominent finding surrounded family support and connection to their Indigenous community in choosing a career path. Nearly all of the women selected careers that focused on

needs in their communities and used their careers to clarify goals and find ways to incorporate Indigenous knowledge systems into their career focuses. Finally, Goodwill et al. (2019) examined their findings in the context of career theories. They assert that while their findings aligned with several career theories (e.g., developmental perspectives, constructionist influences, Social Cognitive Career Theory), findings demonstrated that the career decision trajectory was unique for Indigenous women (Goodwill et al., 2019).

In summary, Native American women's lives have become more complex and multi-layered, and their work has become more varied and complex (Juntunen et al., 2001). For instance, prior to colonization, women had specific work roles which embedded socialization in family and community contexts toward a sustainable tribal economy and society (Holton, 2015). However, land acquisition, set forth by the Dawes Act, shifted economic and social powers historically and continue to create disparities, which plays a critical role in career outcomes (Blustein, 2013). Given the various roles Native American women carry, more research on working and caregiving within macro-level factors (e.g., economic constraints and marginalization) and psychological factors was needed (Vollenhoven, 2020). While work and career provide value to Native American women's lives, existing knowledge highlighted the need to consider ways that existing career theories may need to be expanded or revised to better understand Native American women's work choices and career trajectories (Goodwill et al., 2019).

Existing Career Development Theories Relevant to Native American Women

Native American women made work and career decisions grounded in the context of their familial, social, cultural, and spiritual roles. Scholars have suggested that Native American women's work experiences were more than occupations and involve multiple layers of life

choices related to varying types of paid and unpaid work, such as kinship and childcare, and community obligations (Goodwill et al., 2019). Regardless of work goals and aspirations, Native American women's choices were dependent on several factors, such as the role of colonization on shifting gender norms and ongoing systemic oppression and discrimination (Gambrell, 2016). Exploration into Native American women's career perceptions was needed in order to understand unique experiences and factors that may differ from conventional career theories (Goodwill et al., 2019; Juntunen et al., 2001). This section describes some of the relevant and existing theoretical approaches that can be used as a foundation from which to expand our understanding of Native American women's work and career development.

Career Construction Theory

Savickas's (2005) Career Construction Theory (CCT) was an advancement that broadened prior theories of vocational choice and personality types (e.g., Holland, 1997; Super, 1980). Savickas (2005) purported the need to use a constructivist and narrative approach to explore how individuals construct, process, and the meaning they place on career development and outcomes. Savickas (2005) asserted that careers were constructed as individuals make choices about specific professions that involve self-concept and affirm their goals in the "social reality of work roles" (p. 43). For example, CCT asserted that individuals' career paths were molded by their narratives, life experiences, and goals. In particular, CCT's concept of career development posited that one's motivations resulted from exploration processes and manifested across life roles. A primary tenet, drawn from Super (1980), argued that experiences were intertwined with life roles and were context-rich and diverse.

CCT incorporates individual's personal and professional identities and acknowledged that these were value-laden and situated in socially constructed realities. CCT relied upon

narrative techniques that allowed individuals to author their own identity and career context and recognize the themes that speak to their goals and motivations (Savickas, 2005). CCT is comprised of three primary components. First, career adaptability referred to coping with developmental tasks that involved skill development and context-dependent factors such as social determinants (Savickas, 2005). Vocational personality was the second component of CCT and referred to one's abilities, needs, values, and interests related to career development (Savickas, 2005). These aspects were typically reinforced by one's social identities and characteristics such as gender, personality, and resources. The third component of CCT was life themes. Life themes referred to the meaning and purpose one derives from work decisions, and thus, decision-making was a critical factor in helping individuals understand their career choices (Savickas, 2005).

In summary, CCT expanded traditional theories of career development by centering individuals and their stories and highlighting the ways in which work was interconnected with life roles and context. The narrative aspect of CCT allowed individuals to describe the experiences that shape their vocational lives. Accordingly, it was essential to understand what motivated individuals to take specific steps in life and pursue certain goals. This study drew from CCT's perspective by centering a desire to understand how Native American women situated their identities and how they narrated the ways that their experiences allowed them to describe the nuance of their work and career barriers, interests, and purpose.

Psychology of Working

Blustein's Psychology of Working perspective (2006) expanded traditional career theories further by centralizing broader economic conditions and marginalization. Blustein acknowledged that amid deteriorating work conditions globally, social inequities have risen and

led to disparate economic conditions that eradicate work choices for many people (Blustein, 2006). As a result, he advocated for shifting vocational discourse from focusing on career to work. The Psychology of Working perspective accounted for socioeconomic differences and included a broader ranges of work experiences than had been explicitly integrated into vocational development theories to date, such as care work and work that allowed people to meet their basic needs and allowed for goal-directed actions, such as transitions, that led to a career (e.g., Blustein, 2006; Richardson, 2012b; Young & Valach, 2004). Blustein's perspective drew attention to relevant historical and cultural factors and interpersonal and social factors that contributed to the process and outcomes of career exploration (1997).

Blustein's (1997, 2006) contributions inform how vocational lives were positioned into their broader context and were later formalized into the psychology of working theory. The application of psychology of working fit well within the Native American context. Situating Native American women's current employment conditions into the broader U.S. context provided a nuanced understanding of how their knowledge-base informed work and nonwork roles were central to their wellbeing.

Counseling for Work and Relationships

Richardson (2012b) developed her counseling for work and relationship perspective to shift what she deemed as problematic perspectives about earlier career conceptualizations. She asserted that work was consistently found to be socially constructed within power dynamics and powerlessness resulting in oppression. In her critique of career discourse throughout history, Richardson (2012a) pointed out how early career theories tended to lean toward individuals who already hold power and privileges and thus were more likely to benefit from career practices. She criticized that perpetuation of power and oppression and asserted that

much of the existing career theories and discourse about career development carries assumptions about people's choices and individual abilities, characteristics, or interests in attaining careers. In short, she argued that this bias has spawned gendered career norms and excluded individuals whose lives were constrained by oppression and economic marginalization.

Richardson (2012b) built on Blustein's work using a social constructivist perspective, asserting that the counseling for work and relationship theory aimed to help individuals construct lives rather than careers. She described people as taking agentic action in response to the constraints and are a primary role in how they constructed their lives. She viewed four primary life contexts that contributed to shaping people's lives, including market work (e.g., public sector, education institutions), personal care work (e.g., unpaid work to care for self or others), personal relationships (e.g., intimate partners, family members, friends), and relationships in the context of market work (e.g., relationships with teachers, students, employers). Moreover, Richardson's theory was contextual and flexible to other types of contexts, roles, and relationships that became a part of one's trajectory.

Given the gendered and racial challenges that Native American women face, alongside the erasure of traditional work roles, Richardson's (2012a) assertion that work roles were socially and politically intertwined provided a framework for understanding the complexity of Native American vocational experiences. Richardson’s concept of various types of work roles aligned with Native American women’s view that their work and nonwork roles were intertwined and central to their identities. Indeed, positioning Native American women’s roles into the social structure of their communities allowed for better understanding of the unique barriers and options they faced. Richardson’s fusion of life domains and work life offered

important distinctions that uplifted the critical unpaid work in which Native American women invested their time and energies. Richardson's (2012a) scholarship also aligned with Native American woman's view that their work and nonwork roles constructed each other and were central to their identities. Furthermore, positioning women's varied paid and unpaid work roles into the social structure of their communities allowed for a better understanding of the unique barriers and options women faced (Richardson, 2012a).

Richardson's (2012) fusion of life domains on work offered important distinctions that uplifted the critical unpaid work of Native American women. Across several studies, Native American women are found to come into their empowerment through improving the lives of their families and communities (e.g., Brave Heart et al., 2016; Gambrell, 2016). Understanding how their goals were drawn from personal and cultural resources allowed us to more accurately recognize their contemporary work lives. Despite oppressive social conditions, we better understood how Native American women negotiated their social context and influenced their options to adapt to the needs of their families and communities.

Summary and Rationale for Present Study

The current study proposes that understanding the vocational lives of Native American women required an expansion of current vocational theories to capture the complex histories and nuanced social contexts these women experience as they engaged in work, while taking into consideration the history of racism, sexism, and exploitation implicated in western research. Therefore, this study sought to inform how we understand Native American women's world of work in several ways.

First, existing theories of vocational psychology did not account for the complex cultural, historical, and political aspects of tribes. As such, attributions about Native American women's

economic, work, and employment factors have not fully captured nor explained their perceptions of health within their communities. For example, markers of the economic health of communities (e.g., SES) in the U.S. tended to focus on un/employment and income/poverty rates but have not accounted for how tribes prioritize cultural agendas. There was evidence (e.g., Burnette, 2015; Gambrell, 2016; Liddell et al., 2021) that Native American women prioritized social and cultural activities (e.g., cultural/language revitalization focused on fostering intergenerational resilience and combatting systemic oppression) over individual prosperity (e.g., personal career and work goals; Liddell et al., 2021). Given this, this proposal aimed to explore the values and goals of Native American women and their communities to find congruent explanations that accounted for and more fully explain their vision of and health and wellness markers within vocational psychology.

Next, vocational research has explored the work and career experiences of Native American women at subpopulation levels (e.g., Native American women in higher education, Native American mothers, and employed Native American women). This focus has ignored women's intentionality in decision-making that has perpetuated stigma about roles (e.g., social status regarding women who were not employed). Therefore, another contribution of the current research extended what was known in Native American communities about individuals' vocational and career interests by combining women across life roles to illuminate the shared values all Native American women hold as meaningful contributions to their families and communities. Specifically, this study departed from previous research that focused on work, career, or education or employment type (e.g., participant criteria) by exploring the career pathways and the choices women make about work with other aspects of their lives irrespective of their work status, decision-making, or career and academic pursuits in order to learn about the

interrelationships of the values across choices.

Finally, Western research has an extractive and harmful past with Tribes in the U.S. and Wisconsin tribes have been impacted by those past practices. Additionally, this study, while centered in counseling psychology, sought knowledge with spiritual components embedded and therefore involved approaches that honored and respected oral tradition. Using methodology based on Menominee Theory and drawing from Indigenous philosophy and research methods ensured that research engagement and interactions were respectful of the autonomy of its participants by allowing context for the construction of a meaningful narration of their stories and knowledge. Therefore, this project proposed a methodology that honored policies, such as University of Wisconsin System's Regent Policy Document 8-2: Tribal Consultation, and existing Tribal cultural research board across Wisconsin, which aim to develop collaborative knowledge-building between universities and tribes in a manner that honors and protect the interests of individuals, Tribes, and land that Tribes exercise sovereignty on. This proposed methodology was collaborative because the author's tribal community and Native knowledge guides approved its purpose and protocol and has been be re-shaped in manner that met the aims described throughout chapter 3 of this document.

Chapter 3: Esēhcekan

Disclaimer: *The theory described and used in this document contains knowledge based on ancient Menominee ways of knowing and doing. Educational, academic, or community-based experiences are not sufficient to grant permission to use or borrow from this methodology without the expressed permission of the author, Pilar Gauthier, or knowledge holders (e.g., Elders) from the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin. Scholars are encouraged to read this methodology with the understanding that it was developed by and for indigenous researchers and their communities. This paradigm (e.g., ontology, epistemology, methodology, and axiology), including the elder epistemology and Menominee language expressed within the document, is protected and should not be used as a template for other scholarship, including research.*

What is described within this Menominee Theory, also called Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan, stands on its own as a research philosophy. For example, Indigenous scholars may call their approach Indigenous Research and make methodological decisions that include aspects from other paradigms (e.g., constructionism, thematic analysis); however, this theory uses methodology (including methods and analytic procedures) that are exclusive and wholistically congruent with Menominee Theory which centers relationality and cultural ethics and morals.

Methodological Decision

Wilson (2021) defines a *research paradigm* as "a set of beliefs about the world and about gaining knowledge that go together to guide your actions as to how you're going to go about doing your research" (p. 175). Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan, an Indigenous philosophy, describes the Menominee way of being and beliefs about the world (ontology) that

guide how Menominee people think about the world (epistemology). In a research context, Menominee ways of thinking set forth how I/we interact with and gain knowledge about the world (methodology). Woven within Omaeqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan is our ethical standards and morals (axiology), which ensure I/we are helpful and purposeful to the world. Relationships are central to Indigenous research aims. Moreover, there must be a purpose (e.g., decolonizing practices) that foster health of Indigenous communities. Indigenous people recognize that truth and reality are context-based and therefore (co)constructed in the context of the individual(s) and their tribal context (e.g., social and political context, spiritual beliefs, and customs).

In the indigenous paradigm, "an epistemology where relationships are built (and exist) are more important than reality" (see Table 1.1; p. 177, Wilson, 2001). Wilson (2001) asserts that personhood of knowledge is a fundamental difference in an Indigenous paradigm. The belief that knowledge is an individual entity; it is relational and shared with all creation predates western philosophy on Turtle Island (America). For example, the Menominee people believe that the Menominee language is an entity. As knowledge, the language cannot be owned (e.g., sold, given or taken) because it was gifted to *all* the Menominee people by the Creator. Therefore, the Menominee language must be shared freely with its people. In a research or practice context, language revitalization efforts were decolonizing and purposeful in that Menominee people believe that life without the Menominee language means the culture dissolves, and the Menominee people cease to exist.

Table 1.1 Major Tenets of Philosophical Underpinnings*

	Ontology	**Epistemology**	**Methodology**	**Axiology**
	The nature of reality	The relationship between the inquirer and the known	Processes for gaining knowledge of the world	

Positivism	There is a "real" reality Truth exists and can be known Dichotomous conclusions are possible	The scientist is objective The scientist does not affect the research and is not affected by it	Scientific method Hypothetico-deductive process Absolute truth can be uncovered Linear	
Postpositivism	There is a "real reality Truth can never be fully known Dichotomous conclusions are not possible because systems are complex	All research is flawed The scientist has biases that may affect the research	Scientific method Hypothetico-deductive process Linear Reliance upon inferences based on probability	
Constructivism	There is no "real" reality or absolute truth There are no conjectures Ideas about the world are constructed in the minds of individuals Perceptions are reality	Constructions can only be understood via interactions between (a) the investigator and the participant or (b) between the investigator and the world of the participant	Reliance upon hermeneutics as data Dialectic (interactions between the participant and the investigator) are critical to the interpretation of the data Recursive	
Critical Theory	Social constructions are shaped by social, political, cultural, historical, and economic forces	Social constructions are deeply embedded in the investigator and the participant The values of the investigator are vital to the inquiry The investigator and the participant form a relationship	Constructions are refined or altered via the process of interpretation Interpretations facilitate social action designed to emancipate from oppression Dialectism is used to alter constructions Recursive	
			Processes for "*coming to know*" (about the world)	
Omā	Relationships	Knowledge	Stories are shared	Has

eqnomenēwak Mā̱ehnow Pemātesekan - Indigenous Philosophy	are more important than knowledge. Knowledge is relational and shared with all of creation (e.g., humans, animals, plants, earth, cosmos) Reality is context-based and our relationship with ideas and concepts being explained are critical (Wilson, 2021) Knowledge is linked with a particular epistemology, is relational, purposeful has a specific place-based protocol	cannot be owned or discovered Researcher role has obligations to answer to "all relations" The listener/learner is positioned as a co-participant The relationship between the listener and story teller is collaborative The relationship builds and deepens as stories are shared The listener, storyteller, and the storyteller's context (e.g., family, tribal community) form a relationship	relationally, through conversation Knowledge is mutual and mixed: gained, shared, built, and analyzed, *between* individuals (researcher, participants and community/relations) Stories evoke spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental remembrances Collaborative, dialogic, intuitive Iterative and reflexive Recursive	purpose and responsible to protect the rights of all our relations Research must matter and bring something beneficial to the world (Wilson, 2001)

*This table is directly reproduced from Heppner et al. (2015, p. 7) with the exception of the Indigenous philosophy row.

In Indigenous research, knowledge must be considered as having its own life and purpose. In a conversation with a research team on the Menominee reservation, an Elder was asked by a non-Native researcher about the possibility of collecting plant samples that grew along a lake on the Menominee reservation. The elder responded, "Before I can consider collecting plants samples, I have to take time to consider the wild rice beds that grow in that area. The wild rice beds do not have a way of giving us consent, and so we have to consider their voices, listen to them in a way that we understand what they need and how they might be

impacted" (C. Caldwell, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, personal communication, July, 2019). Our teachings about the way we interact and consider the environment ensures we see the wild rice bed as our relatives, they are animate and have personhood. Therefore, the relationship between a research question and the wild rice bed is more important than the question.

My role as an Indigenous researcher necessitated that I use a methodology that was congruent with and centered relationality and uplifted the protocols of Menominee and Indigenous ways of knowing and doing while ensuring that its purpose centered the wellbeing and goals of Indigenous women and communities. The methodology, methods, and analytic decisions of this study centered and uplifted the beliefs and ways of sharing knowledge among Indigenous people using a decolonizing aim (Wilson, 2001). Incorporating a group of Indigenous women knowledge guides to oversee this study, along with Western academic allies, ensured the standards described in its philosophical framework were followed. Given my worldview, the knowledge and beliefs of myself and the Indigenous people represented in this study, along with the harmful history of research within tribes, non-Indigenous scholars and researchers should support these methodological decisions. Furthermore, these decisions go beyond 'do no harm' and honored what it meant to be a good relative. The protocol that facilitated being a good relative went above and beyond western research philosophical underpinnings and should be honored as a distinct and legitimate research paradigm. From the perspective of Menominee elders and knowledge guides, this paradigm is the "gold standard' for conducting research with Indigenous communities.

Introduction

Indigenous scholars have articulated research approaches and methodologies that are epistemologically and theoretically distinct from western models. The protocols are congruent

with Indigenous ways of *coming to know* and center Indigenous knowledge of science (Kovach, 2009, 2021; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). The approach in this study acknowledged the ethical tensions and complexities that exist between higher education institutions and Native American communities (Kerr & Ferguson, 2021). In undertaking a complex and multilayered approach, I demonstrated how I return to my "tribal core" and, in doing so, acknowledged an "existing Indigenous cultural worldview and identity" (Kovach, 2009, p. 53).

This chapter is a humble articulation of the, Menominee Theory of Omaēqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan (A Good Way of Life). I acknowledge that in borrowing from these old teachings as a mere learner, my intentions were simply to do this work in a good way. To honor those who came before me and my relatives still actively resisting coloniality, I described this methodology in detail and included a description of my identities, affiliations, and relationships within academic institutions. From honoring relationality to centering an ethical study design, I engaged a wholistic experience for all who were a part of and witnessed this journey. This process was iterative and uplifted an Indigenous ontology from various Tribal experts and scholars and integrated the expertise of Western scholars and allies, including those who oversaw my dissertation (Debassige, 2013). The first sections of this chapter describe the epistemology and ethical research framework of Omaēqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan based on Wilson's (2008) Indigenous Research Paradigm and Debassige's (2010) application of a spirit-centered model. I then introduce Netaēnawēmākanak[6], the relatives (e.g., knowledge guides, knowledge holders) who assisted with this study. I then move into the research design by describing the Conversational method by Kovach (2009, 2021), which aligned with oral traditional ways of Menominee people. From there, I describe analytic procedure using condensed conversations

[6] Menominee term meaning, a way of doing work

and condensed stories. The use of "I/our" in this chapter reflects the shared worldview between myself and Netaenawēmākanak. To note, I use the terms "relationality" as opposed to "identity" supported by pronouns "I/we" as I consider myself-in-relation rather than an individual independent of all my relations. In this way, I brought my relations with me as a guide on this journey.

Omaeqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan Epistemology

Indigenous scholars have proposed culturally congruent approaches to research. The Indigenous Research Paradigm, described by Wilson (2008), is an exemplary model that incorporates a decolonizing lens and tribal relation-based characteristics distinct from western research processes. The Indigenous research paradigm places Indigenous voices and tribal epistemologies at the center of its process (Debassige, 2010). Accordingly, the design in this study followed the example of Debassige (2010) and critically examined and explicitly named the underlying assumptions of its methodology (e.g., data collection and analysis) to inform and uplift Indigenous ways of knowing and the protocols inherent to that end. Debassige's (2010) Anishinaabe mino-bimaadiziwin (The Good Life) research methodology places prominence on our Indigenous ways of knowing in partnership with academia. Omaeqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan loosely translates as a command to express to the 'Menominee people – Live Well!', as a concept, it reminds us to live in a good and respectful way. Omaeqnomenēwak Wēqnasen[7] and Native American ways of life are context-based. Wilson (2021) asserts that how you think about reality depends on the context, life experiences, and praxis. Therefore, in this context I meant Omaeqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan to reflect 'A Good Way of Life'. Omaeqnomenēwak ways of knowing are ancient among Mamāceqtāwak, Menominee people,

[7] Menominee term meaning, Menominee language

centering these teachings and ways of coming to know within western research was critical (Debassige, 2010).

Omaēqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan serves as the basis for how I/we were taught to follow the instructions of Māēc Awāētok, the Creator. Following these ways ensured this work was done in a good way. Together, Omaēqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan was both the epistemology and research methodology. It is customary to begin any gathering such as this by locating myself with an Indigenous research and life (Debassige, 2010). These are the metaphysical, active ways of being and living Omaēqnomenēwak.

Location

Posoh! Pilar Gauthier newihswan. Nōhnaeq Ted Gauthier Jr. awew mesek Nekiah Doreen Gauthier awew. Nemāēhsoh Sapatis awew kaehnap mesek Nōhkomaeh Nepew awew kaehnap. Nāēqnīw nekīqsak, Saswaen, Jacoby, mesek Mayan owīswan. Nekot netān, Anahkosaeh owīswan. Omeqnomene, Kaeyas Mamāceqtāwak. Omaeqnomenew netawem netaeqcyakoh! Greetings! My English name is Pilar; My parents are Ted and Doreen Gauthier, my grandparents are Sapatis and Nepew, who are now passed. I have three sons, they are Quinn (Saswaen), Jacoby and Mayan. I have one daughter who is Anīhkosaeh (Little Star Girl). I come from the Wild Rice People; we are 'the ancient ones.' I am Menominee in my spirit! I would also like to humbly ask my Elders and speakers of Omaeqnomenēw Wēqnasen, for forgiveness for any mistakes I make in speaking (pause for acknowledgement).

I grew up on the Menominee Indian reservation; I come from the Gauthier family. I attended the Menominee Indian school district until eighth grade before transferring to a white public high school located in the town adjacent to the reservation. My mother felt there was access to more academic opportunities if I went to the white public high school. I worked hard in

high school academically and joined many extracurricular activities (e.g., sports, music). However, in preparing for college (e.g., taking the ACT), I was told by a White counselor that I was better off seeking employment. This was a significant moment of adversity for me. I still recall feeling my heart sink in shame and wondering how I would face my family who were counting on me to be the first in our family to become college educated. I internalized that White counselor's message. However, after working for one year at my local casino, I decided she was wrong about me. I am a descendent of great Menominee and Ho-Chunk ancestors and Native American women matriarchs. My existence is their persistence. I applied and was accepted into college and thus, my academic journey began.

Native American identity shaped my worldview and comprised kinship, love, land, and Creation. I am here, 15 years after following the instructions of my uncle, who, when I was uncertain about entering into graduate school to study western psychology, told me, "Go. Find out what we share; we all have things we share, despite our differences. Find out what Western psychology says about well-being and integrate what you have learned here (raising his arms out in to acknowledge land and place)" (G. Gauthier, Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin, personal communication, August, 2010). He was talking about inter-knowledge sharing (Dei, 2011).

My research approach was shaped by sacred Menominee knowledge of science and Native American scholarship from around the world. I view the role of my grandparents and Elders as critical and fundamental to my process. Our grandparents and Elders remind us about our formal relationship to the natural environment. They remind us to view our non-human relatives as having consciousness and purpose. In this way, I had a personal responsibility to ensure research practices that respect and protect the rights and welfare of the personhood of our

community members and non-human relatives in all aspects. It was my burden to explain how this research respected and protected these rights.

This journey was about my process as a developing counseling psychologist to move beyond 'no harm' toward what it means to be a good relative in this work and scholarship. I aimed to deepen my understanding of Western theory within Western contexts to understand what parts fit with other parts of who I am and who/what I represent. Therefore, I was accountable to my family, the elders, ancestors, non-human and spiritual beings, all whom have done this work before me and opened a path and enabled me to do this kind of work. I was also accountable to the next seven generations, including my children and grandchildren, who will continue this work when I am gone. In better understanding my worldview, I had let go of the doubts, the imposter feelings which had previously presented themselves especially within colonial-settler spaces. Here, I reckoned with those feelings and uplifted the original teachings, leaning on the brilliant Indigenous knowledge systems that exist which guided this project.

Indigenous Storywork Methodology

The Indigenous Storywork (Storywork) methodology developed by Archibald (2008) emphasizes ethics and honors relationality to research. Storywork aligns with Omāeqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan. Storywork describes making meaning through stories within a research context (Archibald, 2008). Kovach (2021) likens *data* collected in Indigenous research, with *gift* stating, "collecting data is the gifting of another's story to a researcher" (p. 155). Archibald et al. (2019) views stories as "the most powerful intergenerational manifestation of hope" (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 13). Storywork principles serve as ethical guides by ensuring accountability between the storyteller/knowledge holder and listener/learner. These roles hold more specific meaning than participant and researcher. Henceforth, in keeping with the Storywork protocol, I

referred to narrative interviews (i.e., data) as *story* given that this term implies a higher degree of accountability to relationality and had implications for ownership and use. Storywork consist of *preparing for* stories and *working with* stories.

Preparing for stories refers to Archibald's (2008) use of Indigenous epistemology, which requires a learner/listener to prepare for working with Indigenous stories using the 4R principles of *respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence* (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Preparing for story is critical for giving it life and nurturing relationship (Kovach, 2021). I observed and read other Indigenous scholars and learned how they told and use stories to prepare for Storywork. Similar to Menominee Theory, I learned about the cultural guidelines and purposes of those stories being used by witnessing. Much of my graduate training required me to seek and incorporate Indigenous scholarship (e.g., attending conferences, reading publications). During my doctoral studies, I re-engaged in learning Omaeqnomenēw Wēqnasen (Menominee language), which reminded me of the importance to open my heart, mind, body, and spirit to learning in context and relationship. Working with stories occurs through the principles of *[w]holism, interrelatedness*, and *synergy*. Collaboration with Knowledge holders and Knowledge guides ensured we honored protocols for handling stories. For example, learners/listeners must acknowledge the source of stories, their culture/tribe, and contextual background (e.g., cultural context).

Archibald emphasizes protocols for *preparing for* story in a way that develops trust within the research context (2008). The interrelationship between stories and coming to know (i.e., knowledge) serves an important function in storytelling (Kovach, 2021) and is consistent with Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan. Storywork reminded me of long visits at my grandparents' house, hunting and berry picking in our ancestral Menominee forest with my

parents, and being in ceremony with my relatives. Storywork is relational, and relationships are spiritual. Storywork is healing. Visiting and being around family, culture, and spirituality is how I came to know storywork from a Menominee way of knowing and being. In a research context, storywork promotes cohesion and knowledge transmission. The following subsections briefly describe the 4R principles to establish the storywork context and chart the ethical obligations that accompany stories. While they were illustrated separately, they were viewed as interdependent across research practice.

Respect

Respect is a central ethical tenet of Indigenous Storywork. In her quest to develop a culturally appropriate Indigenous methodology, Archibald (2008) began with “the principles of respect for cultural knowledge embedded in the stories and respect for the people who owned or shared the stories as an ethical guide” (Archibald, 2008, p. 36). Similarly, I view research as valuable when it is experiential and allows for observation, (self)reflection, and action. My role as a scholar favored approaches to research that view oral traditions as valid philosophies of science.

Responsibility

Archibald (2008) emphasized that researchers "should also take responsibility for any mistakes contained...given that...those who shared their knowledge...[do] so with great care and often said that they spoke the truth as they knew it" (Archibald, 2008, p. 24). Researcher responsibility, at once, acknowledge Indigenous communities' intimate connection to colonization and painful past experiences of western research while uplifting insights of tribal communities (Archibald et al., 2019). The researcher serves as a steward of ethical and culturally responsible research practices. Complimentary to counseling psychology, Indigenous research

addresses inequities occurring in social and political conditions via processes that account for self-determination, decolonization, and social justice. The Indigenous methodology is one such research paradigm that seeks answers to our concerns as Indigenous people. Within this model, it is the burden of researchers to explain to Indigenous communities how their proposals respect and protects these rights. Kovach's (2010) conversational method was used in this study and ensured responsible data collection and adherence to relationality.

Reciprocity

In a research paradigm, I/we are caretakers of knowledge and understand that reciprocity is a multi-level process that recognizes aspects of the participant/knowledge holder and tribal communities (Lavallée, 2009). At a knowledge holder level, reciprocity ensures that individuals and their stories are respected, that they are viewed as co-producers of knowledge (Dei, 2013), their voices empowered, and that they are paid for their time and expertise (Lavallée, 2009). At a community level, reciprocity ensures research is a two- way process that aims to prevent extraction toward connectedness (Kovach, 2009) and build a community of learners (Dei, 2013). Finally, it is critical to acknowledge that tribal communities are known to have an intimate connection to colonization and painful past experiences with Western-based research. Therefore, a decolonizing aim was used to advance and validate and respect Indigenous research protocols, such as Tribal research review boards and cultural experts.

Reverence

Archibald views stories as being tools for teaching and that they are described to have the power to educate the mind, heart, body, and spirit (2008). Therefore, appreciating the process of storytelling is equally important as receiving the story; for this reason, Indigenous research is regarded as ceremonial (Wilson, 2008). In upholding these ethics, I asked myself: Was I

responsible to those committed to meaningful work lives in and outside of tribal contexts, particularly within the communities where these work roles exist? Was I respectful to my relatives' communities, including those Indigenous employers who are doing the best they can? Did I honor the histories and customs of the relatives I engaged? Did I do what ancestors expect of me? Was this project mutually beneficial to the wellbeing of those individuals and communities I am engage? Finally, did I carry a spirit of transparency, openness, flexibility, and humility? Taken together, researchers should consider how their processes are taken from the community and what they intend to give back.

Honoring Wisconsin First Nation Peoples and their Sites

Now that I have acknowledged where I came from and the importance and process of storywork to Omāeqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan, it is time to introduce the Tribal Nations of Wisconsin. In keeping with this approach, it is important to name the communities of knowledge that were represented in this project (e.g., site, knowledge guides, knowledge holders). Further, honoring the First Peoples of Wisconsin was my way of naming their existence and importance to their role in Wisconsin history. The site in which this research took place is in Wisconsin, the ancestral homelands originally occupied by the Menominee, Ho-Chunk (Winnebago), Ojibwe (Chippewa), and Potawatomi Peoples. In addition, Wisconsin is the present home to 11 federally recognized sovereign Tribal Nations and one non-federally recognized tribe.

- The Menominee people call themselves 'Kāeyas Mamāceqtāwak' meaning the Ancient or Old Ones. They place their origin story at the mouth of the Menominee River in near what is now northwestern Michigan and northeastern Wisconsin and a mere 60 miles east of their reservation. Presently, the Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin owns

the largest reservation east of the Mississippi River and is located in northeast Wisconsin.

- The Ho-Chunk call themselves Ho-chungra, "people of the parent speech," or "people of the Big Voice." They place their origin story at Móogašuc, or the Red Banks, near what is now Green Bay, WI, and they currently own land in 14 counties, primarily in the middle- to lower-half the state.
- Wisconsin's six Lake Superior Chippewa/Ojibwe bands are Red Cliff Band, Bad River, Lac Du Flambeau, Mole Lake Sokaogan, St. Croix, and Lac Court Oreilles. The Ojibwe call themselves “Anishinaabeg,” which means the “True People” or the “Original People,” and, presently, their bands are spread throughout the upper half of the state.
- Potawatomi means "Keepers of the Sacred Fire," but they call themselves Neshnabek, "the True People." The Forest County Potawatomi is originally from a much larger group who resided on land east of the Mississippi River in what is now lower Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Their reservation is located primarily in northeastern WI, and they also have trust land in the City of Milwaukee.
- The Oneida call themselves Oneyoteaka, "People of the Standing Stone," and are originally from the ceded lands in present-day central-western New York. They are now located on reservation land in parts of two counties in the Green Bay, WI metropolitan area.
- The Stockbridge-Munsee Band of Mohican Indians call themselves “Muh-he-con- ne-ok," The People of the Waters That Are Never Still. They were forcibly removed from their original territories in the eastern part of the U.S. in the Hudson River Valley area of New York and extending across six other states in that region. Their reservation is now located in northeast Wisconsin.

- The Brothertown Indian Nation are the united descendants of Mohegan, Eastern Pequot, Mashantucket Pequot, Niantic, Narragansett, Montauk, and Tunxis people of New York and New England. Their members are currently spread across the Midwest however, many are located in Fond du Lac, WI.

Due to various reasons, including economic, many Native American families reside in urban communities across the state, with the majority in Milwaukee. Wisconsin is now home to many Native American people from across the U.S. who have distinct histories and knowledge.

Netaenawēmākanak

I will now introduce the relatives whom I invited to help me along this journey. Western academics refer to these roles as participants and advisory boards, and while those terms apply, there were nuanced cultural differences. Netaenawēmākanak is a Menominee term meaning, 'all my relations'. It refers to our coexistence with all human and non-human relatives and bears an assumption we are responsible for and answer to them. To honor the sources of knowledge my participants and advisors provide to this study, I regarded them in the same manner as I would any relative. In this space, we were relatives. My role as the researcher was regarded as co-participant and relative.

This study is about the stories of Native American women. I was interested in learning how they make meaning from their work options, choices, and trajectories. This study attempted to construct a psychological and spiritual understanding of work in the context of their stories. Using an Indigenous Framework assumes that Native American women were intrinsically tied to the universal truths (e.g., 4R's) about their worldview while knowing that realities were viewed as constructions, and their truths nuanced (Wilson, 2001). Omaeqnomenēwak Maehnow Pemātesekan center how Indigenous people situate themselves within their social and cultural

world, (Wilson, 2008).

Knowledge Holders

I referred to women participants as 'knowledge holders' to give proper attention to the ancient ways of knowing they carry forward today. Moreover, to align with Storywork and Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan, they were considered co-researchers. To note, for this study, I used the terms, Native American and Native, Indigenous, storyteller, and knowledge holder interchangeably to refer to participants. These titles show respect for the legitimacy of the Indigenous knowledge they shared through conversation and story. Referring to Indigenous Peoples who participate in research as knowledge holders align with Lugones' (2007) beliefs that our people are "fully informed" and active resisters (p. 747- 748). Knowledge holders for this project were affiliated with Tribal communities across Wisconsin.

The inclusion criterion for knowledge holders as interviewees included: 1) self-identified as a member or descendant of any tribe and who, at the time of this study, lived in Wisconsin, 2) identified as a woman age 18 and above, 3) identified as being currently engaged in paid or non-paid work, labor, or employment, and 4) identified as knowledge holders who were able to choose to participate in the research on their own freely. Eligibility was assessed by the study team, which included me (Pilar Gauthier, M.S., doctorate counseling psychology student) and my dissertation chair, Dr. Mindi Thompson (Professor from the School of Education at the University of Wisconsin-Madison). To participate in this study, knowledge holders were asked to share their work status and tribal affiliation.

Women who met inclusion criteria were recruited through tribal organizations and social networks. A mixed sampling strategy was used for this study. Criterion and purposeful sampling were used to recruit knowledge holders across Wisconsin tribes. According to Padgett

(2017), the researcher selects participants based on their particular knowledge in purposive sampling. In addition to sharing their stories related to how they make sense of their work and life choices, Knowledge Holders reviewed and approved the stories to ensure they reflect in the way they intended. A more descriptive reintroduction of the Knowledge Holders is provided in chapter four.

Knowledge Guides

I invited Native American women advisors to provide cultural expertise and emotional and spiritual support through this research design and study. I referred to them as 'knowledge guides. While some knowledge guides currently or previously held various work and/or research roles and who were interested in developing research questions meant to prompt meaningful conversations about this topic, including Mindi Thompson, others were invited for the cultural care they carry for their tribal community.

During early stages of this research project, I presented on this topic at the annual Women's Empowerment Summit at the College of the Menominee Nation in the fall of 2021. My goal was to present the cultural implications of work among Native American women to assess the importance of this topic among a community of Native American women who attended the conference from tribes across Wisconsin. In emphasizing my existing relationships with Native women, it was critical to seek their initial feedback and, ultimately, their permission to do this work (Wilson, 2008). This process began a purposive recruitment approach, and I received positive feedback, support, and contact information for interested women who wanted to serve in an advisory capacity for this study. These women, along with others who respond to a flyer will be invited for this role. The design and interview questions were refined and approved by knowledge guides.

Western Ethics and Informed Consent

I have now provided a sense of the rigorous ethical protocols of Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan as they were woven throughout and were further described by storywork. Given the nature of this dissertation being situated in a university context, it is fitting to explicitly describe Western academic ethical protocols. This section will describe how the women who participated in this study, and their stories, were protected and safeguarded according to the university procedures.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was sought from the University of Wisconsin—Madison to ensure protected, informed, and uncoerced consent. In addition, support (e.g., letters of support) from Tribes with an IRB were sought and received for transparency and consultation. Good relatives' agreements (i.e., consent forms) were developed and offered before each conversation, and all knowledge holders waived consent (Kovach, 2010). Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Knowledge holder interviewees were compensated for their participation using traditional gifting practices. Finally, Knowledge holders were asked on the form if they were interested in follow-up contact after this study to participate in community media dissemination, to which all were in favor of.

Conversations were face-to-face or virtual (e.g., video) depending on the preference and abilities of knowledge holders. Visits (described below) were conducted at times and location comfortable to each knowledge holder (e.g., their tribal community). Knowledge holders were compensated for their time with a gift card, and mileage was added for those commuting to a location. Conversations were transcribed verbatim and transcriptions were uploaded into a secure Box drive on the [University's] computer. As described below, conversations were reflexively selected and reported as condensed into shortened

conversations and stories.

The topic of work and in the context of cultural, social, and spiritual practices were foreshadowed to be emotionally demanding. To minimize emotional or spiritual risk, all knowledge holders were assured of their voluntary participation and that they were allowed to discontinue participation at any time during this study or request to skip any questions with no adverse effects. In addition to research training, I brought extensive therapy experience that allowed me to be attuned and sensitive to emotional reactions and was prepared to respond appropriately in a supportive manner. I am a Native American doctoral student with previous training in conducting interviews and have previous experience in qualitative research as well having grown up on a reservation and with personal and work connections with Native people in Wisconsin. With those important teachings in mind, I facilitated the conversations. All interviews were supervised by Mindi Thompson, a licensed health service psychologist.

Procedures

Conversational Method

This project used the conversational method in Indigenous Research described by Margaret Kovach (2010). The conversational method fit within Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan and involves a decolonizing aim in purposefulness and relationism (Kovach, 2010). Kovach (2010) asserted that "Indigenous methodologies embrace relational assumptions as central to their core epistemologies." (p. 42). Kovach (2010) further stated:

> *"An understanding of the relational nuances of an Indigenous paradigm is critical to moving forward with an Indigenous methodological approach. Further, it is central in understanding why the conversational method, which is inherently relational, is congruent with Indigenous methodologies (p. 42)."*

The conversational method honors a Native American worldview and oral tradition as a guide for this research. While conversational methods were used in Western qualitative research, when used in an Indigenous research context, it becomes distinct. For instance, Kovach (2010) states conversational ways of coming to know were embedded in a particular tribal epistemology and within an indigenous paradigm. Further, conversational ways in Indigenous research promote relationality through informality, flexibility, collaboration, dialogue, and reflexivity (Kovach, 2010). By preconceiving the narratives of knowledge holders as a sacred sharing of stories and listening, I invited relationships and collaboration, which positioned me, the researcher, as a participant and relative.

The conversational method comprises specific protocols. Akin to building rapport in western counseling settings, building relationship at the outset is critical for establishing trust. Therefore, semi-structured conversations were informal, flexible, dialogic, collaborative, and centered on epistemology and place. Semi-structured interviews were conducted as visits and the process of collection as conversations, (Kovach, 2009, 2010) with each knowledge holder interpreting questions based on context (e.g., environmental, cultural, or individual location). Each conversation intended to explore work stories were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The anticipated length of conversations was one hour; however, conversations were often longer to create a more storytelling and information gathering environment (Wilson, 2008). Conversations were framed using semi-structured interview prompts and informed by the Native American research advisory board and tribal IRB consultation.

Conversations were informal, flexible, dialogic, collaborative, and included specific protocols determined by the knowledge holder's epistemological practices (e.g., introductions of self and people/places we share common knowledge of, smudging; Kovach, 2010).

During conversations, it is critical for the learner not to interrupt but rather allow the story to be received as it comes and use the skill of deep listening to engage physically, intellectually, and spiritually with the storyteller. Co-creating in knowledge in an Indigenous paradigm invites reflexivity on the part of the researcher. Sharing my inward knowledge within the conversational methodology deepened trust and allowed interpretation to develop (Kovach, 2021). Indigenous people use metaphor, and the listener should prepare for meaning-making in this way, using field notes to reflect and guide the storywork process (Archibald, 2008). Therefore, I used reflexive practices to notate my experiences throughout this study which were used to develop and enrichen the story told in chapter four.

Visits. I use the term visit as opposed to setting. Visits describe 'being together' in a relational way whereas conversations were the spoken words during the visit. Setting up for a 'good visit', as my grandmother would say, requires preparation. I was taught that whenever a visitor calls, it is necessary to offer food or refreshment as a formal way of welcoming, especially in exchange for stories, knowledge, spiritual healing, or one's time. Particularly for in-person visits, it is critical to begin by first establishing an Indigenous process of authenticity and credibility to the work (e.g., encircling to develop reliability, Wilson, 2008). Therefore, I offered refreshments (e.g., water, berries) and which allowed for time to review or discuss consent materials, discuss how findings will be shared and describe the benefits of the study. I offered tobacco ties as way to signal seriousness, sincerity, and honesty (Kovach, 2021).

Condensed Conversations and Stories

Condensed conversations and condensed stories provide contextualized narrations that reflect the women's voices about how women navigate their various work and life roles (e.g., between worlds). Condensed conversations and storytelling do not rely upon western

qualitative coding processes. For instance, Kovach (2010) notes that thematic grouping of knowledge is a non-contextual analysis of findings and further, produce similar findings as reflective narratives. Simonds and Christopher (2013) recounted the ways in which Western quantitative and qualitative analytical methods were problematic when applied to Indigenous stories. They noted that western coding processes employed in qualitative research practices were problematic because they "rip apart" the stories from their context (Simonds & Christopher, 2013, p. 2188). The condensed conversation and storytelling process allows for context to the story being told. Developing condensed stories upheld women's narrations in context and truth (Kovach, 2010).

In this study, these condensed conversations and condensed stories were contextualized examples from a given story that represented themes toward a broader understanding. Indigenous scholars have asserted that Indigenous learning does not *give* the meaning of a story to the learner, but through metaphor, allows the learner to form their interpretation (Christensen, 2004; Kovach, 2010). Condensed conversations and stories were congruent and uphold listening/learning in action by readers of the final document. The difference between condensed conversations from stories were the inclusion of knowledge shifting that came by way of inviting my inward process as I listened, felt, and learned. Here is where the position of the women as co-researchers and relatives were elevated and prominent.

Reflexivity

Throughout the study, I used a self-referent approach as modeled by Debassige (2013). I maintained multisensory structured field notes (e.g., visual, nonverbal cues as well as my personal spiritual emotional physical mental experiences) throughout the visits, noting important aspects about conversations and any interactions with knowledge holders. These field

notes described the context of the physical and social setting and captured the stories of each visit and conversation. The multisensory field notes were generated in two ways. First, they captured the immediate sensory knowledge I gained to form my initial understandings. Secondly, they described how my understanding deepened over the course of the process during the in-between initial story collection and meaning-making (e.g., findings). This *in-between space* was where I returned to places (e.g., family, place-based environments) and practices (e.g., smudging, ceremony, kinship) to restore balance, energy, guidance and wisdom from knowledge guides, family, and facilitated wellness (Debassige, 2010). This in-between space was critical for my self-reflection and for arriving at a meaningful story presented in chapter four. Constantly returning to Omaēqnomenēwak teachings not only helped me gather perspective, but also caretook my spirit as the stories were emotionally difficult for me to hold and process. In combination, this iterative process shaped the direction and meaning of the stories and in turn allowed for deeper insight (Wilson, 2008).

Meaning Making

Given the tension between Western and Indigenous ways of conducting research in academia, there is limited scholarship on Indigenous methods that describe a way to synthesize findings in an Indigenous methodology that does not also borrow from western qualitative analysis (see Kovach, 2009 for discussion on incorporating methods; Debassige, 2013). To date, much of the scholarship utilizing storytelling and condensed conversations has relied upon Western analysis (e.g., thematic analysis, ethnographic analysis; Debassige, 2010; Kovach, 2021). More recently, scholars have begun to question this approach and called for movement forward with anticipated oral traditional storying in place of Western analysis. In particular, Debassige (2010) asserted “if scholars are left to solely adapt or institutionalize Traditional

Knowledge, the sustainability of our ways of knowing may be jeopardized" (p. 16). As such, I sought to break free from methodological mixing to center Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan as based on a legitimate philosophical system of knowledge that grounded this methodology (Debassige, 2013).

To center Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan, I took the following steps. I used the field notes accumulated throughout the study to allow themes of what woman shared to take shape as intuitive interpretation. I sought feedback from women guides, and the women storytellers themselves, about those interpretations (i.e., how I came to understand the stories) to see if they felt I needed to rethink, rewrite, reimagine. Together, I as the listener, collaborated with the knowledge holders to make meaning in-relation, deriving themes with story through self-in-relation interpretations which led to a wholistic picture. Christiansen (2004) describes this process as circle learning which allow the learner to experience the learning, in their wholistic way.

From a Native American perspective, learning and writing reflects the way we hear stories, and Elders and others talk about themselves in the context of what is being conveyed. Learning involves remembering through patterns with a relationship process and relies on critical thinking, such as identifying central issues, identifying assumptions, recognizing bias, and using advisors to guide the process is a part of the methodology (Christiansen, 2004). In this way, I am not speaking *for*, but *with* Native American women about the stories they/we felt was important (Kovach, 2009). Similarly, I asked the woman knowledge holders to co-create their own personal profiles that was reflected in chapter four of this document.

The final phase was to weave condensed stories together to create a fuller understanding of the knowledge that stood out as important to us, our experiences, reflections, and personal

journeys as Native American woman. Each condensed story included a reflective narrative by the researcher (me) highlighting key teaching I received from the conversations and stories (Kovach, 2010). In keeping with the integrity of stories, who had their own ownership (e.g., life of their own), the interconnected nature of Omaēqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan research is upheld. For instance, Elder teachers include reflection on where their knowledge was derived (e.g., creation stories) while applying it in-context (e.g., lessons to be learned; Galla & Goodwill, 2017). In keeping with these ways of Indigenous knowledge sharing, a contextual presentation of work was appropriate (Kovach, 2010).

Chapter 4: Ācemwan (The Story)

“This is about women's empowerment and matriation.” (L. Bailey, personal communication). The knowledge guides and I agreed that I should weave each conversation into one story. Our conversations serve as critical pieces in what exists as a more complete and broader story of women's personhood. The person that emerged is called Nētekaeh[1], which means my/our sister; this is her story. Nētekaeh represents the complex personhood of all the women who visited me during this project. She talks about her life across the lifespan, as she has experienced it and articulates her perspective along her varied paths living in contemporary society. This way of telling her story fits appropriately with the lifecycle teachings we learn from our Elders. Our life and conception of time is cyclic and begin in birth, moves into youth, then adulthood/elderhood, and ends in our death cycle. Similarly, our stories have a beginning, a history, a present, and a future.

There is an important relationship between the women knowledge holders and how their stories connect over time and across the lifespan (e.g., age ranging from 19-73). Yet, I could not figure out what it was, so I kept thinking about this. Seemingly meant to be, I received two teachings right around the same time (early 2024) from two traditional Native women who used the concept of "season" in such a natural and articulate way that it furthered my understanding of the relationship between the women knowledge holders. The first woman, Jennifer K. Gauthier, serves as a knowledge guide for this project and in checking in on my writing and wellbeing, said, "I was thinking about how this was the season you were starting these conversations." There was much more to that conversation, which I loved, but I want to highlight her use of the term "season" to situate what I needed for my learning/perspective-taking process within place and time. The second woman guide, Gail Beauchamp, a colleague whom I consider more as a

friend and aunty, had just given a presentation about cultural considerations for working with Native American veterans. Following her presentation, she and I talked about the concept of dementia as a diagnosable condition in the mental health field. I asked for her teachings about memory loss and aging in our Native communities. We discussed the foundation of elder reverence in our approaches to care. She said, "We don't notice those changes our elders go through as a problem or a burden in our societies. It's just another season, and of course, we accept that."

And there it was again, the word season, except now it described lifespan, where change and death are naturally occurring and embraced. Seasons have observable predictors and a chronology that guides us on how to move into our next seasons and tasks. Through these markers, we can grow through our lessons that ensure a strong next seven generations. By using seasons to mark women's changes through time, we see where we can be resilient. So now I have this process of a lifecycle across stories, rooted in seasons, and yes, this work *is* seasonal; this story is seasonal and harmonious.

This chapter, therefore, follows the natural life cycles of Nētekaeh in synchrony with her seasons and is presented in three parts. Following a prelude that introduces the women knowledge holders and an overview of the structure of their story form, which serves as a reader's guide, I open Nētekaeh's story at her (re)birth, her spring season, represented as our coming together again as women in this sacred space of storywork. Here, a purposeful reestablishment of kinship emerges in a context of discomfort and courage. We then move into her youth, her summer season, where she shares how she came to know the world and herself. We hear about the people whose steps she follows, and who inspires the path she aspires to create. We then move into Nētekaeh's fall season, where she describes her adulthood

experiences across phases from early-, middle-, and elderhood. We hold healing together as she overcomes adversity and hardship, and celebrates healing and empowerment. Nētekaeh's story story culminates into her winter season, where she reflects on her life lessons, offing wisdom that foreshadows a depth of hope, abundance of joy, and rebalance.

Metāehmosak (Women Knowledge-Holders)

The knowledge holders came together in a given place and time to share their stories; they represent Woodland Women and Women of the Great Lakes (J. K. Gauthier, personal communication). Their existence symbolizes their connection to forests and the natural world, and their wisdom represents roots dug deeply into Earth, allowing them the strength to bend and withstand storms. Here, they will remain resilient for as long as their stories continue to be told.

- Little Sister Winterberry is 19 years old and a single mother to her five-year old daughter. She herself is a daughter and granddaughter. Little Sister Winterberry grew up in a close family in her tribal community where she learned the love of kinship through traditional (e.g., family cultural practices) and non-traditional (e.g., youth athlete) ways of life. Little Sister Winterberry experienced adversity in her youthhood which informs her goals and priorities now as a young adult woman. Her work and college decisions are in response to experiencing and witnessing the destructive effects of trauma, including bullying, poverty, and mental health and addiction. Little Sister Winterberry is an independent and determined woman aspiring to navigate college while remaining connected to her community and especially prioritizing her role as a mother.
- Little Sister Red Elderberry (23) is a daughter and relative in a family to many strong women and leaders. Through these women, Little Sister Red Elderberry grew

up in her tribal community learning about the importance of taking an active role in problem-solving issues in her community. Her experiences in early adulthood have been challenging and led to deepening her understanding how what it means to be a native woman living in a colonial world. Her healing and wellbeing center on her relationship to land. Little Sister Red Elderberry is committed to uplifting the voices of Native women and through college education, aspires to do work that prioritizes her traditional Native American philosophies of science within land-based work.

- Sister Soft Maple is a 29-year-old mother to a 9-month-old toddler daughter and wife to her husband of three years (partnered for five after a wonderful 20-year friendship). Sister Soft Maple is also a caregiver to her father, a tribal elder, who took a central role in her life following the passing of her mother. Sister Soft Maple's mother was her life-giver in many ways. Through her parent's teachings, Sister Soft Maple learned about gardening as a way for restoring Native American nature-based relationships. Sister Soft Maple holds an education degree and served her youth from her tribal community in classroom spaces for many years until realizing her calling was in nature-based approaches. She is currently a homesteader, practitioner of traditional medicines, and learner of her traditional language and way of life. She and her husband, along with their daughter and families, work together, learning, and sharing their harvests through community engagement.
- Sister White Ash is 33-years-old and wife to her husband of 15 years (together for 17); together they have four children. Sister White Ash's family are central to her determination for overcoming her own recovery and maintaining sobriety. She has a deep self-awareness that allows for empathy toward issues related to substance abuse

and mental health disparities that plague her community. Sister White Ash's college education is related to clinical service and, due to her lived experiences in recovery, she serves as a bridge between systems of care and community members who otherwise face barriers to entry into their own wellness journeys. Sister White Ash's love for her community extends into how she volunteers her personal time for families in need (e.g., cooking for ill neighbors or grieving families), a value she has learning from the women in her family.

- Sister Eastern Hemlock is 37 and a divorced single mother raising four children whom she views as her guide for living in wellness. Sister Eastern Hemlock represents healing, strength, and tenacity; as a result of child- and early adulthood adversity, she values her sobriety and focuses on traditional ways to guide her in her roles. Sister Eastern Hemlock's lifestyle allows for her children to join her in community activities (e.g., coaching). Sister Eastern Hemlock is also their biggest supporter, she is committed to being a mother they can count on for support, and rely on during adversity. She lives an active and busy life, and is known for her presence leading youth sports and cultural teachings primarily geared toward young girls who she believes deserve opportunities to learn about their traditional ways. Sister Eastern Hemlock has a degree in education and teaches children in a language immersion classroom in her tribal community.
- Sister Juneberry is a 37-year-old mother and wife to her husband of 13 years (partnered for nearly 25); together, they have four children. Sister Juneberry grew on her tribal reservation where she recalls a childhood of pain and adversity. Her strength was built by women whom she met later in her life, who taught her about the

strength of her Spirit. Sister's traditional teachings came later in life through these, and other medicine people, whom she met through her travels with her husband and children. Sister Juneberry's healing, sobriety, and traditional lifestyle took hold when she became a mother and she has lived in prayer through ceremony and nature-based practices since. Her priorities are teaching children and youth in her community how to 'belong in their hearts,' and she does this through teaching them their traditional lifestyles as a way to reestablish kinship in community spaces. Sister Juneberry is currently pursuing a master degree which she hopes will offer new insights in her career work in tribal systems and governance.

- Sister Mountain Ash is a 40-year-old wife to her husband of 11 years (partnered for 17), together, they are raising two young children. Sister Mountain Ash has a doctorate degree in First Nations education which she uses to uplift traditional knowledge and language within education systems in her community. She grew up around strong women who taught her about the importance of mother- and womanhood, which she feels is critical for Native women navigating two-world systems and spaces. Sister Mountain Ash is a well-known artist and she draws inspiration from land-based connections. Her children and family are core to her life, and she aspires to become a fluent speaker of her language hoping to learn all she can from her traditional teachers toward cultivating a balanced life in kinship and community.
- Sister Ironwood is a 40-year-old wife to her husband of 13 years (together for 15), they have three daughters and one granddaughter. Sister Ironwood speaks fondly about growing up in a large close family where she spent her childhood traveling as a

powwow dancer, and at home hunting, fishing, and gathering traditional foods in her tribal community. Sister Ironwood's understanding of kinship was developed through these early life experiences and she has continued those ways of life into her own motherhood and grandparenting. Sister Ironwood is currently pursuing a doctorate degree which she hopes will build her knowledge and cultivate new opportunities toward community healing.

- Aunty River Birch is 43-year-old mother and primary provider and nurturer to her two young children, whose spirits she fiercely cultivates and protects. Sister River Birch grew up on her tribal reservation and where she has spent her life roles in career and social life (e.g., traditional powwow dancer). Sister River Birch reflects on her childhood which was mixed with adversity and love. Due to these experiences, her life decisions center around the needs of her community, and especially ensuring her children's identities are nurtured in tribal worldview. Sister River Birch is a careful observer of people. She sees the resilience and determination of the survivorship in her community, and views her role in tribal governance as a conduit to ensure the voices of her community are celebrated, honored, and respected. Sister River Birch is a current learner of her traditional language and she hold a graduate degree in leadership where she applies her learning directly into how she supports the work being done in her community.
- Auntie White Birch is a 45-year-old wife, married to her husband of 7 years (partnered for 17); together they have two children, extending care for their nephews, who view her as a second mother. Auntie White Birch grew up in a strong family of tribal leaders and cultural guides who taught her the importance of ensuring her voice

represents her community and is included in decision-making about her people. She used this knowledge to shape her education journey, primarily focusing on issues related to tribal autonomy and sovereignty in restoring traditional kinship practices in systems of care. Auntie White Birch's grandfather taught her how good Native men carry themselves, and through his care in role modeling, she expresses concern about the importance of balance across genders. Her life work, including her role as a mother, reinforces the teaching that wellness occurs when people live in balance and their spirits align with their expression of self in harmony with the world around them.

- Auntie Quaking Aspen is a 46-year-old woman who lives with her partner of 20 years, a man whom she expresses values her in every way. Auntie Quaking Aspen is also a primary caregiver to her father who is a retired veteran and elder of their tribal community, a role she shares alongside cultural practices (e.g., traditional powwow dancer, gardener) and work. Auntie Quaking Aspen grew up in a family of leaders and change-makers, as well traditional cultural carriers. She reflects on her early life as difficult at times, and wonderful, and allowed her to learn a role of caregiving early on as well as the value of elder epistemology. Auntie Quaking Aspen revere's her grandparents as central to how she understands her traditional roles, and she spent a great deal of time with them, learning cultural practices including her tribal language, which she teaches and shares with her community. Auntie Quaking Aspen holds a graduate degree which she uses to uplift traditional lifeways within her role as a traditional educator in her community.

- Auntie White Pine is a 50-year-old women, mother, grandmother, and wife to her husband of 16 years (partnered for 29); together they raised four children and enjoy time with their two grandchildren. Auntie White Pine was raised in her tribal community which reflected a youthhood of adversity and challenges resulting from her families boarding school survivorship. As a result, Aunty White Pine was not taught her traditional language, despite her grandfather being a first-language speaker. Through her understanding of the intergenerational impacts of trauma, she recognized the importance of her own sobriety on the wellness of her family. Aunty White Pine's healing process is evident and shaped by her deep love for her daughter and sons whom she hopes will know wellness and connection to their own spirit above all else.
- Grandmother White Oak is a 60-year-old wife to her husband of 34 years. Together, they raised three (now adult) children, and enjoy helping to raise six grandchildren. Grandmother White Oak has a college degree which she uses to serve her community, paying special focus to issues of violence among Native Women and addiction concerns of tribal youth. Grandmother White Oak's life was filled with strong women, yet, her cultural knowledge was disrupted, which she believes is due to the influence of her Catholic upbringing. Nonetheless, she has spent her adulthood on her healing journey, including maintaining sobriety and recovery through ceremony and spirituality. Grandmother White Oak is a strong and respected elder in her tribal community. She calls attention to the critical need for government and systems to evolve toward traditional based approaches to healing within family

systems, including her belief that everyone deserves respect, love, empathy, and compassion.

- Grandmother Sugar Maple is a 63-year-old elder and wife to her husband of 38 years. Together, they raised three children and enjoy time spent with three grandchildren. Grandmother Sugar Maple grew up away from her reservation and as a result, raised her family off the reservation as well. She expressed disrupted cultural teachings about her identity which she asserts is a direct ramification of her mother's boarding school experiences which resulted in her mother's long-term suffering. However, Grandmother's place has always been with her tribal community. While she has experienced education and career success, Grandmother Sugar Maple's focus is on findings ways to contribute to home. She does this through sewing ribbon skirts. She believes through her skirts she can gift people something that speaks to who they are, affirming their identity through her lens of what it feels like to live in two-worlds.
- Grandmother Red Cedar is a 73-year-old elder and wife to her husband of 35 years (partnered for 45). Together, they have one child, caregiving for several children in a foster parent capacity, and they continue to enjoy helping to raise their four grandchildren. Grandmother Red Cedar holds a graduate degree in education and her career was spent as an educator and language teacher for her tribal community. As a semi-fluent speaker of her traditional language, Grandmother Red Cedar's career was spent fervently fighting for rights and equity, especially equal pay for language teachers and women in her community. Grandmother Red Cedar is a very spiritual women, and the matriarch and guide in her family's traditional ways. She speaks fondly of young women and youth and while she is concerned about the social health

factors her community faces, believes in the abilities of the next generations to maintain their traditional ways. As a result of Grandmother Red Cedar's lifetime of witnessing the destructive effects of intergenerational trauma, she maintains a spiritual lifestyle which she calls "The Red Road Way of Life."

Nētekaeh: Women's Stories Woven as One

As stated above, women's stories are woven into one personhood, whom we introduce as Nētekaeh. Note that dialogue is held within each season, and signified by the header 'Nētekaeh māēk ācemwaw otācemwan (My Sister tells her story).' When a section of her story is complete, it will be noted by the word, 'eneq' a phrase that generally means, 'that is it' which we use to end our thoughts, until we are ready to speak again. Each season will be introduced with a brief explanation of the significance this time brings, and as a way to prelude that section's theme. The stories and seasonal introduction will include a mixture of two conversational forms a) the dialogue directly between the women and I which come from our visits, and are noted in plain font, and b) my internal voice, which include my sensory feelings, thoughts, questions, and understandings that occur during and in-between visits. These internal dialogue will be presented in italics (i.e., no quotation marks).

Sīkwan (Spring): Rebirthing and Rejuvenating Women Kinship

Respect for Things Significant

Women's wellbeing is spiritual and akin to the wellbeing of kōkomāēhsahkamekonaw, our grandmother Earth, who is our lifegiver and the one who nourishes us. We view grandmother Earth as sacred, and we are her caretakers. This spring season is marked by reintroducing women to their natural place in matriarchy and sacred kinship. Women are reestablishing and matriating toward their natural kinship systems, as evidenced by answering the call of this opportunity to

share with me. Kinship relates to the concept "we are all related" and which connects to our relationship to grandmother Earth where women represent the granddaughters who carry the gift of creating and nurturing life, and are therefore viewed as sacred. It is important to understand women as sacred is an axiom that connects Native people's view of grandmother Earth wherein the rivers and waterways are her veins and life source, which maintain harmony and balance on Earth. Here, water is life.

What follows is an understanding of the importance of women's kinship to their health and wellness, disrupted through colonization and ongoing suppression of their identity. Relatedly for grandmother Earth, human-built dams restrict or stop the flow of surface water and underground streams to further industrialization (e.g., irrigation and commercialism), disconnecting natural water sources and adversely impacting ecosystems, biodiversity, and cultural ways of indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. Restoring these natural systems is difficult and requires a shift in paradigm and way of interacting with each other.

Especially in the context of academic research, I inherently view the women represented in this story not as mere data symbolized by "*N*" but as women who walk in prayer, seeking to reopen the rivers and streams between each other to call forward kinship networks they know still exist (e.g., such as when a dam breaks, the water returns to its natural area). The coming together of these women is meaningful. It serves as the remembrance and rebirthing of the sophisticated kinship systems and a rejection of the longstanding disconnection insidiously upheld within oppression. In this first section, women are cautiously engaging in the newness of this kinship space. The emotions they/we hold symbolize isolation and mistrust, yet are generously and courageously gifted to nourish the kinship we seek.

Nētekaeh māēk ācemwaw otācemwan (My Sister tells Her Story)

Nahāw, now we are sitting alone in a corner of a cozy sitting room...there is a welcoming discomfort in our bodies as we prepare for whatever is going to come from this visit. The setting is warm and inviting. We relate to our surroundings, chatting about the sun streaming in from the window. This day feels good. Our voices are hushed and gentle. I pull out the small red tie filled with naeqnemāw (tobacco). "Thank you for coming today, for agreeing to take time from your busy life to talk with me," I manage awkwardly. "I know how busy we become and I realized, in preparing this medicine, that I get so busy, I forget to teach my kids these ways." *Nētekaeh nods.* "So, I asked my kids to help me make these." *The cloth of the tie feels bumpy as I hold it tightly in my hands. "*And they were so happy," I continue, "and appreciative to touch the medicine and to know what it is going to be used for." *Breathing prayers into the medicine, I reach across the table, and offer it out to her. Nētekaeh smiles and takes the tie, "*Wāēwāēnen," *(thank you) she responds. I noticed she held it in her hands, long after we settle in. I begin.*

"I am so happy to be here with you, and I guess first, I'd like to know, what drew you to wanting to come and talk with me?" Nētekaeh closes her hands together tightly and bows her head, I see her emotion rising immediately as she takes a deep but shaky breath, "...um...," she sighs and takes a breath, "I'm hoping not to get emotional..." She continues carefully, speaking softly as tears begin to form in her eyes, "I think that, in life Native American women don't always have a voice." She pauses briefly to take another breath, as she picks up her head, she looks me resolutely, "You know, throughout my career, I've felt that...that even when you were sitting at a table with men, even Native American men, you didn't always have that voice. And with raising my girls, and my boys, you know I have to make sure that they respect themselves, that they know they *do* have a voice. It's important for them to talk, you know, and to have a conversation about who they are, how they *feel*, as native women." She continues, "It was just

about how you talked about Native American women in general [referencing the flyer]. I know that a lot of our voices are not heard enough. And we have a lot of stories that we've been through, throughout our lifetime, and that we keep them in and we don't really see what happened, or what goes on in our mind, or what we've been through." *My sense of responsibility is what I expected...yet my heart pounds with nervousness and anticipation.*

Nētekaeh goes on, "The focus on native women's experiences...there's so few opportunities for Native women to speak and to share their stories and give their voice. So, knowing that this was a space just for us was important and intriguing." *So, this a way for honoring Native Women...and a chance to stop and breathe together, while of course treating ourselves to warm coffee, sweet tea, and cookies. Nētekaeh and I pause to observe how comforting this space is. It is cozy here, and we are fortunate to have this sitting room to ourselves.* Nētekaeh brings us back, "You see all of these things on social media about all of the things that native women are responsible for, work, family, that after work stuff like volunteering, contributing to community, cooking, sewing, cleaning, beading...all of these things, I think it's just expected, and it's not ...maybe it's not recognized or honored by the other genders or even ourselves."

We busy our eyes with our cups, I look up briefly and we share eye contact...I want to be sure it's clear I am hearing this in my heart, I am here, we are here together. This space is safe...I am telling that just as much to myself and breathing it into existence for her. "I wonder if by talking about this is," I respond, struggling for words, "if we can, just simply by putting it out there, normalize it in a way that can then become protective...because I wonder, it feels like, I don't know, if we talked about our lives," I say, referring to the adversity we face, "that otherwise we'll come off as complaining?" "Right," Nētekaeh agrees, "or that culture and

tradition are being used to normalize us into *not* talking about it, and so its seen as complaining, where maybe from an individual, it's an assertion of our sovereignty and our rights...” She pauses, thinking, “I think that women too often don't stand up for themselves. And I think that that's when you become labeled aggressive or a bitch, or a know it all. But if a man does all the same things, they're a leader.”

That’s right. We have a right to talk together, talk more, speak up. I am trying to infer...what holds us back? “I think that's so important that women talk about just the lateral violence that happens, that we do to ourselves sometimes.” *There it is. It’s been said. The violence...are we doing to ourselves?* Nētekaeh continues sternly to me as she places her hands on the table, “And I think that's huge, trying to give young women that voice of being able to say ‘I'm not going to be treated that way. I'm not silent anymore.’ There were times that it was hurtful to see that cycle [of violence] continue.” I struggle to articulate a response, “I'm really, I don't know, emotional, to hear like this desperate call of communication to talk to each other. We're not talking to each other. Women are not talking to women. And we're not talking to our kids. And we just need to, we just need to talk. And, and I think it's really powerful that somebody has to break the silence.”

I think about the growing awareness about MMIW, wondering, how did we manage to make that happen way out there if we are still struggling to talk together right here? I asked, “Often for Native women, we're talking to White people and White governments about like, MMIW issues, but we're not even talking to each other. And we're expecting Nonnatives to be hearing us?” She agrees, “Right. But it isn't always easy because...it's that feeling of being wrong. Probably.” “Or coming off judgmental,” I add considering the times I’ve felt shame in expressing my voice. I sense Nētekaeh also trying to work this out, she continues describing her

purpose in meeting with me, “Being able to share those experiences with other women, because, I guess...I'm not the only one that could feel and relate to the same way that I'm feeling. Like, it's not just me that feels this way,” she says this last statement more as a half question. “So, I want to be able to share those stories and experiences,” she asserts compassionately, “just so other people can see that it’s not just them that are going through that experience.”

This is the end of Nētekaeh’s spring season. Yet, we know much work remains on the rebirthing of women’s kinship. This process will take continued time and patience. For now, Nētekaeh and I sigh a breath of relief, and we part ways in a hug, looking forward to the next time we see each other.

Eneq.

Nēpen (summer): Youth are Shaped by the Women who Raise Them

Respect for Things Significant

This section describes a season of learning which happens by experiencing traditions and knowledge of culture which is place-based and context dependent. Summer represents a time when we do the most learning and interaction with community and environment. Menominee people, like many tribes on Turtle Island, follow the natural phases and changes in the environment during these months, such as the time in between the first floral buds, and when the berries are ripe for picking, to the time when traditional stories can be told, all of which allow for specific teachings about how to ethically interact and engage with family and the world around us. This season is marked by Nētekaeh growing in her worldview through youth remembrance, during the time when she was surrounded by many teachers and guides.

Nētekaeh māēk ācemwaw otācemwan (My Sister Tells her Story)

As I drive to our meeting place, I think back to our first visit and how Nētekaeh and I struggled to articulate the source of tension in our rebirthing process. I feel a rise in curiosity about the silence and invisibility she experiences. I wonder, how have we maintained our cultural ways if we have been silent? We know we are Indigenous because we feel it...so how did our identity pass through us?

Nētekaeh and I greet each other in a local public place, which was a halfway point for each of us; it is evening time. We are alone in a small sitting room with two comfortable arm chairs placed in front of a warm fireplace. I hand her a tobacco tie and thank her once again for her time. She reaches out for the tie, and smiles and stretches. As before, we are both shaking out our nerves, but there is a sense of solidarity present...as expected, this kinship will continue to grow and settle. We continue our conversation naturally and I ask her, "What did you learn about being a Native woman that carries into your life?" Nētekaeh ponders before saying, "I don't remember like, receiving teachings or...I just watched it happen. I don't think I really understood any part of what I was supposed to be doing or what traditional, even meant. I think I picked up from others, or other women that I really looked up to, or from just being around them. I feel like there's almost always some kind of teaching or understanding, whether it's good or bad in life, that you can pick up on and be like, 'oh, I want to take that' or 'let me take a piece of that respect you have' or 'that different aspect.' I think that's... how I guess I decided how I wanted to be. I wanted to be respectful. I wanted to be kind and loving and also hold to myself to a different standard that really spoke to myself. That was the right way to do it, I guess. But also, the roles, are almost kind of hard for me because I don't think I really...nobody ever taught me, really...it was just me picking up on stuff along the way."

I sense we are both searching for something to grab onto, like evidence that connects our teachings to our Indigenous womanhood. I try to make sense of this feeling and wonder whether we were taught or told anything. I ask, "What do younger women need to know growing up that that comes from traditional ways?" *That sounded weird. These words are tumbling awkwardly out of my mouth. I try again. "*What were you taught, or told, about that?" She looks at me confused, "Traditional? As far as culture?" "Yeah," I respond. "In terms of being a woman?" she clarifies. *I can feel us searching, this does not feel like the right approach.* I try again, "Yeah. Like were there any expectations that you were told or taught about being a woman?" *More silence follows.*

Respect

Nētekaeh leans forward, pensively, "For one thing, I can honestly say, is self-respect, it was instilled and it come in many ways...not a sit-down teaching, but you know, if some certain incident would happen, you know, my grandma, and my mom, they had the same mind if you ask me, because, you know, my grandma taught my mom but, it was, I can honestly say, self-respect. That just stands out to me, right now." *We sit quietly and think for a long moment.* Nētekaeh eventually breaks the silence, "I wasn't, you know, we weren't raised traditionally, *culturally*, because my mom was in that era where she was... her dad was in the boarding school. And my grandpa was a fluent speaker, but he would never teach us anything, and that comes from him being punished for doing that. My mom, she was born and raised Catholic...so I don't...I'm trying to find a way I mean, a specific teaching and I just, I really can't pinpoint on one other than, you know, she'd stress to us self-respect, you know? I remember she would always tell us that nobody was better than anybody else. And she encouraged us, such as if we'd see somebody playing by themselves or something, to invite them in, you know, 'you don't let

someone sit there alone.'" We reflect momentarily about noticing young children in our lives showing that kind of love and care to each other, Nētekaeh smiles and says confidently, "I don't really have any cultural teachings when I was growing up. But I do believe that, you know, the love was there. The love, and everything I got, that certainly is..." I can see her grappling to remember as she says with finality, "I don't remember like, receiving teachings or...I just...just watched it happen. So, my grandparents are an important part of my upbringing. A lot of times, they were my safe place. Like my grandpa had a lot of respect for my grandma."

Okay, so Nētekaeh learned by watching, and I wonder, what does she remember? I know what I remember. I remember my grandparents being the people I could always count on to always make me feel missed. I remember my aunties calling me 'baby' and 'my girl' well into my adulthood. This is the pedagogy of intergenerational learning; the teachings were always there. These are the women who teach and inspire us. And then I remembered my academic traditional elder, Rosemary, teaching me about circle learning and how we remember what we feel. What do I feel? I feel inspired...

Unconditional Love for Each Other and the Natural World

"Akeq, who inspired you?" Nētekaeh smiles, "My, grandparents, my grandmother, my grandpa. My mom's dad too, my grandpa. I would say, my mom and my aunts," she shares, with reverence and fondness, "Like, they're just...I think my grandma and grandpa were the first ones to give me a safe home and unconditional love and complete utter kindness and care. I can't say that I ever experienced that like...100% of the time, but yeah, they showed me what love is." *I feel the love seep into the room. Nētekaeh, still holding the naeqnemāw, pressed her hand to her chest, pausing to grieve momentarily. Her grandparents, amidst young Nētekaeh's troubles and stress, were her stability of love and care.* "My grandma, she inspired me because she took care

of us," she continues, "and she was funny and strong. Like, I was talking about my aunties on my dad's side, I have one left, but they're like...they're like moms. They got that big, 'Come here, baby. Give me some love!' energy, that, 'there's my baby!' Like it just feels special. I'm thankful for that. And so, I guess that can inspire me maybe to be me that way with others." She gestured toward the window, indicating to the natural world outside, "they showed us how to do this. So, we are reflections of our ancestors. And they all loved and cared for us, so we have to do that for those coming after us too." *This was not a "sit-down" teaching, she just knew how to move like the women in her world did, and she knows how to bring love and kindness and strength forward.*

Nētekaeh continues, "I think it's just like the knowledge of all the women in my family, like my dad had been a support in his own way, but growing up, there was a lot of strong women. And I think I, before I really got to be around other people and other people's families and stuff, it's like, I just kind of took it for granted that, you know, grandmas were like that, and the aunties were like that. And so, I'm like 'oh, okay, so it's not just them being bossy.'" *We laugh. I can relate and I remember my mom and aunties always keeping us kids busy doing this or that, always preparing for something.* Nētekaeh continues to describe the teachings she received from the women in her life, "Being able to take care of my family and being able to be strong for those who aren't strong. Being able to respect myself and others." *As she explains, I see the interconnection between strength and respect.* "I feel like that's in everyone's culture...but maybe not, some women are told not to say anything or be strong," she ponders, "I was taught by strong women that I have to stand up for myself or not let anyone disrespect me, but I had to deal with that in a respectful way." *Strength is not just for her, but in holding compassion for those who are struggling. I observe all the women who represent Nētekaeh negotiating how they would*

uplift the women in their lives while holding compassion for the men who, only in slight passings, would she say were going through their own journeys.

Responsibility to Community

"So, I think something that I would like mention," Nētekaeh reflects, "in any leadership position, I'd like to say, 'I'm doing this because this is like what I'm supposed to do. And this is how I learned how you're supposed to give back to people to take care of them.' Our grandma, she would always tell my mom, and my dad, 'if you're going to be in a community, you should be involved, you should be going to meetings, you should be doing this and this and this.'" Nētekaeh gestures with her hands as though to bullet out her points, reinforcing the seriousness of this wisdom. "'Because it's the most important part, of being a part of something'...and I never realized until I got to college, like how much that really was important to me," she asserts. *We remember the teachings when we are supposed to...this is circle learning.* Nētekaeh continues, "And so yeah, it was the memory or the knowledge of how, my grandma's, my great grandmas, and my aunties are all very strong people. And like...I can be...I can be just as strong." *I noticed her hesitancy as if wondering about her own strength. And yet, I love this: the presence of strong, kind women were everywhere; they knew what they were doing, and they made sure we knew they would always help us.*

Matriarchy and Responsibility to Family

"So, women's roles, what did I learn?" Nētekaeh asks herself. *This question makes more sense now that we are talking.* Nētekaeh speaks about the process, "It looked a lot like...well there are a lot of periods of time where my mom was a single mom. I don't know if it was a woman's role, or if it was, I think it was more about being the oldest, being the oldest, I took on a lot of responsibility to help her. We would order wood and I would throw it in and stack it. I

would chop and keep woodstove going like stuff like that. Or, when I was old enough, I'd help to make sure the kids got the school so mom wouldn't be late for work, stuff like that." "So, like, from early on, a caretaker?" I clarify. "Yup," she responds, "From early on, a caretaker, a problem solver. I learned how to navigate hardship really young, probably a lot of us did. What else did I learn about women's roles?" *She holds her chin with both hands, thinking. "*I don't know, in my world, the women did everything." We take a moment before I reflect, "It sounds like you had some very strong women in your family, who had strong voices." She continues, "On my dad's side, well, my dad...he wasn't involved as much. He would show up and he would be present and things but not really involved." *We pause briefly, considering the role and experience of men.* "There's a lot of, I guess a lot of layers there," she says softly. Nētekaeh continues, "But I had my aunties, and they made sure I was taken care of and connected with my cousins. They always talked to me about our clan, my last name, they gave me a sense of identity, even outside of the other side of the family. So, I got a lot of political identity over here," she gestures with her left hand, "and just everyday living and cultural identity are over here, and this side supported that." she finishes, gesturing with her right hand. "I went to ceremonies when I was younger and so I saw those roles. I had an understanding at least in ceremony about who did what and who couldn't do what. And I never really thought about why. It was just observation. That's just how it works." "Yeah," I respond.

We part ways here; it feels like a good way to end for us both. We know our next visit will come when the time is right. On my drive home, I think about the male figures in her story, their absence speaks volumes, it seems to matter in her story and I am not quite sure why. I reflect on what I learned during my preparation writing for this project. I read much about colonization and its impact on men too; it broke Native men right down to their identities. The U.S.

government confined them in such a way that they could not live out their roles as protectors or providers. Yet, us women were able to retain a semblance of our roles, at least as mothers and caretakers. Of course, the government also attempted to take that part of us. In this conversation, I sense Nētekaeh's silence about men is complex and delicate. There is grief and caution in articulating men's suffering. We recognize the women who stepped up to make up for that suffering, and we leave it at that. Is it too hard to talk about? Or perhaps it is not our place to talk about it. Indigenous men have voices too...it is as Nētekaeh says, 'there is a lot of layers there,' and we respect the nuance they hold.

Eneq.

Takuakōwew (Autumn): Embodying Womanhood and Elderhood into Our Spirits

Respect for Things Significant

This section centers on Nētekaeh's transition into adulthood and evolving wisdom over time. This time is marked as her autumn season. Autumn is a time for making preparations for winter, when garden bounties are harvested and we prepare for the coming frost and snow. It takes a considerable amount of group cohesion and organization to prepare for winter. As a youth, I remember spending entire weekends with my parents cutting down firewood, hunting, and gathering in our grandparent's home for meals and visiting. Fall time spent in the woods were personal, intimate, and existential for me and my cousins, who were all doing the same things in their family homes. Therefore, autumn is also a time for reflection and inner growth.

As Nētekaeh taught us in her summer season, our relatives make sure we are in the places needed for learning and growth to occur and their teachings become relevant when we need them to be. My uncle said, "Someday you'll understand what I mean." The internal processing, the reflecting, is up to us. So, in this season of takuakōwew, the time of the changing leaves, we

welcome the growth and change that comes in the beauty, pain, and struggle of Nētekaeh's transition. Her experiences signify the necessary and significant knowledge she carries forward from her summer season that aides in her freedom from youthhood and reflections of the social, political, environmental, and cultural systems she now navigates. Nētekaeh's autumn season is divided into three parts: early adulthood, middle adulthood, and elderhood, which are accompanied by a brief prelude that concludes into a unifying theme.

Nētekaeh māēk ācemwaw otācemwan (My Sister Tells Her Story)

Early Adulthood

Nētekaeh and I reconnect after what feels like too long. We agree to meet at the same local coffee shop as before. Pulling in, I notice my nerves jumping with anticipation; I have missed Nētekaeh. I greet her in the lobby area and we chat as we order coffee. We return to the same comfortable sitting area as before. I take a moment to observe her. She is a young woman now. I sense her maturity in the midst of growing recognition of challenges that is accompanied by her hopeful but calm energy. I pass her a red tobacco tie and I watch as she rolls it in her hand a few times before carefully placing into a pocket. Nētekaeh said she tends to be an early riser and she was glad to have this visit, "something good to do today," she said. I am curious about how things are going for her and try not to be protective, knowing how precarious this age can feel. "Akeq, how are things going?" I offer. *Her hands are clamped together and she is looking away from me, almost facing completely in another direction.* Through her gentle and calming voice, I hear the seriousness in her words, *"*I used to think it was you know, easy, as far as, like...I didn't even know about the missing murdered indigenous women. I think that was just, well as a kid I was just so protected by everybody. And then growing up, you hear all this," she says, "and you're in shock. It's not easy...it's not as easy as I thought it would be." *This is like a*

punch to my gut, I forgot about this...the shock of the 'real world' and for Nētekaeh, her Native identity is at the center.

She goes on to explain the difficulties that folded into the realization about her own safety in the world, including struggling to work through college, which forced her to rely on family support. *She is navigating these systems in real time, and I sense shame surfacing in her words...as if she ought to know a way. "*But it's time for me to you know, I have to grow up," she says matter-of-factly, "this is the stage where you're ready to grow up and you're ready to move out by yourself. And I just feel like that's where I am right now. But I've also been like that forever," she says, and I remember her explaining how she learned to problem-solve early on. "But now is reality," her voice is stern. "And I need to grow up and I need to, you know, do everything on my own. So, I'm just kind of...," she trails off. "You're in that?" I offer. "Yeah," she responds, "So my mindset is a little different." "That seems exciting to be like, 'I'm ready to get independent,'" I smile at her, attempting to affirm her determination. "It definitely took me awhile, because I was scared," she adds, "Like, adulting was so scary to me. I was like, 'I don't want to do this.' But [before this], my whole life, I was like, 'oh my god, I can't wait to turn 18.' And I'm going to be 20 in a couple of days...it's scary to me. But I've also been doing, you know, adult things... so it's nothing really brand new to me."

I sense a shift in Nētekaeh's body language and notice her look away. Her expression turns contemplative. She slowly begins again. "I have been talking about...how to talk about the different things that I'd been going through with being at college, and just some of the things that have happened in those years. And how I felt very...it's like, it really made me doubt myself and my capabilities." She continues, I see the pain in her face as she articulates, "...How do I use... words, which are something that like I've always been very good with, to talk about this?" *We*

pause, her words are foreboding. The mother in me pulls toward her emotions, I want to care for her and yet, I know this is her process to feel and express. I sense her attempt to be strong as she takes a moment to collect and breathe. I feel concern and sadness in not knowing how to respond. I don't like to see Nētekaeh hurting like this. I am compelled to ask her what happened...what happened, Akeq, that hurt you? As if sensing my care, she starts at the beginning.

*"*I was actually interested in looking at the philosophy... I even had like an idea for like a capstone a future capstone project...looking at indigenous knowledge and philosophy and how our food ways, and how like the science behind our food, and whatnot, has kind of dictated or shown up in our philosophies as like [Native American] people." *She is connecting her teachings to her future work.* Nētekaeh continues, *"*So, the plan was four years of undergrad, and then whatever I need for my masters or doctorate. So that's why I ended up picking there. This, "she gestures with her hands referencing our area, "is the land of my mother, and there," she gestures toward another area, "can be the land of my father...because my dad's family would have descended from that area, so it's kind of like coming home, there. It was an easy enough decision in the first place." *I love that! Leaving home was not easy, and she found a way to reconcile that.*

She shares about the strong Native presence on campus, which she explained served as a welcoming place for her, at least until her second year. She continues, "The Native student coordinator who was there for my freshman and sophomore year," she pauses momentarily, considering her words, "several of my friends came forward along with several the faculty and staff, and they had reports that he sexually harassed them and sexually harassed other students, as well as sexually assaulted one of my friends. So, it was... I think it just kind of like changed

how I interacted with the whole university system after that. All of us we were kind of...like in our bubble, in our own bubble of like...how do we deal with this? It was frustrating."

She introduces three of her Native friends, whom she met through student organizing, "We were running the executive board (e-board), and we were like, we're an all women e-board, and like, we need to care about issues like MMIW. It was just hard to wrap my mind around, like, how someone could be so...he wanted to say he was supportive, but in the end, he just didn't offer that support, he made it that much harder. And yet, *we* were still the ones who had to pick up the pieces." *Nētekaeh's frustration renews as she relives the experience of trying to support issues of MMIW, while being victimized by the very support system that welcomed her.* Nētekaeh continues, "We had each other, but I wanted to come home...I just felt like I would be giving up in face of *him*," she emphasizes, "and that's just what made it worse, the idea of coming home. So, it was like just sticking it through." *Her only choice felt like one where she had to stay in place as if to rise above this abuser.* "And I don't really regret it because I found, and I made, friends who I think today that I would call my sisters as well. And I wouldn't want to give that up for going somewhere else when I was 18." "Yeah," I understand what she means, "All things considered," I add. "Yeah," Nētekaeh says, "I appreciate what I gained. But, it's still...I can't help but feeling like a little, I don't know bitter...because there's so many people around me who are able to manage all four years without things getting in the way or coming up. It's just like...other people had a normal college experience, and I don't really think mine was very normal." *Normal for who, I wonder.*

"I'm just sitting here...I think when we first started talking, you mentioned feeling, I don't know if you said this, you didn't say it but it, kind of like the self-doubt or questions of 'why can't I stick it out? What's wrong with me? I'm not making sense,'" I reflect, "and then I'm listening to

your story and you were doing so much work, trying to preserve a safe space for fellow Indigenous students, trying to create safety for yourself...and I'm just...it doesn't, I guess the way I'm hearing it and experiencing your story...it seemed like if given the right recipe, you would have really, potentially thrived, actually." She considers this for a moment and responds, "I think that's also why I feel upset about it. It was like, I love school. I do. I love learning. I love reading. I love discussing and talking. Yeah, it's just, it wasn't enough." "What do you mean it wasn't enough?" I ask, "do you mean, your ability to articulate or what does that mean?" "I guess like it just wasn't...I'm not sure," she adds, "but it was really frustrating to not be doing well in school, at that time. Like that was the one thing I've always done decent and...I can't say it was really challenged in like school schoolwork, or classes or anything until junior year of college, maybe. It was like everything has always been..." *I can see frustration and confusion etching her face...no one prepares us for what it's really like.* "You're smart. You are. I mean, you said that," I affirm. "Yeah," she agrees, "this is a surprise dealing with these things." "That makes a lot of sense." I reply compassionately, "how to handle, how to experience struggle in academia for the first time. And how do you not then internalize that, alongside of all these other betrayals that you're experiencing, including such stress." She sighs and nods, "It's been a long learning curve, it's like something that gets talked about in therapy and with my mom now. And like, where along the line did I learn that I shouldn't be asking for help. Or like, I shouldn't be like doing these things." *She falls into a strained silence. I know she is right; I resonate with her words...I remember feeling that struggle of wanting help and not knowing where to start or who to ask.* Nētekaeh continues, *"*I'm definitely, not necessarily a better person, but in a better place than I was when I was like, younger. When I was first 18 and I didn't know you know, half the reasons why I felt the way I did. I had no idea that's what anxiety felt like. So, for the longest time, I'm

just like ‘everybody else feels this way, so what's the problem? Why can't I talk to people?’ So yeah, now I can name the things that are wrong now and know that it's not actually just mine, or that I'm not like pretending it's not all in my head.”

There is much wisdom in Nētekaeh; I feel in awe of her, I am moved by her story. She is strong and resilient. Yet, there is something about feeling heard, being affirmed...this is healing...and this is not my space to share about me, but I indeed resonate with what she’s been through. This phase of Nētekaeh’s season concludes with her grappling with the sudden impact of Native womanhood. She has had to grow up quickly. There is survivance here and she is gathering her support while still feeling uncertainty. As we part ways, I pray for her continued healing and strength.

Middle Adulthood

Nētekaeh and I met at her home today, she takes me into her kitchen where she is busily preparing tea. The early morning sun filters into the room and I look around, admiring a garden of herbs and spices strewn about in various bottles and jars, some filling corners of countertops, others hanging from windows. Nētekaeh pours me a cup of tea that she seeped from a dried white flower. I offer her tobacco, which she says is a perfect exchange for good company and conversation. I feel welcomed in her presence. Nētekaeh is a caregiver now. She has established herself in this role and carries a new sense of duty and obligation. This part of her season brings a testimony of grief and loss, and hardship. Much of what she shares is sacred, she tells me so. She is intentional in opening up and I honor that. While these parts of her story are not for me to share with you all, you should know, I sense a shift in Nētekaeh’s spirit. She smiles through her tears as she imparts cherished memories about those who are now passed.

Unlike before, Nētekaeh's world is consumed with daily tasks of supporting others, assisting family, and moving about her own world of work and community life. She especially holds her family roles tightly to her chest and is fiercely protective of those in her circles. She has endured much at this point in her life and I see her voice more powerful than before. When I look closely at her, I see her mother, her grandmother, her ancestors reflecting back at me. I feel her energy and light, she certain, and filled with passion and empowerment. She is now a matriarch. Through that lens, she holds concern. In this season, we wonder together about the intersections of healing and culture within our roles and place in society as women who are in the in-between space of youth and elders.

Empowerment Builds through Obstacles of Returning Home

Nētekaeh and I begin by talking about what we notice about the shifts in our life roles since we last met. Nētekaeh shares about stepping into the role of matriarch within her family. She describes, "Suddenly, I was done pleasing others, I was gifted support to fulfill my dream of reconnecting to my indigenous roots, and I just went there." She recalls the concern she was receiving from community members who are aware of her family losses and noticed the changes in her life roes, as she fills their absence. Her community is not accustomed to seeing her in this new role, in her matriarchy. "Yeah," I sense understanding, "It makes me automatically think about the position you're put in when people are asking you well, 'what are you doing these days?' And how do you describe that change you feel? While also wondering, what's driving this question?" She responds by introducing the mistrust that arises in her, "Yeah, like in my mind, I instantly think of how do I know this person? How can I connect to what they're trying to say? And it usually comes down to what are they trying to get at? What do they need to hear? Like, are they just wanting to see what's going on?"

I am struck by Nētekaeh expressing that she feels unsure of others' intentions. I wonder if she, in asserting herself, is causing a stirring or reaction in others. I wonder how they receive her and I lean forward, curious to hear more about her change process. She begins by giving a specific example about her career choice, "I still want to be a middle school teacher," she stated referring to working in her tribal community. "I feel like that's where I belong. Just being able to have conversation with the kids is where I want to be. I like social studies, I like history. But I haven't found a job yet, well I did, but she wasn't offering me the pay that I wanted and, in order for me to survive with my kids, I said, 'I'm sorry, I can't do that right now.'" Nētekaeh is pointing out how a recent job offer presented new challenges in her life, and would require her to juggle a schedule that could not accommodate her family obligations alongside community volunteerism. "I told her," referring to a women employer, "'I worked too hard for you to tell me that. No, I'm sorry.' And then there was the pay issue," she continues, "I just got my bachelor's, and I asked before I applied for this job, I took four extra classes in history," which she explains were geared toward enhancing her curriculum to teach Native American history, "and when I asked her if she would pay me more for those classes, she told me, 'Okay, yeah.' So, I applied for the job. She then comes to me with the contract that's below average. And I was like, 'I'm sorry, but that's under $20 an hour, that doesn't work for me.' Seriously!" She sounds exasperated as she explains her negotiation process, "So I asked for more. And it felt like...she felt like I owed her, for doing my student teaching there. And I was just like, 'that's disappointing from a woman to a woman.' She said she was disappointed that I didn't follow through and that really hurt because I really loved the work out there. And I would take it in a heartbeat if she said, 'Okay, I'll give you this much more money.' You know, I would be there in

a heartbeat. I would have signed that contract. But she went back on her word. And I felt like I was cheated. I know that I'm worth more than that."

"On top of all of the cultural traditional knowledge you've gained over the years." I respond. "Yes! Over the years. And having the ability to work with the kids as I walked into the building. I had that respect, that personal connection with those kids and you want to offer me below average? And I felt bad because I wanted to take it, to say, 'Alright, give me the contract, you know, under $20, I'll eventually make it.' And my mom's like, 'no, don't do that you're worth more than you're worth so much. You have to fight for it if you want it.' She's said, 'I worked at below average. And it took me 20 years to get where you are trying to start out.' And I was like, 'you know, you're absolutely right.' You know? I just feel like that was enough for me to say, alright, 'Well, I'm gonna find something better.'" *I love that Nētekaeh's mom affirmed her worth. Simply hearing her speak on her own empowerment reminds me that the standard I feel inside is not 'too much.' Rather, it is appropriate and it has been a long time coming. The obstacles Nētekaeh faces underscore the difficulty of what she is attempting to do in navigating her life priorities. Nētekaeh reminds me she has been strategic all along; she has had to be.*

Nētekaeh describes her fulfillment as much more than money or work place status, especially when they create obstacles to social or family obligations. "I have been having conversations with different people, because if I'm going to ever switch jobs, it's got to be remote work. There are some options, I'm not limited. It's just that, in 2021, I thought that was the only pathway, you know, how to get home, remote work. But now I think about other pathways to be home, because I always say, 'I am my best self, when I'm home.' And so there are other opportunities, people have been in the research field longer than I have, they believe that there are so many more opportunities, but I'm just learning about them." To elucidate, Nētekaeh shares

about a conversation she had regarding a symposium she attended exploring post graduate work opportunities. She shared she was asked by a facilitator, "'What do you want to do [following degree conferral],'" to which Nētekaeh responded, "I kept saying, 'I need to go home after this. I want to be home.' And, and so she's like, 'why did you want to get a [degree] and all this stuff?' and I think she asked me something like, 'Well, what can we do?' But then I said something like this, I said, 'Well, seeing as how I want to be home, how could *your* grant programs help?' And so, she remembered our panel, and I ran into her several other times, and she tells that story of how, you know, this training was like, kind of going downhill, but she, you know, like, she called upon us, and I just kind of flipped it around." *I hold back a cheer when I hear Nētekaeh's proposal– I had no idea women were negotiating this way. THIS is why we need to talk. The exchange of ideas can lead us to new pathways. Her priorities and life tasks clearly aim for familial/community healing, keeping the peace, and ensuring traditions and culture align with values. In all her work and commitment, she expresses gratitude for her own existence, most notably through recognizing family strength and guidance from women as the source of resiliency.* "And so yeah, fortunately, I was able to come home, and that's, that was my priority. But that also meant giving up other stuff, potentially," she says, her voice flat, "But why should I have to go and move to a big research university and leave? You know?" "Yep, absolutely," I resonate, "Constantly...every step of the way, every thought that's in the process of planning your next steps, we are making concessions in ways that have to do with indigeneity and strategy."

Nētekaeh's life is busy with community work, she shares about coaching multiple sports over the years, and her hope for teaching young women how to hunt, fish, as well as bead and sew, for the purpose of building their self-confident. She talks about her kids' roles in supporting her work and community roles, *"*Well, 'moms on the field,' 'mom's coaching,' or 'moms back in

school,' you know, and they're supporting me. And they're happy for me with what I'm doing in my life. And I'm supporting them; I take them to powwows, I'm sitting there celebrating them, watching them win, when they get so amped," Nētekaeh smiles proudly, "...and I'm just in there, they're my biggest inspiration, because it's just like, the feelings and the vibes and the smiling that they constantly want me around is like, my biggest joy. Like, they want me there. They want me to do these things." *We bond in our love for family and share in the empowerment and challenge of prioritizing our lives for them. The simple way to describe this would be to say, 'we are breaking cycles' and, yet, I sense we have to unpack that further.*

*"*Do you feel that's the easy part about being a native woman? Our commitment to family?" I ask. "I think a lot of things come naturally, being a parent, having the love that I have for my family comes naturally, comes easily," Nētekaeh responds ubiquitously, "But also, there's been a lot of sorting out over the years of the healthy way to show love. And so, when we think about Native men, you know, there's a lot of healing that needs to be done there. I know, my husband has...I know that there's things that he's been through in his life too. But I feel like if we didn't come together, I probably would have been single. I just...I would have been happy to be on my own because after what I what I was through, I wasn't going to settle. I wasn't going to... just...there's no way," she trails off for a moment, thinking, "After I found myself, because I was going to Al-Anon meetings, I went pretty hard for a while, and I kind of just found myself, and I healed from a lot of stuff. And now looking back at it, I was in this place in my life, and the right person came along. Before, I would have just been like, 'Oh no, he's too nice, 'ew yuck.' Right?"

Intersection of Gender Roles and Patriarchy

I sense the intersection of male presence emerging in the story. They seem to have come up passively so far, and there is a sense of protection for their story...along with a feeling that their story is not for me to tell. I sense Nētekaeh would agree. Yet, while I recognize that native men have been through a lot intergenerationally, it feels important to articulate how we experience them in our lives.

"Yeah, I think it's too important to say that you're, I mean, I just get the sense. I mean, it's very clear that you're absolutely dedicated to your work, and the sustainability of tribal programs and resources. And it's important, I think, to highlight you recognizing that you're potentially underpaid..." "Yeah," Nētekaeh says softly, "That, I would have never even been able to, like, verbalize that. But that's a fair statement." I sense that my centering of her worth is unsettling for her and I attempt to bring her back in, to reassure her this is safe, "Yeah. And I think for the purposes of this conversation, I'm less worried if it happens to men and women, but it's happening to you and that is what I care about." "Right," she responds, I can see she is thinking about this. "Like, you said, we're not talking about it. And so...we should care about it," I say this more as a question than a statement. "Right," she says cautiously, "Yeah. So, it's hard for me to know exactly what's going on with other women. Yeah, of course, best friends, you know, you get a sense...when they share." *Again, she is alluding to maintaining privacy around her experiences. Where did we lose our sense of safety in just talking? There is a veneer of politeness we carry, to show that we are unfazed, when really, we're not okay with all of this.*

"Well, and the interesting thing about patriarchy is it's so ingrained and insidious," I theorize aloud, "And how we were raised, sometimes it's like...making sense of this in the dark and like these feelings, this intuition, and we're sort of pulling the curtains open a little bit and being like, hang on a second..." I pause, thinking. "Yeah," Nētekaeh seemingly following and

agreeing. She continues to appear pensive, so I continue to wonder, “I wonder if this thing maybe is, yeah, we don't talk about that stuff. And how much of that has to do with what we were told...what was appropriate and fair to talk about or not talk about and why? Right. There's a lot going on. Like you're talking about these things only in privacy.” “Right,” Nētekaeh says, “I'm like, looking away because it is uncomfortable.” *These are the layers Nētekaeh was talking about earlier. She knows how to trust her instincts, and she is indeed discerning and perceptive. Yet, there is wisdom in knowing the differences between who is safe and good, versus those still struggling with internalization. We continue to work through this, trying to make sense of what stood out in those teachings our grandparents shown us.*

“I think about like, how our men should be, like, my, my son's grandfather,” Nētekaeh poses, “You know, we have a lot of people who know, like, ‘Oh, I know, the language or I know this culture,’ like, but if you're not living it...so, my son's grandfather,” she illustrates, “he speaks our language, but he also *lives* it, he *lives* the values. He's a good man, he's a good caretaker. He's good. Amazing. I mean, not good, but *amazing*...you know, community member, like, somebody that you really could look up to, and he's living the values. And so, I see them, *we* see them and we know who they are, because we can feel them in our gut feeling, right? When we meet someone, we know who just feels good. And living the values versus ‘Oh, I'm showing you what I can do. But I'm gonna go home and be a shitty person.’” Nētekaeh continues by sharing about how values of equality and balance showed up in her grandparents’ relationship. *I consider my memories of my grandparents as though we are talking about the same people.* “I think about the steady variable there, being their relationship,” I reflect, memories swimming in my head, “and the kinship that they cultivated, and how that must give balance.”

Nētekaeh agrees, “Yeah, I don't know. Like, you think of like, the gender norms and the, you know, the inequality between the genders that exist now, I mean, they for sure exist. We're for sure treated differently, we're paid less, all of those things. And I think grandma and grandpa and you know, the time that they grew up and how they were with each other, I never felt like an imbalance between them. They worked together and they helped each other and like, I know, Grandpa never ever looked down on grandma like that she was less than, or you know, vice versa. And, you know, when you think of equality, I think of their relationship. It's weird, like, I keep going back to them, but they, you know, I've never experienced or seen balance like that, you know, except for there.” “Yeah,” I echo, “and that's how you that's how you learn it, by seeing it. Like they just knew unconditional love. They just knew how to build rapport and see people and see each other.” Nētekaeh agrees, “And they had like a whole other you know, experience than we did, like they grew up speaking their languages and didn't go to school until grade school, and you know, they went through the whole like boarding school experience and land dispossession and all of that. You know? They went through the really hard stuff yeah and...” *We hold our thoughts to ourselves for a moment. I wonder about the way our elders balanced out the ecosystem of their spirituality, how their ways of coping helped them endure...for us to be able to be here.*

“Where do you what do you think the root of those power dynamics are?” I wonder aloud. “Um, I think it's learned behavior...its intergenerational,” Nētekaeh responds thoughtfully, “I don't know at what point that came in, because that's not how we were. I don’t know if it came in with the boarding schools. I don't know if that idea of wealth and power came in with the fur trade? I don't know. But we changed. And then the Constitution made that permanent and acceptable.” This is an interesting view point, “You mean the Constitution for tribes?” “Yes,”

she answers. “Which is Western oriented and sort of...that kind of way of conducting business?” I clarify. Nētekaeh articulates, “Right, and I think that's one of the things we accepted to become federally recognized again. I think they've really tried, there's a lot of areas that are very broad that you could have a little room for how you want to create the process around that. But yeah, so I think they really, really tried their best.” *Nētekaeh holds dignity and respect in how she understands Tribal Nations dilemma in accepting that adopting a Western governmental structure was a means toward tribal sovereignty. Yet, she alludes to inherent problems in that system.*

“At least in my experience, there's a lot of, I don't know how to say it...it's like, a male centered world still. And so, navigating that, it's a little extra work to just be able to do your work. Now, if that makes sense.” “It does, Akeq, it absolutely does.” She begins to remember about her experiences collaborating on teams to address community concerns, “some of the discussions get heated. Outside of the, I guess outside of the male centeredness, just in general, there's a lot of territorialism. There's a lot of like, power and control dynamics that we learn that are present. So, it's, really crazy watching all of it. And people not even realizing it. Just being in the moment and worried about who has authority over ‘what’ and not ‘how’ we can work together, and maybe all share that authority.”

“And how does culture fit into this?” I ask. Nētekaeh: “So I just, myself included and other native women, I see them in spaces where they're disrespected and it's accepted and normalized like, ‘oh, well, this isn't my time to say anything. So, I'll just sit here and take it.’ You know?” “Yeah, that forces you to reflect on how long it took us as individuals to recognize that that was happening to us. And to think I love my family, I love my community and I can kind of point to the situations over my lifetime, where these people I love and care about have done this

and how much we've all internalized about these things" Nētekaeh nods in agreement and reacts, "Or knowing, 'Okay, Well, I know how to expect to be treated in this space.' And that means we're going to be compartmentalized, maybe diminished a little bit. And to be with these men who are looked up to and honored and seen as leaders and like...this is our how our best men treat us, you know, what does that say? So, I don't know where the where the conversations are going with anyone else but like, I don't know they're, they're all connected and they're all woven together?"

Nētekaeh is reaching out for validation, wondering if others reflected in this story feel the same. I assure her immediately, "Yes, for sure. That's the wisdom of native women, there's an assumption that we're not paying attention. But what I'm learning is that women are absolutely paying attention. And regardless of ages, or folks that I've met with, it's like a timeline, and over time, you see the same things being told and these perspectives at different points and like life transitions and things like that, where it's all connecting." She directs her next questions at me, "Will you ever be seen as equal? They're always like, find something to like. 'Well, you didn't grow up here.' Or you don't live on the reservation. Even though I live in unceded territory. I live on ancestral lands. 'You have that white man's education?' You know, there's all of like these things, you know, that? No matter. It just doesn't matter." I fully agree and struggle to imagine anything different, "Culturally," I begin, "It's not easy like it might be in dominant culture to say 'feminism,' it's not as simple because of the cultural context...because then you're disrespecting, especially if there's an age difference." Nētekaeh sighs, "Yeah, there's all these different cultural mores that you have to navigate and be mindful of. And I think from, like a professional standpoint, I think there's this, like, there's this external view and mindset of what a native community is like, everything is great. And oh, there's all this language, and there's all this

culture and all these really good things are happening. And yes, all of that is happening. And they're still misogyny, there's still, you know, that...inter-, what is that...lateral...I don't want to say it's violence, but there's like some kind of lateral stuff." "Lateral interpersonal dynamic?" I attempt to rephrase the term lateral violence in agreement." "Right," Nētekaeh concurs, "So I mean, it's...yeah, there's just ...there's so much going on. And I think, you know, we create our own networks and our own friendships and our own spaces that where we can be open, or if not be open and share and talk about these things. It's like, at least we feel comfortable." "We as in the women?" I ask. "Yeah," she responds. "And I guess it, it's not all men, because there's some men out there that get it that are supportive and understand that, aren't like that," I mention softly, identifying these male figures in my head. "Yeah, I can count them on one hand," she reflects, "and on the other, like, there's, like, image after image, people that I spent time with and been in meetings with...and they're often elevated. And it's feels weird to see them leading like MMIW work or, you know, sex trade conversations and work when, at the very core, they're not respectful or, even see us as equals in any at any level." "Unaware," I add, "that they carry male privilege, and even cultural male privilege. Because back to your..." "they...are hurting and damaging their own actions. They're just not aware of it, Nētekaeh concludes. *I remember when I first met Nētekaeh during our spring season when she talked about why she wanted to meet with me to share her story. I remember how our uncertainty was imperceptible. Now, her story flows. She perceives the problems of her lived and daily experiences of invisibility and diminishment through her deep cultural knowledge, allowing for a clarity of the impact of patriarchy. All I think is, how do I honor her story so that others know the strength and wisdom she carries?*

Women Lead through Empathy and Love

There is a reservoir of empathy and compassion drives Nētekaeh to persist through gendered and systemic obstacles. She has developed a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships in her community. Her basic human desire for her community to have belongingness and her choices thus far have been to de-center herself, and re-center her family and community healing. I do not get the sense she wants to lead others; rather she seems to view her role as a part of the whole, and her search is for inroads to that aim.

"Can you share what drives you?" I ask. "I guess, having my personal experiences, I think about what I am taught in school," Nētekaeh says through controlled words, "to understand people's grief or traumas, and to see that and how the pieces work. To see people are on their way to recovery, it gives me more experiences. Having gone through my own grief and trauma at a young age, and not realizing it, being able to see that in my work and school and put those tools and techniques to good use is what I am looking for." "It is interesting to hear how you are navigating all of your life experiences which lead to a high standard for your education," I reflect. "Yes," she agrees, "I feel like some places I went to for schooling, like observing in local clinics, I saw people giving assessments and felt they could have been more caring. Like once, this person at the clinic, a clinician, said she was there for twenty years but it felt like she acting a certain way to clients...and when the clients left the room, her attitude changed. I thought, 'what the heck? That is not the correct way to care about the community.' To see it in person, and the client was pregnant and using, and she was trying to get clean. The counselor was like, 'well she's just going to lose custody anyways.' And I was like, 'why judge her before she even has the baby?' Her attitude was, 'I don't believe her in recovery.' The thing is," Nētekaeh pauses and looks at me directly, "this girl recently passed away from overdose. And to know that was in my field experience? Holy crap," she says, shaking her head in disappointment and sadness,

“The way the counselor was, she was just like, ‘Oh she's here again.’ And I'm like, this isn't health.” “I'm so sorry, that is painful to hear,” I say, I do not know how else to respond.

I imagine this mother, desperate for help, and Nētekaeh, watching her not receive care. Our hearts are heavy for what was lost. Nētekaeh looks sad, “You know, she had babies. Geez.” “It sounds like in all of your roles...you really carry those roles with respect.” We take a moment to process this grief. This grief is why we are here, this is what drives us both. “This seems layered, like planning your trajectory, and then talking about or caring for your community and the economic status that people are in and sort of protecting that too,” I recall earlier parts of our conversation. “Yeah. Yup,” Nētekaeh agrees, “and also thinking about just really trying to make sure we are thinking about why people are the way that they are. Like, all of us, we have relatives who are in addiction...so I watched some of my little cousins and they tell me stuff, because I've tried to be non-judgmental. Like, I don't say ‘why are you doing that?’ And they'll tell me things like, that lifestyle, when they're living fast or on the move, even though it's like drug involvement, they have quicker access to resources, they have little networks of support. It's like, why aren't we (the tribe) looking at that and maybe finding a way to mimic that? Are we even listening? And what are we even doing? I always tell myself these things in my head.”

We part today expressing gratitude for being able to pour a little of stories out together. I tell her that I hope to see her again soon, but I know she is busy, and we agree to meet again when the time is right.

Eneq.

Women in Solidarity

In 2013, I attended my first Society of Indian Psychologist convention where I would present my master’s thesis which proposed the Indigenous research methodology and

epistemology of 'Schelangen,' the Lummi Way of Life. My presentation highlighted the important collaboration between me, my research advisor, Dr. Jeff King (Muskogee Creek) on behalf of the Mental Health Counseling Department at Western Washington University, and elders of Lhaq'temish, the Lummi People of Washington state, who comprised the Northwest Indian College IRB. At this convention, I met indigenous scholars and Elders from New Zealand, our Māori Relatives, who came to share their research and wellness models. After four days of sharing and learning, they gifted us, the attendees, with ceremony, in which they taught us their way of greeting each other in kinship. I recall the deep intimacy and physical connection during this ceremony. I remember pressing my forehead to the forehead of my kin, and my nose to their nose, as we greeted and expressed our love for each other. I remember this ceremony now as I sit in my learning with Nētekaeh in the present. It feels very much like that ceremony. In the in-between spaces of Nētekaeh's story, I feel overwhelmed and obsessed with her words, my emotions vacillate in grief and empowerment. As her story takes shape, I am growing in renewed understanding about myself. I notice when I talk to Metaēmohsak, other Native women, I feel deeper intimacy and connection. I recognize Nētekaeh in them and the image of myself is clearer in theirs. How could we live without this good feeling for so long?

Elderhood

I woke up early today, excited for what the day will bring. We have been planning this visit for some time. I make the long drive to her home, through forest and past the river that weaves through her homelands. I arrive to her house just before midmorning. She must have heard me pulling in, as she comes outside and greets me with a big smile and hug. Keckīw and I embrace and appreciate this reconnection. Keckīw. This is what I call her now, as she is no longer my sister, but my elder. Keckīw welcomes me into her home, she offers coffee and I

accept. I offer her a red pouch of tobacco. She smiles as she reaches out to grasp it gently in her hand and promises to take care of it later. I notice her hands; they are older and wizened with time. Keckīws home is quiet too; she is listening to flute music, which is streaming on her television. She indicates to the still photo on the screen, "Oh, look at that, Navajo country!" I tell her I have missed her, and I am glad to be here.

Keckīw has much to share since our last visit; she told me she has been looking forward to this conversation. She reminds me of her experiences of being undervalued and her fight for equality throughout her career. "So, my concern now is for our young community members-that they get recognized and valued appropriately. So that's usually on the back of my mind in meetings is, you know, 'how is this decision going to affect our community?' For example, oftentimes, females are the head of households or they have males that are absent or not working, maybe they are underemployed themselves. So oftentimes, the women's income is key to the survival for that family. And employers don't realize that, especially if they're non-native employers. And I think our community has had a history of believing that non-native people are more qualified than native people are. So that also affected the status of our community, economically. So, we say we're in poverty, we say we are underemployed, but we do that to ourselves, as a community. We got to put people in positions that can make those changes for us...would be they are board members, or directors or whatever. But we got to most importantly, support our own people."

Accountability is Within Ourselves

I remember the difficulty she faced in expressing her voice at one time. "Do you feel heard, speaking up in your own community about these issues?" "Yeah, I do feel heard. Even if what I'm speaking about involves somebody sitting right there, I don't care because they have to

hear it. It's not particularly that I am trying to bring them down, but rather putting it out there, it's really for the people, not for yourself." *I think about my own age, and whether I'd have the courage to take a stance. There seem to be so many roadblocks. I express my concern to Keckīw. She smiles at me knowingly.* "You know, it takes strength, and it takes direction and guidance. Some people can do it and some people don't want to do it; they're happy just being who they are. I have relatives that are like, 'I'm not getting involved in that, you know, I'm not gonna vote, I'm not gonna do this, do that. You know, I'm happy where I'm at, I don't want all that stress on me.' But I'm like, 'No, let's have stress! Let's make change!'" She smiles toward me again, "You're never too old to make change."

"So, what do you think is needed to be able to be able to engage together in that then?" I ask. Keckīw contemplates briefly, "Sometimes I think it's, there's so many people stuck in their own ways where they can't even...," she pauses to make this point, "I don't know they *can't*, but they can't or won't admit they're wrong, you know? I remember when I start admitting my wrongs and apologizing. And I, it just makes you feel good! There was a point when I wouldn't you know, when I was lost in my own way, there. I would defend myself and tell myself 'to hell with them,' you know? But then something inside me was like, 'you know you were wrong.' And when I come to that thinking, when you start apologizing," she looks at me stermly, "you feel good, you do." *I feel Keckīw is pleading with me to understand the importance of accountability.* She continues, "And after you do it for a while, it's so much easier. And then you hope you don't make them mistakes anymore. But there's just so many that can't do that. They're really stuck. How long are we going to take this before we see it's wrong?"

"How did you like, just kind of carry that, I don't know, that way of thinking about things that are, I guess it was your own experiences?" I ask, wanting to learn more about her process of

asserting. “Yeah, I guess just not finding out the inequalities and the professional differences of everybody opened my eyes. Because as I struggled to get my bachelor's degree and my master's degree and move forward, I became aware of different things that were happening, you know, through education, so that made me more concerned too. And now that I was really concerned, I'm an elder and retired and I feel like I need to do something to help families and the communities. So, I try,” she says. “Yeah, the thing you mentioned,” I respond, “which is women tend to be the breadwinners around here, do you think there's a reason why women tend to be the breadwinners, like, in your lifetime, is that always how you've seen it?” Keckīw shakes her head, “No, I think when I was little, I was used to seeing my mom and dad, and my aunties and uncles, those who we would go and visit and spend time with. There seemed to be more couples and more families that way. Today, there seem to be more single parent families or, you know, a spouse missing for whatever reason. And now, unfortunately, more recently, with COVID and the loss of elders, and the overdosing with the younger people, it seems like we're losing people on both ends. So that's worrisome, too. It's like, what's going to happen to us, you know, with our future leaders not there and our elders leaving? They're not able to pass on a lot of that important stuff, because they're going too soon due to sickness. So that's kind of the situation we're in right now.” *Reality hits me with her words, I had not thought of it that way.* She speaks again, this time soft and distant, “Some days I just want to give up. Many times, I cried. I pray every day at the river. If I miss it down there one day, then I pray somewhere else. It does give you a good feeling, you know? And sometimes you'll see the blessings and you will know your prayers were answered, even if it was something small, that just gives me hope for the next day.” *It is hard to see her mourn.*

We must Instill Cultural Identity and Love

“So, Keckīw, what do you suppose is the answer? I think about my own family, and how I combat these issues...?” I trail off, unsure of my own question. Keckīw understands, “I’d talk to them about the importance of culture. For my family, there's a burial mound where a forefather of ours lies, no one knows exactly where he is, but I try to go back there once every summer, it's way back by the river. And I take my grandkids back there every couple of months.” Keckīw and I contemplate about the connection between living in a good way and culture. She reminds me about the importance of taking time for prayer, which requires us to slow down from the demands of life. “When you get to my age, you don't think economically so much anymore. Because just being here every day and being in ceremony and stuff, it's like, money's only important in that it helps you to live with the basics for me, you know? Do I have bread, milk, and eggs? As long as I have the basics, I'm happy. I don't need to have a Mercedes Benz in the parking lot. I don't need to live in a big fancy house. I'm happy with what I have, and you know, as long as we can get along, well that, to me, there are other qualities of life that are more important now like love and kindness, you know, to be good to one another and to love our children. Because, you know, with this overdosing and stuff, it's so scary for me because I've already lost a niece and I'm losing, you know, friends and relatives all the time. And it's just, like, be good to one another! We don't know how long we're going to be together here. So, we got to make it count.”

She considers for another moment and says, “You know, I love sewing and making ribbon skirts and regalia. That keeps me busy, but it's connection to culture, connection to who we are, and medicine in a lot of ways. And it's just really neat, trying to create things that people that people think are important to them. They ask, ‘can you make me a skirt with my clan?’ ‘Can you make me a skirt with my spirit name?’ You know, ‘I'm a water girl, can you make me a

water skirt?' And those things mean a lot to people and they're proud of it. They want to tell a story, you know, in their skirts." I sense she is making an important point, "So, you know, I like doing those special things, and then I always remember what my mom said, you know, when I'm sewing and when she's teaching me things, she always said, 'you can make mistakes, nobody's perfect. And you have to always be in good spirits when you're doing it.' And so respecting that and just wondering about the person that's going to get the skirt. What are they doing? What's happening in their life? Things like that." *She tells me that I can bring this teaching into everything I do. I contemplate that teaching. What is the person like who may benefit from this choice I am making. Even if I will never meet them, there is an impact. Our choices have impact.*

Native Women Bring about Balance in Societies

"What are the changes that you've seen, after all, this time being in the community?" I ask. "I think the best change I've seen is we have more native teachers in our schools, because as my work focuses on education, I see our own native people going to college and coming back and going into the teaching roles. And I love that because the kids need those role models in the schools, you know. Our system of learning has been so different for so long that to sit in a classroom and lecture doesn't mean much to us, you know. As matter of fact, kids can sit and doodle and space out and not even be there mentally, you know. Where, now we have native teachers who know kids need hands on learning, and they get the students more involved. And, it just seems to have improved the learning system for the kids then. And I'm happy about that."

Keckīw shares her excitement about women leadership taking place in her community, seeing roles being filled by Native women for the very first time in her lifetime. "What's exciting about that?" I ask. She smiles, "Oh, the change! You know, that finally, not only

natives, but a woman has made it to the top! And the people in the community had enough confidence in her to prepare her and to put her there, you know, we want her as our leader. And they see true leadership in her, that she can bring us together. And I think women are used to doing that as family hubs, you know, we're used to taking care of our families, keeping everything together, running smoothly and stuff. So that carries over to our work, too. That's why we're good workers. Because we know that success is not just one thing, it's a component of many things. And we have to address all those issues to be truly, you know, happy or where we're supposed to be. So we're not imbalanced."

I can feel Keckīws hope to see a resurgence of her younger relatives taking ownership of their culture and traditional ways. She is energized and more vocal about community issues and seeing Native women engaging in personal growth and community roles. We end our conversation here and spend more time visiting with family who have just walked into the room. We agree to visit again very soon.

Eneq.

Pepōn (winter): A time for reflection

Respect for Things Significant

This section describes a season of reflection which happens when we slow down to recognize and honor the changes in nature. In our ways, the winter season does not represent death or ending, but rather our future and what awaits us in the next season of another beginning and (re)birth, or the next generation of women. During this time, we reconnect to ourselves through intention and rest, and to each other through stories and accessing ancestral memories. These stories help remind us about what is important in life, and how to heal and learn from our ups and downs, to replenish our spirits and restore our energies. In this season of winter, Keckīw

contemplates her own gratitude; she sets down her intentions for us all to have good days to come, and that our gardens grow well...and that we get our well-deserved rest. Through listening to Keckīw's stories and wisdom, we honor and love her; she is so precious.

Keckīw māēk ācemwaw otācemwan (My Elder Tells Her Story)

I take the same roads as before, past the river, to her house in the woods. When I climb the stairs of her porch, I am aware of the bundle in my hand, and the finality it symbolizes. She welcomes me into her home and we settle into our places in the living room. I offer her the bundle. Gesturing to invite Keckīw to share the final part to her story, I ask, "Keckīw, can you please share some words about what you think women need in order to live meaningfully?" I observe she is still holding her tobacco pouch; she rolls it in her hands, allowing her fingers to caress the fabric, as she considers her next words. "It takes will to understand what we as women are going through. It would be nice to go into any space and to be respected and to be heard and to be allowed to share. To not be spoken to condescendingly, to not be invalidated because we went to school or we didn't go to school, or all these ways that we find to diminish each other." She pauses momentarily, "Our voice is our most powerful aspect. Being heard and validated and understood, is our first step towards creating a different future." What does that look like, I wonder aloud. She ponders for a moment, "Once you connect with likeminded people, our humanness connects us."

She mentions that regardless of what other women are doing, whether living in a good or bad way, "We must lift each other up with good words and encouragement...and be healthy in our spirituality." Keckīw smiles at me and continues, "Women are the most powerful thing on Earth, we're the connection between the two sides...we know we're powerful. And I think that is why we need to keep having conversations and empowering our daughters...," I watch as tears

form in her eyes. I put my head and eyes down respectfully. “If I could just live, and garden, and make baskets, I hope I am well enough to do that,” Keckīw takes a deep sigh, “imagine all of us doing that together? Wouldn’t that be a dream?” “Yes,” I add, “to sit out in the sun, just hanging out, that would be a wonderful way to live.” Keckīw continues my thought, “...digging our hands in the dirt, our hands in the soil...any way to connect with the Earth is...healing.”

She looks out through the window near us. I follow her gaze and see the water. She holds finality in her voice as she says, “It is important, just having the space to talk it out, what your identity is, but also the space to talk it out with yourself. Or to observe and be in the quiet with yourself. It's like, I can go out in the woods and not have to think about, you know, all these things that are so hurtful. And if I do, I don't feel unsafe out there. That is how our ancestors made their philosophy, they sat and observed.” *I repeat these last words over and over in my head...comprehending their magnitude. These words will stay with me for a long time.*

Right as our visit concludes, I observe console etched on Keckīw’s brow, and I reach out for a hug. She hugs me and whispers, “I am so proud of you, my girl.” My heart thuds and tears spring to my eyes. I hear that affirmation echo across Nētekaeh’s story, Keckīw is proud of Nētekaeh. She looks into my eyes and smiles, “We haven't had you for so long, in our home. This is really a gift for us.”

Eneq.

Chapter 5

This journey has been long and arduous, beginning two decades ago when I sat with my uncle, seeking counsel about starting higher academic learning. The teachings I have received within academic and community spaces shaped my understanding of approaching this work. In developing this study, I asked myself two fundamental questions: Will understanding the way Native woman approach their life roles help to close the gaps they face? Will this study and its methodology help the community I serve and belong to? All the while ensuring, through council by knowledge guides, that it does not widen or sustain gaps.

Guided by Omāeqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan, a relationship-based research framework emerged, which cultivated healing between women and allowed a deeper understanding of how Native women see themselves in the context of their relationships, experiences, values, and priorities. Their knowledge and vulnerability support the literature that describes Native American women as "having a deep understanding of the widespread psychological effects of historical trauma (Brave Heart et al., 2016). Following one visit, one woman asked me, "Do you think anyone realizes how sophisticated our intellect is?"

The following section describes an interpretation of women's stories as a re-imagining about the future of their communities, with recommendations incorporated. I then discuss using an indigenous research paradigm with a proposed dissemination to the community that is healing and honors women and their hope. Next, I present the study limitations and commentary on the significance of this research. Finally, I will share my reflections on this journey.

Imagining the Future is a Gift: Interpretation and Recommendations

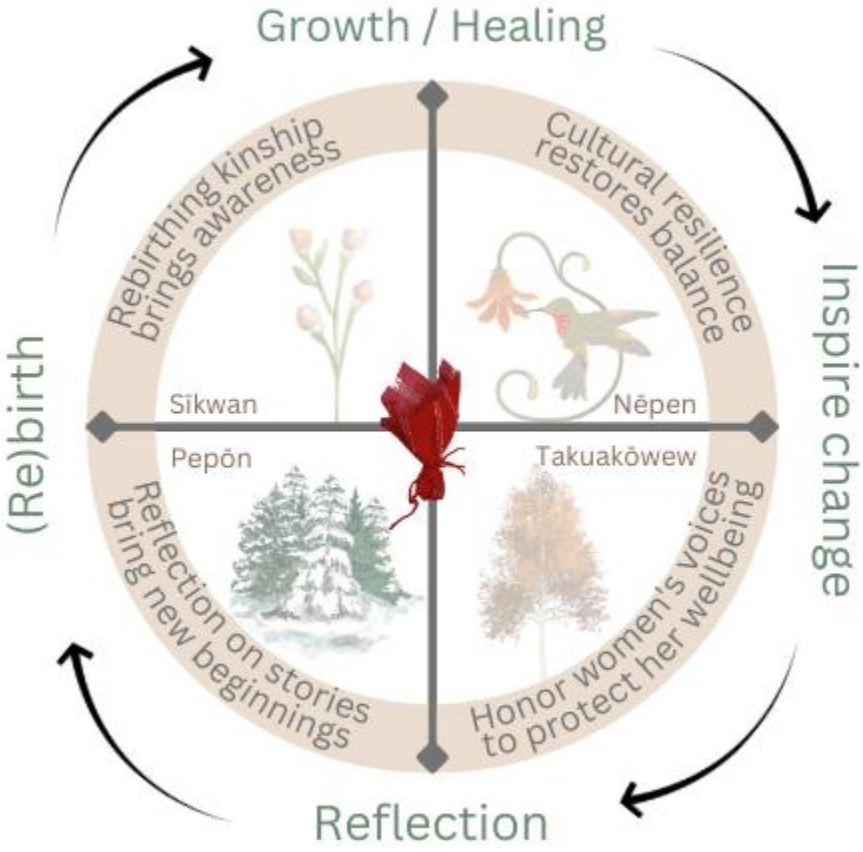
This study seeks to understand how Native American women in the Midwest navigate their work and life roles, as well as their political context and cultural and social values, to

provide inroads to the work trajectories they lead. Consistent with existing literature, women's stories connect work to their life domains (Richardson, 2012; Brave Heart et al., 2016). For example, women in this study recurrently discuss the links between work and nonwork (e.g., social, family, cultural) roles, which are essential to feeling in balance. Moreover, connection to "home" is a prominent factor in negotiating work roles, which enables them to maintain roles aligned with their commitment to community (e.g., contributing or participating in social/cultural activities) and connection to their indigenous cultural landscapes, alongside extended family and kin. Women's priorities are determining factors in their wellbeing. Women identify factors for restoring balance in their lives. For instance, the kinship between women and wellness across genders (e.g., male wellbeing) is critical for youth wellness and the health and longevity of their tribes.

The process of Indigenous rematriation, graphed along the four seasonal cycles, offers themes of intergenerational kinship and balance to guide how women understand love, show support, navigate challenges, and find connectedness (Figure 1). They involve a) Sīkwan (spring): Rebirthing women's kinship brings awareness about their experiences, b) Nēpen (summer): Cultural resilience serves as an opportunity to restore balance, c) Takuakōwew (autumn), which is divided into two parts i) Women's voices and knowledge must be recognized and honored, and ii) We must address issues of safety that concern women's wellbeing, and, d) Pepōn (winter): Reflecting on our sources of knowledge leads to new beginnings. The center of the graph depicts a tobacco tie, an offering I was taught to make to remind me/us to 'get our minds together' and approach our work 'in a good way.' The tobacco tie represents Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan that guides women's choices and priorities through their seasonal journeys.

Figure 1.

The Process of Indigenous Rematriation



Note. The depiction begins in the season of Sīkwan and follows a circular path.

Sīkwan (Spring): Rebirthing Women's Kinship Brings Awareness About Their Experiences

Interviews are a common strategy within qualitative research and indigenous methods, where they are typically semi-structured and allow for researcher reflexivity (Wilson, 2021). Such strategies, such as my visits with women, allow for an authentic experience that creates authentic discussion. However, these visits are distinct in the meaning they hold for women,

which highlight the intersectionality of Native Women being represented authentically within a research paradigm in a context of sharing between women about women's experiences. Women describe about the important opportunity to share experiences in this study despite the layers of uncertainty they hold to facilitate the health and wellness of their communities. Women's uncertainties about sharing their stories were palpable and verbalized and, as a result, highlight the criticality of safety and transparency about my intentions for this study.

The process of bringing women together serve as its own healing journey within this broader story of research, which engender trust where the research process and my researcher role are a conduit for trust building, safety, and collaboration toward an agreed-upon aim of uplifting women's stories about their lives. My most emotional experiences (e.g., reflexivity) are in those initial moments of meeting with women. We are actively involved in our awareness about our experiences of 'silence,' which are intimately connected to discomfort in this coming-together process (e.g., encircling) of story work. Through encircling, I am acutely aware of the process of safety, value, and listening that I know is necessary to nourish the stories being told, above and beyond meeting the goals of this project. It is clear that coming together as women through this research opportunity was brought on by yearning for kinship and women's sense of responsibility to each other and their future generations, which cultivate their/our courage for navigating the discomfort we express.

Women's stories of their own life experiences suggest that wellness must include awareness about such a patriarchal inward process that threatens to dissuade them from engaging in opportunities to connect. Accordingly, the coming together processes for many women ignites pain and sadness and highlighted the criticality of an opportunity to shed light on women’s experiences. Women articulate reasons for caution in trusting others, including Western

patriarchal norms, leaving them to feel patronized in cultural and Western settings (e.g., work), subverting their opportunities to assert or express themselves. At worst, this silence stifles their experiences of adversity in times of need, and at best, their contributions to family and community are ignored or undermined. Women express that speaking out on their own behalf is a leadership trait, and they challenge the notion that they are aggressive or hostile. Instead, they view their voice as a symbol of their rights and sovereignty. Overall, women commit to each other, and their sacrifice for sharing their stories are filled with anticipation and knowledge that their stories align and shed awareness for other women who may feel isolated.

At their root, women persist in the challenges they face with awareness, dignity, and humility. Through their stories, they offer us the gift of reflection on the role of colonization and internalized patriarchy in their lives; their wisdom serves as an opportunity for us to consider when holding concern and care about the beliefs and perceptions that society has about them, including:

1. silencing women from speaking about their work, cultural, and personal lives, especially if it is to challenge the systemic oppressions they experience;
2. sequestering women throughout their lives from support, often beginning in their youth, resulting in women persisting in hardship and adversity alone;
3. repudiating women from opportunities to talk and learn about what it means to be a Native American woman, thereby diminishing the value of women's life stories and wisdom;
4. failing to recognize or honor women's contributions to family and community and minimizing their knowledge and skills as mere role expectations;
5. viewing women who stand up for themselves as hostile or aggressive and

6. perpetuating cycles of abuse and violence through ongoing silencing of their voices and concerns.

The entirety of the spring season section honors Native American women's courage in entering into this work. Their willingness to fortify their strength through coming together helps us to see what decision-making can mean as an exercise of sovereignty. Therefore, the visit itself represents a process that can broker peace between how we relate to each other, beginning in womanhood, that allows for elucidation of the root cause, implicating an opportunity to repair the bonds of kinship. In turn, women's stories legitimize a more accurate and meaningful conceptualization of what it means to live as a Native American woman in contemporary U.S. society. The following sections will discuss how the above experiences manifest across women's seasonal changes (e.g., spring and autumn).

Nēpen (Summer): Cultural Resilience Serves as an Opportunity to Restore Balance

Women's stories uncover themes of silence and quiet persistence parallel to women's remembering process, which preserves their cultural way of life. This season, a time of learning, marks an opportunity to connect women's childhood teachings to their understanding of their roles, which are best understood through the lives of the women who raised them. Some women express difficulty in describing specific cultural teachings that reflect Native American identity. In contrast, others draw distinctions between traditional and cultural teachings and other social life experiences. For instance, women discuss how distressing or negative memories are teaching moments for overcoming adversity later in life. Conversely, others discuss learning how to navigate Western systems, including governance and work, to ensure the future stability of their family or community.

It was striking to see several women express confusion when I asked them to share any teachings they received about their roles as Native women (more on the pedology of cultural learning will be discussed below). However, many women feel the influence of colonization on what they perceive as the lack of a clear cultural identity in their childhood that defines their womanhood. On the other hand, women resonate when discussing the people who shaped their lives; their narratives revolve around teachable moments where several values emerged, including self-respect, unconditional love, responsibility to the community, and matriarchy within families. These value-based instructions undoubtedly provide a foundation for women to navigate childhood adversity, which they carry into adulthood. Particularly, in terms of male roles, women often speak about men on the periphery, empathizing with their absence in the context of broader systemic struggles (e.g., patriarchy as a byproduct of colonization). Even for women who feel their male role models are balanced and admirable, they highlight the role of women in leading their families and communities in various ways.

Women perceive women as benevolent in their practices as mothers and grandmothers, and intellectual and wise leaders in community and work roles. These roles integrate women's recollections of their own youthful anticipation about their future active involvement and leadership roles in their community. Women describe a sense of purpose in helping their mothers manage the household, particularly in single-parent homes. Thus, women learn from their female kin how to handle adversity early on, while developing a worldview of compassion toward others who struggle, which allow them to understand nuanced challenges within systems. For example, several women share about their roles as decision-makers, where they are faced with learning how to problem-solve and multi-task (e.g., balance school and caregiving younger siblings so their mothers could get to work on time). As an elder remarked, these characteristics

allow women to be skilled in navigating multiple life roles simultaneously in adulthood, which she cautions are opportunities for women to be taken advantage of. Above all, women admire their older female kin as role models to whom they aspire to become. They view their current roles as matriarchal and perennial to their family legacy and unique cultural knowledge.

However, women's childhoods should not be rendered as purely pleasant. While women speak respectfully and compassionately about assisting in adult or parenting tasks, they perceive a critical gap being filled in their role. Their reflections on their summer season are a gift, allowing us to shape new understandings of how we can support our little sisters and daughters as they prepare for their autumn season, including recognizing that:

1. women family members (e.g., grandmothers, mothers, aunties, older female cousins) are critical role models and serve as steadfast sources of support and comfort, and women's childhoods must be grounded in such sanctuaries of unconditional love and compassion; all children should have access to such sources of care;
2. women's childhoods are mixed with love and survivorship; we must ensure children's sense of self is defined by values and aspirations rather than role expectations;
3. women's cultural worldview are complicated by factors related to colonization; we should encourage developmentally appropriate and meaningful conversations with youth about these factors to ensure they can discern cultural teachings from survivorship toward preserving their cultural way of life.

The summer season section honors the women kinfolk who shape Native American women's resilience and worldview; women are testaments to the caring, intellectual, and

influential women who shape them. Regarding their resilience, women's awareness about what they observe in their youth indicates opportunities to support today's youth as they prepare for adulthood. Particularly for women emerging into their womanhood, discussions surrounding the barriers women face can serve as a strategy for uplifting their autonomy and well-being early on. Additionally, youth bring forth gifts into their womanhood that speak to their matriarchy (e.g., decision-makers, problem-solvers, multitaskers, life-bearers), which should be celebrated and not conflated with their cultural roles or negatively perpetuated by patriarchal expectations. Finally, women's teachings about their summer seasons permit us to be more open with youth by discussing the struggles Native American women face, including the overturning of internalized interpersonal patterns toward celebrating opportunities to connect through cultural identity and teachings.

Takuakōwew (Autumn)

Women's experiences throughout adulthood have implications for how to prepare young women better as they embark on their adulthood paths. Drawing on the apparent need for women to share their stories, youth can be affirmed about the challenges in shifting life roles. For instance, women share their feelings of disillusionment in uncovering the reality of the violence against Native and indigenous women, disparities in navigating work and career, interpersonal challenges in asserting self, and perpetuated cycles of abuse that result in persisting in isolation.

Women's Voices and Knowledge must be Recognized and Honored

Women's early life experiences reflect the difficulty in overcoming misaligned life and work roles, particularly when their cultural values are undermined. They express feeling their lives move in a direction that further remove them living their values and they find their goals tend to mismatch with their sense of self, which they previously envisioned. To overcome this,

women talk about the importance of connection, particularly to other women, which facilitates a sense of solidarity. For instance, Little Sister Elderberry finds safety and comfort in opening up to her mother and a therapist, which allows her to name her anxiety following a traumatic experience in her first year in college. While Little Sister Elderberry and Little Sister Winterberry forecaste their ability to persist and grow, women later in their adulthood describe the need to build support networks alongside other women, thus enabling them to nurture gifts into life work.

As women internally heal over time, they become more aware of ways to navigate and deter the effects of patriarchy in ways that enable them to become influential in facilitating positive health behaviors (e.g., recovery from mental health or addiction) and well-being to improve health outcomes (e.g., intergenerational trauma, poverty) in their community. Through their lived experiences of hardship and struggles, including mental health, raising families alone, or financial strain, women understand the connection between historical trauma and the shared grief in their community. For example, Grandmother Red Cedar expresses concern about a need for more understanding, which she feels can be reduced by having their own people fill critical roles in their community. Similarly, Sister White Ash shares that her standards for her community are no different than what she would expect to provide in her family, and she is not always sure non-native providers understand her or respect her voice. This norm of silencing among women is salient and guides how they quietly engaged in their community work, sometimes feeling unsure about when to advocate without sacrificing their reputation.

In general, women rejoice in finding a sense of giving back when they can center their cultural identity. The theme of connecting identity to community is significant to women. Sister Eastern Hemlock describes healing and clarity coming with life experience and resilience; she

describes her role as a mother and cultural carrier as central to her children's being, which appears to become more evident after entering into single motherhood. Sister River Birch notes that she needed to draw upon guidance from other women to facilitate this pathway, resulting in spiritual healing and growth as markers for rejuvenation and clarity. In turn, Sister Soft Maple suggests to her women kin, "Do not work to please others," and emphasizes the importance of finding ways for women to reconnect to roots (e.g., cultural practices that include physically working with land and gardens). Auntie Quaking Aspen asserts that women should recognize the hard work of other women, which is substantiated by other women's expressions, including recognizing women's valuable cultural knowledge that is gifted through life experience. As Auntie White Birch demonstrates, women must realize their wellness is not a price for these gifts and we can ask employers how they can help *us* meet *our* goals. Finally, several women, including Sister Juneberry, Sister White Ash, and Grandmother White Oak, assert that women must recognize the importance of our own healing and that good feelings and a way of life come with healing.

While women explore access to mental health services as pathways to healing, they express feeling those pathways require more cultural sensitivity and awareness about women's lives that intersect with mental health and addiction. For instance, Little Sister Red Elderberry shares about the importance of talking to others to name the feelings that arise when women face trauma and adversity. She said there is a "universal experience" to being a Native woman; kinship is everywhere, and in general, women need spaces where they can talk, including more mental health counselors who can relate. This sentiment was powerfully substantiated by Sister Juneberry, who expresses sadness about the mother she observed being treated poorly by a clinician in her own community due to stigma and negative perceptions about the mother's

struggle to manage addiction and mental health. Sister Juneberry's words about that mother are haunting, "[that mother succumbed to her addiction] you know, she had babies."

Through compassion, women imagine ways to build health and wellness irrespective of their paid and unpaid roles. They inherently apply their knowledge of intergenerational trauma by discussing people's traumas and life challenges with compassion, humility, and love. Little Sister Winterberry talks about taking into account what she witnessed growing up, including her father's mental health struggles, which impacted his children in different ways. She asserts that her role as a bus monitor, which supports her in getting through college, allows her to connect with students, to "sit down and talk to them and ask them if they are genuinely okay...you just never know." They revere their elder women kin and smile fondly about the youth in their lives. Their own compassion rippled across stories is a testament to the pain and love they hold for their community.

We must Address Issues of Safety that Concern Women's Wellbeing

Women's experiences are intersectional and include patriarchal dynamics and systemic barriers, which present ongoing barriers. Women identify several ways they cope with the barriers they face, such as learning how to articulate painful experiences (e.g., working through difficulty with close friends and family), shoring support among other women, and establishing boundaries that uplift their worth and values (e.g., turning down job opportunities when pay was inequitable or geographically displaced from home). However, they express weariness and frustration about the chronic nature of these challenges.

In this regard, they discuss how Native American serving organizations tend to be developed mainly by ideologies that support Euro-Western conventions, making it challenging to imagine change (e.g., "...the idea of wealth and power came in...and the constitution made that

permanent and acceptable. ... that's one of the things we accepted to become federally recognized again." Here, women describe the most salient influences of patriarchy and gender bias. Regarding issues of violence and safety, women recognize the need for advocacy and fear the pushback they will receive in calling attention to the systems that exist within their own communities, highlighting demoralization as a primary reason for their hesitance. For example, they share about being surrounded by men who view their ideas and contributions as lesser, "... 'I know how to expect to be treated in this space.' And that means we're going to be compartmentalized, and maybe diminished a little bit...and this is where our best men treat us", which also have implications for inequality in career opportunities/advancement or pay increases along with stagnation in forward progress in community development work due to territorialism over roles of power and authority (e.g., "people...worried about who has authority over 'what' and not 'how' we can work together...").

Particularly for women in management roles, they talk about strategizing within their system to support other women in succeeding in work-life balance. One woman sharing that she recognizes the hardship women face as heads of households, carrying cultural and community roles alongside paid roles. In response, she turned her entire women's team into salaried employees, thus enabling them the flexibility to balance work and personal life. Irrespective of how women navigate patriarchal barriers (e.g., misogyny), they express the importance of maintaining proximity to land and place. Women share their experiences of giving up opportunities in work roles in order to be home, realizing "I am my best self when I am home."

Barriers to Living 'In Balance'

We must understand that women's context of quiet persistence is complex. Mistrust or caution is not solely between women and one institution. It is neither a 'women versus academic

research institution' nor between women (e.g., women versus women). Instead, the reality of women's oppression is nuanced and exists between them in the colonial world, a phenomenon that is settled into the social depths of their daily lives. Through the spring season, women identify barriers, including "no one listening," feeling undermined or dismissed, leading to difficulty in articulating something that has not yet been spoken out loud: that of their oppression, which stems from their very existence.

Lateral violence and the absence of healthy male presence is also an underlying and intersectional issue that involves understanding women's experience of social structures within the context of colonization and the ongoing systemic oppression they face (e.g., including the power dynamics within institutions; Jaber et al., 2023). The evidence regarding women's discomfort in opening up about their life stories, along with their desire to restore women's kinship, indicate that lateral violence plays a role in their internalized beliefs about women, which thwart women's kinship. Similar to Jaber et al. (2023) findings, themes of lateral violence were vaguely described explicitly (e.g., the term was mentioned once across all 15 conversations). However, the concept is described implicitly throughout which offers additional insight explanation of their interpersonal barriers.

These intersecting concepts collide with ongoing experiences of oppression into adulthood, further eroding opportunities to trust in other people as sources of support and marginalizing them from developing kinship and spaces to connect about issues they face. Consequently, women find ways to connect their gendered experiences through carefully vetted friendship groups (e.g., "...best friends, you know, you get a sense when they share") or immediate family (e.g., mothers). Women in this study express a desire to overcome, through their reflexivity, the need to facilitate healing from interpersonal distrust as a move to restoring

kinship. They make an important connection between their ability to survive in youthhood as an adaptive coping mechanism that manifests as a tendency to hold back as given the uncertainty about negative consequences if they were to push back. For example, "myself included, and other Native women, I see them in spaces where they're disrespected and it's accepted and normalized like, 'oh, well, this isn't my time to say anything So I'll just sit here and take it.' You know?" illustrate the silent negotiation they make when determining situations in which they can or should speak up versus those less opportune (e.g., cultural leaders). Finally, women are distinguishing the positive traits they learn from influential women in their lives from the negative aspects of their womanhood, which appear to exist exclusively in the context of colonial-based oppression.

Women call upon themselves for support, seeking the courage to speak up, heal, and correct the ingrained beliefs they have learned about themselves and other women. As such, referring to the concept of lateral violence reduces the impact of violence and harm these women have endured via colonization and cultural genocide. Moreover, that concept maintains that the ruptures that occur between women are of their own making, and represent their own violent behavior (e.g., lateral *violence*) wherein they, themselves, perpetuate a mechanism to thwart kinship and disallow women from focusing and healing on the source of interpersonal distress. Therefore, we must reframe women's context of life experiences (e.g., persisting through adversity), where lateral violence is a ramification of colonization and patriarchy, and women's self-protectiveness in womanhood is an adaptive coping mechanism where they and others also happen to get hurt by along the way. On their own, women's insight leads to healing pathways that emphasize root causes and where intervention should occur. To illustrate this process, women talk about the deep compassion they bring forward through their own lived experiences.

Little Sister Winterberry explains, "Having gone through my grief and trauma at a young age, and not realizing it...being able to see that in my work and school and put those tools and techniques to good use is what I am looking for." Given the connection between traits carried forward in survivorship, women should be viewed not as actors of lateral violence but as independent and capable women who are learning to receive and give meaningful support through discussing and unraveling internalization.

Honoring women's voices and knowledge are gifts to a pathway of resilience. They help us understand the importance of healing that comes with maturity and womanhood. We can role model their strength and persistence to maintain their resilience, thereby protecting the wellbeing of our future generations. From their healing process, we understand

1. women find their power and healing when their values align with life and cultural roles,
2. women should uplift and celebrate the value and contributions of women;
3. women's healing ushers in a leadership style guided by love and grounded in empathy.
4. Native American societies must reframe our understanding and use of 'lateral violence' and instead recognize broken kinship as a byproduct of colonization. Opportunities to restore woman kinship require courage, vulnerability, and inherent trust in the goodness of other women, who are all healing and doing their best.

Pepōn (Winter): Reflecting on Our Sources of Knowledge Leads to New Beginnings

Elder's stories describe women's hardships as opportunities to learn and grow in ways that enable youth to bypass adversity within colonial or patriarchal norms. Elders describe their

understanding of the changes youth make moving from their summer to autumn season, and they asserted the importance of the younger generations having the support of their communities as a pathway into young adulthood. Elders also shed light on the intergenerational changes they have witnessed over time. For example, Grandmother Red Cedar is observing significant shifts in the family unit, where more women are heads of households than ever before. In turn, she highlights the need for tribal communities to work to understand that women's income is vital for many families. Elders recognizes the courage it will require for women to stand up and speak out about such issues. They advise women and young people to shift how they view speaking up: “Let’s have stress, let’s make change!”

Elders believe good leadership comes from a balanced community; they discuss balance across genders and ages. They share examples of how they worry about community loss that puts their culture at risk. Grandmother White Oak talks about the loss of important cultural and spiritual knowledge due to the high rates of elder mortality and health disparities. All the grandmothers express sadness and concern about youth risks, including the accelerating rates of death due to drug and mental health epidemics. In combination, elders are worried about what the future of their communities means when too many elders and young people pass due to the ongoing disparities they face. They call on their community to work together. Regarding working together across genders, older women view women in kinship as bringing balance back into their societies and have hope that long after the older women of this story are gone, these priorities will remain. They call on all genders to recognize the pitfalls of defensiveness, advise inward reflection about the choices that lead to honesty and growth as a balanced community, and suggest humility to keep us grounded toward constantly seeking strength, direction, and guidance.

Finally, I want to comment on the design of elderhood woven throughout women and Native American communities. Women reflect on their youth, admiring and mimicking the older women in their lives, looking eagerly forward to such roles in their later years. This concept of elderhood is not just an internal experience but something Native American people designed and need in our communities. With elders leading the way, women are responsible for moving with the seasons to preserve the intentions of our relatives and ancestors, who were good at putting community and the natural world at the center. Elder's wisdom is stern and loving, and tells us how to use traditional knowledge to move forward healing that must occur between women.

1. Women view their older women relatives as positive sources and role models. Extending such beliefs and support toward women outside their familial circles (e.g., immediate relatives, best friend groups) can help unify the bonds of kinship in their broader community;
2. We can harness the deep connections between youth and older/elder women to allow for teaching about the importance of women's kinship, including safeguarding them from the vulnerability of their internalization as they prepare for adulthood;
3. Healing and restorative practices (e.g., talking circles) should aim for the balance and well-being of native women;
4. Rely on our teachings and elder guidance to remind us about the importance of cultural identity. Do not be afraid to ask for help or support, our elders remember their teachings so they can guide us and ensure we remember these ways.

Native women take on critical roles in their communities, and their insight are wonderful gifts for us all to help us understand the issues they face and how to facilitate support for them. It

is clear their seasonal journeys are filled with many paths. As one elder told me, “Some paths are easy to walk through, and we can get by relatively easy. Other paths are difficult, filled with mud, holes, and long grass; who knows what lies in there? For those paths, we must have help from each other to cross to the other side.”

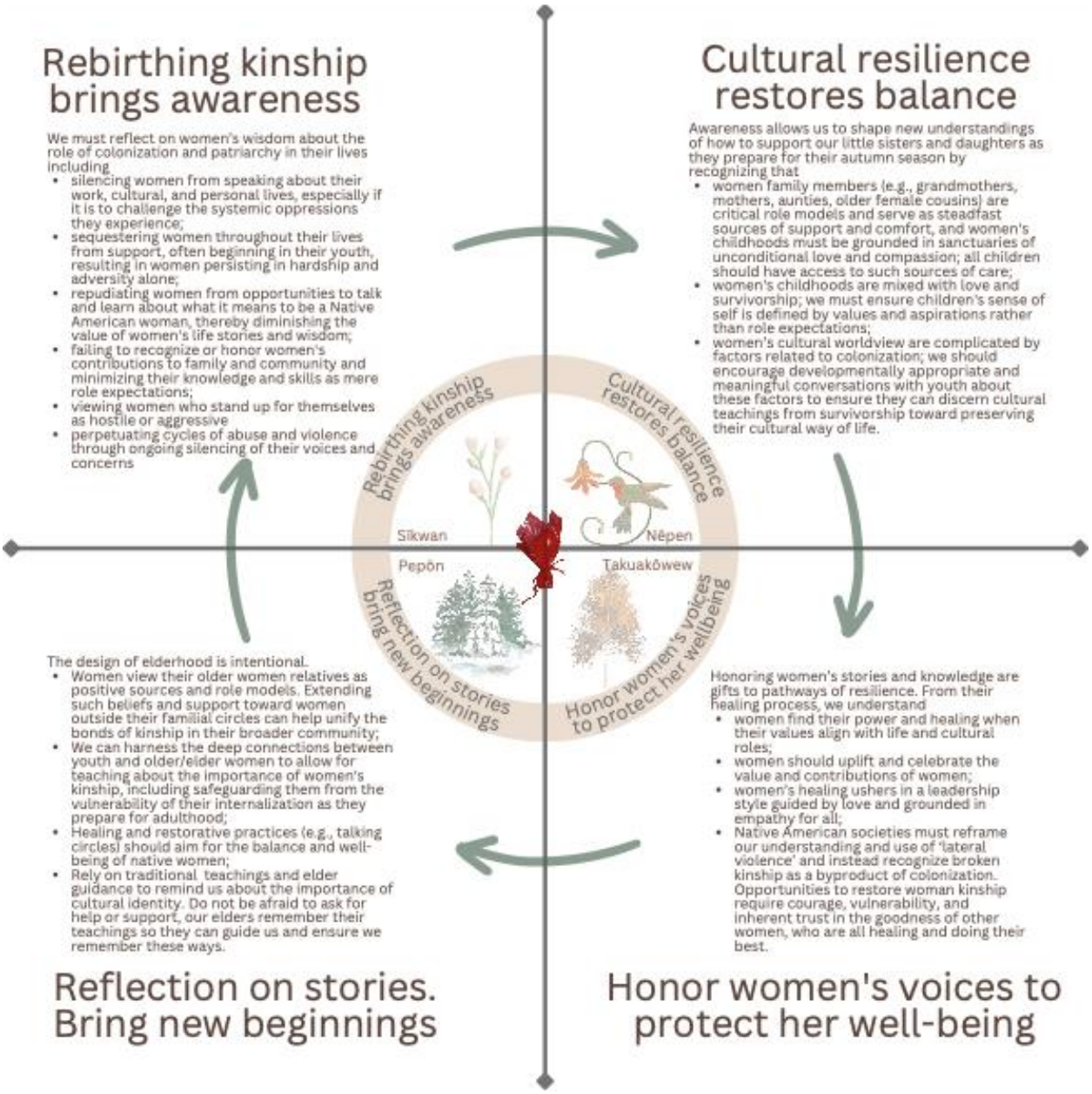
Summary of the Women Knowledge Holders’ Teachings

Themes of cultural identity, values, and resilience weave across women's life roles and vocational trajectories. To assert their insights, the women knowledge holders’ testimonies offer several critical ways we can begin to repair and restore healing and their wisdom is depicts many lessons we can learn from all their seasonal phases of life (see Figure 2). First, women are fully aware of the role of colonization and patriarchy on community wellbeing. Their stories shed light on the impact of colonization and patriarchal practices that embed Western practices (e.g., governmental constitutions and workplace policies) into their lives in ways that undervalue and diminish their accomplishments and worth.

Such structural shifts are difficult to rectify and perpetuated with silent enduring (e.g., MMIW and gendered work and family expectations). There is an implicit message of compassion for what Native people and women in their lives and communities face; women know the history of interpersonal and social challenges stemming from coloniality. For example, women elect to discuss gendered issues (e.g., men's struggles) on the periphery, alluding to nuanced male impacts that led to their health disparities (e.g., mental health implications). Likewise, they describe lateral violence as a contribution of internalized colonization versus the character traits of other women.

Figure 2.

The Teachings that Guide us toward Rematriation



Note. A summary of teachings from women along their seasonal journeys.

Together, women navigate their vocational lives, strategizing around these disruptions, which otherwise serve as barriers and impediments to their wellness, on their paths to exercise their life roles. Women's vision for health and balance includes self-care to generate energy in the broader context of community wellness and cultural survivance (e.g., language and cultural vitality). Their stories are gifts for how we understand their life and how they prioritize cultural

values of wellness in their goals. Finally, Native women's health has implications beyond their families and lives. Women have relied on intergenerational resilience to overcome detrimental government policies of erasure, contributing to present-day women who are uniting to ignite their passion toward new paths for future generations.

Application to Clinical Settings and Theory

Much of what has been discussed so far applies to social and community contexts. However, there are clinical applications that warrant consideration for practitioners working with Native American women. This section will connect several key themes that argue for reshaping the theories that conceptualize Native American women by calling attention to the barriers they face that are unique to their social and spiritual identities. I will briefly discuss women's priorities as a way to understand the challenges they race in clinical settings to offer insight into how their values and priorities are implicated in barriers to goals.

In a study exploring Native American women's intersecting leadership and work experiences, Barkdull (2010) discusses the concept of 'turning points' to describe the significant life events women experience that profoundly affect their path. In Barkdull's (2010) study, women reflected on moments of great adversity or pain and positive or successful experiences as opportunities to persevere and grow. Similarly, several women in this study share the obstacles they face as moments of pressure that eventually help them to make important decisions and, ultimately, healthier choices or outlooks. Clinicians must understand how women discuss their goals and priorities in the context of how they are shaped over time. Likewise, women recognize the importance of supporting a theory of change wherein women's conceptualization of their well-being emerges through telling their stories.

Native American women illuminate complex intersections about the interpersonal dynamics that are intertwined in their sense of identity. Ignoring the role of historical and intergenerational (e.g., U.S. history of politically motivated gendered erasure), Native American women face risks of perpetuated silencing of their voices. The erosion of women's identities over time due to U.S. socio-political dynamics renders them uncertain about how to share and with whom. Therefore, efforts to respect women's dignity must include an examination of the role of Western clinical and theoretical orientations, which can undermine the relevance of women's storying (e.g., talking out) of their concerns in a way that reduces their experiences within a particular theory that misses the mark in fully understanding and explaining the long-term consequences they have faced. Due to the tensions, women express about the layers of the divide that presently exist in their communities, it must be understood that women contend with service to their community in a context of frustration and empathy. Clinicians must recognize the bias in their worldviews that promotes feelings of shame or isolation in missing nuances about women's paths.

Scholarship on therapeutic approaches with Native American women suggests there is disagreement in pathologizing their experiences of distress. While it is unknown if the women in the study are currently in distress, they shared distressing concerns. Their coping signals 'imbalance,' feeling 'diminished,' or generally speaking about the 'busy' lives they lead. These tend to be common adjectives to describe the challenges they face and observe in their communities. Clinicians must explore these adjectives collaboratively to understand the condition of their wellness, including the impacts on their social lives. Within group settings (e.g., work, school), ruptures within intimate spaces such as work or school are expected as women practice re-connecting to one another. Talking circles is a common and appropriate

response to ruptures (e.g., individuals move against, such as disagreeing, arguing, showing dissatisfaction, or individuals move away, such as withdrawing, avoiding, or disengages) which can then be healing spaces for repair when emotional bonds are restored (Høgenhaug et al., 2024).

Finally, I want to comment on the wellness models women in this story described as key to their healing. Primarily, women appear to find healing through time and family or kinship support when there is a balance between spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental health. They find other women were feeling similarly, seeking personal self-care passed through kinship and ceremony. Subsequently, their awareness paved the way for life shifts, including sobriety, adopting a traditional food lifestyle and gardening, learning or teaching their traditional languages, engaging in traditional arts, and attending social and ceremonial gatherings. These shifts in daily practices maintain and preserve cultural traditions and serve as a wellness response.

Vocational Psychology

This study supports vocational psychological theories that suggest Native American women pursue work roles that align with their social motivations for contributing to their communities (Juntunen et al., 2001). Further, women are well aware of the ongoing barriers that impact their upward mobility and personal satisfaction (e.g., work-life balance and family priorities; Morgan, 2015; Todd, 2012). Women's healing journeys are a primary source of their resilience, which enables them to persist through layers of oppressive factors, including interpersonal factors between those they work with and structural barriers that hinder their success in work while constraining them from balancing life roles, including caregiving and

parenting. Subsequently, women are supplanting traditional lifeways into their work and career roles, which overturns the impacts of colonization.

This study furthers what is known about the multilayered role of work by providing insight into the economic, racial, and psychological constraints that exist as barriers (Vollenhoven, 2020). For instance, building on CCT, women center their desire to be home (e.g., response to policies such as the Land Removal Act). They assert their guidelines for career pursuits that align with their values, sense of purpose, and social context (e.g., turning down work that takes them away from their homelands). Similarly, Blustein's (2006) theory of working psychology was apparent in women's acknowledgment of gender and economic gaps they faced; however, these factors were less salient as determinants in their career and life roles. In fact, consistent with Richardson's (2012b) theory of counseling for work and relationship, women appear to embrace instead lower socioeconomic status (e.g., Sister Soft Maple giving up her career for homesteading) if there are no other alternatives for knowledge-based paid work that provided fulfillment, opting to rely on their partner or lower pay to make ends meet.

Women assert that tribal economic health is not solely measured by one's ability to engage in work roles, work status, or income (e.g., socioeconomic status). Rather, wellness is measured by their ability to balance their families' sustenance (via paid work) with their active participation in community and cultural lifeways. Moreover, their vocational lives are often disrupted by various barriers and impede their ability to develop and maintain community connections and relationships that are crucial for healing and growth; and they observe how their communities internalize these work systems in ways that contradict what is best for their community. Therefore, the index for wellbeing is based on women's understanding of social interests, including a sense of community that starts inward and is shared through kinship,

extending into broader society. While women carry a prominent role in familial and community wellness, they prefer to view themselves as a part of the whole. These women are not seeking recognition or status, and while they encourage women supporting and advocating for women, they also assert the importance of balance across genders. Culturally, women measure their efforts in the outcome of people learning cultural knowledge, observing joy in their youth, and honoring the older women they learn from.

Outreach, Policy, and Consultation

Much of this discussion centers around women's voices and empowerment. Previous attempts to understand women's oppression entail focusing on feminism to understand women's situations of oppression and their activism to promote their inclusion, particularly within colonial ideologies (e.g., western geopolitics and institutions; Smith, 2010). While women contextualize their gendered experiences in the context of the influence of Western ideologies, they deny wanting empowerment within institutional or political settings. Instead, they view sovereignty as a representation of their inherent ability to improve their children's and community's lives when they lead to decision-making in ways that align with cultural values and preferred social norms and mores.

The challenge women face is within the gendered experiences in their community, where navigating gendered imbalance (e.g., Native/non-Native men are often in roles of leadership and power, such as in a boardroom) is complex. Smith (2005) proposes that such concerns are best left for Native American women to analyze within the context of affirming tribal sovereignty. In the context of tribal contexts, illustrating the relationship between colonization and gender-based violence, including the day-to-day suppression or undermining women face, can challenge tribes to consider how such impacts interfere in decisions (e.g., grants and programs they pursue) on

behalf of their communities (Maracle, 1988; Smith, 2005). Supported by previous literature on a preference for egalitarian and cooperative relationships (e.g., Lilly et al., 2022), women in this study articulate ways they are enacting sovereignty to overcome patriarchal colonialism, including serving as heads of households. Importantly, talking together and sharing experiences and concerns are shifting a new normalization about what it means for a woman to speak up, leading to externalizing patriarchal ideals (Lilly et al., 2022).

Significance of this Study

Indigenous Methodologies to Advance the Understanding of Wellness

This study contributes to existing literature using indigenous methodology grounded in a specific tribal worldview and ethical philosophy. Further, this study articulates how such a philosophy stands on its own through explicit inclusion of axiology, as evidenced by having women answer the research question and uncovering unexpected layers of healing between researcher and knowledge holders that elucidate a critical prerequisite for considering how to support Native women. Given the context of colonization, patriarchy, and gendered oppression, attending to the ruptures women face through a process of inquiry that is reflexive and compassionate allows women to articulate an approach through their lens that opens new spaces for reconciliation between women while honoring the voices of Native American ancestral knowledge and futurity. In turn, a process emerged that offers other women a path to understanding and relating to one another, opening new spaces for reconciliation. Relatedly, I propose an analytic method that aligns with maintaining the integrity of indigenous teaching in the context of the stories they originate.

The Pedagogy of Traditional Teachings Emerges from Indigenous Methodology

While the focus of this section is to understand the teachings that women received in their youth that inform their worldview and roles in adulthood, it is clear there is a nuanced intersection between how intergenerational teachings pass down versus internalized teaching methods (e.g., the impact of the western education system) that were confused by my line of interview inquiry. Specifically, the prompt, "What were you taught about women's roles that align with your traditional ways?" is difficult to compartmentalize, and identifying specific events or instances required more time and consideration. For instance, in thinking back, I was unable to recall, until later, about learning specific dances and cultural protocols that marked the return of sturgeon to their spawning grounds in the spring, or the time when geese head south for winter, or how to take care of and show respect to Elders.

Similarly, the women and I stumble to remember traditional knowledge and teachings they/we receive(d), leading me to wonder how knowledge is taught and remembered. At this moment during the visit, I remember that teachings become relevant in a specific time and place, and in asking that question, I was asking women to take their teachings out of the context of their original teaching process. This adaptation is a specific example of the extractive nature of research and data and likely reflects my internalization of western scientific approaches to data gathering. In attuning to the puzzlement of women, I reframe my approach and instead ask, "Who inspires you?" Here is where the pedagogy of learning emerges out of indigenous epistemology to support and affirm axiology.

'Gold Standard' Research Design

The term 'gold standard' refers to data generated due to a calculated systemic design wherein the effectiveness of interventions can be reliably measured, observed, and replicated. This study provides a straightforward process that establishes what can be gleaned when a design

is systematically developed and reviewed by multiple levels (e.g., Tribal government, community members and stakeholders, institutional IRBs). That design includes culturally congruent explanations of its intent and purpose, wherein the bias is accounted for, multiple sources examine data and check for authenticity and robustness. This dissertation will add to the dearth of indigenous methodologies and contribute to further transformations for how indigenous methodologies can be designed and tribal knowledge sources serve as gatekeepers between institutions and communities.

This study and its findings serve as an empirical resource for clinical providers, stakeholders, and educators interested in mental health, vocational psychology, indigenous research design, or related topics as reflected by the needs of the communities it is intended for. From my academic experience, this study and its findings offers insights into research, clinical practice, and social methods for addressing gendered oppression and the gaps women face. The findings, in the context of its methodology, should be incorporated into research methodology courses where students can learn about other legitimate philosophies and methods.

To illustrate the impact of this approach, I will share my dissemination plan as māēc-āwāētok (Great Spirit, Creator) intended, a final piece of my additional contribution to indigenous methodology as a way to establish community-led research. In January 2024, I took a day off work to take my eldest son to a doctor's appointment at our tribal clinic. Sitting in the waiting room, I saw one of the woman elders who worked at the Menominee Language and Culture Commission when I was applying for my research review. Sitting in a clinic waiting room, I watched as several community members greeted her, and after her last hug, she turned and saw me, smiling, and said, “Oh, it’s good to see you!” We embraced in a warm hug, and when we broke free, she asked, “How is your paper coming along?” I said, “Oh, it’s going so

well, I could not begin to tell you how powerful and phenomenal the women's stories are!" The elder nodded in seriousness and responded, "We have to feast this story," I noticed she referred to the story with personhood, which planted the seed for Nētekaeh. She continued, "This is about women's empowerment and matriation. It has to be honored and feasted." I nodded emotionally, responding, "I would love that; it feels like the right thing to do." The elder gave me her contact information and invited me to reach out to her when I am ready to begin planning the feasting of this story.

In retrospect, I had planned to disseminate my data in a way that honors the community and allows them to be a part of recommendations and future directions of data, which feels most appropriate given that the research design and question are personal and deeply connected to my community and Native American women. Having taken the additional steps to request review, guidance, and approval from my council of elders allows for more people to see the benefit of this project and provide their input along the way. Finally, near the time I was preparing for defense, I was approached by a good friend and film producer whom I met as a result of my non-profit work, who offered to document this story on film, as he believes this story should be shared with a broader community. Regardless of the many ways I seek to share this story, I hope it contributes to healing for Native American women and the communities they love. Moreover, I am thrilled to imagine returning to community spaces where we can think about how fulfill the tasks of their story.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Indigenous data sovereignty is an agenda that "is linked with indigenous peoples' right to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions, as well as their right to maintain, control, protect and develop

their intellectual property over these" (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016, pg, xxii). Data sovereignty (e.g., statistical data) enables tribal nations the right of governance over their own people by ensuring their decision making in data from conception to usage of data, thus allowing Indigenous peoples to develop wellness, policy, and sustainable infrastructure (Walter & Suina, 2021). It is important to recognize that American Indians historically placed value on data and used such expertise to guide their lifeways (Rodriguez-Lonebear 2016), such as along seasonal and cosmological patterns. Yet, there is a paucity of data about Tribes that present legal and ethical challenges for them, including moving from data sovereignty to data dependence (Kukutai & Taylor, 2016; Rodriguez-Lonebear 2016).

While discussion about the importance of intergovernmental and institutional cooperation and collective action toward data sovereignty are not within the purview of this paper, it is within the author's desire to consider how this research (e.g., story) lends itself to advancing the data about vocation and wellness for women in tribal nations. The story provides a baseline definition which encompass women's claim that wellbeing is situated in complex factors related to culture, economy, patriarchy, and rooted in coloniality, and ought to be applied or considered to Indigenous and marginalized populations throughout the world. As an advocacy movement, data serves as a strategic asset which allows Tribal Nations to prioritize their political and cultural sovereignty (e.g., values and lifeways). In terms of nation-building, Indigenous research designs and securing data ensure statistics (and stories) are protected and useful. While it is critical for research with Indigenous peoples to develop meaningful relationships, tribes must co-lead efforts to ensure the tenets of their philosophy are respected and integrated (Tsosie, 2019). As Indigenous scholars, we have a duty to preserve sovereignty and share vital information with

Tribes about the importance of cultural sovereignty to leverage shared decision-making toward the interests and future of Indigenous people.

Tribal Critical Theory as an Avenue for Indigenous Research

Tribal Critical Theory (henceforth referred to as TribalCrit) examines the experiences of racism and the unique political status of Indigenous people in the U.S. along seven basic tenets, including grounding our understanding of concepts and measures within the role and history of colonization and implications for contemporary experiences (McKinley & Brayboy, 2021). The paradigm I selected, Omaēqnomenēwak Maēhnow Pemātesekan, follows aptly with the basic tenets of TribalCrit by grounding the understanding of vocational and wellness in the roots of colonization, stemming back 500 years ago. Thus, understanding how women's work roles are rooted in contemporary offshoots of colonization and racism helps us understand their perceptions and vision of a good life in the context of work and life roles. Using storytelling as a mode for theory development adheres to occupying a space in academia that allows theory and identity to emerge from the story through the lens of Indigenous people and scholars. Using the seven tenets of TribalCrit allows Indigenous scholars and allies to develop concepts in the context of community work where societal epistemologies and philosophies become the foundation of understanding from which to learn (McKinley & Brayboy, 2021).

The story in chapter four infuses cultural sovereignty (Coffey & Tsosie, 2001) as it encompasses and intersects with the metaphysical, spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of my experiences of spending time in a community of women and their/our stories. This spirit work is an anthem of resilience and intellectual influences of a cultural worldview grounded in a specific belief system that has existed since time immemorial. It lends to a significant evolution of TribalCrit in which gender undergirds patriarchal colonialism as a core concern of Indigenous

peoples and their sovereignty and right to self-determination. Future scholarship using TribalCrit should recognize that it does not serve as a standalone paradigm (e.g., such as Omāeqnomenēwak Māehnow Pemātesekan) but that it can guide toward following the paradigm of a given tribal context and Nation, offering central questions of issues to consider when engaging in Indigenous research (McKinley & Brayboy, 2021). Understanding TribalCrit as an avenue for collaboration within Indigenous research is an initial pivotal step toward self-determination and sovereignty for Indigenous Nations.

Study Limitations

While the teachings articulated in women's stories can be applied to various tribal communities or settings, it is important to note that tribal communities are diverse and have a socio-political history that informs their approaches to wellness. This research design is developed within a specific place and time. While its ethical perspective is guided and approved by multiple cultural knowledge sources, the understanding of the cultural philosophy in future studies may shift depending on the topic, researcher's positionality, and approach. As such, the philosophical stance can be adapted to another tribal context, where such an approach may have great appreciation and relevance. To that point, a process for developing this design was provided, including an analytic method that may be further adapted or used in congruence with a given community's practices and beliefs.

These stories are shared by Native American women in the Midwest, all of whom have direct ties to their indigenous communities but with varying degrees of cultural knowledge. Importantly, these women are navigating their lives with openness to healing, introspections, and embracing kinship opportunities. As such, there are many stories we do not know, particularly of those women who may not yet be ready to share about what they know and live(d) through. The

women who shared, provide insight based on their lived experiences, in turn, they speak compassionately and empathetically on behalf of those in their lives and community. In doing so, they assure us they do not speak for other women but are sharing in hope that their stories unify womanhood collectively.

Āyīsoh (the Way We Reciprocate): Researcher's Personal Reflections

We are currently in the season where we are learning to trust each other. This project sets forth a renewal of healing within me, and I have many moments where I ponder, 'Knowing women and their relatives will read this story, what is important for them to hear? The magnitude of responsibility was heavy. I shared one day with my advisor, Mindi Thompson, that these women's stories are difficult and emotional for me, as I see a reflection of myself and loved ones through their lenses. I explained that I find myself pausing frequently to lean into my grieving about what women, including my grammas and aunties, endure(d). Dr. Thompson eloquently responded, "I want to remind you of your words (e.g., noted in chapter three) and promises to yourself: "Constantly returning to Omaēqnomenēwak teachings will not only help me gather perspective but also caretake my spirit as the stories may be difficult for me to hear and process."

Indeed, I find myself returning to ceremony, kinship, and leaning on the support of my women guides. I recall moments of self-doubt, where my older kin, Jennifer K. Gauthier, commented, "I think you are doing this skillfully without having to explain. Your native readers will see it...you see that in old archives and historical texts. The ancestors left messages in things that only we could interpret." These words allow me to remember that my moments of self-doubt grow from my deep desire to honor the women, their/our ancestors, and our relatives through the weaving of their stories. Moreover, I know I am not alone in facing the emotional difficulty and triggering that occurred in this project. Sitting together with the women knowledge holders

tapped into a new learning process of trust-building between us. We have become so accustomed to intrapersonal coping and weathering alone, that trust along with feeling heard and valued for what is shared, is therapeutic. Putting these stories into the universe serve a greater purpose and make this work all the more powerful and our emotional connections palpable. And together, we are conquering the barriers which are meant to maintain division between our collective resiliency and strength.

Finally, I want to talk about the women who shared with me. While their tones in telling their stories are serious, given the seriousness of their situations, these women are also joyful and fun! Through our visits, we share many laughs. These are truly remarkable individuals who can, at once, consider all their relatives in the context of their lens while appreciating life's joy. We know humor is a useful trait that helps us remain humble in our healing. While it is difficult to witness their grieving, it is also a good balance to laugh together and share about each other's joys and passion. Also, every single woman is graceful, kind, generous, and powerful. I am writing this and reflecting in awe: there are 15 women out there who are making a difference for the next generation. What a wonderful thing to know! There are 15 women who are nourishing resilience and gifts of younger people - as their committed life work – what a difference they are making! Of particular note, for the two young women who represented our early autumn season, I was blown away by their wisdom and intellect. They are, without a doubt, a testament to the women who raised them. They demonstrate the critical role of Native American women's permanence in this world. To both of those young women: We are proud of you – you are representing us well, my girl.

Oskēh-Wa̱epeqtah (A New Beginning)

It is customary in our ways as indigenous people that after doing good work (e.g., discussing together what we learned from women's stories), we make an offering to an Elder, asking them to close our gatherings with words for a good departure. Therefore, to close this section, I will share a poem that I wrote in my in-between space, which reflects women along their seasonal journeys toward hope for their new beginning.

They say some things do not need to be shared.

But even in silence,

our emotions reverberate loudly.

Like the waters that push through the dam,

The flow into our sisterhood is swift and natural,

Our blood memories are stirring.

Here, we do not mourn for ourselves.

Our tears shout prayers to our grandmothers and our daughters,

do they hear us? Do they know we pray for them?

This is a place of healing.

When you put women in this place of safety,

We restore our ways of creating, shaping, and being.

Our tears fall,

and nourish the Earth.

They nourish our roots.

We come to know ourselves

through reflecting on what was told to us

by our relatives who are no longer with us,

and listening and learning from our relatives still here.

Over time, we see our reflection change

We look deeply and sometimes; we see our grammas.

When we look closely in her face, we see our aunties, they are smiling back at us.

Let us hear their voices, in unison, they cry:

"You have integrity and a voice. You are brave.

Now that you see..."

Our grammas always spoke up when needed,

They stood by us, always strong.

Now, their lives have nearly passed us by,

Do you hear her? Do you hear gramma?

She still prays for us.

She tells us she is proud,

She has confidence in us.

"You can do this, together," she says.

We must remember how she taught us

to carry on her ways.

Remember that gramma never scolded us;

her way of holding us accountable

was so loving and kind, that it was harsh,

Why wouldn't we want to follow such loving guidance and lessons?

This poem, in its entirety, was inspired by all the women who contributed to this story, their words are woven as one, just as they asked. Netaenawemakanak (all my relations), eneq.

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