From Resilience to Survivance:
The Life Journey of Justine Whitegull Archer

By

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A dissertation in practice submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education
In Educational Leadership
University of Washington Tacoma
Tacoma, WA
June 2026

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Program Authorized to Offer Degree: Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership

Abstract

This research study focused on the impact of settler colonialism, specifically as it relates to women who respond through heartwork, caring for tribal communities in response to the targeting of tribal community members through the disruption of traditional Indigenous roles. This was accomplished by: identifying resilience factors shared by Elders and family members in response to colonialism; examining resilience in the face of 21st-century social issues faced by Justine Whitegull Archer in her leadership and advocacy role; and finally analyzing the research findings to explore possible pathways and frameworks for moving from resilience to survivance. This research study uses a storytelling narrative and reflexive ethnography grounded in a Wažookį (family) worldview. Within an overarching refusal paradigm, a desire-based lens and framework served as a depathologizing approach, informing the transition from resilience to survivance. Through Indigenous research methods and methodology, emerging concepts included those related to Ho-Chunk ancestry, such as generational kinship networks and reciprocity, as well as Indigenous matriarchal concepts of egalitarianism and traditional Indigenous roles. The implications are that the use of Indigenous Ancestral Knowledges obtained through relationships with Elders and familial knowledge, interpreted through desire-based frameworks, can lead to the identification of tribal-specific resilience factors. The intent of this research study is to use identified resilience factors within carceral systems at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels.

Keywords: Indigenous matriarchy, heartwork, desire-based framework, ancestral refusal praxis, traditional Indigenous roles

Dedication

While the entirety of this dissertation is dedicated to my mother, I also dedicate it to those who helped me persevere through the hardest moments, in every conversation, every presentation, and every opportunity to share her with others on my own journey. When I doubted myself and was chained to my laptop day after day, year after year, I think of those who, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually, kept me going and held me down at home and at work throughout that time so I could complete this.

I dedicate this to my Native American Reentry Services family. Because of them, I am finally able to let go and let others help. On the two occasions I had to step away from everything, I saw them step into the leadership roles they had been working toward. I am so proud of them and honored that they stepped up to help me when I needed it most.

I dedicate this to my father, James Fortner Jr., and my brothers, James Fortner III, Osceola Fortner, and Asa Archer. I felt so loved by their encouragement. They were in my ear, supporting me, making me laugh when I didn't want to, and just cheering and reassuring me. I felt my father's concern in his urging me to take care of myself. I felt my brothers draw on their healed selves in their words of encouragement and comfort, and I love you all so much for it.

I dedicate this to my children, D'Asia Campbell, Adel Fortner, and Elijah Campbell, and my grandchildren, Xander Penkova, Aiyana Vargas, and Divine Fortner. I thank my daughters and son for literally taking care of me, acting as if *they* were the parents, and staying so close that they responded to my needs without me saying a word. And love and gratitude to my adopted daughter, Brenda Choi, who stepped in and took care of my home whenever I felt overwhelmed, pinagigi my girl. Xander, Aiyana, and Divine…you are my hearts, my happiness. I love you for the hugs, kisses, funny text messages, and the love and happiness of just being with you.

Lastly, I dedicate this to my husband, Jonathan Stevens. I love you so much. I have returned to school three times since we got married, and he has supported me every time. He took care of our kids on his own so I could focus on my studies. My work has been tough, with some years worse than others. He did not discourage me from it; he held me up. I know he is proud of me; he tells me all the time. Wa'iniginapsina for taking care of me while I committed my time caring for others.

Acknowledgements

This doctoral journey was incredibly powerful and healing, and I was blessed with the support of many. Pį̨nagigiwi to my tribe, the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, its Education Department, and to my Tega Francis *Miinąka* Rave Sr., Dr. John *Iinekimąąnį* Lee, and Jerod *Hokiwaigu* Stacy, three Hoocak speakers who helped me with the language. I raise my hands to the Muckleshoot Tribe for making a home for our cohort. Being part of an all-Indigenous cohort was an amazing experience, I cannot imagine doing this with anyone else. I thank our faculty and UW staff, for providing an experience that moved us from responding to and reacting to western experiences, to grounding ourselves in Indigenous Knowledges and Ways of Being from which we could engage our heartwork on our own terms. I also want to acknowledge the Native American Reentry Services board of directors for sharing this vision, creating the opportunity to conduct this research study, and pįnagigi Dr. Talley Monohon for your time, support, and encouragement.

The love and support I received from the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and NARS Elders humbles me, wonigixetewi. The Clan Mothers and Rita Gardner welcomed me with open arms, and their contributions were integral to this research study, bridging the past and present through humor and directness characteristic of Ho-Chunk matriarchs. With pride, I shared the knowledge the Native American Reentry Service Elders Warren Gohl, Joisky Caudill, and Laura Bluehorse-Swift brought to our relatives in the Iron House over the years. I love you all so much and can never thank you enough, pinagigiwi.

Lastly, I want to acknowledge my committee: Dr. Michelle Montgomery, who challenged me to be a stronger researcher and writer, and to stand in refusal; Dr. Carma Corcoran, who walked

beside me with gentle guidance and sisterhood throughout this journey; and Dr. Deirdre Raynor, who uplifted me with her words of encouragement and support.

Pinagigiwi, you all have done good for me, and I will forever be grateful that you chose to walk alongside me on this journey.

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Definition of Terms

Ho-Chunk

Aa hikiruti: “to raise somebody up; to grab someone by the hand and pull them along

Ciiporoke: Traditional Ho-Chunk housing structure

Cooranąąžįįga (Standing in the Blue, now commonly referred to as two-spirit)

Cųųwį: Your father’s sisters

Haaga: Third son

Hąąhewira: Moon

Hąąte haginąc: “To fast and seek a medicine”

Hanąąc Woiš’ak Wagikere: Giving respect to everyone

Heeną: Second son

Hi’ųnį: Mother, and your mother’s sisters

Hiinų: First daughter

Hiwapąnąs kere: Perseverance

Jaaji: Father, and your father’s brothers

Kunįka: Grandmother

Kųnų: First son

Mąą: Earth

Mąąka: Peyote medicine

Mąįxete: “Big knife” referring to white people

Mą’ųna: Creator

Nąąğį: Fourth son

Nąąnį: Your mother, and your mother’s sisters

Nąąnįxete: Big Sister

Nųųnų: Older sister

Teega: Mother's brothers

Tejącowįga (Blue Ocean Woman, now commonly referred to as two-spirit)

Waną'į mąąšją: "Strong mind" resilience

Wiihą: Second daughter

Dakota

ItkunzA: To be aligned with all (reciprocity)

Wowakisake: Resilience

Dakota Wicohan: Dakota teachings-Indian ways

Other:

Futurity: Referencing or in relation to future event or space

Honorary: Honoraries are non-Native participants within Washington prison Native American groups

Hoops: Term for Native American group within prisons

Iron House: term for prison used by Native's

Native: Term contemporarily used in Native American communities in reference to each other.

Red Road: Native American way of going through life in an Indigenous way

Relatives: "Relatives, brothers, and sisters" are familial terms used instead of "clients, felons, or offenders" to signify relationship and kinship

Wellbriety: To be sober and well

Whitestream feminism: Widely accepted feminist discourse based on the white middle class as it relates to their ethnic, political, capital, and investment interests and experience (Grande, 2003)

Hinįįkaragiwi, Introduction

Hanąąc hinįkaragiwi. Mąixete raašra Winona Stevens hįįgaire. Hoocąk raašra Pįįhimąąnįįga hįįgaire. Hoocąk hižą waa'ųaje eegi Hųųc hikiikarac hižą waa'ųaje. Hi'ųnį haara, Mąixete raašra Justine Whitegullga wanąğira. Nįoxąwąnį eja howaji. Hi'ąc haara James Richard Fortner Jr ga higaire. Mąnąąpe hižą hirešųnų Olathe Kansas eja howaji. Že'e eeja, waxopįnį seep wažookį wahaarašge eja howajiire. Tacoma Washington eja, spuyaləpabš mąąra eja haciaje. Wažookį wahaara, ciinąk hijąra hiisge waakicapwi. Schitsu'umsh ra nąga Colville howace ra nąga Quileute ra nąga Nimiipuu ra waakicapwi.

Greetings to you all. My English name is Winona Stevens, my Hoocak name is Walking Good. On my mother's side, I am a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin, I am Bear Clan. My mother is Justine Whitegull Archer from Black River Falls, Wisconsin. My father is James Richard Fortner Jr., a veteran from Olathe, Kansas, which is the home of my African American family. I live in Tacoma, Washington, on the lands of the Puyallup Tribe. Through my children, my family has relations with the Coeur D'Alene, the Confederated Tribes of Colville, the Quileute, and the Nez Perce tribes.

I respectfully begin this introductory chapter in Ho-Chunk and English. As you go into the preface, which is provided to give context about the relationship I had with my mother, it will be followed by a story, then the positionality and worldview from which this dissertation is grounded.

Preface

My mother, Justine Whitegull Archer, was a complicated woman. A Ho-Chunk woman, she came from a background of community and kinship, similar to that of my father, James Richard Fortner Jr. He was an African American soldier from Kansas, yet they both came from

families with religious backgrounds. Where my father's family was foundational in establishing the Church of the Living God in Olathe, KS, my mother's family was instrumental in sharing the word through Native American Church meetings across Wisconsin.

Later in life, she was known in her professional circles as a tough, no-nonsense "mama bear," whose resilience followed her survival of domestic violence. But those who knew her in her youth—the mother I remember—knew her as a lighthearted, easygoing, fun, laid-back, and ambitious person.

Memories of my mother are complex and diverse. She composed the soundtrack of my life during car rides to Milford Lake and trips between Kansas and Wisconsin. While my siblings and I are probably the only ones who remember her suffering from abuse, I also recall feeling proud of her strength and resilience despite our circumstances. I remember her asking me to promise to care for my three youngest siblings if anything happened to her, and how happy she was when we swam at the Gault pool.

When I became a mother, my parents had different ideas about the direction my life should take. While my mother's outlook was shaped by the family's recovery from her marriage to my stepfather and the challenge of starting over, my father's focus was on me building a foundation of home and financial stability by getting my finances in order for homeownership. He kept telling me, "Once you get your hands on that dirt, you keep it." In that way, I felt their visions for me colliding, even though both wanted what was best for our family. This only further strained my relationship with my mom.

Figure 1

James Fortner Jr. w/ daughter Winona Stevens

Things were up and down over the years, and then everything changed with the opportunity to attend a Mending Broken Hearts training by White Bison's Marlin *Makade Asin* Farley/ (White Earth Tribe) and Sharyl Whitehawk (Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibway Tribe). This experience sparked the motivation to address intergenerational trauma within our family. I started with counseling and establishing healthy boundaries for myself and my children. The shift in our relationship caused tension between us; there were times when both of us were right, or both of us were wrong. We eventually became estranged for several painful years.

My graduation from the University of Washington in 2012 broke the ice between Mom and me, and we gradually rebuilt our relationship. We found it easier to have a one-on-one connection, and we enjoyed seven years of closeness—a healthier, loving camaraderie I sorely miss. She accompanied me into prisons, being a mom or gaga to the relatives in the Iron House who did not have someone there during the annual powwows. We logged countless miles across Washington, with her hitting the thumbs-up on her favorite songs on her Billy Ocean Pandora station. My mother was hospitalized from the fall of 2018 until she passed away on Memorial Day in 2019. My sister Sylvia and I were on daily rotations; she was never alone during her hospitalization. The family came together in support of her, and that brought her happiness.

Figure 2

Justine Whitegull Archer w/ daughter Winona Stevens

The main purpose of this preface is to be forthright: my relationship with my mother was tough. Our relationship was not perfect; it was filled with love, frustration, pride, anger, comfort,

animosity, and everything that comes with family trauma and drama. Intergenerational trauma and abuse shaped our family and spilled into how we related to each other. We are not the only ones. Many have had family relationships complicated by pain, abuse, and trauma. Yet the love remains. Many with Native parents of a certain generation know and understand the experience of loving a parent after their trauma.

There is truth in the good and the bad of our love and experiences. My father told me healing is a matter of decision: there is what we believe and what we do. When healing is possible, do we maintain the status quo and hope for change, or step out in faith that our efforts will lead to healing? This dissertation is my offering to you of my mother's life lessons—not as a deficit-based focus on barriers, challenges, or trauma, but as teachings and understandings grounded in love, strength, giving, and ambition. There is healing in the truth and understanding of our mothers' journeys. I envision my mother's journey leading my grandchildren's grandchildren to be unable to conceive of our community's historic trauma, unable to grasp the impact of incarceration and abuse. We can use the strength of our mothers to transform families, communities, and systems from resilience to survivance.

Related Structural Barriers and Inequities

As I share my mother's life journey, it has been difficult to keep certain emotions at bay. In this doctoral journey, revisiting her pain and trauma has been painful; at times, the unfairness of what she went through still infuriates me in my grief for her. Putting on my academic hat, I was challenged emotionally in the telling of the barriers and inequities my mother experienced. I was drawn to desire-based decolonizing methods of refusal (Tuck, 2009, pp. 409-416) because "Desire-centered research does not deny the experience of tragedy, trauma, and pain, but positions the knowing derived from such experiences as wise" (Tuck & Yang, 2014a, p. 231).

Within desire-based research, there is acknowledgment of both the good and the bad in her life, including the pain and trauma she experienced. The truth of her journey is foundational to the healing needed by my siblings and our family, and it is this truth that compels me to share it so that her truth, even in pain, can benefit our people. This begins with a desire-based approach as a healing opportunity. Healing begins with the longing to acknowledge and reconcile past pain and harms, while at the same time finding knowledge, wisdom, and discernment from her life experiences.

An example of this approach appears in the story "How Waxopįnį šiišik Tested Heex Pįįwįga," which describes the harmful effects of the bad spirit, or Waxopįnį Šiišik, in this case the spirit of alcohol, on my stepfather, mother, siblings, and me. The spirit referenced is the spirit within alcohol, not a ghostly spirit. It is a contemporary use of a story figure as a healing methodology and for mental and emotional protection.

Listing statistical data and narrative details that portrayed survivors of domestic violence as victims kept leading to the urge to disconnect from the process. Instead, I positioned our family's survival story as a Ho-Chunk woorak to address my mother's experience with barriers and inequities. This enabled me to tell the story of my mother's and family's experiences inspired by oral traditions, helping me through the emotional challenge of writing by creating distance from tragedy, trauma, and pain while incorporating them into this research study. Telling it this way allowed me to include this painful experience, which eventually led to healing and forgiveness, while minimizing the risk of triggering.

How the Waxopįnį Šiišik Tested Heex Pįįwįga (Beautiful Swan Woman)

The Waxopįnį Šiišik had his hands full of messing with the lives of many; he found humor in this, but sometimes, some folks seemed to be just out of his reach. Heex Pįįwįga was

one of them, and what is worse, she was making her way in the world without falling into the addiction of his ways. So the Waxopįnį Šiišik bided his time until an opportunity presented itself.

Heex Pįįwįga was making her way through the world with her three children. She had lost a son, her Heeną (second son) Lee, but she persevered. A few years later, the Waxopįnį Šiišik weaseled his way into her life. He took the form of harm disguised as love through a young man traumatized by war. His trickery led her into isolation; she had given up her home, leaving her entire support system. Her small family was thrust into poverty and hunger, abandoned on a dilapidated farm with no food, running water, or ability to fend for themselves. The Waxopįnį Šiišik made Heex Pįįwįga entirely financially dependent on him, and throughout, she and her children experienced violence at his hands.

Figure 3

Heex Pįįwįga (Beautiful Swan Woman) in Black River Falls, WI, 1971

At the same time, the troubled young man the Waxopįnį Šiišik had taken over managed to fight his way through to show love to Heex Pįįwįga, her three children, and Nąąğiga and Wihąga, the two children they were blessed with. He showed his love through song, dance, and teachings. But inevitably, he would succumb to the Waxopįnį Šiišik. Despite all of this, even when she seemed defeated, Heex Pįįwįga had an undercurrent of strength that the Waxopįnį Šiišik could not seem to touch, no matter how hard he tried. Heex Pįįwįga had a gift. Her medicine was transforming challenges into strengths and harm into blessings.

Heex Pįįwįga was determined to get out from under the Waxopįnį Šiišik's thumb. As he became increasingly dangerous, she whisked Kųnųga (first son) away to safety. It broke her heart but in the Waxopįnį Šiišik's form of harm disguised as love, he violently hated any memory of love from before him, and in Kųnųga and Haagaga's (third son) faces he saw their warrior

fathers. Then Heex Pį̨wį̨ga began preparing, and when the Waxopį̨nį̨ Šiišik was passed out, she turned into a swan and, with her wažokį̨ (family), took flight to safety in the land of the Spuyaləpabš. They flew thousands of miles for almost a week over mountain ranges and deserts before finally arriving at the home of the warrior father of her oldest children. Yet the Waxopį̨nį̨ Šiišik was not done with her; he followed them and once again used harm disguised as love to trick her into returning. However, this time, Heex Pį̨wį̨ga did not let him have his way entirely; once again, she left another child, Hiinų̨ga (first daughter), behind for her safety. She also made Hinų̨ga promise that, should anything happen to her, she would ensure her siblings were cared for and had a good life. Hinų̨ga was angry at being left behind. She knew Heex Pį̨wį̨ga was in danger, and even with her three youngest siblings, she knew her hi'ų̨nį̨ (mother) would be alone.

Heex Pį̨wį̨ga kept using her medicine, the Waxopį̨nį̨ Šiišik kept closing doors, but she kept opening windows, so that she may fly out of them later. It took her a few years, but Heex Pį̨wį̨ga finally flew for the last time and was reunited with all of her children. The Waxopį̨nį̨ Šiišik gave up harm disguised as love but kept the tie to the young man through the spirit of alcohol. He took comfort in the invisible trauma ties he could still feel between himself and the wažokį̨. That was until one day, he could not feel them anymore; then, he was truly alone until he finally left his form for good and moved on, not knowing that it was forgiveness that severed his trauma tie to the wažokį̨.

Heex Pį̨wį̨ga nested in the land of the Spuyaləpabš. The time with the Waxopį̨nį̨ Šiišik took its toll on them all, and despite being removed from harm disguised as love, her children still struggled. So Heex Pį̨wį̨ga once again used her medicine. As she taught her children the medicine, she also shared how to use it with her big voice. The medicine she gave each was based on their individual gifts. Three children received the healing medicines to use with their

strengths: Hinųga’s was compassion, Haagaga’s was connection, and Nąąğiga’s was strength of heart. To her eldest son and youngest daughter, she gave medicines of might: Kųnųga’s was discipline, and Wihąga’s was heart.

Heex Pįįwįga’s time to walk on came, and she left behind medicine teachings with each of her children, teaching them to turn challenges into strengths and harm into blessings. Her children are using their medicine right now, which is why you are reading this story. Her wažokį grieved her loss, but Hinųga may have caught sight of her in a Wihąga, but that is not for you to know.

Positionality and Worldview Introduction

Originally, this dissertation focused on institutionalized racism within corrections and its impact on Native American religious freedoms. This focus goes back to my work with our relatives incarcerated in Iron Houses across Washington state. My loved ones have been affected by the criminal “justice” system, and I came to this work as a big sister, and to be a big sister to relatives who might need me. During a strategic planning session, the board of directors of the organization I founded, Native American Reentry Services, decided to include research through a doctoral program to inform our work and mission. This decision was made in response to the challenge of finding research, evidence-based practices, or peer-reviewed literature addressing intersectional issues related to incarceration, reentry, Native Americans, and healing.

Academic Journey

The shift of focus from carceral institutionalized racism to a healing platform was not academic or logical; it was my mother inserting herself into my coursework. As I moved deeper into the doctoral program, my mother gradually appeared in different assignments, discussion

boards, and presentations; assignments began with a focus on criminal “justice” systems and slowly shifted toward her.

My mom did not work in the criminal “justice” system. As she transitioned into retirement and as our relationship was healing, she began supporting the relatives in the Iron House and started going into the prisons with me. Her advocacy had always been community-based, focusing on domestic violence, fair housing, and other issues, and she used her voice to speak for those she felt were not heard. Yet as she became more involved in my work, she began supporting the Hoops by purchasing yarn, fabrics, and sewing machines to encourage their Red Road walk.

At some point, I realized this doctoral program was becoming a healing process for me, not my organization. My mother repeatedly inserted herself into my work, and my focus shifted from organizational and systemic goals to a more personal and professional platform. Throughout, I struggled to understand the change and to make the connection.

Healing Journey

The connection surfaced after Dr. Michelle Montgomery told us in class one sunny day to write until we were not angry anymore. That moment came when a 10-page assignment grew to twenty. After the anger subsided, I realized that pain had caused me to lose focus on what mattered most — healing, something I had discussed many times with my mom. In life, she believed my greatest success came from connections to our people, not from engaging with systems of oppression.

It was Dr. Billye Sankofa Waters who ushered in the next phase of my journey, helping me to make sense of a carceral healing focus in an educational doctoral program with my mother

in my ear with each assignment. Through community-grounded praxis, I connected the work of women in my community, like my mother, to the deep-rooted trauma. It is heartwork.

Heartwork

In our heartwork, we can "see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the planet" brown (2017, p. 36). The original intention of this dissertation remains the same, except that instead of addressing Native communities' systemic challenges with correction systems, the focus shifts inward to our community's heartwork; those whose profession is in heartwork, and those for whom heartwork is intended. Justine Whitegull Archer's life journey will provide an outline for telling the story of her resilience and strength as a Ho-Chunk woman, how she used them to address intergenerational and historical trauma, and the lessons to be learned in transforming challenges into strengths and harm into blessings. This is so her descendants do not have to live a life of constant, toxic resilience, but one in which survival is achieved through refusal of the western world, and resilience is built from love and healing. This research will inform the development of frameworks to identify paths of healing for Native men, women, and relationships at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels.

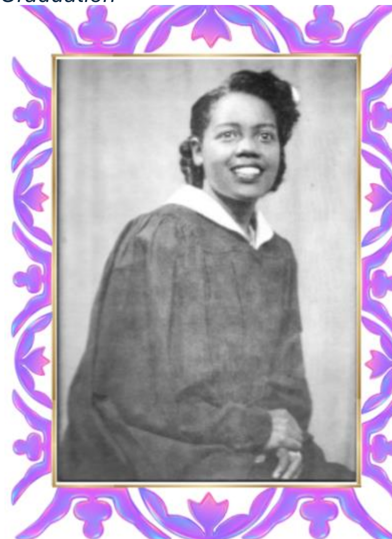
Heartwork Identity

My place in this world as a Black-Native woman centers the roles I carry within my family as a cuzak, Hinųk, Hi'ųnį, and Kunįka (granddaughter, daughter, mother, and grandmother). Raised by a Ho-Chunk mother and a Black grandmother, childhood prepared me

for the development of resilience and the fortitude to use it. That meant the ability to act on family needs and to take responsibility for my kin and community.

Figure 4

Mary Berry Person, Beauty School Graduation



As Mary Berry Person's granddaughter, my professional and personal life reflects the values of caring for others and being raised as a Proverbs 31 woman (King James Version Bible, 2007, Proverbs 31:10-31). As Justine's daughter, there was the expectation to model leadership, exemplify my people in the use of my voice (Ho-Chunk translates to "People of the Big Voice"), and demonstrate responsibility and accountability in family, work, and community. These teachings informed my heartwork in advocacy, shaping my roles as mobilizer, social worker, Tejąčowįga ally, and abolitionist healer for Indigenous prison rights. My mother would be excited to see the shift in my views on feminism and my identification as a Native feminist, having been exposed to Native and Black feminism as a decolonization struggle against misogyny and gender oppression while still fighting on behalf of both men and women in our communities (Ramirez, 2007).

Figure 5

Justine Whitegull Archer, High School Graduation

Originally, I was resistant to my mother's work in feminist arenas, unable to relate to it as anything more than a white woman's cause that ignored racial issues and advocacy to the exclusion of men, who, in

my case, represented the majority of Washington’s Native American incarcerated population that I worked with. Justine Whitegull Archer was a feminist. One of the last positions she held was as the president of the Tacoma chapter of the National Organization of Women. The compelling literature on Native and Black feminism makes me wish I had been able to share this work with my mother; she would have loved the readings of this academic journey.

Heartwork Advocacy

My mother taught my siblings and me to use our voices in advocacy. Ho-Chunk means “People of the Big Voice,” and we have each grown into our ability to use our big voices in advocacy for others. Advocacy is not easy; it means using your voice when it would be more comfortable to remain seated, not to raise your hand, remain silent when someone needs you to speak up, or walk away.

As a Black Native woman, it was a struggle to use my voice while working in corrections. I have been called racist names, had a custody staff member yell in my face trying to intimidate me, and had racist staff threaten my job for standing up for the Hoop. But my mother taught me how to carry myself. I earned the nickname "Trouble," developed a reputation for being mean, and still hear some folks are afraid of me. During tough days working in the criminal “justice” system, I called my mom from prison parking lots for comfort. Now, I call on her, my Nąąnį̨s, and my Ancestors, but I also use a gift she unknowingly gave me, her bear mask.

My mom’s bear mask strengthens me when advocacy gets overwhelming. The first time I used it, I was preparing for a meeting at the Washington Corrections Center for Women. One of the staff was notorious for getting away with racism, and despite what people think, I do not enjoy the fight. I want to come to an agreement, to work things out, a kumbaya moment, can we

all just get along? But that was not happening here. Walking in, I wondered what Mom would do if she were with me. Sitting in that parking lot, my eyes closed, mentally reaching out to her (she was in Tacoma), I saw a bear mask. So I slipped on that bear mask, and it worked. I have been using it ever since, and share it, and the story of how it came to be, with others as well.

This Indigenous educational leadership doctoral program has expanded my capacity to address aspects of my work that I had not been able to attend to until now. Conversely, this expansion has enabled me to narrow my focus on the different roles I carry in my heartwork: Black-Native feminist, Native social worker, abolitionist healer, reentry community mobilizer, Indigenous researcher, and now educator. The focus is not on the work that comes from these roles as professions, but on their tie to the origins of my professional journey, my family.

As a Black-Native feminist, my heartwork includes the men in my communities as an extension of the support I want for the men in my life. My social work path is informed by witnessing my mother carry both parents' roles and responsibilities, leading to heartwork that enables men to take their place within their families by healing trauma. As an abolitionist healer, reentry community mobilization involves establishing systems of healing that disrupt and dismantle the impact of colonization…in other words, taking care of the tribe.

Carceral Heartwork

I collaborate with others engaged in the carceral heartwork of advocating for healing opportunities and spaces. The Ho-Chunk Nation supported my endeavors, granting me the privilege of education and profession, which compelled me to accept harus kįį those I committed to. This privilege enables me to support and address micro-, mezzo-, and macro-level issues systemically from a social work lens, while creating responses that include Indigenous Knowledges, are informed by my profession, and are well-informed by my education. In this

way, I work with our people, for our people, which brings me back to the origins of my passion for this heartwork.

My heartwork's origins inspired *From Resilience to Survivance: The Life Journey of Justine Whitegull Archer,* with the eventual goal of unearthing frameworks to address how the criminal "justice" systems negatively affect our communities. For our Indigenous relatives living and working within this system, the Native American experience is challenged by laws and policies governing diversity, equity, and inclusion and cultural competency—they are ineffective. These policies were created to address a black-white binary, which creates a disconnect because they do not relate to issues of Native American sovereignty and rights, such as religious rights recognized in the American Indian Religious Freedom Act[1] of 1978 (Brayboy, 2005).

Examples of how this disconnect unfolds in present-day criminal "justice" systems—built upon the tenets of colonialism—include: paternalistic governing policies, self-proclaimed "ownership" of cultural practices, controlled access to and use of Indigenous Knowledges, the industrial complex profiting from chattel as low-wage earners, and the designation of people as a race rather than as sovereign citizens, leading to competition for race-based cultural program resources (Patel, 2015, pp. 33-40). To competently address conditions in my community, my heartwork calls on me to protect my community and all I hold sacred by challenging the system that allows these practices to thrive and cause harm. This protection of the community has practical implications for how we, those who advocate for and support our relatives in the Iron House, carry out our work.

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[1] 1978 Federal law protecting the religious and ceremonial rights and practices of Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians

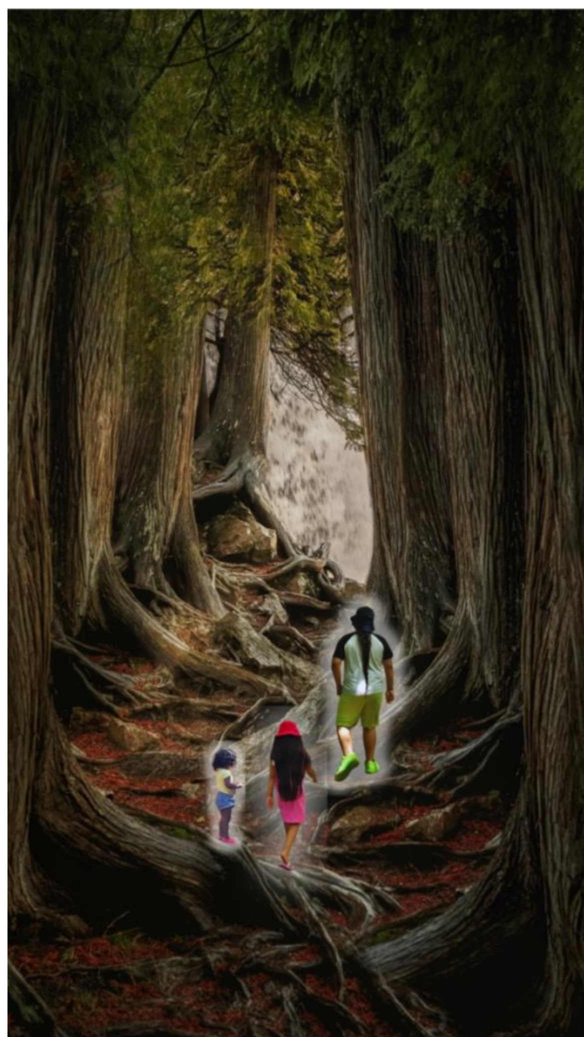
Under the Cedar

Carolyn Hartness, an Eastern Band Cherokee/Norwegian Elder whom I met through her reentry work at the Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, once asked me, "What is your medicine?" My medicine is, through compassion, turning challenges into strengths and harm into blessings. My medicine wraps me in relationship with relatives who have hit rock bottom, enabling me to make connection. I keep it safe by not focusing on a relative's past transgressions, but instead I nourish it by focusing on their Red Road walk and healing journey. The medicine I favor is cedar, and the cedar tree is a good representation of my medicine and its use in heartwork

Cedar trees, as a metaphor, remind me of the care grandmothers give to our families and community. Their branches, drooping under the weight of cedar, remind me of grandmothers in shawls, reaching out to wrap you in their embrace.

Figure 6

Great-grandchildren of Justine Whitegull Archer Under the Cedar



Cedar Canopy

Just as Grandmothers are protectors, metaphorically, cedar is also a protector, specifically the cedar canopy. Since I began working in corrections, the cedar canopy has represented my responsibilities and reciprocity as a community member. Out in the community, our children are exposed to historic trauma. But under the cedar canopy,

reinforced by the privilege and harus kį̨ of our Indigenous professionals, they are protected. Where our professional selves are the *who* of the canopy, the *how* is decolonization. Within my heartwork, decolonization is intended to disrupt and dismantle the traumas of justice-involved community members, with decolonization informing how. There are those of us who may not be associated with Indigenous Ways of Being through knowledge of language, ceremony, or other traditional means, but through its protection, we are part of maintaining and carrying it forward for our next generations.

From my canopy lens, the intersectionality of social work, Indigenous Knowledges, experience, and education aligns with Battiste's two pillars of decolonization. The first pillar is a collective understanding of education's role in colonialism and the unpacking of our histories to create an understanding of our current circumstances. With that knowledge, we are able to address the second pillar, "recovery from colonial impact, restoration of Indigenous people's identities, Indigenous people's languages, Indigenous people's experiences" (Datta, 2018, p. 12).

Beneath the Canopy

Chilisa, of the Botswana People, defines decolonization as "a process of centering the concerns and worldviews of the colonized Other so that they understand themselves through their own assumptions and perspectives" (Chilisa, 2020, p. 11). To begin to understand ourselves, we must have safe spaces to learn, heal, and share. Beneath the canopy is that space, where Indigenization, ceremony, language, and other Indigenous Ways of Being take place. This work is unfolding in Indigenous spaces across the globe. Yet we must be mindful not to neglect the first pillar. Healing through education about colonialism's impact is more than knowledge; it is foundational to recovery in the second pillar. It is comparable to forgiving in order to heal,

using education as we would forgiveness, as a method of refusing to allow colonialism to take up space, influence, distract, or derail us from Indigenization.

In the course of my prison work, I created an intergenerational trauma workshop followed by a discussion to gauge what the brothers who participated thought. Many of us forget that the relatives in the Iron Houses have limited exposure to online information or dialogues we take for granted, and they have had limited teachings about decolonization, intergenerational, or historic trauma. The conversations were intense, with many drawing connections between what they learned and how they saw it manifest in their lives. Many questions led to insights and revelations. One brother asked if any of this could be related to a recurring bad feeling he had, which he described as intense fear, shaking, a racing heart, and a sense that something was really wrong. He was struggling with anxiety attacks and had no idea what they were. The other brothers began sharing with him what he could do to help himself, both in the moment of the attack at the smudge pad and in ceremony at the lodge. He connected the workshop's knowledge to his personal experience (pillar one) and received support from his hoop, who shared how to find healing and comfort in mindfulness and ceremony (pillar two). Ceremony hits differently when a piece of your mind has been opened with knowledge. Without the knowledge of the first pillar, the second pillar is compromised.

Decolonization is on the lips of many across Indian Country, in academia, and in other spaces where oppression is discussed. Not acting on it does a disservice to our community because we are only talking the talk. It is important to be true to what decolonization actually is. It is uncomfortable. It challenges relationships. It is not a fix for unrelated forms of oppression. And it is only a metaphor when deconstructing colonialism as education, and Indigenization, are not part of the effort.

How colonialism was built, how it worked, and its results must be integral to the education process. “Settler colonialism is built on a triad structure of settler-native-slave,” and without acknowledging this triad, space is left for “settler moves to innocence, that problematically attempt to reconcile settler guilt and complicity, and rescue settler futurity” (Tuck & Yang, 2012). It worked through social and political systems designed to increase settler wealth through stolen Indigenous lands worked by enslaved Black hands (Arvin et al., 2013, p. 12). These systems stole not only land and people but also “knowledge as property; Land is the ultimate pursuit; Settlers…destroy and then later erase (via assimilation or cultural strangling) Indigenous peoples…Settlement requires the labor of chattel slaves and guest workers, who must be kept landless and estranged from their homelands” (Tuck & Yang, 2014, p. 812). At its foundation, decolonization is about the land; therefore, land is an element of decolonization discourse as well. All of these are elements that Indigenous professionals must use in our canopy of protection for our people.

Chapter 1: Waną'į mąąšją anaga Hagiği anaga Hanąkijik hoginąk nii’ ap, Resilience to Survivance

The impact that settler colonialism has had on Native American women and women of color is a complex, widespread, and intersectional issue to unpack. This study will focus on the Native response to settler colonialism, which led to loss of land, destruction, and erasure of Indigenous culture, and slavery to work the stolen lands (Tuck & Yang, 2014b). It is this version of colonialism that will be referenced moving forward unless otherwise specified. This dissertation will use the format of ethnography to explore this topic. The work is compartmentalized into three parts, the beginning of which will study Ho-Chunk matriarchal history in a search for understanding the source of resilience of Justine Whitegull Archer and the Ho-Chunk people. The second part will look at the role resilience played in her family's survival, and her heartwork in advocacy. Finally, we will explore the transformation from resilience to survivance, using Ancestral healing Knowledges gathered from the Elders participating in this research study. These Knowledges will enable future descendants to live in a world not in which they must constantly be resilient as a response to past harms and in preparation for future harms, but one in which a society creates a safe space from refusal, survivance, traditional roles, and teachings.

Chapter 1 examines the impact of settler colonialism on Native American populations as the backdrop for the life journey of Justine Whitegull Archer. It also explores resilience and survivance as responses to colonialism and draws on Ho-Chunk Knowledges, worldview, and teachings to inform what I call ancestral refusal practice. This term captures elements of the past, present, and future of Justine Whitegull Archer’s life journey and the dissertation’s structure.

The purpose of this research study concludes this chapter, describing how the outcomes of this dissertation can inform the development of Iron House and reentry concepts, frameworks, and programming grounded in a wažokį worldview. My mother's life journey—her ancestral inheritance, her life, and her legacy for descendants—will outline the framework for exploring the topics, themes, and challenges involved.

It is at the intersection of survivance and refusal that the gaze from which my mother's story will be told is determined. This is not a story based on pathology, victimry, or damage. Rather, this is desire-based research that uses refusal as a decolonizing method as foundational to envisioning a future from the perspective of survivance.

Why "From Resilience to Survivance"?

The word resilience in this title refers to both resilience informed by the strengths and knowledges my mother inherited as a Ho-Chunk woman, as a Bear Clan woman, and as a woman from a strong matriarchal lineage. It also refers to how she experienced resilience later in life, recovering from pain and trauma to prepare for the next onslaught. Many Native women in our community, coming from strong Indigenous backgrounds, also struggle with this toxic resilience that requires significant sacrifice at their physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual expense.

Figure 7

Survivance Spectrum

Moving from resilience to survivance speaks to what my mother wanted for her

grandchildren and great-grandchildren, a world in which they could survive the harshness of the world as many of us have experienced it, while also using the strength and ability to fight in resistance that she taught us.

Through my work in carceral settings, I witnessed the strength and efficacy of a Native presence in healing opportunities, such as ceremonies and programming that are inclusive of our Indigenous ways. Those practices are highly valued and sacred to our relatives in the Iron House, and survivance within this research study aims to develop foundations from which frameworks support survivance as programming and teaching opportunities for those relatives.

So why not from resilience to thrivance? I feel thrivance is the work of my descendants. My Gaga-Xete[2] Grace Whitegull Decorah would have struggled to conceive of the challenges our community faces, such as the enormity of the drug epidemic or the widespread gang violence. How could I possibly conceive of the challenges my great-grandchildren will face? I will not assume that I can anticipate and prepare them for what is unknown, many generations ahead, but I can prepare them with ancestral knowledge, teach them how to use it in refusal of colonialism past and present, and prepare them for survivance, using that ancestral knowledge to refuse, to survive, and to resist.

Resilience

The trauma response of resilience has become the norm within Native American communities as a result of intergenerational and historic trauma. As a response, it informs how communities move forward in healing while living in a western world founded in institutionalized racist systems. The American Psychological Association (N.D.) defines resilience as "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life

[2] Ho-Chunk for Great-grandmother

experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands."

It makes sense that resilience is a response to trauma, given the intergenerational impact of trauma on Indigenous communities, which has manifested in multiple forms of abuse, including: domestic violence, substance abuse, child abuse, and loss of life through substance-related accidents, overdoses, and self-harm, such as suicide and cultural erasure. The collective grief response to these traumas leads to "anguish, psychological numbing, and destructive coping mechanisms related to disenfranchised grief and historical trauma" (Yellow Horse Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998, p. 68-69).

Survivance

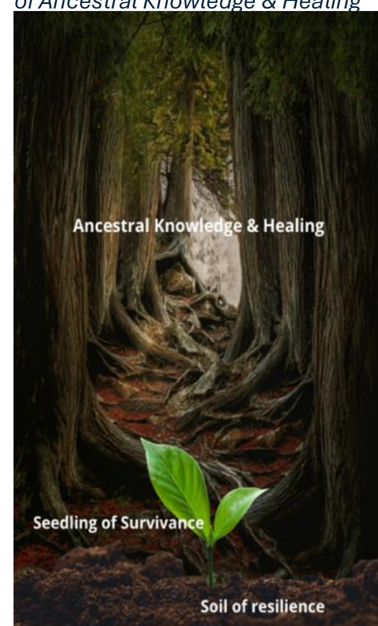
Vizenor described survivance as:

> A Native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty, and the will to resist dominance. Survivance is not just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition, and my sense of survivance outwits dominance and victimry (Vizenor & Lee, 1999, p. 93).

I appreciate that Vizenor does not offer a single definition of survivance but instead offers fluidity allowing for interpretation and depathologizing, with an emphasis on "the tease of tradition…outwitting dominance and victimry" while avoiding the tragic. In this sense, as a grandmother and in my heartwork for our relatives—either in or out of the Iron House—I relate survivance to my work in countering both intergenerational and historic trauma.

Figure 8

Growth of Survivance Under Canopy of Ancestral Knowledge & Healing



For the purposes of this work, survivance is defined as a relationship with our Ancestors from which we receive knowledge for healing. From our Ancestors, survivance is born of resilience, creating fertile ground from which we harvest hope and a vision for our descendants, nourished by ancestral knowledge and healing. It is a process in which our descendants, while standing on the shoulders of those who came before them, resist colonialism, while at the same time, the possibility of life untainted by its trauma is within their grasp. Here, the process blooms into a worldview in which our descendants not only survive but also thrive.

The term ancestral refusal praxis best informs this definition of survivance as a worldview that utilizes Ancestral Knowledges to ultimately develop refusal frameworks and methods targeting colonial systems. Within ancestral refusal praxis, mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual healing informs resistance, refusal, and survivance. So that we may utilize the legacy of our Ancestors for healing, we must learn to do so through the examples of resilience within our own matriarchal history, as I do here in the life journey of my mother Justine Whitegull Archer.

Ancestral Refusal Praxis

Ancestral refusal praxis is informed by the resilience, strength, and teachings of Ho-Chunk matriarchal Ancestors in the face of settler colonialism. It identifies inherent Ho-Chunk matriarchal Knowledges and Ways of Being (ancestral), draws on them for strength and resilience during our walk in life (refusal), and combines the Knowledges, Ways of Being, strength, and resilience in anticipation of planning and preparation for our descendants' survivance (praxis). The potential for ancestral refusal praxis is in educating ourselves in both Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Being and the impact of colonialism, to develop frameworks that decolonize and heal at micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels of our communities.

Ancestral refusal praxises are a necessary component of resistance and refusal, and are key to decolonization; otherwise, “what does it mean when the tools of a racist patriarchy are used to examine the fruits of that same patriarchy?” (Lorde, 1984, p. 106). It is in the individual use of ancestral protective factors that we begin to heal the community as a whole, “what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system.” (brown, 2017, p. 53). Along the healing journey, the ancestral-informed refusal and protective resistant factors and tools will work together to aid in identifying and disrupting systems of inequity.

Statement of Problem

"A nation is not conquered

Until the hearts of its women are on the ground.

Then it is finished,

No matter how brave its warriors

Or how strong their weapons."

Cheyenne proverb

What happens when we—as women—are defeated? When we are broken? When we no longer have the capacity to heal? Where many view resilience as a strength, as a positive attribute, women in leadership and heartwork find themselves in a constant state of toxic resilience—never a break in taking hits, with no time to recover for the next round they know is coming. All the while, these women are living and leading in environments that reinforce resilience as harm. The reinforcement of stereotypes establishes expectations of ever-strong, never-failing, and resilient matriarchs (Green, 2006), increasing reliance on this in leadership and heartwork, perpetuating harm.

Problem of Environment

The environment of colonialism in primarily white institutions (PWI) requires resilience when one's culture is not acknowledged or included in policy and practice; this creates a fertile field for conflict between western and Indigenous values (Fretts, 2016), which manifest in a multitude of ways, for example when microaggressions are used with racial pretense (Sue et al., 2007). Also, there is an assumption of fairness within the power of PWIs, enforced within a eurocentric dynamic of meritocracy, privilege, power, and influence (Styres, 2019).

As it relates to people of color within PWI's, cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion are housed where this "fairness" lives, while serving the interests of the predominately white stakeholders within. There is no equity or equality in cultural competency if it is just a tool to manage diversity (Sakamoto, 2007) and if "everyone being the same and being treated the same" is the goal (Carnes, 2013, p. 44).

The Native American experience has witnessed cultural competency, diversity, equity, and inclusion, aligning our interests with those of other cultures. This has led to the categorization of Native Americans as part of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (or BIPOC, as it is commonly known) groupings without acknowledgment of sovereignty. This, in turn, supports the tendency to mischaracterize Indigenous and sovereignty issues as cultural (Brayboy, 2005; Sturm, 2019), creating challenges to sovereignty and to advocating for our communities.

Problem of Resilience

Resilience as an anti-colonial response is not a bad thing; it is a part of survival. However, with the disruption of the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Knowledges, resilience has become toxic, leading to a disruption in the traditional roles within our societies as well. Colonialism has fueled resilience by disrupting women's roles within most Indigenous

communities—which are traditionally along the spectrum of matriarchal or egalitarian–while changing men’s roles to align with western patriarchal worldviews. In the life journey of Justine Whitegull Archer, toxic resilience was a survival tool for women, as experienced by Justine, her daughters, and granddaughters. It was also a way of fighting stereotypes and role disruption, as experienced by her sons and grandsons. The present-day experience of many men and women, like my mother, sees resilience not only as toxic but also without relief.

We now have women entering professions that address the trauma and disruption in our communities, be it through education, social work, law, or other fields that serve people (Bouchrika, 2025). Taking this into consideration, we should ask, how is resilience experienced by women whose profession and heartwork addresses colonialism’s impact on our communities? How is resilience experienced by men whose struggle with self-efficacy is founded in the disruption of their traditional roles as Indigenous men?

Problem with Acclimation

Exposure to and assimilation into western society have led to the acceptance and normalization of new role norms. We have become increasingly familiar and comfortable with western-defined roles that have taken the place of what made women, children, and Teją́cowįgara sacred. Often, these roles are based on stigma and stereotypes. Women in leadership experience workplace oppression when microaggressions are used with racial pretense (Sue et al., 2007, pp. 30-31). Our young men grow into adulthood with messages that reinforce stereotypes and stigma about who they are as warriors because patriarchal and Eurocentric society and culture have tainted our men's worldviews (Innes & Anderson, 2015).

Leadership in Native communities—and other communities of color—are challenged by heartwork when the acceptance of stigmas and stereotypes leads to violence in many forms. As a

mother, Justine Whitegull Archer struggled with the infiltration of gang life and the criminal "justice" system into her family. Oppression and violence go hand in hand with the experience of the Iron House, leading to high recidivism rates in our communities. Her experience mirrors that of many in Tacoma's urban Indian population.

Despite only accounting for 1.9% of Washington's population, Native American men and women recidivate at a rate of 45.3% and account for 8.9% of those incarcerated within prisons or in custody under community supervision (Tribal Relations, 2021). The cycle of stigma, stereotypes, oppression, and violence challenges those whose heartwork is in this area, and those whose lives are caught up in the cycle as well.

Developing a decolonization approach to respond to these challenges depends on leadership that can reintegrate Indigenous norms and values, planting the seed for the renewal of traditional roles. But again, this is where resilience comes into play. For women in leadership, heartwork relies on how resilient they are—whether in health or toxicity. Either way, the pressure to maintain healthy or toxic resilience is immense, especially if their heartwork requires them to sustain when they are positioned to influence change within our families, communities, legislation, and policies.

Problem of Hearts on the Ground

Currently, Native American women are increasingly in leadership positions representing tribes and their people. In 2015, 20 percent of tribes were led by women. Native American women lead within our communities, education systems, organizations, and criminal "justice" systems, and they have overwhelmingly dominated in acquiring leadership positions in Native nonprofits (Fox et al., 2015, p. 82; Foxworth, 2016).

This is not new, however, in the context of the larger patriarchal society in which we live. Women in leadership are not given the respect and reverence they once were, as demonstrated by common workplace experiences such as exposure to misogyny, sexism, and unfair work and labor practices, and intentional race-related microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007).

Resilience should be a strength, not a backup plan that requires the sacrifice of women. With so many women in positions supporting Indian Country, we are in a perilous situation if the norm is for leaders to struggle with healing and rely on resilience to get by day-to-day. At the micro-level, we witness the impact on families when the hearts of its matriarchs are on the ground. Our families struggle and fall apart, and when the familial building blocks of our communities' struggle, our nations struggle, and we as a people struggle. This is how we fall to the western mainstream—whitestream—society. This is how we lose our Indigenous ways of knowing and being.

Purpose of the Research Study

In response to the previous statement of problem, this study proposes to generate a dissertation utilizing a timeline to guide the use of Ho-Chunk Indigenous Knowledges and ways of being. Ho-Chunk resilience responses, past and present, will be analyzed in relation to the challenges posed by settler colonialism and to resilience and healing, with the potential to transform toxic resilience into healthy resilience and to move from resilience to survivance. This will be viewed through the lens of how colonialism has disrupted traditional roles within our communities.

Justine Whitegull Archer was a Ho-Chunk woman and a proud member of the Bear Clan. Her life stages included her childhood in Ho-Chunk communities in Wisconsin, her time as a military wife and mother, her transition to single parenthood, her experience as a survivor of

domestic violence, and her work as a domestic violence advocate. The idea for an ethnography based on my mother's life journey was motivated by the strength and resilience she demonstrated in the face of social barriers and societal issues. Inspired by my mother's journey, I endeavor to offer discourse about those on both the giving and receiving ends of the heartwork being done in our community. A depathologizing approach will center the truth of who we are, countering what the western gaze seeks, and ensure that those reading it know that oppression is western history and that resistance is ours.

Research Goal

This research aims to advance the use of Indigenous Knowledges as a healing methodology and to demonstrate methods of specific tribes, in this case the Ho-Chunk people, and their past and present matriarchal resilience. Three research questions were developed, based on the past, present, and future of ancestral and matriarchal knowledge and healing.

The first objective addresses the research question "What is my mother's legacy as a Ho-Chunk woman?" by identifying resilience factors used by Ho-Chunk Ancestors in response to settler colonialism. This will be answered through a critical analysis of existing Ho-Chunk and Indigenous Knowledges, as well as Knowledges gathered from the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and Native American Reentry Service Elders. These Elders are a testament to their ancestors' strength and resilience and have served their respective communities by teaching those same strengths and resiliencies.

Secondly, my research will answer the question "What is the wholistic[3] 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?" by examining the use of resilience, how 21st-century social issues affect the community, and leadership responses. How will knowledge

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[3] The use of the word wholistic—as opposed to holistic—is inspired by Absolon's wholism theory, which considers "time and space: the past, present, future; directions and doorways of life" (Absolon, 2010, p. 75).

gleaned from the Clan Mothers and NARS Elders align with the matriarchal professional and personal response to familial (intergenerational) and community (historic) trauma? An analysis of family commentary and the societal issues faced by Justine Whitegull Archer will provide insight into the resilience that sustained her in both her family and her professional heartwork.

Lastly, these research findings will be examined to determine their use in formulating pathways from resilience to survivance, thereby addressing the research question, "How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?" Indigenous Knowledges of the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and the NARS Elders will contribute to the formation of these pathways.

Research Vision

Survivance is an intergenerational connection to an individual and a collective sense of presence and resistance, expressed through personal experience and the word (or language), particularly through stories. In Native communities on this continent, the knowledge of survivance is shared through stories (Vizenor, 2013, p. 107).

Vizenor's refusal to offer a single definition of survivance encourages dialogue about definition (Vizenor, 2013, p. 113), leaving room to apply and incorporate it into our own visions of survivance. My vision for this research is that this dissertation will serve as a foundation for the next stage of my work with our relatives in the Iron House. In addressing limited access to Indigenous methods of healing and knowledge within correctional systems, Native American Reentry Services envisions the applicability and diverse use of this research. At the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels, this research has the potential to inform the creation of tools and frameworks for healing and survival. Establishing frameworks grounded in Ancestral Knowledges to inform, decolonize, and create healthier systems will promote healing of the mind, body, and spirit.

I also envision others following me on a journey of looking back to our Ancestors, looking beyond experiences of trauma and toxicity, and using their teachings and knowledge; in this way, we will be gifting this forward to our descendants. This could be done through the creation of a template others may view as a guide to a journey of self-discovery, using their families' and tribes' stories to give structure and form to the transition from resilient to thriving generations for our descendants.

I envision my own family surviving and resisting with the gifts left to us by our Ancestors, developing a relationship with them, and using resilience to cultivate fertile ground from which we harvest hope and a vision. As our descendants move forward in survivance, I pray they walk with kin, carrying forward a legacy of Ho-Chunk and African American culture and values.

My vision is to create a thorough process to support the use of a desire-based approach. The use of my mom's story is inspired by Ho-Chunk oral traditions, which demonstrate experiences of struggle, challenges, and pain while also informing wisdom and discernment. This approach is respectful of my mother's story and also of those who share their experiences through listening engagements in this research study, ensuring that their contributions will not be fodder for those who would look at this dissertation with interest only in the painful parts of the experiences of the folks that are captured in this.

Chapter 2: Wąąkšik Woiperes Stoo wahii, Gathering of Indigenous Knowledges

Chapter 2 begins by explaining the development of the theoretical frameworks, which, together with the three research questions, led to the use of matriarchal, settler-colonial, and refusal theories. Matriarchal theory examines works that explore Indigenous matriarchy, feminism, and womanhood. Settler-colonial theory examines the disruption of Indigenous gender roles and the toxic response to that disruption. Finally, refusal theory examines elements of refusal, survivance, and emergent strategy to inform works that lead to Iron House and reentry concepts, frameworks, and programming that center the survival and resistance of high-risk relatives involved in the criminal "justice" system, whether on the giving or receiving end of heartwork.

The western academic approach to gathering knowledge through scholarly research would be insufficient to meet the goals of this dissertation. More than a review of existing literature, Indigenous research requires a diversity and breadth of sources. A critical component of this collection of Indigenous Knowledges is its ability to enable the targeted audience—the relatives who have experienced the Iron House—to feel confident in their ability to critique, argue, and defend using this as a resource. I hope they see this gathering of Knowledges as an acknowledgment of their experiences, Knowledges, and hopes for their futures.

If this collection of Indigenous Knowledges were a story my Ancestors told, its title would be "Hanąąc Woiš'ak Wagikere," or "giving respect to everyone." Respect for our Ancestors of the past by acknowledging their knowledge and wisdom as Ho-Chunk people; respect for those who struggle to live and do heartwork in our tribal communities and home; and respect for those who give us hope by maintaining our traditions and ceremonies.

To address the problems in our environment, including toxic resilience, acclimation to western culture, and the hearts of our women in leadership from the ground, the goal of this collection of Indigenous Knowledges is to identify existing research by Indigenous researchers and writers related to the criminal "justice" system, incarceration, institutionalized racism, colonialism, and Indigenous ways of being and methodologies. The relevant theories—matriarchal, settler colonial, and refusal—capture the factors that inform the makeup of the canopy of traditional protection represented by cedar trees and will create a bridge between theory and practice, between research and healing.

Theoretical Framework

The Hi'uną Hojikere Eja Matriarchal Theoretical Framework is created to understand the history and current expressions of matriarchal strength among the Ho-Chunk. Hi'uną is the Ho-Chunk word for mother, and hojikere means "beginning." The name draws inspiration from Göettner-Abendroth's definition in her research on Indigenous matriarchal communities worldwide.

There are similarities in matriarchal social elements between the Hochungra and societies that identify as matriarchal. However, the Hi'uną Hojikere Eja Matriarchal Theoretical Framework will operate from a refusal perspective. Rejecting the western understanding of matriarchy and feminism removes both the distraction of viewing matriarchy as the rule and dominion of women, and of feminism as a movement that centers the white experience and does not revere the identity and role of motherhood.

Instead, this research study focuses on Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Knowledge informed by Hi'uną and Kunąka teachings shared by the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and relatives of Justine Whitegull Archer. The strength and resilience transferred generationally to the relatives who

took part in this research study have been organized into a list of resilience factors that have kept the Hochungra people strong for generations. This research study is also influenced by the works of Ho-Chunk women, such as Drs. Angel Hinzo and Reyna Ramirez, along with Sunshine *Gišįnįšįnįxjį* Thomas-Bear and Gayla *Mą̄xipį̄* Whitewater, who are the founders of the non-profit Hisgexjį Horak.

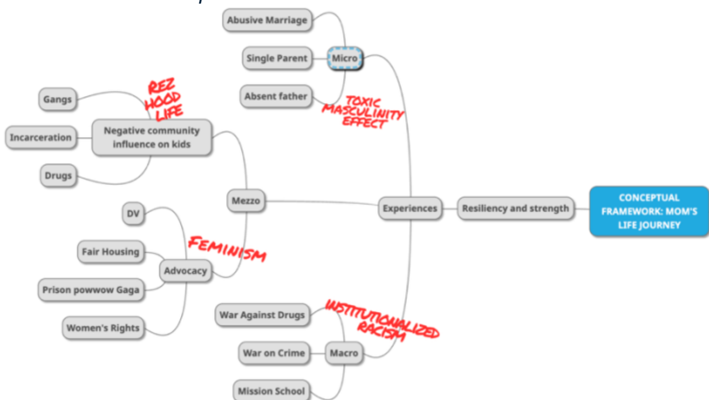
The theoretical framework development began with mind-mapping Justine Whitegull Archer's life experiences based on the research questions of Justine and her tribe's past, how she walked through this world, and what the lessons of her past and life leave for her descendants and the communities she loved through her heartwork. Ultimately this led to the development of a framework that identified three theories. Viewed from a paradigm of past, present, and future, this theoretical framework is in alignment with the past present and future lens of the research questions. The theories identified are matriarchal, settler-colonial, and refusal theories. These theories were identified the following themes based on Justine as a Ho-Chunk woman, her role as a mother and community advocate, and grandmother: toxic masculinity effect,

Figure 9

Development of Theoretical Framework through Conceptual Framework Mind Map 1 of 2

Figure 10

Development of Theoretical Framework through Conceptual Framework Mind Map 2 of 2



rez/hood life, feminism, institutionalized racism, sacred women/notion of women, BIPOC women roles and stereotypes, and 7 generations.

What is my mother's legacy as a Ho-Chunk woman?

This question calls for an approach that identifies and understands the innate foundation of our resilience and strength. A gap in the literature exists regarding the documentation of Ho-Chunk matriarchal teachings and knowledge, largely due to the practice of oral traditions. By not putting certain things in writing, Ho-Chunk Knowledges are kept safe from those it was not intended for. Matriarchal theory offers an opportunity to study other Indigenous cultures to identify commonalities that might shed light on Ho-Chunk matriarchy. This research study will draw on prior research on Indigenous matriarchal social structures to identify commonalities with Ho-Chunk worldviews and social structures. Research will also focus on Indigenous worldviews of the sacredness of women as a concept to support the theory.

What is the wholistic 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?

There is a commonality in how intergenerational and historical traumas have manifested in Indigenous communities, and it can be found in colonialism. Arvin et al. (2013) define settler colonialism as “a persistent social and political formation” (p. 12). Its foundation is the settler and colonizer seizure of land, the destruction of Indigenous peoples and cultures on the land, and the use of slave labor to work the land (Patel, 2015; Saito, 2020; Tuck & Yang, 2014). Its impact spans time and can be tied to the social ills experienced in Indigenous, Black, and other communities of color today. These social ills are being tackled by leadership through the heartwork of the professional women of the community and are experienced through the disruption of traditional Indigenous roles.

By identifying the origins of the issues we see today as structures, in that "settler colonialism can be described as a structure not an event, as much of the past injustices are unaddressed and take on different forms" (Montgomery et al., 2022, p. 46), we can take steps of refusal to combat its harm by developing frameworks and programming that exercise refusal. This is key to addressing issues that might not normally be recognized as colonialism. If we look at the structure of colonialism as a mindset, how are people unknowingly demonstrating a colonized mentality?

We have relatives in our communities who commit violence in the name of being a warrior, when our warriors were really intellectual, caregiving, and demonstrated love, care, and teachings, with violence a last resort. Colonized religious zeal is displayed by queerphobic community members when our Tej\u0105\u0301cowi\u0328ga and two-spirit relatives were once honored and revered. We have too many relatives who have experienced the Iron House and have adapted to, and become trapped in, an institutionalized mindset. This is the achievement of the goal of severing men from their families and communities after centuries of intentional family and community destruction. Addiction is a form of colonization, being trapped in that pain instead of experiencing the pain of sacrifice in ceremony and for our people. If we look at the structure of colonialism as a mindset, we will have a better understanding of the heartwork challenges of Indigenous women in leadership.

How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?

The rationale for using refusal theory to address this research question is to identify Indigenous resilience factors and other strengths that have supported healing in the past against colonialism. How do refusal and recognition theories operate in decolonization efforts? In social work, recognition's goal of reconciliation is at odds with advocacy. How do you negotiate the

humanity of those you are there to serve? Refusal, however, does not seek inclusion, and part of what we are refusing is being led or tempted by offers of acknowledgment and inclusion (Grande, 2018). Reviewing the literature aims to deepen understanding of where social work, refusal, and decolonization intersect, or do not intersect, with carceral concerns.

Survivance offers futurity to the act of refusal; it uses the sacredness of our Ancestors in survival and resistance while walking in strength and resilience. From a social work perspective, the elements of survival, resistance, and survivance have potential for framework development when done collectively with the people they are intended to benefit. Where some may feel "it does little to accentuate the value and contribution of Native people today" (Baumann, 2023, p. 2), survivance is attractive to carceral research because many of our relatives are still fighting for survival and resisting within systems many of us do not experience.

It is expected that emergent strategy may provide a vehicle for furthering the development of frameworks and programs through its concepts of fractals, spiraling, healing, and organizational transformation. Of particular interest is its alignment with White Bison's Wellbriety Movement. The interconnectedness between the seen and unseen worlds and all around us is an Indigenous worldview that is foundational to emergent strategy.

Matriarchal Theory and Paradigm

Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines matriarch as "a woman who rules or dominates a family, group, or state, specifically: a mother who is head and ruler of her family and descendants". This definition is sparse; it lacks depth. The second half of this definition frames matriarchy as the opposite of patriarchy and offers little insight beyond a woman's role as a position of authority. In the first half, the "woman who rules and dominates" fails to capture relationality except as a figurehead. It fails to capture the sacredness of women as understood in Indigenous cultures.

This research aims to identify teachings on the sacredness of women and to understand how our matriarchal Ancestors lived in a world where women were respected, revered, and honored (Göettner-Abendroth, 2012; Göettner-Abendroth, 2023; World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, & Göettner-Abendroth, H., 2009; Quinless, 2022, p. 4; Göettner-Abendroth (2023), referenced in much of the available literature, developed a matriarchal paradigm and theory by first clarifying the definition of matriarchy as “in the beginning, the mothers” while taking pains to point out that matriarchy is not the opposite of patriarchy, so as not to be confused with “dominance or rule of the mothers” (p. 1-2).

The 2003 and 2004 First and Second World Congress of Matriarchal Studies included existing matriarchal societies across Asia, Africa, the Americas, and the Pacific that still function under their ancestral matriarchal patterns and traditions. Indigenous matriarchal societies exhibit egalitarian social mores and values, and gender value complementing reciprocity (WCMS, 2009, p. 20).

Within matriarchal theory, the multiplicity of matriarchal societies and cultural influences shape economic, relational, political, and cultural life. Matriarchal societies are characterized by strong economic autonomy and influence within a gifting economy. At a more local level within gender-egalitarian communities, matrilineal kinship refers to matrilineality and matrilocality, or kinship through the line of mothers and residence with or near mothers. It is also associated with a politically egalitarian society based on consensus and a cultural worldview that holds womanhood as sacred (Göettner-Abendroth, 2023, pp. 1, 6; Grande, 2015, pp. 241-242).

An example of reciprocity and kinship in practice today, even within patriarchal societies, is the worldwide support for Standing Rock’s Sacred Stone Spirit camp in 2016 and 2017. Indigenous communities from across the globe traveled to support the Standing Rock Sioux

Tribe of North and South Dakota in its fight against the Dakota Access Pipeline. Relatives who came to the Lakota front lines included the Māori, Hawaiians, Tibetans, Japanese, Sami, Taino, Aztecs, and African Americans in diaspora, many of whom supported the Black Lives Matter movement. The connection of all these relatives through Mother Earth is a testament to Indigenous relationality and interconnectedness that persists to this day, even in countries dominated by settler colonialism and patriarchy (Brammer, 2016; Grube, 2016; Hayes, 2016; New Mexico Political Report, 2016; Whittle, 2016).

It is heartwarming to see the commonality and relationality among Indigenous peoples across the globe. “The laws that govern Indigenous peoples were recognized and embraced by each citizen as the basis for mature decision making ... These laws were rooted in the social praxis and experience of each nation” (Maracle & Kamboureli, 2015, p. 142).

The Structure of Matriarchy

There are many similarities between Native matriarchal systems across Turtle Island. “The knowledge held by Indigenous women is lived and embodied, is a process of sharing social life, histories, economic, and political practices” (Kermoal & Altamirano-Jiménez, 2016, p. 10). This commonality was documented in Göettner-Abendroth’s development of a matriarchal paradigm and theory. She identified four characteristics of global matriarchal societies across economic, social, political, and cultural worldview and spiritual levels (Göettner-Abendroth, 2012, p. xxv; World Congress on Matriarchal Studies, 2009, p. 21-24).

The economic level is defined by reciprocity and the gifting culture, in which kinship establishes relationships and diplomacy through resource mutuality, creating a balance in which gain and accumulation are not part of the economy; rather, they are gifting and mutual aid.

The social level is based on the centrality of motherhood as the defining force behind societal structure, including matriarchal lineage, belonging to matri-clans, kinship, and clan-houses. Examples include the common practice of shared mothering among sisters and the close relationship a person has with their mother's brother, who are honor-bound to them and their mothers (Göettner-Abendroth, 2012, p. 11). Men's roles, rights, and responsibilities lie not with their biological children but with their mothers, sisters, and their sisters' children.

The politics of matriarchal societies is driven by consensus within egalitarian societies, informed by all-inclusive decision-making, kinship, and reciprocity. This is true at the micro-, mezzo-, and macro-levels across villages/tribes, councils, and regions, and it supports and is supported by the mutuality of a gift-based economy.

A matriarchal worldview, encompassing the spiritualities and cultures of matriarchal societies, is most commonly characterized by reverence for our Ancestors and the role they play in our lives, as well as by the inclusivity of sacredness and respect for all life and elements found (Absolon, 2010). Across Grandmother Earth, "each woman and man, each plant and animal, the smallest pebble and the biggest star. In such a culture, everything is spiritual" (WCMS, 2009, p. 24).

Indigenous Matriarchal Systems

Refusal in Indigenous research creates a situation in which information shared through oral traditions is not documented in writing, which is what western research and literature reviews require. There is also the challenge of interpreting the bias, intent, and comprehension of past non-Native researchers. Through collaboration with Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and the NARS Elders, this research is enriched by their contributions during talking circles and listening engagements (Absolon, 2022, pp. 234-241).

Contrary to the prevalent view of what matriarchy is, the matriarchal paradigm is not an extension of western feminism, which is rooted in Eurocentrism and settler colonialism. Rather, it is a vision of a non-patriarchal world, an egalitarian society in which both men and women participate, inclusive of Indigenous cultures, matrilineal, and with an economic distribution system that falls under the purview of women in power (Göettner-Abendroth, 2012, p. xix-xx; 2023, p. 7).

Eurocentric concepts and understandings of matriarchy and women's standing in Indigenous communities are superficial. The western lens values women based on attractiveness, servitude, and caregiving, which does not lend itself to the inclusion of Indigenous and Black matriarchy and feminism. It is because "traditions enable Indigenous peoples to draw upon a reserve of ancestral knowledge that inherits what whitestream feminism has been unable to install-a pervasive understanding of woman as power" (Grande, 2015, p. 242). A demonstration of women's power can be seen in the history of Native women and our connection to the land. Among the Ho-Chunk, women's stewardship of the land, both in responsibility and as landowners, was considered progressive because Ho-Chunk women kept land whether they were married or not. This was unknown in settler communities. This speaks not only to a right of property but also to an understanding of women's responsibility toward Grandmother Earth.

Paula Gunn Allen (1986), a Laguna Pueblo and Arab-American woman, captures the pre-colonial influence of matriarchy in tribal societies through the development of "elaborate systems of thought that included science, philosophy, and government based on a belief in the central importance of female energies, autonomy of individuals, cooperation, human dignity, human freedom, and egalitarian distribution of status, goods, and services." This influence supported Indigenous peoples across Turtle Island in many of the ways we still revere today (pp.

211-212). The foundation of these systems is a centered space in which relations and connectedness to each other and Earth are the basis for our Indigenous principles, values, and traditions that define us (Grande, 2015, pp. 207, 241–242).

Indigenous communities traditionally viewed women through the lens of life-giver, or, as Grande (2015) describes it, "a woman-centered sense of the universe". We see the earth as a grandmother or mother, and many Native people relate to the moon as female. It is this woman-centered understanding that informs authority:

> The structure of authority was an extension of the above belief systems. Jurisdiction between men and women was parceled out and importance with a balance we saw in the natural world. Men had jurisdiction over the external world and so far as they promoted and entered balance engagement of the natural world. Women had jurisdiction over harvesting of food and so far as they nurture the balanced engagement of the foods. (Maracle & Kamboureli, 2015, p. 146)

Women's authority informed the demonstration of respect and reciprocity for Grandmother Earth. It is embedded in our responsibilities and in how we align our cycles with hers; our responsibilities regarding harvest, respectful agriculture, goods distribution, and respect for those who sustain us (the four-legged) and those we live with (the elements and life in our environment) (Maracle & Kamboureli, 2015, p. 143). This informs our human relations and our roles within kinship networks, and it is therefore influential not only in the resources sustaining our Nations but also in the societal and political ramifications of that responsibility (Child, 2012, p. 29; 32).

Sacredness of Woman

Women are sacred. This is affirmed in many teachings and prayers, and it is publicly acknowledged. But what does it mean? That I am sacred? How do I act in a sacred way? How should I expect to be regarded as sacred by my own people? By men? The sacredness of women is understood across many nations, but the need we have now, for both our men and women, is to understand the original beliefs held. Even if a woman comes from a patriarchally rooted nation, given what she faces in this western patriarchal, violent world, she needs the strength of the worldview that sees women as sacred to care for her community, her people.

> The notion of woman is: 1) conceived in a deep and abiding relationship to a powerful and "enchanted universe" (Berman 1981); 2) positioned in dialectical relationship with man and all other beings; and 3) viewed as an extension of the Earth Mother herself, the life force and symbol of women's continuing strategies for creativity, intelligence, and empowerment. (Grande, 2015, p. 174)

There is sacredness in our role in the human journey of life because of our place in the cycle of "creation, destruction, re-creation" (Johnston, 1976, p. 17).

Walking in Sacredness

Understanding the sacredness of women varies across many nations; it depends entirely on who your people are. One of the things I learned working in prisons—and taken lessons from—is that our relatives who participate in Hoops do an excellent job of conducting themselves intertribally. Informed by intertribal teachings and the Elders who provided them, teachings shared in the Iron House give a diverse number of lessons about sacredness and how it relates to healing, relationality, and interconnectedness.

Across Turtle Island, our relatives have shared many teachings over the years. For example, in the Ojibwe language, the word Wiidigemaagan is gender-neutral and refers to a

spouse, whether husband or wife (Child, 2012). Anishinaabe/First Nations author Johnston (1976) shares his Ojibwe teaching that "for her special gift of giving life and being, women had a special place in order of existence and were exempt from the vision quest" (p. 17), demonstrating that women may not participate in ceremony not because of a negative belief but because of her sacredness. In advocating our empowerment, Stó:lō Nation author Lee Maracle reminds us that "respect for the earth and respect for women were bound together, and organized women governors wielded the power to enforce this. Culturally, the earth itself was the only being women accommodated" (Maracle & Kamboureli, 2015, p. 143).

Anishinaabe Dr. Amy Shawanda (2022) shares her people's pedagogy, which centers women's traditional teachings, and presents the Seven Life Stages cycle showing the transformation of women between the physical and spiritual realms, beginning with childbirth and extending to the unseen spirit world as the cycle renews (pp. 33-34). This is reflected in the practice of burying the placenta after childbirth, with the placenta grounding our spirits to the earth, the same earth our Ancestors became one with (p. 42).

Figure 11

Shawanda's Seven Life Stages of Women's Physical & Spiritual Realm Transformations

As the givers of life, women are the foremost transmitters of knowledge because of our connections between this world and the spirit world. "We embody the cosmologies and the geographies every time we engage in ceremony." (p. 42). Anishinaabe maternal pedagogy teaches the intersection of spirituality, creation, and future generations when passing on Anishinaabe Knowledges. An example of this is the teaching that we have a special relationship

with water as water carriers, demonstrated by the strength of their connection to their daughters and grandchildren (p. 26).

Matriarchy and Ho-Chunk Women

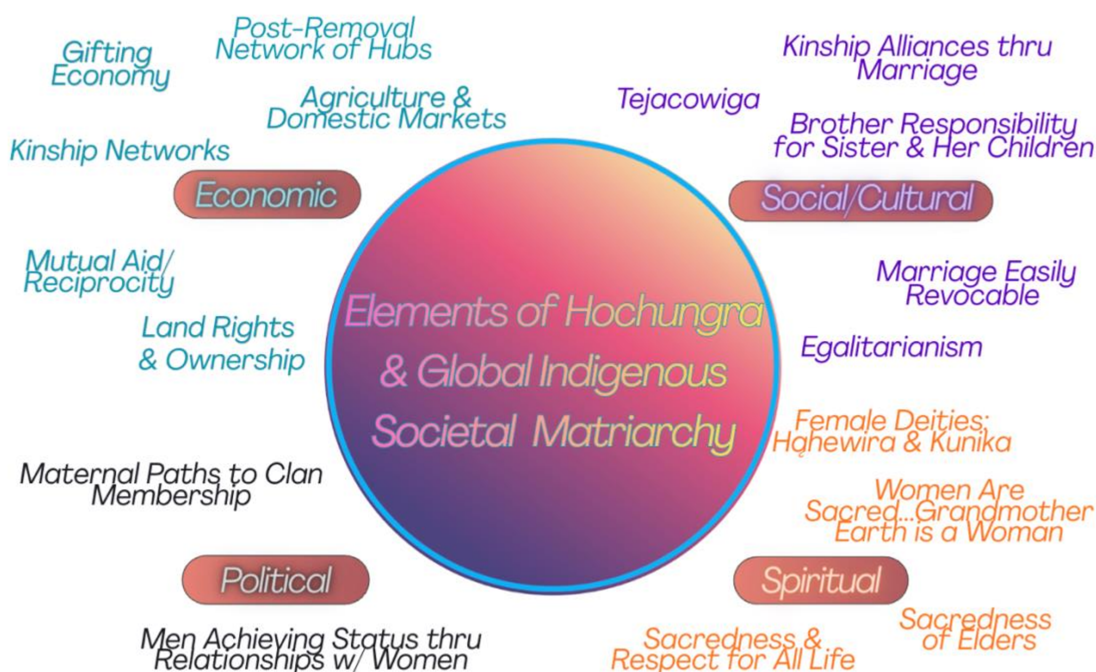
This section on Ho-Chunk Matriarchy begins by quoting a Facebook reel from the Big Voice, Original Radio Station of the Winnebago Tribe. It is challenging to discuss the matriarchy of our people, but it is important, and I offer my appreciation to the radio station for raising this sensitive subject:

> Hanaac hinįkaragiwi, today we are talking about something that is rarely acknowledged in our communities: the Ho-Chunk used to be matrilineal and the fact that many of us do not know that is not by accident. Patriarchal systems took hold not because they were original because the people were trying to survive. So why is this history buried? Because acknowledging a matrilineal past challenges the patriarchal systems many communities treat as traditional. Colonialism reinforced patriarchy. Missionaries only recognize male leadership, government agents only negotiated with men, so the older women-centered systems became minimized, dismissed, or rewritten. Why is it offensive to some people today? Because it confronts the idea that men have always held exclusive political and ceremonial authority. It reveals that women once had high status, control of lineage, and even the power to decide leadership, something modern patriarchal systems try to deny, and it challenges people who grew up hearing that clan identity, leadership, or naming must go through the men. The truth shows our society only became patriarchal after trauma, displacement, and colonial pressure, not by original design. But the old system never fully disappeared, that's why women like Ho-poe-Kaw, or Glory of the Morning, could become chief of the entire nation. Our stories, our clans, and even the way war

> bundles passed through the sisters' children still carry this earlier world. So, in closing, our history is not just what survived, it's also what was buried. Remember, patriarchy is not the root of who we are. Our Ancestors lived in a world where women held immense power, and those teachings still live in us today. (Winnebago-The Big Voice, 2025)

Oral traditions, archaeological evidence, and linguistic data have been used in research to support findings that Hochungra origins were matrilineal and that it was a matricultural society.

Figure 12 *Commonalities between Hochungra and Global Indigenous Matriarchal Societies*



Hochungra oral history provides evidence of respect for feminine leadership and its influence on ceremony, spiritual practices, and social hierarchy. The shift to patrilineality coincided with the impact of wars, disease, and European contact. Some of this research included correlations with our Ioway, Missourias, and Oto relatives and shared oral traditions, pointing to a common point in history before those tribes broke away from the Hochungra (Jung, 2023; Staeck, 1994).

Socially

Ho-Chunk leadership and hierarchical positions, while not given to women, were influenced by the status of women through marriage and by familial roles. Depending on the circumstances, clan affiliation could follow the mother's descent. Also relevant are a Teega's (mother's brother's) significant involvement with his sister's children, even more than with his own. He is responsible for discipline and other aspects of child rearing that, in western culture, fall to the father. Therefore, his own children would expect that role from their own Teega. This is common among Indigenous matriarchal communities worldwide. For example, Dipio (2019, p. 17) shares the Arabic proverb "the boy, if he turns out poorly, belongs two-thirds to his mother's brother," indicating an uncle's responsibilities to his sisters and their children, similar to the Ho-Chunk saying that a cusge's (nephew's) behavior can reflect poorly on his Teega (mother's brother).

Upon marriage, men took up residence in their wife's home, with many duties and responsibilities directed by their father-in-law. After two years, they would return to their family of origin. However, it was common for men to alternate between their wife's home and their parent's homes. Sororal polygyny, in which sisters share one husband, was practiced by the Ho-Chunk into the early 1800s, according to European observers (Jung, 2023; Lurie, 1996; Radin, 1970).

Politically

A significant aspect of Ho-Chunk women's roles in politics and the tribal economy is the creation and maintenance of kinship networks through intermarriage with other tribes. This later extended to marriage with traders, leading to French husbands becoming part of Ho-Chunk communities. The kinship network has obvious economic implications, not only through

marriage but also through oversight and responsibility for resources vital to maintaining network relationships and reciprocity.

The ascension of Hąboguwįga (Glory of the Morning) to Chief of the Grand Village at Lake Winnebago circa 1727 has implications for descent and inheritance. There are two stories about her assuming the position of chief. One states she had no brothers, while the other says she had two, neither of whom was capable. Regardless, she led the people through many challenges and experienced much personal turmoil as well. She was known as a chief in peace and in battle. In fact, Ho-Chunk women were observed to be fierce in battle alongside the men, and it was also entirely within the realm of possibility that a Teega would leave a clan war bundle to his sister's son rather than to his own sons (Hinzo, 2016; Jung, 2023).

Economically

Ho-Chunk women also had rights and property that were unheard of in colonial society. As previously mentioned, Ho-Chunk kinship networks had economic implications. Marriage expanded the network, and in reciprocity, women also brought much to the table. Ho-Chunk women who owned property, worked mines and the land, and were responsible for resources such as maple syrup, wild rice, and other staples that were coveted by settlers. Fruits and crops grew in abundance in the wild but were actually cultivated by women who were responsible for nurturing the land. This oversight and responsibility for resources were vital to maintaining network relationships and reciprocity. Indeed, Ho-Chunk women were diverse in their skills and knowledge, not limited to but including roles in cosmology, astronomy, and the effigy mounds (Hinzo, 2016; Lurie, 1996).

Ho-Chunk Female Deities

Ho-Chunk had two important female deities, Hąąhewira (Moon) and Mąą, or Kunįka (Earth, or Grandmother). Our creation stories tell us that Kunįka was volatile in the beginning, rocking and shaking, and that she became rocks and stones (Dieterle, n.d.d). Kunįka also blesses us. She gifted us with tobacco and corn and is married to Bear, Ancestors to the Bear Clan (Radin, 1970). A teaching for men related to Kunįka is:

> Women are sacred. If you make your wife suffer, then you will die in a short time. Our Grandmother Earth is a woman, and in abusing your wife you are abusing her. Most certainly will you be abusing your grandmother if you act thus. Since after all it is she who is taking care of us, by your action you will be practically killing yourself. (Blowsnake, 1926, p. 60)

Hąąhewira blesses women during coming-of-age ceremonies and blesses men with the power of Tejącowįga (Blue Ocean Woman) or Cooranąąžįįga (Standing in the Blue, now commonly referred to as two-spirit) (Dieterle, n.d.a). Hąąhewira blesses men to be Tejącowįga or Cooranąąžįįga, but it means death if they do not accept. Outwardly, the men conduct themselves as women would, in dress, roles, and by marrying other men. They are special in that their gifts include "prophecy, healing, artistry, and excelling at women's tasks". They are also known to:

> Have the reputation of being the cleverest people, the sort who would be good at gambling. They were once held in high esteem, and although said to be shameless, they wanted for nothing and were often taken to wife by men. (Dieterle, n.d.a)

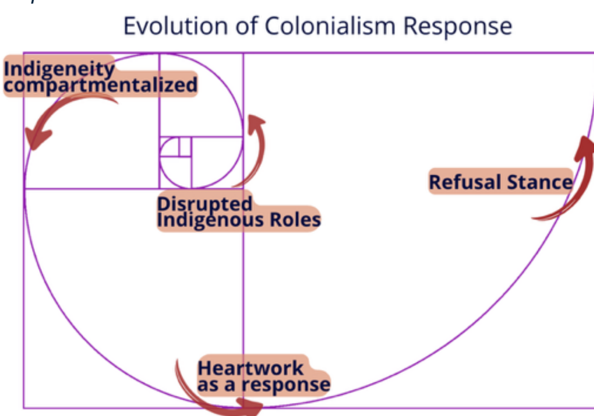
Coraminąka derives from the mirror of the sky reflected on blue lake water. That mirror image shows the person looking into the lake in reverse. "Left is right, right is left; top is bottom, bottom is top." The mirror of the soul, the nąąğirak, is the appearance of the person looking into the lake, this is considered wákącąk (holy). In polarity:

Not having powers of war, nor of life in its essence (reproduction), his sacred power expresses itself in terms of prophecy. Just as right has become left, and top has become bottom, so the future has become as history, to be seen in the mind's eye as if a remembrance of things past. (Dieterle, n.d.a & c)

Impact of Settler Colonialism

Figure 13

Colonialism Healing Spectrum Applied to Fibonacci Spiral



As previously stated, colonialism's disruption across Turtle Island is challenging in its complexity and scope. In the context of heartwork, these readings on the impact of colonialism will focus on heartwork as it is practiced by women and on heartwork as a response to the disruption of Indigenous male roles.

Decolonization within a framework of desire provides a space to exercise sovereignty (Tuck, 2009). It is within this space that we can deconstruct colonized masculinity, address Native male gender bias, and reconstruct Indigenous masculinity within traditional male roles.

There is hesitancy in approaching Indigenous masculinity as a category, given the history and experience of patriarchal masculinity that centers itself in all spaces. It feels like inviting a fox into the hen house, inviting the colonizer into our refusal-centered conversation (Hokowhitu, 2015). Indeed, settler author Sam McKegney proposes challenging the connotation of masculinity as belonging to a settler colonial construct and opening the door to (re)gendering masculinity, specifically Indigenous masculinity. The implication is that failing to open this door

would be complicit in the genocidal efforts that have targeted Indigenous men (Penn State Department of Comparative Literature, 2017).

He quotes respected Dene-Canadian scholar Glen Coulthard, who, in recent social media posts, states, “I was more convinced when masculinity was a problem, not a solution, in our Indigenous studies analysis” (PSDCL, 2017). He then outlines his position on the inappropriateness of this work in the same arenas as Indigenous feminism and two-spirit spaces. Many hold this position in alliance with those who advocate for women and two-spirit relatives in our community. These relatives have suffered greatly at the hands of colonial male supremacy and toxic masculinity. Even among our men, this skepticism about male gender bias is reflected in how they view their own relationships and healing within our communities, an example of the harm and consequences of masculine supremacy and toxicity to themselves (Innes & Anderson, 2015).

Toxic Resilience and Native Women

Part of our work as mothers is instilling culture and traditions as protective factors against a racist world. When I refer to mothers, I am speaking of the experiences of our grandmothers, mothers (in the traditional sense, our biological mothers, grandmothers, and their sisters), the aunties who may or may not have given birth, and our two-spirit wažokį.

We live in an era in which Indigenous women lead across western and Indigenous tribal, community, and governmental organizations. In heartwork, our children and families are asked to sacrifice alongside us for family, community, and work. When this comes after lived experiences of abuse and violence, learning to walk in our traditional Indigenous roles becomes even more challenging. When our heartwork originates in intergenerational and historic trauma, it is easy to see why so many of us engage in unhealthy sacrifice, leading to poor self-care. This

is further solidified by toxic experiences within personal and professional relationships. Women’s leadership, advocacy, and challenges within our Native community are shaped by lateral violence and toxic masculinity presented as tradition through entitlement, misogyny, sexism, and abuse (Mihesuah, 2003).

Sometimes this violence and toxicity present as—or because of—stereotypes. Viewing historic and present-day mothers in matriarchy through a stereotypical lens, Native women's survival response is, in many ways, like that of our African American sisters. Both are stereotyped as the aggressive, strong, emasculating matriarch or as women lacking femininity, while at the same time being fetishized (Green, 2006). The stereotypes of Native and African American women as they walk in this world also fuel toxic resilience. We look up to the strong Black woman, but it is exhausting to be a strong Black woman. We have a high regard for resilient Native women, but the stronger and more resilient you are, the more hits and punches you have taken, with more to come.

Despite all of this, we find mental healing by grounding our activism in our matriarchal roots (Mihesuah, 2003). When our healing is tied to the community around us through movement, land, community, ceremony, sacred space, sleep, and food, physical and spiritual healing is promoted within Indigenous frameworks that address holistic health needs (Luger & Collins, 2022).

Truth of Pain, Trauma, Tragedy

“My life consisted of physical, mental, spiritual, emotional, and sexual abuse, which I thought was normal because that's all I saw around me” (Amber et al., 2021, p. 40). Some of the most powerful women in our communities have turned painful experiences into heartwork. Their lived experiences provide expertise in spaces that cannot be entered by those who have not

already been there. While not yet informing heartwork at the time of publishing, in "Indigenous Women and Street Gangs: Survivance Narratives," six sisters share their journeys and offer insight into the trauma that too many Indigenous women increasingly experience.

Some of the insights they shared include gaining power, status, and protection through relationships with men. Unfortunately, misogyny born of this protection has led to abuse in many forms. Abuse is not necessarily a deterrent to dangerous situations when it is something you become accustomed to early in life. Toxic resilience built up from a violent home life can be reinforced when you see it repeated in the home lives of other families in the community. This has extended into the community for women who have experienced punishment for disrespecting men and sexual and physical abuse at the hands of the police. Even worse, losses in many forms only perpetuate the cycle of violence when the next generation is lost to foster care or juvenile corrections. These children experience neglect and death within government systems (Amber et al., 2021).

Shifting into heartwork space, women in personal and professional heartwork roles experience a depletion of personal and professional capital. This toxic resilience, especially in light of the lived-experience heartwork previously mentioned, does not benefit our communities when these same sisters are pouring from empty cups. How can leaders remain true to their passion and vision when declining mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual health detracts from it (Quinless, 2022)?

Knowledge from Truth

In women, the ability to withstand hardship is considered a positive attribute. This resilience is needed when colonialism continues to target the men of our communities through role disruption, separation from, and destruction of our families (Green, 2006). In these

circumstances, we find ourselves spending "years of having to make hard choices without good choices" (Kendall, 2020, p. 240). The decisions we make are informed by how we respond to our trauma and by the roles we have adopted that are counter to who we are in sacredness.

We are bombarded with messages about self-care as a response to personal and professional life challenges, yet is self-care enough? Recently, I had the opportunity to participate in a series of listening engagements with Native women in leadership positions. A common thread was women holding executive, administrative, and management positions in fields addressing the same trauma that is affecting their families. While doing this work, caring for the self falls by the wayside. For many of us, self-care is reduced to a response to medical needs or physical appearance.

> What is the point of our personal wellness if not for the betterment of others? Healthy people make healthy families, healthy families make healthy communities, and healthy communities make a stronger, safer, cleaner, more balanced world. (Luger & Collins, 2022, p. 101)

For Native women in leadership, volatility within colonial systems and structures exacerbates harm experienced in their professions (Quinless, 2022, p. 19). Healing is integral to mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. More than self-care, an emphasis on healing and well-being is required to counter intergenerational and historic trauma in our personal and professional lives.

Wisdom Born of Lived Experience

The wisdom derived from the aforementioned experiences is the understanding of the importance of assuming our traditional Indigenous roles, particularly of understanding and centering ourselves within our sacred roles of womanhood. The beginning of this process is

putting into action the knowledge we already have; the importance of taking care of ourselves, how this relates to our relationships with our communities, what relationships look like in matriarchal systems, and how past challenges can enrich futurity. Our matriarchal roots are also tied to activism (Mihesuah, 2003), creating a cycle among healing, heartwork, and matriarchy. This cycle, enriched by our past and future, can use wisdom pathways to reignite transfers of knowledge, gaps in which have become generational. Generational gaps not only disrupt the transmission of knowledge between generations but also traditional relationships within families (Defriend & Cook, 2023).

Enriched by the Past and Future

For Native people, healing is integral to mental, physical, spiritual, and emotional well-being. Beyond self-care, an emphasis on healing and well-being counters intergenerational and historic trauma. For Native women in leadership, this healing is necessary to navigate the volatility of colonial systems and structures that exacerbate harm in our heartwork (Quinless, 2022, p. 19). Wholistic teachings from sisters that address our experiences encourage growth in kinship and connection, support mental and emotional healing, advance matriarchal activism, and use an Indigenous framework (Grande, 2015; Luger & Collins, 2022; Mihesuah, 2003).

> What is the point of our personal wellness if not for the betterment of others? Healthy people make healthy families, healthy families make healthy communities, and healthy communities make a stronger, safer, cleaner, more balanced world. (Luger & Collins, 2022, p. 101)

Desire-based findings applied to small-scale practices can inform larger systemic patterns (brown, 2017, p. 6). Wisdoms gained through past experiences shape patterns of success and growth, both professionally and in the community. brown offers the Fibonacci spiral as a

metaphor for this pattern. As the spiral of growth represents our efforts, the spiral of personal disruption, dismantling, or healing expands into our professional lives.

One area of research that deserves more attention is the traditional Indigenous role of two-spirit relatives, who were highly respected in most tribal communities, with exceptions. Colonialism and religious persecution, in the form of gender violence, destabilized tribal communities through the genocidal persecution of two-spirit relatives. Understanding the impact of this gender violence and its effect on our community is incomplete without educating ourselves about two-spirit contributions to ceremony and the care of the community, and about the loss to our community because of their persecution.

Caregiving was a crucial element of two-spirit relatives' roles in Indigenous societies; it was—and is—a crucial part of both Native and two-spirit identity. Their contributions to kinship and caregiving systems provided family care and helped stabilize families and communities in response to crises. Two-spirit relatives were crucial to the transfer of knowledge, and this was also part of nurturing caregiving. Caregiving roles for Elders positioned two-spirit caregivers to receive knowledge, while caregiving for children positioned them to give knowledge. Caregiving extended to the tribe and their roles and responsibilities in ceremony (Evans-Campbell et al., 2007).

> We were the ones who took care of the infirmed. We were the ones who raised the children, not because they were unwanted, or abandoned or, we were in text godparents. We were the ones who stayed behind, and protected the village; we're the last form of defense against, protecting the women, the children, and the village. (Evans-Campbell et al., 2007, p. 81).

Two-spirit traditional Indigenous roles were crucial to our tribal communities, and the disruption of these roles has negatively affected the health of our families today. This disruption, in part, contributes to the challenges women face today as a result of colonialism.

Indigenous Masculinity

From what frames of reference are we viewing Indigenous masculinity? First, we must acknowledge the duality of men's roles within both western and Indigenous patriarchal contexts. This acknowledgment heightens our awareness of the need to unearth and identify their true roles as Indigenous men. To do this, we must first open our minds to the space in which men are challenged in their relationality and intersectionality within the Indigenous families and communities in which they live. "It is within this ideology that the pain of trauma and institutionalization is addressed by superiority over women, prioritization of self, and dismisses the sacredness of women and children" (Collins, 2025).

Today, it is widely understood across many Native and academic circles that, at the very least, egalitarianism was the norm within Indigenous communities (Collins, 2025; Hinzo, 2016; Jung, 2023; Ramirez, 2007). Yet due to the influence of colonialism, many do not know Indigenous Ways of Being within matriarchal or egalitarian societies. The belief systems, values, and mores that connected men to their families, clan members, and tribe were disrupted. Now we have generations of men struggling with being both the oppressed and the oppressor, with stereotypes, and with a misunderstanding or lack of knowledge about their sacred duties.

Truth of Pain, Trauma, Tragedy

> Accordingly, Indigenous masculinity, in serving two essentialized binary masters (i.e. colonized/colonizer and men/women), creates a model for looking at power within the colonial context where the two essentialized notions associated with the dominance of

> colonized men over the Indigenous man, and man over woman, create the ambivalent figure of the Indigenous heterosexual patriarch. Both oppressor and oppressed. (Hokowhitu, 2015, p. 83)

There is a psychological toll on men living under western patriarchy. For example, looking to the Iron House, we can see the connection between colonialism's beginnings and today's western patriarchal and extreme male supremacist ideologies. Before the 1800s, imprisonment was primarily a form of confinement and/or punishment. Captain Richard Henry Pratt forced Kiowa men to participate in "education" and "work" programs (convict labor) and attend church services…all in the interest of "Kill the Indian, save the man". This led to his commission to develop boarding schools, beginning with the Carlisle Indian Industrial School (Graber, 2019). From these beginnings, the evolution into the modern corrections system has led to Native American overrepresentation in adult and youth incarceration (Cross, 2008; Widra, 2023).

It is no wonder that carceral institutionalization (hypervigilance, interpersonal distrust, emotional over-control, exploitative norms of prison culture, and post-traumatic stress reactions) feels familiar to our relatives living with intergenerational trauma (substance abuse, suicidal behavior, depression, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognizing and expressing emotions) (Haney, 2002; Yellow Horse Brave Heart, 2007).

Throughout, Native men have been struggling against a vicious cycle of stereotypes, specifically the "noble savage," the "bloodthirsty warrior," and the "drunken absentee" (McKegney, 2021, p. 34). These stereotypes perpetuate internalized oppression in the form of hypermasculinity, self-destruction, vengefulness, violence, emasculation, and a lack of self-control:

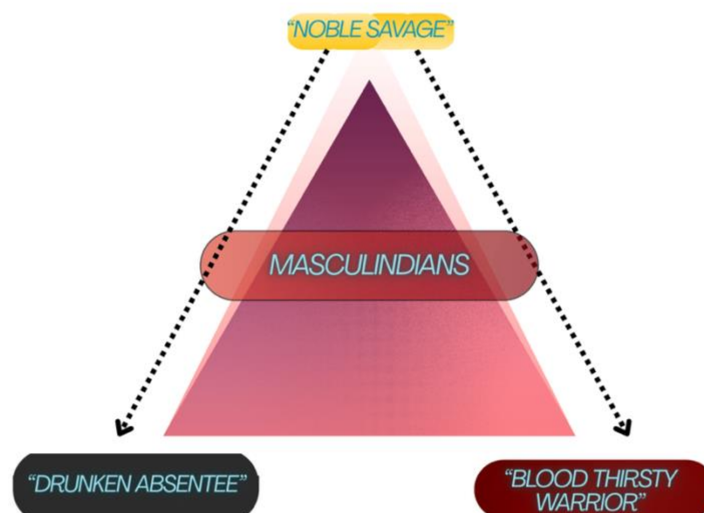
> To put it starkly, Indigenous men are targeted for premature death because they are constructed in the settler imaginary as less than human, as threatening to white Canadian prosperity, and therefore are responsible for the very violence to which they are subjected. (McKegney, 2021, p. 46)

Knowledge from Truth

Our men continue to struggle with these stereotypes today—many who have caused harm in Native communities justify it in the name of being a warrior. Many young men identify with warrior status and Native pride as a connection to their original role within their community. This is a place to begin understanding how colonialism still affects our youth, because this street image of a modern-day warrior goes back to colonialism.

Figure 14

Masculindians Simulated Stereotypes of Indigenous Masculinity



If we look, for instance, at manifest destiny, the stereotype of Native men as violent warmongers served the purpose of eventual surrender or defeat at the hands of settlers. Taiaiake Alfred (Mohawk) speaks of the danger this stereotype presents to this day:

> There's no winning in that one for Natives because, firstly, there's just no winning in that kind of power struggle, and secondly, if you construct yourself to serve that role, there may be some pride in physicality, and so forth, but there is no living with it because it's not meant to be lived with; It's meant to be killed, every single time period their images to be slain by the white conqueror. And now that they do not slay them, most of the time,

> openly, you know, what's the role of the Native male? And they have not really constructed a role for themselves because they have not really been put back into the proper context because the communities are still reeling from the conquest. (McKegney, 2014, p. 79)

Wisdom Born of Lived Experience

Going back to the Iron House, let us look at how wisdom can be derived from lived experience by examining how it is influenced in this setting. First, by coming to understand the truth of their Indigenous male roles, and second, by understanding and acting on their medicine.

Truth takes many forms, and many of us who are blessed to work in healing capacities have had conversations with others that acknowledge the space our Ancestors hold in our DNA. We feel them when they respond to the drum through us. Our next generations hear it before they are born into this world. Relatives like Diné Iron House Advocate Leandru Willie speak to these gifts. Leandru states, “It's in your blood, and you feel that heartbeat of our nation, our people, that drum. It's amazing how that can speak to somebody's spirit, seeing and recognizing moving forward what Creator’s already given you” (Native Hope, 2025).

Enriching by the Past and Future

Through her work in carceral settings, Chippewa Cree Elder Dr. Carma Corcoran has witnessed the transformation of experience into wisdom and can speak on how low self-esteem and negativity can shift toward healing. Supporting this change are gifts of song, storytelling, and heartwork, many of which are used in work with youth, addiction, and social services. “They had those gifts; it was just they needed to come to Creator and to community to reclaim their culture” (Native Hope, 2025).

In reentry circles, giving back to the community is referred to as restorative healing or justice. Restorative healing extends to dismantling systemic racism and barriers. Efforts can work to “destroy stereotypes that categorize and diminish [our] people” (Brant, 1994, p. 6). By definition, restorative justice demonstrates human capacity and growth. It begins with the teachings of Elders, planting the seeds of capacity and growth through traditional teachings of sacrifice, unity, forgiveness, interconnectedness, and our relationship to the world around us. This seed has grown into a need for many to give back, with many wanting to focus on the youth impacted by violence, gangs, and drugs, and on those who perpetrate them in the community before ending up in prison (Restorative Justice Exchange, 2024).

Within Indigenous communities, restorative healing and justice go beyond what is done in reentry because they are stepping into their traditional Indigenous roles. It is here that they use knowledge of pain, trauma, and tragic experiences to create knowledge. In transitioning from resilience to survivance, they are moving into traditional roles of integrity, protecting and providing for communities in ways they were denied by themselves and then by incarceration (Collins, 2025).

Native Feminism

A Native feminist lens is required to understand the gender bias experienced by Indigenous and Native American men. While Native feminism prioritizes gender oppression, it differs from whitestream feminism in that it also prioritizes land, sovereignty, futurity, and decolonization. Whitestream feminist concepts center discourse on power and patriarchy, differing from the feminine discourse of women of color. Contrary to whitestream feminism, Native and Black feminism not only reveres motherhood but also addresses race, thereby being inclusive of the men in our communities (Arvin et al., 2013).

Fellow Ho-Chunk Dr. Reyna Ramirez stated, “I choose to claim the term Native feminist in order to fight against misogyny and gender oppression.” (Ramirez, 2007, p. 32) and invited Indigenous men to fight alongside women as Native feminists. I daresay I have met men in prison whose beliefs and restorative justice work would be considered Native feminism. These are the men who, as part of healing, challenge other men so women do not have to. More than advocacy, it is healing. Some would be hard-pressed, or even offended, to relate this to countering male gender oppression. I do so here, from my role as a Native feminist, Indigenous abolitionist, and abolitionist healer, centering a wažokį worldview in my work with our relatives in the Iron House. Decolonizing in abolition means taking our male and female relatives back from positions of being oppressed, oppressor, or both.

This creates an opening to understand the intersectionality of western patriarchal attitudes adopted by Native men and the binary experiences of discrimination, trauma, toxicity, and entitlement. This is in keeping with the Native Feminist value of not viewing feminism through the lens of gender, but rather through the lenses of community, decolonization, and the fight against genocide (Grey, 2004; Innes & Anderson, 2015).

Decolonization and Indigenization efforts require:

> An acknowledged goal of renewing tradition in which gender roles were interdependent, it follows that Native women require the participation of men in the social, political and spiritual life of the community. The survival of cultural and perpetuation of tradition necessitate the fostering of collective experience; Exclusion of any segment of the population is not a viable option. (Grey, 2004, p. 14)

Lens of Refusal

Audra Simpson’s work in refusal is in the arena of politics and sovereignty, and she defined refusal as:

> A political alternative to "recognition". Refusal requires that one’s political sovereignty be acknowledged and upheld, and it raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing: what is their authority to do so? Where does it come from? Who are they to do so? (Simpson, 2014, p. 11)

When discussing the politics of refusal, it is important to clarify what it is not. It is not reconciliation. It does not position policymakers and the government in the upper hand. It does not position us in a relationship with the oppressor, nor does it respond to their “demand to know” (Coulthard, 2007). Should they have the authority to bestow acknowledgment upon us? Refusal says no.

The theory of recognition highlights institutional oppression and the processes within systems that support it (Baum, 2004, p. 1073). “Restructuring Indigenous-state relations…leaves intact the state’s role as arbiter and therefore ultimately reproduces the very configurations of colonial power that Native peoples seek to transcend” (Coulthard, 2014).

> There is a political alternative to “recognition”, the much sought-after and presumed “good” of multicultural politics. This alternative is “refusal”, and it is exercised by people within this book. They deploy it as a political and ethical stance that stands in stark contrast to the desire to have one’s distinctiveness as a culture, as a people, recognized. Simpson (2014, p. 11)

The authority of recognition challenges a stance of refusal. When it is not recognized it causes settler discomfort, the “imperial project of promise and non-promise” becomes a tool of control, and there is harm in rejecting inducements and “gifts of belonging” (Agathangelou et al., 2008,

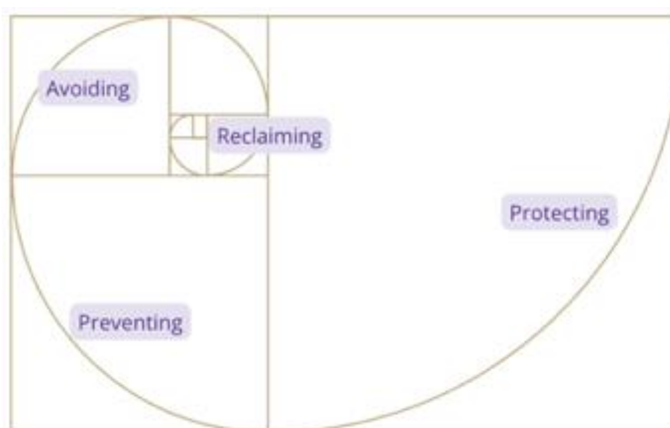
p. 138; Grande, 2018, p. 59; Simpson, 2014). The politics of refusal, however, does not allow for colonialist authority of recognition, taking space, or making demands. It does not seek inclusion, acknowledgment, or recognition. It uses our sovereignty, our Indigenous ways of being, knowing, everything, as our own (Grande, 2018).

Refusal's Versatility

Refusal—as theory, pedagogy, praxis, and a lens—provides versatility in practice, as seen at the intersection of refusal and decolonization. Examples of existing refusal research, pedagogy, and praxis include decolonizing through refusal and desire (Dutta, U., 2023), a qualitative analysis stance (Tuck & Yang, 2014b), racial realist praxis (Lopez & Calderón, 2022), and critical Indigenous theories of justice as refusal (Tuck & Yang, 2018). It is realized in the tenets of critical race theory and tribal critical race theory (Brayboy, 2005).

Figure 15

Decolonization through Refusal



Reclaiming...
...what was broken, remade, renamed & claimed
(Patel, 2015, pg. 19)

Avoiding...
...temptation of inducements, divisive "promise and non-promises", marginalization & exploitation
(Agathangelou et al., 2008, p. 138; Grande, 2018, p. 59)

Preventing...
...precarious positions of "promise and non-promise" &reprisal from the offense of refusing "gift(s) of belonging."
(Agathangelou et al.,2008, p. 138; Grande, 2018, p. 59)

Protecting...
...all that is sacred by refusing demands of and refusing/limiting access to Indigenous Knowledges & Ways of Being.
(Coulthard, 2007; Simpson, 2014; Tuck, et al., 2018)

The ethnographic refusal stance taken regarding whether we choose to make Indigenous Knowledges known—or not—is both a decolonizing and

Indigenizing approach (Simpson, 2014). Native feminism exercises refusal by rejecting whitestream feminist limitations, instead including a focus on the sons and sovereignty of Indigeneity. It is expressed in the assumption of traditional female and male roles, kinship networks, the reclamation of matriarchal Knowledges, and the challenge to "men to make real their commitment to the matriarchal and co-lineal structures of the past. This is a feminist act." (Maracle & Kamboureli, 2015, p. 130).

Depathologizing the lens through which we look at our history and inform our future in refusal is supported by a desire-based framework. "Desire-based research frameworks are concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (Tuck, 2009, p. 416). This contradicts the damage-centered research methodology that historically targets and marginalizes populations, in which the politics of recognition incentivizes research with inducements that have led to the "long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken" (Patel, 2015; Tuck, 2009, p. 409). Desire-based approaches focus on the parts of us that long for knowledge and healing in refusal of what pathologizes us and causes harm. At the same time, they encourage seeking what we desire.

The story of Heex Pįįwįga (Beautiful Swan Woman) demonstrates a desire-based approach to life's journey, presenting a complex account of personhood that "involves making room for the contradictions, for mis/re/cognitions, usually in an effort to sustain a sense of collective balance" (p. 421). Within the telling of her story as a Ho-Chunk oral tradition, her story employs survivance and resistance in a desire-based approach that not only de-pathologizes its telling but also demonstrates her medicine of transforming challenges into strengths and harm into blessings (Tuck, 2009) in survivance and resistance.

Survivance and Resistance

There is a multiplicity of definitions and understandings of survivance. Vizenor did not give survivance a single definition, yet he describes it in many ways, including as "an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 11). The action of survivance is in the present tense.

Just as there are many interpretations of survivance and its use, there are also many views on its use beyond academia. There is diversity in the Native people and ways in which we would utilize the practice of survivance in epic ways that impact us as a people, as well as in our day-to-day lives (Sabzalian, 2019). It is in sovereignty and self-determination (Brayboy, 2005), refusal (Grande, 2018), desire-based research (Tuck, 2009), Native feminism (Ramirez, 2007), traditional role futurity (Collins, 2025; Maracle, & Kamboureli, 2015), storywork (Archibald et al., 2019), healing (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008; Luger & Collins, 2022), and the work of our Ancestors and Nations, such as Ho-Chunk survivance (Hinzo, 2016, p. 99; Lonetree, A., 2011). Within this diversity of scholarship, advocacy, and healing are the gifts of survival, sovereignty, and resistance in strength and resilience (Vizenor, 1998, p. 93).

In this diversity of ways, ranging from the epic to the day-to-day, the lens of this research proposes to demonstrate that "survivance is a practice, not an ideology, dissimulation, or a theory" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 11). It is in survival and resistance that our most recent Ancestors literally fought and died for sovereignty. We are living in a time in which we find ourselves standing on the shoulders of those recent Ancestors. We are still fighting and resisting, but we are doing it not only while under attack on reservations and in urban areas, but also in courts, in state capitols, and in board and meeting rooms across all levels of government and jurisdiction. Those of us standing on the shoulders of our Ancestors are positioned to address the challenges within our community that continue the manifestation of settler colonialism, which hinders

survivance. This work is grounded in knowledge based on Indigenous teachings and traditions, informed by reciprocity and responsibility within practices of Indigenous kinship renewal and relational sovereignty. In futurity, the actions of survivance "can be found through Indigenous kinship and relational sovereignty. They can be found within us. They can be found within the People" (Galanda, 2023, p. 16).

Emergent Strategy

> "Emergence is the way complex systems and patterns arise out of a multiplicity of relatively simple interactions" (Obolensky, 2010, p. 105).

Upon reading brown's Emergent Strategy, I was struck by the interconnectedness and relationality to Indigenous works. Emergent strategy is not a foreign concept to many of us working in Indigenous arenas of healing, community, and organization. In acknowledgment of the principles and practices of emergent strategy as "often decontextualized from their roots in Indigenous peoples and communities," one must be mindful not to engage in recolonization or call for a return to an idealized state of being (Ritchie et al., 2023, p. 66). brown has outlined the elements of emergent strategy as fractal, adaptive, interdependence and decentralization, non-linear and iterative, resilience and transformative justice, and creating more possibilities (brown, 2017, p. 50).

Indigenous concepts such as Wellbriety, circular philosophy, and the sacredness of women demonstrate a connection to age-old teachings that have informed present-day emergent strategy. Wellbriety's four laws of change (change comes from within, for development to occur it must be preceded by a vision, great learning must take place, and you must create a healing forest) can be interpreted as an emergent strategic guide for recovery, healing, and growth (Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008, p. 1930).

It is echoed in Indigenous circular philosophy, in which cycles and circles are fundamental to Indigenous thinking and worldviews. Wellbriety and other Indigenous circular praxes are decolonizing. They define our relationship with Grandmother Earth and the life around us, our connection to the stars, and how we gather and engage with the environment (Fixico, 2025). brown demonstrates that fractals are small-scale practices that inform larger systemic patterns. In tying this to relationality with Grandmother Earth, brown states, "In the framework of emergence, the whole is a mirror of the parts. Existence is fractal- the health of the cell is the health of the species and the planet" (brown, 2017, p. 13).

Emergent Strategy as Refusal

Elements of emergent strategy include adaptation, purpose and intent. Refusal is the lens through which we operate; it is in how we live. At the micro-level, using brown's Fibonacci spiral as a simile, we begin at the spiral's center to 1) disrupt and dismantle trauma and 2) lay the foundation for healing, aligning with Wellbriety's first law of change: change comes from within. Representing our efforts and drive, the spiral's expansion of disruption, dismantling, and healing extends into our professional lives. From here, we see how transforming ourselves transforms the world around us, with fractals representing "what we practice at the small scale sets the patterns for the whole system" (p. 53). In the same way this pattern creates a spiral found in nature, it is also found in the escalation of personal struggles manifesting as burnout, splitting, disrupting drama, mission drift, and stagnation. Aligning with Wellbriety's principle that conflict precedes clarity, we continue our growth along the spiral with adaptation and change as opportunity and possibility. (brown, 2017; Coyhis & Simonelli, 2008).

brown (2017, p. 53) tells us to "see our own lives and work and relationships as a front line, a first place we can practice justice, liberation, and alignment with each other and the

planet." Through refusal, to change the personal struggles mentioned above, we address the impact of colonization through a strengths-based lens. Justice, liberation, and alignment with each other in addressing colonization begin with our mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being. From these cups, we pour into our communities. It is through Indigenous holistic living and healing that we demonstrate frontline healing with mezzo-level implications for our community. In their decolonizing wellness and Indigenous community health work, Luger and Collins advocate for an Indigenous framework of physical and spiritual healing. They do so by addressing holistic health needs across seven areas: movement, land, community, ceremony, sacred space, sleep, and food, tying spiritual and physical healing to community and kinship. From an emergent strategy lens, their view of the impact of our individual health on our communities aligns with the spiral metaphor, beginning with our individual growth and extending to its impact on our heartwork. "What is the point of our personal wellness if not for the betterment of others? Healthy people make healthy families, healthy families make healthy communities, and healthy communities make a stronger, safer, cleaner, more balanced world" (Luger & Collins, 2022, p. 101).

Declining health distracts from our vision and work for our people. Because losing a library of knowledge with each community member is so detrimental to our communities, self-care for us as individuals is actually an Indigenous practice and community healing methodology. It is an act of refusal we must all participate in to ensure the longevity of our visions and messages.

An integral component of self-care as refusal is interdependence and centralization. It is an interconnectedness, relationality, and reciprocity within our kinship networks of support that lead to balance for us individually, within our families, and within our communities. It is through

the establishment of kinship networks or collectives that we develop alternatives to solitude. This again provides us with a space for change and growth, and it provides a space and opportunity to challenge others by speaking truth and to be challenged by accepting the truth spoken by trusted others (brown, 2017).

> I am living a life I do not regret
>
> a life that will resonate with my Ancestors,
>
> and with as many generations forward as I can imagine.
>
> I am attending to the crises of my time with my best self,
>
> I am of communities that are doing our collective best
>
> to honor our Ancestors and all humans to come. (brown, 2017, p. 55)

Chapter 3: Wooʼų, Indigenous Research Methodology & Method

Chapter 3 begins with an accounting of Indigenous research rigor and ethical consideration methodology. To include positionality and worldview as described in the introduction, the methodology is crafted as a response to potential critiques of Indigenous research as sources of information for policy and law, and the unfortunate need to utilize two-eyed seeing in spaces where Indigenous Ways of Being are discussed. The method's design was crafted with respectful consideration of engagement with the Elders and Indigenous community members taking part in this study.

What is your medicine? An Elder asked me this, sparking a reflection during this academic journey that eventually shaped my worldview. Much of my worldview informs the statement below, and respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility tie my worldview to this research's methodology (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

The relationship between my personal worldview and this research methodology is evident in how, as a Black Ho-Chunk woman, my medicine informs my engagement with this world, what I value within it, how I move through it, and how I drop knowledge and understand the space I hold. In academia, this could be framed as ontology, epistemology, methodology, or axiology, but these are not separate studies (Wilson, 2008). They are enmeshed, woven together because, in both Indigenous worldviews and methodologies, interconnectedness cannot be undone.

Rigor and Indigenous Research

This section on rigor is specifically for the relatives in the Iron House. This research is not about introducing something new; it is about providing a tool created from Indigenous knowledge systems with the purpose of refusing policy-tainted spiritual practices. It is offensive

when Indigenous Ways of Being are compartmentalized to be drafted into policy and legislation. We witnessed how "compartmentalizing complex wholes into disparate pieces facilitates the naming and ordering of those pieces and parts in order to have dominion over them" (Patel, 2015, p. 19), i.e., sweat lodge protocols. Within systems such as state departments of corrections, that is the only way it has been made accessible. This is true from the American Indian Religious Freedom Act at the federal level to our relatives working as a Hoop to negotiate the best way to have ceremony.

There is pressure when conducting research that is not quantitative; to be taken seriously, PWIs (primarily white institutions) and whitestreaming entities use rigor to determine trustworthiness and reliability through established criteria (Meadows & Morris, 2001). If the outcome of rigor criteria is proof, the outcome of Indigenous research methodology is knowledge. "You know: the stuff about rigor, validity and whatnot. These things do not really hold any relevance for us" (Wilson, 2001, p. 101).

Indigenous Knowledges are practice-based evidence that have been in use since time immemorial. Our Knowledges uphold rigor. So even though we do not need externally imposed measures or tests to determine whether something is "true," we have our own ways of ensuring this. We have our own ways or questions to ask (Wilson, 2001, p. 101)

Two-Eyed Seeing

It is my intention to demonstrate refusal in how this research is crafted and by not heeding the use of academic rigor in this Indigenous research. At the same time, I have come to accept that there must be space to view elements of this research and work through "two-eyed seeing"; viewing Indigenous Knowledge Systems through one eye and western knowledge

systems through the other (Alberta Marshall, Mi'kmaw of Eskasoni First Nation, personal communication, n.d., as cited in Iwama et al., 2009, p. 80).

Two-eyed seeing serves two purposes in this research study. First, it offers an opportunity to examine the systemic colonial impacts my mother experienced, while also showing how her inherited ancestral refusal factors informed the resilience with which she survived. Second, two-eyed seeing must be used by those working in criminal "justice" systems, PWIs (primarily white institutions), and whitestreaming entities that rely on research, evidence-based practices, peer review, and similar methods to validate and justify policy. Relatives who engage with the criminal "justice" system, specifically corrections systems, must use two-eyed seeing to justify Indigenous ceremonies that are incongruent with state agency policies and legislation.

Two-eyed seeing is also a tool for our allies. These are the non-Natives who support our ceremonies and spiritual practices, even when it causes them harm. I thank those who have taken hits for our people in the interest of doing what is right and interpreting policy by the spirit of the law and not the letter of the law. These allies use two-eyed seeing in their positions to actively advocate and challenge colonial settler systems, position themselves to stand between BIPOC and white supremacist systems, and to oppose any position, policy, or stance that would cause harm. (Kendall, 2020, pp. 257-258).

Method

This research study is framed as a narrative and reflexive ethnography. This approach supports the use of my experiences as the daughter of Justine Whitegull Archer and my position as a Black and Ho-Chunk researcher in diaspora. Being an "outside-within" researcher of my own culture while conducting research from within the University of Washington (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 153; Gruppetta, 2004, p. 2) requires me to address the disparity between those two

roles. This is done through reciprocity with my family and community, while addressing ethical considerations and implications for future work that align with my value system.

Research Design

Within the overarching refusal paradigm, the use of a desire-based lens and framework will serve as a depathologizing approach that informs the transition from resilience to survivance. To better understand desire-based research, you must understand its alternative, the damage-centered research frameworks we have become accustomed to.

A desire-based research framework diverges from damage-centered approaches that portray communities of color as marginalized and disenfranchised. For example, studies perpetuate stereotypes of our communities as impoverished urban ghettos rather than as centers of multicultural learning and healing. Damage-centered research can be fueled by those with seemingly good intentions; they use inducements such as grants, contracts, awards, and recognition to entice the sharing of pain- and trauma-filled personal and community narratives. This type of research and the institutions that feed on its results thrive on the stories that attract attention and the narratives that secure grant money. The more painful the story, the more western attention and resources it attracts (Grande, 2018; Tuck & Yang, 2014).

There is honesty in desire-based research frameworks; they are described as the antidote to damage-centered approaches. This depathologizing framework fosters elements of survival, refusal, resistance, hope, and futurity, lending itself to survivance while remaining truthful about the realities of our experiences (Tuck, 2009; Vizenor, 2008). We practice survivance through desire-based research by "refusing to succumb to the tragic stories about our lives; a refusal to let colonization be the only story we tell about ourselves" (Morrill & Sabzalian, 2022, p. 31).

To be intentional about a desire-based approach to sharing information gathered during listening engagements and talking circles, a simple framework based on four elements of desire-based research was used to analyze how themes identified will be shared. This is necessary to prevent inadvertently slipping into damaged-based research frameworks. The four elements include 1) identifying how wisdom and discernment inform knowing based on life experience, 2) identifying how—individually or collectively—what becomes known, 3) identifying longing, how the here and now is enhanced by longing and by a present that is enriched by futurity and the past. This is done while 4) being mindful of misdirection by telling ourselves “look on the bright side” or “hey, it happened for a reason” when interpreting our life experiences. (Tuck & Yang, 2014a, p. 224).

This research design focuses on gathering familial and Elder knowledge to answer what went wrong, what is working, and the possibilities. Through methods that support desire-based frameworks and align with the trajectory of this research, such as deconstruction and reconstruction, emergent theory, refusal, and survivance, we have what we need to answer the question “Well, what are you going to do about it?!”.

An important element of the research design is the past, present, and future, as they relate to the research questions of what my mother's legacy is as a Ho-Chunk woman, what the wholistic 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership is, and how we can use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey. The theoretical framework focuses on matriarchal, settler colonial, and refusal theories. The literature review is grounded in these three theories and how they inform the research questions. The methodology outlines how this Indigenous researcher’s worldview and positionality shape the method of engagement, demonstrating respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991).

This Indigenous research will incorporate personal and oral stories, traditions, and elements that will not be considered owned or the property of the University of Washington. Ownership of what should be shared and taught would be considered a practice of colonization. The University of Washington disclaims ownership of any Indigenous Knowledge, research, or materials produced under this research process.

Knowledge Gathering

The journey of engaging in the listening engagement and talking circle process began with a conversation with Ho-Chunk Elder Rita Gardner. After participating in a past listening engagement, Rita volunteered to take on the role Tuhiwai Smith (2012) defines as the "guardian of the researcher," offering guidance through introductions, connections, and the nuances of the community (p. 159). The challenges of gathering information were in large part due to location, timing, and the ability to travel, much of which was alleviated by the fact that the majority of connections were established by phone, then by Zoom and in-person meetings. All participants were very generous with their time and how they engaged with the research; all were agreeable to recordings, follow-up meetings, future use of shared information, and all were offered, and denied, anonymity.

Indigenous Knowledge Keepers

In the interest of transparency, all relatives who participated in the listening engagements and talking circles had either a relationship or a connection to Justine Whitegull Archer. The family members who participated included her children, brothers, ex-husband and sister-in-law, Native American Reentry Service Elders, and the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers. One family member declined to participate. The remaining invitees consented to participate and were offered, but declined, to be anonymous. Most of those participating were extremely knowledgeable, through

profession and practice, of spiritual practices, social issues, and the healing needs across Indian Country.

All participants are Native American/Indigenous, African American, and/or Ho-Chunk tribal members. The Native/Indigenous participants live in either sovereign territory or urban Indian communities. The African American family members reside in rural Washington and urban Kansas locations.

The Native American Reentry Services' Elders conducted ceremonies in Washington State prisons and continued to provide ceremonies in tribal communities. As NARS Elders Council members, they provide guidance on all decisions appropriate to the ceremonial or traditional nature of Native American Reentry Services.

The Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers are Elders who represent the following Ho-Chunk Nation clans: Wakaja Hikikarac (Thunder), Caxšep Hikikarac (Eagle), Manape/Woonağire Waakšik Hikikarac (Hawk), Recuge Hikikarac (Pigeon), Huuc Hikikarac (Bear), Suukak Hikikarac (Wolf), Wakcexi Hikikarac (Water Spirit), Cexji Hikikarac (Buffalo), Ca Hikikarac (Deer), Huwa Hikikarac (Elk), Ho Hikikarac (Fish), and Waukau Hikikarac (Snake). They are housed in the Ho-Chunk Department of Social Services, where they provide individual and community teachings and teach Hochungra ways of being and knowing, including traditional Ho-Chunk religion, the Native American Church, and Christian beliefs and spirituality.

Mind Mapping

Mind mapping is a process used in White Bison's Wellbriety Training Institute and in tribal communities and organizations across Turtle Island. It helps unearth innate knowledge and information, providing insight and identifying patterns. As an Indigenous method, mind mapping

is "very similar to the traditional teaching methods in which the Elder would ask questions that would make the learner think and apply what had been observed" (White Bison, n.d.).

Mind mapping was used in two ways. First, throughout the dissertation process, it was used to organize thoughts and clarify patterns and themes across the dissertation chapters, which was very helpful as the amount of information gathered grew. Second, during the listening engagements, mind maps were briefly used to trigger insights into the roles and descriptors associated with Justine Whitegull Archer later in life. Used in these ways, mind maps served as a tool to aid in probing a specific line of inquiry, tracking unexplored topics, and staying on topic organizationally and conversationally.

Listening Engagements

Sharing through storywork was conducted through one-on-one listening engagements. The listening engagements began with an overview of the written invitation and consent forms mailed to them, which informed them of the purpose and intent of the research, explained why their presence was requested, and included a review of the consent with the opportunity to ask questions. They were held in person, via a virtual platform, or by phone, depending on resources, time, and availability.

The semi-structured approach to the listening engagement was guided by me, the author, through open-ended questions. This allowed new information to emerge and deeper questioning in areas of interest. The anticipated challenges of staying on topic, time management, difficult or sensitive topics, and information overload did not materialize (Degree Doctor, 2025).

The flexibility of the semi-structured approach allowed for adaptability and left room for additional topics raised by information yielded from the relatives participating. For those who had a relationship with Justine Whitegull Archer, this approach allowed topics and themes to

emerge that were not previously known to the offspring of Justine Whitegull Archer. Overall, the engagements were conversational yet stayed within the boundaries of the research theme and topic. Several relatives took advantage of the opportunity to follow up with additional comments, revisions, and new lines of inquiry. The semi-structured approach to listening engagements enabled each relative to provide storywork, and the synergy of their individual and collective power and knowledge emerged (Archibald, 2008, p. 3).

Talking Circles

Talking Circles informed the collection of Ho-Chunk Ancestral Knowledges, supported by the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers. They began with an introduction of myself as the researcher, followed by the purpose and intent of the research. Normally, talking circles are not scripted; however, with the Clan Mothers I used semi-structured queries.

Ethical Considerations

The transition from reciprocity to ethics makes sense because the ethics of Indigenous research inform how we engage, with whom we engage, and the recognition and respect for when and where it is done (Kovach, 2009). In conducting research ethically, we must ask ourselves: How do we ensure we are informing research in an ethical manner? Do our Indigenous research methodology and methods meet rigorous standards? Can I research fully from a position of refusal?

Indigenous Research Engagement

My hitek (mother’s brother), Francis Rave, expressed concerns about the ethics of what is considered the truth in existing literature about our people and its use in academia as research resources (Francis Rave, Ho-Chunk Nation, lives in Black River Falls, WI, personal communication, October 2024). His interest in maintaining the integrity of Ho-Chunk history is

in part due to the family's Ancestors, John Rave, who brought what is now the Native American Church to the north into Wisconsin (Radin, 1949, p. 12). Tuhiwai Smith (2021) supports this concern, stating, "It is important to recognize that imperialism and colonialism enabled the design of specific tools tailored especially to deal with Indigenous Peoples" (p. 22). These tools also relate to my hitek's concerns, as colonial academic practices have "misappropriation, misrepresentation, and misinterpretation" (Archibald et al., 2019, p. 152) that have hijacked and altered Indigenous history.

This ethical decolonizing research includes more than a critical analysis of the available literature. The voices of Elders who carry Indigenous Knowledges carry weight in how literature about us, but not by us, is considered. In consideration of my outsider-in status (Lee-Morgan, 2019, p. 153) as a researcher entering my community, I am blessed with the support of Ho-Chunk Elder Rita Gardner, who has offered to introduce me to the Ho-Chunk 12 Clan Mothers and has been virtually accompanying me since the beginning of this research study, ensuring a proper introduction to my Elders. Throughout the listening engagement process, the truth of this quote is evident:

> Maintaining the knowledge did not mean finding a "right" story but widening the possibility of stories. Information of different variations is preferred, pulled and maintained as a bundle of possibilities without judgment. Different stories which contradict each other, do not conflict, but simply exist". (Hokari, 2003, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019, p. 213)

Efforts to avoid relying on false histories circulated in the literature and perpetuated through colonized Indigenous practices should not deter us from accepting the truth of differing possibilities (Archibald et al., 2019, pp. 203-223; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 159). In (re)searching

Ho-Chunk history by incorporating the voices of my Elders and family, I use their Ho-Chunk worldview to tell our truth, the “right” story in this telling.

Making Meaning of Shared Knowledges

In academic terms, my research study is a qualitative, reflexive ethnographic narrative. However, as stated previously in the Chapter 2: Gathering of Indigenous Knowledges introduction, a western academic approach did not feel sufficient to meet the goals of this dissertation. To attain the diversity and breadth of sources Indigenous research requires, I utilized what I named the Hi’uną Hojikere Eja Matriarchal Theoretical Framework. It is from this framework that the Knowledges gathered to inform the research questions “What is my mother's legacy as a Ho-Chunk woman?”, “What is the wholistic[4] 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?”, and “How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?” were interpreted.

Interpretation

Within the Hi’uną Hojikere Eja Matriarchal Theoretical Framework, interpretation was conducted through a Wažoką worldview lens, which intrinsically drew on Kirkness and Barnhardt's (1991) four R's of respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility:

- *Respect* through integrity by using the Knowledges held by the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers and NARS Elders
- *Relevance* in meaningfulness of the voices of Justine Whitegull Archers’ relatives informing the Knowledges across various aspects over the span of her life
- *Reciprocity* demonstrated through the concept of wažoką, a way to acknowledge and give back to the Ho-Chunk people

[4] The use of the word wholistic—as opposed to holistic—is inspired by Absolon’s wholism theory, which considers “time and space: the past, present, future; directions and doorways of life” (Absolon, 2010, p. 75).

- *Responsibility*, or accountability, in the telling of this storywork by ensuring all voices are shared in a manner that reflects their approval

The shared Knowledges were recorded using transcription software, and interviews were stored on a secure hard drive. Transcripts were line-by-line organized into themes as they arose and then woven together into the storywork of their shared Knowledges.

Of the 39 people anticipated to take part in this research study, 16 assented to the letter of introduction and the invitation. This included five of the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers, three of the NARS Elders, and eight family members. In total, 13 Elders participated.

Normally, the fourth chapter of a dissertation is titled "Findings." However, out of respect for those who shared throughout this process, it seems only fitting, in keeping true to the design of this Indigenous research, to honor those who shared by instead referring to the fourth chapter as Hanąąc Woiš'ak Wagikere [5], or giving respect to everyone.

[5] Ho-Chunk for "giving respect to everyone" and acknowledging the contents of chapter 4 were not found, but respecting the shared knowledge by all involved

Chapter Four: Hanąąc Woiš'ak Wagikere[6], Giving Respect to Everyone

Chapter 4 is divided by response to each of the three research questions, with each further divided into themes as identified in the listening engagements with the Elders and family members who took part in the study. The Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers responded to semi-structured questions about the teachings, influences, and legacy of their mothers and grandmothers. Family members were asked about their memories of Justine Whitegull Archer, her mothers, and her sisters. Other queries were centered on leadership, and how she instilled resilience and strength in her children. The NARS Elders shared their knowledge and experiences as it related to resilience and survivance.

The legacies we carry are generational; we own the legacies passed down by our Ancestors, as people, we are someone's legacy, and we contribute to the legacy we inherit for our descendants. This research study starts with the question: what was my mother's legacy as a Ho-Chunk woman? To understand the "complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of" my mother's life journey (Tuck, 2009, p. 416), knowledge was gathered through listening engagements and talking circles that involved members of Justine Whitegull Archer's family, as well as Elders from the Ho-Chunk Nation's Clan Mothers and Native American Reentry Services Elder's Council. Participants were selected based on their knowledge and experience to address each of the research questions. Ho-Chunk Elder Rita *Reekumani* Gardner served as an advisor and liaison throughout the research study process to introduce and inform the Ho-Chunk Clan Elders about the study.

Those who engaged with this research study include Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers Bernice *Hiinųk Mąąxį Mąąnįwįga* Blackdeer, Cecelia *Nįįžųwįga* Rave, Roberta *Mąąnąksųcwįga*

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[6] Ho-Chunk for "giving respect to everyone" and acknowledging the contents of chapter 4 were not found, but respecting the shared knowledge by all involved

Decorah, Janice *Hiinųk Hijąwįga* Rice, and Crystal Young, Marie *Wanįkįkwįga* Lewis, and Annie *Mąąšų Pįįwįga* Winneshiek. Justine's brothers Alan *Kųnųga* Whitegull, Tim *Worakpįga* Decorah, and Francis *Miinąka* Rave Sr. provided insights into Justine's childhood. Her sons, James *Kųnųga* Fortner III, Osceola *Haagaga* Fortner, and Asa *Caaska Hirakarapįga* Archer, along with her ex-husband, James Fortner Jr., and his sister, Brenda Person, shared their knowledge of her life from the age of 20 onward.

The participants were organized according to the research question. Questions asked to the Clan Mothers were shaped by the research question "What is Justine Whitegull Archer's legacy as a Ho-Chunk woman?" The family member questions were guided by the second research question, "What is the wholistic 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?" The NARS Elder questions were based on the final research question, "How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?"

Because the questions asked during listening engagements were semi-structured, the intersection of relationships, Ho-Chunk Ways of Being, and generational healing led participants to give responses that addressed areas beyond their original intent. This reflected the healing journey of those involved; responses showed the qualities of desire-based research, as participants shared not only challenges and pain but also the healing and knowledge gained from these experiences.

Justine Whitegull Archer's Legacy as a Ho-Chunk Woman

My brother Asa best captured a description of my mother in sacredness:

> It was just in her heart to be that way, to be a protector. You know, I think it's one of those things that are passed down through generations. It's coded in our DNA. And she got that from someone down the line, from our people, to be that way. I feel like our

> Indigenous blood is strong and the spirit of our Ancestors are strong. But most importantly, there's the spirit of God that she trusted in, that she prayed to. The Holy Spirit was with her always. That's why she was so strong. That's why she was strong the way she was.

This description highlights why womanhood can come to be seen as sacred. Beyond her roles as a giver of life, protector, and knowledge keeper, there is a sacredness in how, through her, her son describes his spiritual connection to his Ancestors. This generational spiritual link persists despite differences in practices. When describing the Ho-Chunk Traditional practices versus Native American Church traditions of her Ancestors, Ho-Chunk Clan Mother Janice Rice points out that despite differing religious preferences, “a lot of the values still came through.” This same spirit is not only passed down to us but also sought after. As Native people, Ho-Chunk Elder Francis Rave Sr. explains that we are seekers of medicine; to hąąte haginąc (to fast) is part of the spiritual foundation Justine inherited from her Rave Ancestors and sought for herself and her children. The mąąka way of life she introduced her children to offers another way to connect Ancestors to descendants—through seeking the sacrament, the comforter, of peyote that Mą’ųna placed for us to find.

Resilience for Place

Justine introduced the peyote ceremony to her children in the same place she learned it, on Ho-Chunk homelands in Wisconsin. Her Haaga Osceola shared early childhood memories of teepee ceremonies. “I remember being in a ceremony with Mom. I did not know what it was. I remember I was probably 3 years old. Mom told me that we were in a peyote ceremony.” Four decades later, her nąąği Asa experiences healing in the same place, saying, “That mąąka way of

life has brought me to almost two years clean and sober, and I have a peace in my life that I've never experienced."

James Fortner III, Justine's Kųnų, relates the resilience of place to the strength he sees in his two youngest siblings, Asa and Sissy. He states, "You know, it took a lot of courage and strength to move away from what they know, which is here (Tacoma)," and he connects their move to the ancestral homelands with a message from his mother when he first moved across Turtle Island on his own: "spread your wings."

Justine Whitegull Archer passed away on May 27th, 2019, on a beautifully clear day when Mount Rainier was out. She was brought home by her Wihą Sylvia Archer, then taken to her brother Alan Whitegull until she was laid to rest with her Ancestors at the Decorah Family Cemetery. Asa shared, "I feel like that healed her, putting her back in this bosom of Mother Earth here, Ho-Chunk land here. I know she's been healed now."

Building on the strengths of sacredness, generational values, and spirituality, Asa also talks about forgiveness, connection, maintaining a prayer life, and helping others.

> My sisters (are) the strongest women I know, thanks to Mom. Y'all are the strongest women that I know. Y'all have been through so much, and that's what gives me some peace of mind, and comfort too, when I think about you guys and I pray for you guys. I know I know how strong you are.

While he expressed concerns about spiritual walks and other challenges faced within the family, the strength of the women raised by Justine is evident. While Justine raised her children by demonstrating advocacy and matriarchal strength, her son Osceola said he felt she would have benefited from the support that comes from sisterhood with other Native women, especially since she was far from her home community. "I think maybe if she had a circle of women that were

Native, too, that could have helped her out a little bit. Maybe, I think just being more involved in the Native community."

Resilience and Reciprocity

The reciprocity of resilience is described by Ho-Chunk Elder Cecelia Rave when she discusses her role as a Clan Mother. She states,

> I say stuff to encourage them (young Ho-Chunk girls and women) along, and to myself, it's kind of really encouraging to me, too. When I listen to the rest of the Clan Mothers here, when they have stuff to offer, and I listen to them, it furthers me.

To further others is to help ourselves. In caring for others, Clan Mother Roberta Decorah shares her spiritual path, which she admits is very strong. "My life is no longer about me, it's about those behind me…what I've learned aligns with other spiritual pathways." She explains how she does this even in difficult situations, especially when offering comfort to those who are grieving. "There are no words that can fully ease grief—so I give a hug and tell them the love comes from my heart. I always pray because I feel God knows what you're doing and understands." Adding to her prayers, she encourages the use of tobacco, "because it's essential. When I'm troubled, I pour it as an offering, showing my intention and hope for healing."

Clan Mother Janice Rice shares that one way of looking after each other goes back to a time when safety depended on being and moving quietly for the safety of those around you:

> Our Ancestors learned that when they were being removed, they had to be quiet and moved quietly so they didn't get caught. They didn't have that eye contact to signal the next person to do the next right thing, to protect one another and guide one another. And then we say in Ho-Chunk we say "Aa hikiruti", that means grab someone by the hand and pull them along, so we have to do that. That's one of the things we're supposed to do, is

> help one another and take the younger ones by the hand. And sometimes that doesn't always happen, but when it does, it feels so good. Feels like you belong, feel like you're being protected, feels like you're being guided.

For times when we do not have aa hikiruti, Janice says we must use prayer:

> Sometimes if you don't have that, you don't feel the sibling reaching for you or a Nąąnį or a Cųųwį helping you, that prayer takes that spot. And then you can guide yourself through with prayer, and have that helping hand of the Creator, of Mą'ųna, helping you along the way. So that's what I learned from family just by existing, just by being part of the community.

It is this lesson that Justine instilled in her children, which informs the wažooki worldview that guides this research study. My brother Osceola spoke of the Nąąnį, Cųųwį, and Gaga responsibilities instilled in me by my mother when asked about healing in our family:

> Being of service. Doing service work. Like the name, Winona, means the giver of bread. That's one definition I've heard of your name. And I think it's like the giver of bread, so when I think of that, it's like somebody who's offering themselves as a helper.

He discussed how this has become a new generation, in that our daughters D'Asia and Adel have both found healing and joy through service work. He sees how they are following in our mothers' footsteps. Just as she came to Tacoma alone and had to figure things out, the next generation of women is using service work for both healing and as a means to be a blessing. Osceola explains how D'Asia, Adel, and the other girls in our family can use education as a pathway to heartwork, healing through spirituality, and culture.

Resilience Informed by Knowledge/Teachings/Education

Osceola's brother James Fortner III shares his thoughts on intergenerational trauma, a term he was introduced to in recent years. He says, "This whole thing makes a whole lot of freaking sense. And then when you start listening and learning about it, and it's like waking stuff up inside of me." He explains how this again goes back to inherent knowledge:

> Everything that was coming out of that class, I understood it. It's not like going to school and learning something, it's like the words I was reading and the videos I was watching and listening to, the speakers…it was like they were pulling something out of me, it was there the whole time. I was like, man, it was already there.

While James learned about intergenerational trauma in a class setting, Clan Mother Bernice Blackdeer encourages us to face the things that went wrong. "To me, I think if you make a mistake, and you get over it, and discover that it was wrong, you learn from it. So that's one of the things I live by."

Clan Mothers Crystal Young and Roberta Decorah discuss the significance of cultural teachings. Roberta explained how she learned resilience through the stories her Gaga shared with her:

> She had the stories. And the resiliency, that I can tell you. The things that she told me, that I explored on the internet, everything that she said, I validated by some document. And to me, that documentation and validating of what she told us was so meaningful. In a sense, to validate something…it makes you even stronger as a woman because you know that this is where you came from. I learned to be organized, I learned to be a strong woman.

The importance of that resilience goes beyond just stories; it lies in connecting us to history, linking our Ancestors with our descendants. Roberta stated,

> I think that our children really need to know their history. They wouldn't be questioning who they were if they knew their history and the hardships that we endured to get to where we are today. I think that's so essential.

Clan Mother Crystal Young shares that this is supported by the work being done by the Ho-Chunk Nation today:

> I really find it inspirational that…we now have a library. The other thing is, on Tuesday nights, get-togethers to learn how to make pą̨ąxge earrings, moccasins, pouches, storytelling…all the stuff that's going on is really important, significant. And people wanting to know their families (history); it's really amazing. They want to know their clans. Grateful for that opportunity.

Traditions of Women

> It's something that we all have in us, especially in Indigenous people, women…and when they speak from somewhere people listen, and it comes out—not with just a tone—but something extraordinary when Natives speak. Like, when Mom would speak about something… she's coming from a real place. People took her seriously because she didn't have to say she'd been there. If she spoke about something, whoever was listening would be like, "Oh, she understands." There was a quality Mom had that made people listen.

James R. Fortner III, 2025

Teega Francis Rave reflects on the strengths witnessed by those who knew his Nų̨ų̨nų̨ (older sister) Justine, and how those traits were reflected in his mother, Irene *Pį̨įhimą̨nį̨įga* Rave, and his sisters, Gail *Wiihą̨ga* Rave and Joyce *Wakaajaska iiga* Funmaker. Looking back on their time in the Native American Church, he describes the tradition of Ho-Chunk women at meetings and how it has changed over time. He states there is room in the church to advance its thinking

about women's roles. He describes how now he is approached for permission to sing in the meetings, something he says was not done until the Vietnam War. Reasoning that ceremonial seats needed to be occupied as women took care of the community, and doing the work of the warriors until they returned home, "women first started to sing with the staff and the instruments because they had to…if they wanted to utilize their Native American Church, they had to do the same things".

Now, he says, there are still those who will not allow women to touch the instruments as they are passed around, but when asked, he allows for women to sing in prayer services he is in charge of, because "I had a mother and I had sisters, so through that I learned to have that kind of respect that you should be accorded." He is not alone in this way of thinking and also mentions how my brother Asa hosted a prayer meeting last year to pray for the women of the church and all the work they do, so that the community can have these meetings.

He goes on to share how his Nųųnųs used their talents and skills, especially during times of mourning when there is a high demand for sewing, given the number of ribbon skirts and shirts that need to be ready within four days of preparation for a burial. My Nąąnį's were skilled in making baskets, beadwork, and applique. My Nąąnį Gail was an exceptional artist; in addition to being a seamstress and working on beadwork, she also made star quilts. You can see her skills passed down to her children today. He mentions a skill my Nąąnį Joyce had that was a little different. Besides the crafting skills she learned with her sisters, she also had a talent for processing a deer. When there

Figure 16

Sisters Wakąja sgąjga, Wiihąga, and Heex Pįjwjga

was a need for caa (deer) meat, she was involved in obtaining it—killing the deer, then dressing, skinning, and butchering it all the way to cooking it for the prayer meeting.

Leadership

Ho-Chunk women carry traditions forward while providing care not only for our families but also for our community and government. Women are present in every aspect of the Ho-Chunk Nation, including government, administration, business, culture, community, and family. Everything that has upheld our resilience and sustained our people over generations is embodied in the Ho-Chunk women we are today.

Figure 17

Wedding of James Fortner Jr. & Justine Whitegull Archer

I am blessed to have both Ho-Chunk and African roots, and my mother raised me to honor both. My grandmother, Mary Berry Person, was a leader. As the oldest child, my response to questions about how mothers and grandmothers demonstrated leadership differs from my siblings because I had more exposure to my Grandma Mary, who lived near Ft. Riley, compared to my siblings. In many ways, the way I learned leadership from her and my mother shows a link between my two cultures. I learned about safety, care, and spiritual leadership, and my grandmother was well known for her community involvement through the church and her work.

My Teega Tim Decorah describes how my Gagas Irene Rave and Francita "Cita" Decorah led in the Ho-Chunk community. Even in situations where men were traditionally prioritized during Native American Church activities, my Gaga Irene and her younger sister Gaga Cita took charge and started delegating by asking, "Hey, do you want to say a prayer for

the meal? Do you want to take over the meal?" Their leadership and competence, both in the community and at home, allowed them to step into leadership roles whenever needed.

Strength

My Teega's Al Whitegull and Tim Decorah described the strength of Gaga Irene and Gaga Cita. While some people in the community might demand respect as Elders, my Gagas earned it. They were known to be outspoken, and the courage from their past experiences only added to their strength. Teega Tim shared how this caused some to fear them because you knew you could "catch hell" from them. Teega Al confirms this by saying no one tried to argue with either of them.

Roberta Decorah explains that part of her role as a Clan Mother is to share "experience, strength, and hope, that kind of thing for our young." She also shares that her mother, aunts, and Gagas were all women of strength, and how even the pain of arthritis did not stop her Gaga from taking care of her home:

> My grandma would get up here, regardless of her arthritis and how bad it was. She would get up and move, bake bread, you know. Every day there'd be something; sewing, quilts, blankets, lots of stuff by hand. I'd say they were all strong in their own fashion. It was a service work, she knew her language, her culture…to share whatever knowledge she had with kids.

Janice Rice also shares how Ho-Chunk women built resilience through the traditional practice of isolating in a ciiporoke (dwelling) during their monthly cycle. She describes how these women valued privacy and personal space during this time. It was a period "they could devote on themselves and center themselves and feel good about being able to learn to cook for themselves,

learn to clean for themselves." She explains how noticeable the benefits were to the mind, body, and spirit when this traditional practice promoted self-efficacy.

Discipline

With that kind of strength comes a certain level of discipline to expect. When the Gaga's and Nąąnį's that we are talking about were raising children, Tim Decorah shared that if people were trying to avoid them, it was "if they knew that they were doing something that they weren't supposed to be doing, like at a birthday party or devotions or meeting, or just in general." Bernice Blackdeer reinforced Teega Tim's statement with what she was told by her own mother:

> When you go somewhere, you don't do everything everybody else is doing…She said, "You use your head, God gave you a brain and put it in your head and put it on your shoulder. I can't remind you enough, because I don't want to hear somebody telling that you did something that I'm going to be ashamed of".

In agreement, Roberta Decorah shared:

> My grandmother was a Bear Clan. The one thing that really amazed me was how she lived. Very humble. And my mother was strict in the sense that if you did something, you better sure have an answer for why you did it. I mean…if you did something, she'd hear about it. You know, you'd have to say why did you do that? I didn't teach you that. And so you had to answer for whatever you did.

Teachers

When asked about the role of a Clan Mother and how she came into that position, Bernice Blackdeer shared that Myrtle *Hįyųgįwįga* Long approached her. Myrtle Long established the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers in 2001. By organizing the Clan Mothers, she gave each Ho-Chunk clan member a matriarchal connection that offers teachings, Ho-Chunk knowledge, and a sense

of belonging. The weight of this responsibility was not lost on Bernice: "I felt like that was one of the biggest questions that I think I've ever had to deal with, other than getting married and saying I do." She reflected on how her parents reared her, the strictness of her upbringing, and questioned whether she could pass those lessons on to young women in a way that would convey the rights and wrongs of life. She said, "if there's a way of teaching it to somebody, that would be being a grandmother."

Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's

Teachings and lessons from Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's were a vital part of life education for the Clan Mothers. These women created a safe space for topics you might not have wanted to discuss with your parents. In sharing these life lessons, Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's roles align with the vision of the Clan Mothers. Roberta Decorah explained how she encouraged her daughters and Nąąnįxete's to emulate the relationship she had with her mother's Nąąnįxete. She knew there are mother-daughter conversations that could cause a daughter to ignore her mother's advice, so Robert encouraged the relationship, understanding that "if I said something to her, she wouldn't listen to me. So, I knew that my older sister would talk to her in a way that she would understand."

There was strength in their teachings because, as Roberta Decorah put it:

> They had gone beyond where I was, and I wanted to know how they did. That always amazed me, the how, so I would ask them and they would explain in detail what that was about, and it kind of made you able to want to venture out a little bit more than where you were before, so that you were able to try something new. You were afraid, but they told you…the why is to try something new.

She describes how kinship ways are supported by Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's roles. She explains that a historical perspective provides insight that no one individual could contain on their own, this is how knowledge is preserved by the family, clan, and tribe—something no one person could hold alone. Roberta shared a dream she had after her Nąąnį's had passed, where she asked who she should turn to know that they were gone. She was told it was her responsibility to use what they had taught her, and that she is now the person others will come to for that knowledge. She explains that the reciprocity of this relationship sustains Ho-Chunk kinship ways, because knowledge descends generationally through these relationships. When we need to learn what was shared by the Nąąnį, Cųųwį, Jaaji, Teega, or others, it is through this ongoing exchange.

Clan Mother Janice Rice offers another generational perspective, that of the Hinų's and Wihą's. She shares how you will see the Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's at events and ceremonies, and in conversations, mixed with laughing and talking, you will see teachings directed at a particular girl. These lessons may be directed at her alone because she is the Hinų. As the Wihą of her family, Janice stated:

> Sometimes it doesn't get said to you directly, but your older (sister) the Hinų's, is getting told to do something, or guide her. But I'm the Wihą on the side that gets to learn what I overheard them saying, or to each other. Those kinds of things, the way that our grandmothers learned and the way that our mothers learned, was one-on-one. And my mother was raised traditional, and so she got those teachings during her lifetime.

Janice goes on to describe how your clan affiliation influences how you receive teachings. She describes how family and clan members in the community guide you to the ones from whom you should be receiving your clan teachings, even if you were not aware of it at the time. She shares that as an adult, she realized many of her teachings came from Bear Clan women, and how

naturally and seamlessly that clan knowledge was passed down through generations. There is strength in the reciprocity of an entire generation of clan women intentionally sharing their knowledge with the younger members of their clan families.

Prayer

Out of the eighteen participants, prayer was mentioned 99 times. It was not just about the act of praying; it emphasized the importance of prayer as a practice and in mentorship, by praying in the way a Nąąnį or Gaga would. Clan Mother Cece Rave states, “My grandma, she always used to pray. My mother too, she always prayed. And that’s what I do daily too.” Clan Mother Janice Rice shared that within the home, the days started and ended in prayer, noting this was a common practice among the male relatives as well. She shared, “It wasn’t until I saw mąįxete people (white people) being ashamed to pray that I thought, ‘What? We’re not supposed to pray?’ They looked like if somebody said grace before a meal…like shock at school”. The significance of prayer was reinforced by what she learned from her Gaga, Nąąnį, and her older sister. “I was just shadowing them.” In this way, it was also a generational act, not only through mentorship but also by intentionally instilling the practice of prayer in our children. It was also mentioned as a placeholder for the comfort of an absent loved one, like a Nąąnį or Cųųwį. Additionally, it serves as a strong form of connection to loved ones such as your children, when prayer and love are the only things you can give.

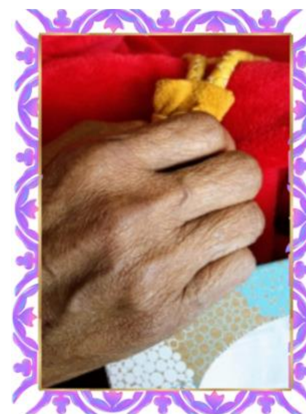
As a form of healing and resilience, prayer was mentioned as a way to help us release anything painful we are praying about, so we can be forgiving and loving. Prayer is medicine for healing and a force against harm. My grandmother, Mary Person, modeled ongoing prayer throughout her work, a practice I inherited from her. She had a big heart, and as she interceded to support and protect the community's needs, prayer was part of her essential arsenal.

Asa Archer describes remembering our mother in prayer, entering a room to find her in the midst of prayer. Her prayer was strong; you could tell by the clasp of her hands, her eyes closed, and the focused expression on her face. He sees her prayer at NAC meetings, among the women who pray just as intently, just as passionately:

> Our women, they have their hands locked like that, and they're just praying all night, eating medicine, praying. So now when I look back and I remember my mom that way, I'm able to picture her being around that fireplace and around the fireplace with her hands and her head locked down and just in prayer. That's what I want for my kids.

Figure 18

Justine Whitegull Archer with a medicine bag from the Iron House April 2019



Ho-Chunk Core Values

Writings about how Ho-Chunk women have walked in this world and the futurity of their strength and resilience would be incomplete without understanding how their relationships with men shape this worldview. Hochungra values outline much of what was shared about relationships. Today, as we confront how patriarchal influence has disrupted the wellbeing of Ho-Chunk women—from whitestream racism and misogyny to lateral oppression—we must be mindful of our intent to decolonize and restore our communities. “The survival of culture and perpetuation of tradition necessitate the fostering of collective experience; exclusion of any segment of the population is not a viable option” (Grey, 2004, p. 14).

Ho-Chunk Clan Mother Janice Rice shared the Ho-Chunk Core Values as guidance for building our relationships, kinship responsibilities, and reciprocity. As Clan Mother Cece Rave tells us, “to show love and concern.”

Woogixete – Love

Nąąc hokiją - Compassion

Woiš'ak - Respect

Kuuži giwahare – Humility

Hisgexji – Honesty

Wanąąc hojąįsge /Kųįne – To be pitiful, humble

Woogizok – Truth

In closing, I share these words of wisdom from Clan Mother Bernice Blackdeer:

> One of the things that an Elder said at a spiritual gathering, he said, none of us are really capable of love. The only one who can really love us is the Creator. With the gifts that he gave us, what we're able to do, he did that out of love for each one of us. The only thing we as human beings that walk on this earth, that we're able to do as the closest thing, is respect. To respect your spouse, you respect your brother and sister, as the closest you can come to love because we aren't able to create anything the way that Mą'ųna, the way Creator, has done for us.

The Wholistic 21st-Century Experience of Indigenous Female Leadership

The second research question, "What is the holistic 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?" aimed to understand how settler colonialism manifested or impacted Native, Black, and other women of color. In this context, the questions posed to participants sought to explore Justine Whitegull Archer's experiences as a mother, community leader, and her resilience in both roles.

The family members included four of Justine Whitegull Archer's five children, three brothers, her ex-husband, and her sister-in-law. While my youngest sibling Sylvia Archer did not participate, my brothers James Fortner III, Osceola Fortner, and Asa Archer took part in the

listening engagements. In the role of research study participant, I included myself and answered the same questions as my siblings. The age gap between me (the oldest) and my brother Asa (the second youngest) is 14 years; by including myself, I aim to provide a more detailed narrative to help shape the findings.

The family members' recollections begin with Justine's childhood, shared by her brothers Francis Rave Sr., Alan Whitegull, and Tim Decorah. Her ex-husband James Fortner Jr. and his sister Brenda Person provide insights into her years after leaving Wisconsin, marking the start of her life as a mother and wife. Her children share memories and stories spanning the rest of her life, including her evolution into an advocate and matriarch. Their responses help us understand how Justine's holistic experiences as a Ho-Chunk woman shaped her role as a leader.

The challenge of this research question stemmed from the pain, trauma, and tragedy revealed through the interview questions, especially from my brothers. Despite their experiences, they spoke from a place of strength and healing where they are now. This marks where the research begins to employ desire-based research frameworks; in how the stories are framed and interpreted. The truth of their stories is uncovered by acknowledging both the good and the bad without renaming them.

Matriarchal Strength

Elements such as women being fighters and teachers, the use of tough love, and trauma as a form of generational disruption were common themes across many of the conversations during listening engagements. In Justine's life journey, she

Figure 19

Gaga's Francita Decorah & Irene Rave

was surrounded by strong women who were fighters, known for their strength and toughness, and honestly, for being intimidating. They were advocates before that was a thing, known to stand toe-to-toe with anyone, even police, if they felt they were being out of line. Walking into a space and commanding this kind of presence speaks volumes. They were not afraid of anyone. Al Whitegull and Tim Decorah shared that they taught their children to stand up for themselves and recounted how Gaga Cita would say, “You got a voice, you got a mouth”, Mom said. “Use it…you got a brain, use it.” She also shared lessons she received from her parents, to not be discouraged or to believe you are less than others. She said, “You are better. You are just as good as them, if not better,”

Moving from her mother Irene’s house to her husband’s family, Justine continued to witness the strength of women making a difference, this time within the Black community. Her mother-in-law, Mary Person, was very active and involved, with her daughter Brenda Person describing her as an “it takes a village type of person.” In line with her Native American Church and Lutheran roots, Justine found another way to connect religion to community, this time from the Black community perspective.

Parenting

Osceola’s words about our mother echo those of Teega Al and Tim regarding our grandmothers. He shared, “For some reason, everybody in our community was scared of my mom.” He says it with laughter but also shares how she was not afraid to show up at his school when she had concerns about her children facing discrimination. He stated, “They would say ‘Ms. Archer, Ms. Archer we'll take care of that!’ you know, and that’s passed on to you, honestly. I'll say my sister's coming, and people start (saying) “Oh! Gotta go!”

James shares the way our mother taught us—that she wanted her descendants to grow strong, see the world, but proceed with caution. He felt she wanted the women in our family to use that strength to keep from falling into the traps of pain, trauma, and tragedy from our family's past, and he expressed how painful it is to know the experiences of our family and Ancestors. Reflecting on how our mother and others in our community use heartwork to fight oppression, he said it can make you feel militant, "I understand now. Yes, I'll walk with you. I'll march with you. I'll stand with you. I'll raise my fist with you."

Figure 20

Osceola Fortner w/ mother Justine Whitegull Archer

An area of significant focus for heartwork is the ramifications of substance abuse in our communities. Osceola recalls when, as he became a teenager, there was a duality in his relationship with our mother; the vicious, tough love side was at odds with the mother who told him she loved him and showed it with hugs and kisses. As a mother, how do you tackle a force like gang life and drugs? For years, the answer we were bombarded with was admonition to not hug a thug but practice tough love and use ultimatums delivered through interventions. The result for Osceola was the challenge of living with the duality of how she parented his struggles, exacerbated by the multiple roles she had to fulfill as a single mother, and the fact that he had no relationship with his father or any father figure. Yet in his healing, he came to understand the complexity of her.

It is not only the choices we make, but also the people we choose that influence either health or toxicity within our families. This can be an intergenerational trait. Within our own family, we have several generations with stepparents in the household. As is the case with Joseph

Person Sr., our father’s stepfather, that influence led to experiencing how a man demonstrates authority within the home, his businesses, and the church. As James puts it, “he was a boss in everything he did.” Unfortunately, not every new family member positively impacts the existing family the way Joseph Person Sr. did, especially when substance use factors into the new relationships. Recognizing and acknowledging this within intergenerational patterns is key, and the teachings needed to support this are vital. Laura Bluehorse-Swift discusses how intergenerational trauma teachings are not expansive or available enough:

> These are things that we should be learning early in our lives, or in some part of our early educational process, we should be learning these concepts? Because it affects us so deeply, and if you don't know, you just continue doing it? And you don't even recognize that it's wrong because you don't understand that cycle; you don't understand because it's this subconscious process that you've been conditioned into doing.

One thing James points out is that within our generation, of the five siblings, I am the only one who did not struggle with substance abuse or the criminal “justice” system. While he attributes this to a strong personality and will, I attribute it to the relationship I was able to have with my grandmother, Mary Person, through which I was exposed to more teachings and opportunities to learn from and apply them. However, my other siblings did not have the same relationship because of their young age and isolation caused by domestic violence. Those two factors alone contributed to the disconnect between James and Osceola from Grandma Mary, and Asa and Sylvia from their Grandma Essie Mae.

Just as we understand how Mary Person's influence ingrained resilience in me, the same was true for James and his Teega Ted Rave. Traditionally, a Teega’s responsibility is to discipline and teach his sister’s children, playing a significant role in their upbringing. James

shares a memory of his Teega Ted, of being out in the woods and making water drums. While he was exposed to Teegas in a traditional sense, he said his mother also encouraged him to interact with his father's brothers, supporting the Teega relationship even on his father's side.

Toxic Masculinity

During the listening engagements, several men spoke about trauma, domestic violence, misogyny, pride, and ego. Among these, anger appears in many forms. Justine's son Asa shared how, as a child, he first began processing the violence our mother, sister, and I experienced as he grew to understand it;

Figure 21

Asa Archer w/ mother Justine Whitegull Archer

> I was scared to look at (it) sometimes, one of those things I wanted to avoid…I know it affected my family, and I've seen it…and I've heard about it, and for me, I thought that that was all I needed to know without it making me an angry person.

Seeing her nąąğį struggling with anger, Justine talked to him about what she called "angry Indians," or people who let their justified anger consume them, leading to racism against others.

Osceola shares an incident where, despite neighbors calling the police to help our mother, they chose not to do so. He describes his anger and frustration in that moment. What does this teach a boy? How many of our children grow up knowing they cannot trust the police response or the law when they can turn away from a domestic scene like that?

Older brother James also discussed anger in the context of responding to his growing awareness of the injustice faced by the Black and Native communities. While the understandable

response might be anger, he says it is part of developing strength as a Black Native person, and now the response is knowledge—the act of learning and sharing it with those willing to listen.

Warren Gohl has seen how ego, pride, and misogyny contribute to toxic masculinity. He explains how ego causes Native men to diverge from the Indigenous view of women as sacred. He points out situations where men openly question women's roles at the sweat lodge, refuse to be near women, questioning them about their moon cycles, and defend themselves by suggesting women take men's "power," almost as if they are witches. "I knew a lot of young men find that to be threatening, 'Oh, the women get together once a month and they're like witches', you know, that kind of talk." He also describes how some men attempt to center themselves in leadership roles in spaces created by Native women. Recalling an incident at a gathering space used for traditional medicines, he paraphrases a conversation where one man said, "Well, yeah, they got too much power, as it is, you know, not to take over our food, too." I said, "That's a good point. Where'd you get your first food from?" "My mom."

Warren also describes a certain toxic pride that can be found among those in Native traditional circles. Observing community powwows, he has noticed over the years that they are becoming "more fancy" and that some dancers have "more feathers than a bird." Looking back 30 or 40 years, the experience was about a "sense of dancing for other people, a sense of looking up to Grandfather and saying, 'Thank you for giving me this gift.'" He explains that pride can stem not from the heart, but from the ego, and to prevent pride from being driven by ego, powwows must be viewed as places of sacrifice. He recalls,

> In the old days, I would meet an old man dancing and come off the dancing floor at the powwow grounds and his feet would be bleeding. He's old, you know, and he wouldn't

> complain about the pain, "This is from my heart, I offer this up for the people." You never see that anymore.

Racism

It is interesting that no matter where Justine went—whether with her family of origin in Wisconsin or her married family in Kansas—both of her families were sheltered from the racism in the world around them. Both her ex-husband, James Fortner Sr., and her brother, Francis Rave, shared how their parents made sure they were shielded from outside influences. James said, "See, I lived a sheltered life, and my family's all been there. And the world's problem is the world's problem. We're not part of the world." Francis echoed this, saying, "I don't think they (his parents) ever allowed anything like that to negatively influence their input that they had as far as raising us."

An example of how racism impacted people was seen in the boarding school experiences of Ho-Chunk members. Francis Rave mentions that while he did not face the same kind of racism that his Teega Roland Rave experienced at Neillsville Boarding School in Wisconsin, it still played a role in the experience of education for Ho-Chunk children. "In those days the prejudice was really strong in the Black River community." Describing incidents of both overt and covert racism, he said it was "palpable. It was something that was in the air." Alan Whitegull says it was just something you dealt with, and:

> (If) you had to get into a scrap with somebody, you got into it with them, you know. And that would usually kind of solve the problem for a while until the next guy come along and tried to put 'em up.

James shared how growing up Black and Native challenged how he and others around him identified him. Looking up to strong male figures on both sides of his family, his desire to

emulate them was challenged by what he calls the truth: “What's the truth? The truth is what was done to who I am, to my grandparents, their grandparents, my parents, our tribe, our Black side.” While today’s readily available information, supported by our communities, counters stereotypes and misinformation, he learned from the public school systems and television of the 70s and 80s—sources where misinformation and stereotypes created conflict with how he understood himself as Native and Black person; “(cartoons) thirty, forty years later…they're not so funny with bones in their hair, big lips, and, you know, the Native ‘woo woo woo’.” Yet, family truths encouraged him to dig deeper. Truth also came from Elders he met while incarcerated, who spoke truth not from a perspective of someone still in the throes of addiction or on a bad path, but from one focused on using lived experience for healing and wisdom.

Many mothers like mine have experienced the heartbreaking reality of watching their children live lives that evoke fear. The school-to-prison pipeline waits to catch children who lash out or mask their pain with drugs, alcohol, and risky behaviors that can pull them away from us in various ways. James shares some of his journey down that dark path, about anger and being reactive: “I didn't know what else to do with it, so I dealt with it in that way and, you know, kept on. It became a giant circle until I got tired of it, a revolving door.” He also talks about his losses due to following that path, including the wisdom his mother tried to pass along and the disconnection from his family, especially his younger brothers:

> I didn't want my brothers to see anything about me. I didn't want them to see me out there in the streets wearing my flag, and wearing my Dickies, and braided hair, and doing things I was doing. That's why I kept most of that stuff away.

He describes the disconnect, whether intentional or not—intentional in that he was very conscious of keeping his two worlds separate, and unintentional in that even when he was with

family, “I was around but I wasn’t…I was somewhere else.” His words reflect what relatives in the Iron House have shared as their motivation for giving back to our communities: to bring healing to spaces they once left damaged.

> I didn't want them to see that, and I'm glad I felt that way. They still ended up where they still ended up being, just doing what they did. And I feel a lot of guilt for that, especially with Chuckie. Chuckie, I felt so much guilt in the route that he took. Because the things I went through…I didn't even want it for myself. But they thought it was cool. And I didn't like that. Not one bit.

Figure 22

James Fortner III w/ mother Justine Whitegull Archer

While these words carry pain, they also point to a path of redemption. Recognizing what was done and gaining wisdom from it can help us create something to share, enriching our community.

Seneca Elder Warren Gohl shares his experiences with brothers in the Iron House who have yet to reach that point. Most concerning is a cavalier attitude—whether as a shield from pain or not—as their children and marriages are struggling. He talks about when people come together for visits or at annual prison powwows, and how that cavalier attitude:

> Means that you're good at manipulating your environment…perhaps your relationships. But it gets real, real scary there. Maintaining survivance, what is it? Your own ego? Your fear? Is it really the drum of the past, the drum of the Ancestors as you hear in your heart? There's a big conflict there.

Heartwork and Heartache

In several conversations, the discussion often turned toward toxicity in the form of resilience, internalized and lateral oppression, self-neglect, or unhealthy sacrifice. Laura Bluehorse-Swift shares some challenges unique to tribal experiences, one of which is that tribal government structures are based on western organizational principles. Tribal entities adopting hierarchy and western methodologies contradict our matriarchal and egalitarian roots of consensus, whether they are tribal, religious, or spiritual forms of government, organization, or community.

When hierarchy is applied to spiritual or traditional contexts, there can be a disconnect between the good intentions trickling down from the top and the work being done at the bottom. It is in this space that many women, in doing their heartwork, face harm. Using my mother and grandmother as examples, both were aligned in speaking their truth. While speaking truth can earn respect from others, women of color speaking their truth can be received and interpreted differently. Both my mother and grandmother advocated within their communities; my mother was more involved in political spheres, while my grandmothers were more active in religious circles. It still pains me to know that their steadfastness in their beliefs and truths led others in the hierarchy to cause harm to them for speaking what needed to be said.

My Aunt Brenda Person shared how the lateral violence experienced by her mother affected her: "I picked the defensive side because I felt like I always had to protect my mother from people that she would just open her arms to." Despite her pain, she never stopped opening her arms to those who would hurt her; she would never turn anyone away.

For my mother—in all the spaces she entered, prepared for battle—she was never afraid to say what needed to be said. Her son Asa shared, "She always spoke up to a concern or

something to address, she never held back and she spoke with conviction. She walked into the room like God sent her."

It is a social justice issue when women sacrifice themselves to the point of mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual harm, and it reflects the state and health of our communities that so many women experience this. Many women I have worked with professionally are doing heartwork in our communities for causes that have affected their own families and are being drained because they cannot give enough, and they are pouring from empty cups. Sacrifice to this extent also means sacrificing your emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

Yet many of us are driven by the generational aspect of heartwork. Teega Francis Rave shared how my Gaga Irene, who sacrificed her dream of going to school to become a home economics teacher, but ended up in the Twin Cities as a seamstress making uniforms, parachutes, and backpacks when World War II broke out. She never returned to school to chase her dream, but she applied everything she learned in her childhood—doing basketmaking, beadwork, tanning hides, and applique. Like her, I did not pursue my dream of writing and becoming a librarian; instead, I entered social work in response to a need in the community that reflected a need in my family. Many of us watch our mothers and grandmothers enter professions that serve a community need at the expense of personal dreams, yet it is both an honor and a blessing to be in such a position. We are fortunate to do our heartwork and excel because our mothers and grandmothers showed us that caring for the community fulfills in a way no other deed can.

Part of doing this work well involves building relationships and connections within the community, resources, and those who can help you obtain what you lack. James shares how our mother's network of relationships made her a go-to person for people seeking to give or in need of help. He recalls community members coming to her, with Mom responding with what she

could do, then engaging stakeholders and doing the legwork to best address each situation. He describes her work ethic as being forward-moving and goal-oriented, which empowered both herself and her community. Asa remembers that even as a young child, he felt motivated by our mother's achievements, recalling an American Indian Higher Education Consortium plaque with a large eagle feather mounted on it, saying, "I didn't know what it was or signified, but I knew my mom achieved something."

Moving in Tacoma's community advocacy and city government circles positioned my mother to teach me many lessons about walking in both worlds as a Black Native woman in the workplace. You can tell a teacher's experiences by the teachings they share, and over the years I have shared my mother's experiences and the lessons she taught me from them with others to inspire them, especially women who may not have had a figure like her in their lives. Some people might be offended by the lessons many of us in brown and black communities receive to help us survive harmful and triggering encounters at work; these messages are not for them. They are for those who must live through these situations and need these tools to help them get through environments that are toxic to people of color.

For those who were not raised by a Native woman in a Black family or have not had the blessing of being exposed to Black grandmothers and aunties, I briefly share some of the lessons I learned. These lessons include understanding that work is not the place to play or make your social life ("You are not at work to make friends"). This prepares you when others might try to intimidate you or claim what you have done as their own ("Stand firm"). In these spaces, we must take care in protecting ourselves because at some point, you will be defending yourself as an Angry Black Woman, against white fragility, or for triggering white tears over something no one else would have been called out for. When you may be invited to spaces where you are

tokenized, be ready to use your voice ("Always say what needs to be said"). This is the real talk from research by many people of color in academia: the white gaze, microaggressions, and whitestream feminism, to name a few. (Butler, 2023; McDaniel, 2023; Rabelo et al., 2021; Stanford, 2018; Thomas-Bear, 2025; Walcott, 2018, pp. 85-99; Willsea, 2020; Winters, 2020)

I learned some things the hard way; I pushed back when my mother tried to teach me with statements like "It's not like that anymore" and "No, they're my friends, that won't happen." These were a few of the things I used to tell her until experience taught me otherwise. Then she started asking me, "Well, what are you going to do about it?!" I have seen many women I connect with in the Native community respond to that question, too. They do so to the point of harming their mind, body, and spirit. We must identify and acknowledge the harm from toxic resilience and sacrifice that our mothers and grandmothers experienced, as well as the sisters around us now, so we can move forward and embrace our Elder status as teachers and in love, in longevity.

These lessons are inspired by my mother's life and work experiences, and they hold true whether you are in southern Texas or western Washington. The people who would impose these "-isms" on you until they become ingrained just come at it in different ways. When I entered the workforce in Washington state, I realized early on that we live in a place where people like to see themselves as liberal, open-minded, and progressive — until they are confronted with something that makes them uncomfortable. My mother showed me how to persevere despite discomfort, to stand firm in my beliefs. In her stance, she did not let anyone's racism or misogyny get in her way. I am proud of her and her strength for that.

Trauma Experience Can Be Used to Inform Healing Journeys

The last research question, "How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?" was meant to explore how the findings from research questions #1 and #2 inform a healthy resilience in response to ongoing survival and resistance, or survivance, of colonialism that still affects our communities. By recognizing the differences between unhealthy and healthy resilience in how our people survive and resist today, this research question aims to identify elements that can guide healing frameworks.

The Native American Reentry Service Elder's Council members engaged with Justine through their Iron House work when she attended prison powwows as a guest. Their listening engagements focused on resilience and survivance, drawing on their work with relatives in the Iron House, where they encouraged healing journey ceremonies to address the impacts of trauma.

Laura Bluehorse-Swift is a Lakota Elder who cared for the Native American Sisterhood Circle at Washington Corrections Center for Women in Gig Harbor, WA. In her work, her sponsorship gave the women the chance to participate in sweat lodge ceremonies and to receive the teachings and other support she shared to help them walk the Red Road. In my conversation with her, instead of using the word "resiliency," she said she preferred to use the word wowakisake[7], the Lakota term, because "Let's call it what it is, because we knew about it. It was one of our foundational values." She also shared the ItkunzA[8], which is the Lakota translation for reciprocity as a natural law because "You give what you get; what you give out in the universe you get back."

[7] Wowakisake is Lakota for resilience
[8] ItkunzA is Lakota "to be aligned with all" or reciprocity

She shares how she used to demonstrate tough love as part of her healing from codependency. This was not something she received in a book, group, or class, but rather in ceremony while praying for her daughter, Sister Bluehorse.

> That kind of taught me, or told me, no, we have to love her, no matter what…I'm not getting this from a book, or from you, or wherever, the spirit said this in ceremony. That no matter what she does, we have to love her, no matter what choices she makes, we have to love her, and so I did, I kind of changed my view.

Laura shared that "wowakisake" should be used instead of resilience because resilience to many means being able to take hits while expecting the next ones. Instead, Laura explains how she uses "wowakisake" with resilience as a form of sacrifice that allows us to open our hearts and simply love—only love. Resilience is love that sacrifices. Laura goes on to discuss a mindset that challenges maintaining healthy resilience when something unexpected comes your way. She describes it as:

> When something bad happened, I'd say, "Oh, whoa is me…why is this happening to me?" Here, I thought I paid all my penance, because there's still that Catholic influence, right? I thought that I had paid things forward, and why now is this happening to me? And I don't deserve this. Wah, wah, wah.

However, in wowakisake, there is a teaching that bad things that happen can carry lessons. This is when we go to Mą'ųna in prayer, asking, as Laura did, "Creator, what message are you trying to send me? What teaching are you trying to give me?" For Laura, this meant creating a Plan B and figuring out the steps to reach her goals, all sparked by the bad experience she faced, which she believes brought her to where she is now: "my spirits and Ancestors were telling me 'You're

right where you need to be.'" Our Ancestors persisted because that was a value they held—an attitude that helps you get through any hardship.

Hiwapąnąs kere[9] (Perseverance)

Joisky Caudill is descended from the Samaii in Northern Europe and South America. She shares her perspective on maintaining resilience, which is a practice and mindset that goes beyond what we know self-care to be. She uses a metaphor that inside us, there's a fireplace of culture and Indigenous teachings. In times of weakness, when you need help, you go to this fireplace. This is where she asks the "Holies" for help, and it is maintained by "Continuing to pray and build our resilience, and not feel defeated, because we will feel defeated, but that's only temporary, because our Ancestors are inside and all around us, and they will help us be resilient".

She taught the sisters of the Red Willow Circle, where she sponsored the Native Hoop at Mission Creek Corrections Center for Women, to hold on to your culture and traditions, no matter how little you think you know. Even if we know very little about our own culture, that thread, as she describes it, "It's going to turn into a rope, and pretty soon it's going to turn into a ray of light, and it's going to shine."

Warren Gohl, a Seneca Elder who cared for the brothers at Cedar Creek, Stafford Creek, Washington Corrections Centers, and McNeil Island's Special Commitment Center, offers insight into the understanding and mindset needed to maintain waną'į mąąšją. He takes us back to the start of our Red Road walk, literally. When we are first born, we are carried by others, but eventually you reach a point where your mother no longer walks for you—you walk on your own. This, Warren states, marks the beginning of "accepting some responsibility for your

[9] Hiwapąnąs kere is Ho-Chunk for perseverance

behavior, and you cherish that responsibility, that you feel that it's doing good for everybody and doing good for yourself."

The relatives we serve in prison hoops face a challenge: the prison system works hard to institutionalize you, and many relatives struggle as they try to find their way. When we follow Joisky's advice and hold onto that thread of culture and traditions, what we have been taught and who taught it influence how we walk. As Warren says, "spirit and the heart, and not the protocol of things." There is no shame in this; this is where reciprocity—helping others maintain resilience—comes into play. Only when we are able to take responsibility for ourselves can we truly demonstrate reciprocity. Warren also advises using your voice and not sugar-coating your message.

> It should be a private one-on-one, preferably in the vicinity of the lodge. And a short message to the person who your heart says—not your mind, but your heart—says is being disrespectful or tyrannical, but perhaps doesn't understand how they feel (and are) impacting upon the brothers and sisters. And by just a few quiet words—don't think anymore, listen to your heart—your heart will tell you which is the path to follow and once you're on it thank the heart.

When we see relatives who are not walking from their spirit and heart, the protocol of things is where we see some of the traits that cause harm, such as misogyny, racism, and toxic leadership. What does that look like? Speaking rudely to sisters about their moon or their bodies in the name of protocol, dismissing other Natives because they are mixed race, and using a leadership role to boost your ego instead of caring for the people. That is what Warren means.

Resilience and Ceremony

Joisky emphasizes essential elements of resilience for Indigenous people: culture, teachings, the Red Road walk, and the importance of continuing to seek these aspects. Francis Rave explains how we, as Native people, are seekers of medicine, and we do so through "hąąte haginąc" (fasting). He states, "What the Creator God did, what Mą'ųna did, was he took that superstition of ours to be a seeker of medicine, and he took a medicine, and he put his holy spirit in that medicine, that's the peyote."

Survivance

Warren shares conversations he had in Mexico with Tlanezpilli, the leader of the women and people, and Indigenous medicine women he was introduced to. In discussions about life and "what's the best good that we can do," one of the Elders became excited and emphasized the importance of doing everything we can for both physical and emotional survival, and to do so in a loving way. She said this is how children will learn the right ways and follow them, and out of "broken shame." In her work, Joisky encourages belief and visualizing yourself following your traditions and ceremonies. "There's going to be challenges, just believe, be strong, believe, because that's going to help them to thrive, not just survive, all of us to thrive."

What are we believing in? Laura emphasizes the importance of teachings, sharing our experiences, and considering what we want for our children, grandchildren, and future generations. For her family and descendants, she wants Dakota Wicohan—Dakota teachings and Indian ways—to guide their thrivance, "I want them to understand the power of it and bask in it and understand, have the understanding of that wowakisake and the reciprocity and to be good relatives."

She shares an example of Dakota survivance through the origins of Devil Ball, a women's game that began during Dakota imprisonment at Fort Snelling. She describes the pain

her Ancestors must have felt, watching the mass hangings of their leaders, medicine people, and loved ones, as well as the pain of mistreatment by soldiers. After sharing Gerald Vizenor's definition of survivance with her, she stated:

> What an example of survivance, that they could be going through this horrible, horrible, tragic experience of the march itself, being imprisoned and continually abused by these ugly soldiers…forced to watch people they love being hanged…and they make a game of it. They make a game for it, and they survived, and they thrived because they understood. Even as much as I miss my girls, I understand that they're okay. I understand that I'm going to see them again. I understand that they didn't go for nothing, but their lives had meaning and purpose, and that's survivance.

Our people who bring medicine and ceremony—like Warren, Laura, and Joisky—are examples of resilience and love that sacrifice despite our pain. They channel their love through the trauma of combat, addiction, and violence. This is what Tuck refers to when she discusses desire-based lenses and pathways, wisdom born from pain, trauma, and tragedy that uses what they have come to know to feed the longing of our relatives in ways that enrich both our past and future (Tuck, 2009).

Across Indian Country, culture is used to address intergenerational and historic trauma in tribal communities. The work of Warren, Laura, and Joisky focuses on the needs of relatives in the Iron House, where culture plays a prominent role in programming. Laura highlights the importance of culture but questions how we utilize culture in caring for the people, as a decolonizing approach to policies, and to facilitate survivance; "I think there's no easy answer, but I feel like it's so basic, and we struggle because there's so many varying levels of healing."

As a social worker, Laura approaches healing work from a systemic perspective, beginning with the collective recognition that we are spiritual beings, that our teachings and ways of being promote reciprocity and good relations with one another, and that these principles should be fundamental and integrated into tribal policies. These policies influence culture, teachings, and understanding of Indigenous family systems, as well as the interconnectedness among all of these elements.

Summary of Findings

Across all three research questions and eighteen participants, several patterns emerged that inform the transition from resilience to survivance.

First, the resilience described by participants is not a single phenomenon. It is found through the forms of ancestral resilience — rooted in matriarchal knowledge, prayer, kinship, ceremony, and cultural practice — and colonial resilience — the toxic, depleting endurance required to survive constant harm. The Clan Mothers described the first. The family members described both, and the tension between them. The NARS Elders described the practice of transforming the second into the first through ceremony, teaching, and community.

Second, the importance of traditional Ho-Chunk kinship roles— Nąąnįs, Jaajis, Cųųwįs, Teegas, Gagas, Cokas, Clan Mothers, Hinų and Wihą —is highlighted in how Matriarchal Knowledges are shared through generations. When kinship systems work, it is the relationships through which knowledge flows. When it is disrupted — by displacement, domestic violence, incarceration, or traditional role destruction — prayer and ceremony serve to hold kinship systems together.

Third, healing and place are inseparable. The participants' testimonies consistently connect healing to specific geography — Ho-Chunk homelands, ceremony sites, the lodge, the

land where Ancestors rest. Healing programs that operate without attention to place — and this includes most correctional programming — are working to the disadvantage of the relatives they serve.

Fourth, voice — the use of one's big voice in advocacy, in ceremony, in speaking truth — is both a resilience factor and an act of survivance. It is not a metaphor. It is a practice that Justine taught, the Clan Mothers model, and the NARS Elders deploy in the Iron House.

Fifth, forgiveness emerged as an act of sovereignty, not absolution. It severs the trauma bond and refuses to allow the one who caused harm to continue dictating the family's trajectory. This is ancestral refusal praxis in its most intimate form.

These findings, synthesized into Ho-Chunk Resilience Factors, are presented and discussed in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five: Waaxšuc Kųųhąija, Taking Our Place Under the Cedar

Chapter 5 concludes this dissertation by first recapping the research study's aims and objectives, including discussions of the processes and results for each research question. It includes Ho-Chunk Resilience Factors, informed by those who took part in listening engagements. Research study insights examine limitations in western academia versus Indigenous research, and the direction, benefits, and potential applications of this research study.

The aims of this research were to promote the use of Indigenous Knowledges as a healing approach, specifically that of the Ho-Chunk people, and to understand past and present matriarchal resilience. The Hi'unį Hojikere Eja Matriarchal Theoretical Framework was developed to understand the teachings of Ho-Chunk mothers, past and present. By operating from a position of refusal, the framework challenged western matriarchy and feminism through the works of Ho-Chunk contributors Drs. Angel Hinzo and Reyna Ramirez, and of Sunshine *Gišįnįšįnįxjį* Thomas-Bear and Gayla *Mą̄xipį̄* Whitewater of Hisgexjį Horak. Hinzo, Thomas-Bear, and Whitewater brought forward teachings about the roles of Ho-Chunk women, while Ramirez explained how Native feminism serves not only Native women but the community at large by addressing sexism, racism, and other forms of violence in the community.

Taking our place under the cedar references the metaphor for professional responsibility in Indigenous Ways of Being, introduced at the beginning of this dissertation. The responsibility of Indigenous academia and professionalism to all we hold sacred informs the discussion, implications, and recommendations—not in the sense of projecting this into the western academic world to be consumed, but rather to be used within Indigenous and communities of color to heal and transform. The three main objectives include identifying resilience factors shared by Elders and family members in response to colonialism, examining resilience in the

face of 21st-century social issues faced by Justine Whitegull Archer in her leadership and advocacy role, and finally analyzing the research findings to explore possible pathways and frameworks for moving from resilience to survivance.

Research Questions Discussion

The research question "What is Justine Whitegull Archer's legacy as a Ho-Chunk Woman?" was intended to gain an understanding of what my mother inherited and what was inherent. This journey began by exploring an Indigenous sense of matriarchy, specifically as it relates to Ho-Chunk women. From a western perspective, matriarchy is seen as the opposite of patriarchy. I discovered that discussions about Ho-Chunk matriarchy could be provocative, since there appears to be no consensus about whether our society has been matriarchal or patriarchal. To refocus myself, I returned to this quote:

> Maintaining the knowledge did not mean finding a "right" story but widening the possibility of stories. Information of different variations is preferred, pulled and maintained as a bundle of possibilities without judgment. Different stories which contradict each other, do not conflict, but simply exist. (Hokari, 2003, as cited in Archibald et al., 2019, p. 213)

When I look at the walks of my mother, my Gaga's Irene and Francita, Grandma Mary, Nąąnį's Gail and Joyce, and the Ho-Chunk Clan Mothers in this world, I realize that the answer to this question, for my purpose, is not in proving that Ho-Chunk is a matriarchal society, but in acknowledging and affirming the strength of Ho-Chunk women as leaders within our homes and communities and for the Ho-Chunk Nation. I also use the term "ancestral refusal praxis" to honor the work and knowledge of our Ancestors and to reject western influence on the practice of

Indigenous Ways of Being, theories, and concepts. Based on what has been shared with me, I have identified Knowledges to guide the journey from resilience to survivance.

My mother's legacy is the love with which she taught us, protected us, and shared love, teachings, and protection with the community around her. She turned pain, trauma, and tragedy into survival and an opportunity to heal and grow. I am sad that my mom's entire life seemed to be a constant fight in one way or another, and I take comfort in my brother Asa's words that she is now healed, resting on the lands from which she and our Ancestors came.

The question "What is the wholistic 21st-century experience of Indigenous female leadership?" was designed to explore the social issues that arose from colonialism and to understand how women of color respond professionally with heartwork to trauma in our communities that also affects our families. This inquiry led down a rabbit hole that diverged into two separate but dyadic relationships within our community: that of the Native family matriarchs and feminists fighting to heal our community, and Native men whose path to healing was shaped by colonialism's influence in various forms of toxic masculinity.

While I expected the listening engagements to focus on experiences within primarily white institutions (PWI), they expanded to include both Native and non-Native spaces. This revealed how harm experienced by family matriarchs and feminists within our communities and PWIs accumulates like a death from a thousand cuts. Although not surprising, I felt it was important to reiterate this message—to use my voice as I was taught—to uplift the sisters fighting family trauma, confronting the same trauma in our communities in their 9-5, and fighting themselves because they cannot sacrifice enough and cannot care for themselves enough at the same time.

It also led to a deeper understanding of how western and Native cultures constantly pull our men in many directions. The pull at the intersection of western patriarchy, masculine supremacy, and Indigenous male roles is overwhelming. One example is the drum. In asserting Indigenous male roles, I have seen the drum used for healing and for connecting with our language and Ancestors, yet it has also become a space where the presence and participation of women are rejected (Association on American Indian Affairs, 2021; Ross & Roach, 2017). This makes me even prouder of the healing work done by the brothers I share space with—in my family, in service to our community, and from within the Iron House, which is one of the most challenging spaces for tackling the enormity of this healing journey.

My expectation for the response to “How can we use our trauma experiences to inform our healing journey?” was that the Clan Mothers and NARS Elders would share their Knowledges on Ho-Chunk Ways of Being and healing that addressed the harms fueling the criminal “justice” system, and this came to fruition. However, where I only anticipated the family member responses to only inform on the effects of colonialism, they also informed on the Ho-Chunk resilience factors (Figure 23, Appendix F). I was also exposed to a wide range of theories and concepts that triggered my tendency to respond to the question, “So what are you going to do about it?” Sandy Grande’s Red Pedagogy and feminist theories of Indigenista were the first to ignite my passion,

Figure 23

Grace Decorah Whitegull & Ho-Chunk Resilience Factors

along with refusal versus recognition, safety zone theory, emergent strategy, survivance, desire-based research frameworks, Native and Black feminism versus whitestream feminism, and intersectionality of Indigenous masculinity with egalitarianism—these are just a few that energize me. I will carry these and others forward to aid me in future endeavors that address the concerns and needs of our heartwork and healing in the Iron House and in the return home of our relatives.

Research Study Insights

Limitations

In the context of this narrative and reflexive ethnography, I do not accept the notion of limitations in this research study. There is no place for limitations in Indigenous research by storywork, whereas, in the western sense, the purpose is to demonstrate critical thinking by identifying weaknesses or challenges to the process. This story has not ended… it will grow, it will change. There is no place to critique weaknesses or challenges in the stories, ideas, or contributions of those I was in relationship with during this journey. Wilson (2008, p. 92) said, "If reality is based upon relationships, then judgment of another's viewpoint is inconceivable. One person cannot possibly know all of the relationships that brought about another's ideas. Making judgment of others' worth or values then is also impossible".

Future Research Direction

Based on my work within the criminal "justice" system, a promising avenue for future research is to examine gender oppression affecting both sexes within Native communities, with the aim of fostering unity. The goal is to promote healing and move toward egalitarianism. I mention this because there is an intersection among gender oppression, identity, and other aspects of colonialism's impact on tribal communities.

There is good work underway addressing colonialism's impact on our communities. However, for our relatives affected by the criminal "justice" system, attention should be given to the effects of institutionalization, the loss of freedom during and after incarceration, and the toll of incarceration combined with the ongoing gender oppression, stereotypes, and stigmas faced by this population.

Thosh Collins' recent work on western patriarchy and Indigenous male roles is an excellent example of actionable concepts needed today by the men in our community. He calls out the toxicity he witnesses, where some Native men lean toward western patriarchy and drift away from their Indigenous roots. Hisgexjį Horak, a nonprofit founded by two Ho-Chunk women, Sunshine Gišįnįšįnįxjį Thomas-Bear and Gayla Mą̄xipį̄ Whitewater, whose work is rooted in Ho-Chunk identity, culture, and history, is compelling because it does not apologize for speaking the truth while addressing topics such as the silencing of Ho-Chunk women and how genocides relate to Ho-Chunk past and present.

The implications of work of educators, social justice warriors, and truth-tellers like Thosh Collins and Hisgexjį Horak serves as an excellent example of addressing our community's toxicity while also demonstrating allyship through egalitarianism. They are not rewriting or altering past works; instead, they directly draw on our history and Indigenous Ways of Being in ways that are impactful and consistent with their "tell it like it is" approach, respecting our culture and showing the Elders before us that we are listening to their teachings.

Beneficiaries and Application of Findings

The purpose of this research study was to create a document that supports Native American reentry and Iron House advocacy work by identifying how colonialism and responses to it have harmed our community. To benefit the brothers and sisters in Iron House hoops across

Washington state and beyond, this will be used by Native American Reentry Services to spark discussion among our staff and board members and to develop concepts and frameworks with the hope of creating innovative and progressive programming in our field. I also hope it inspires those who may not have considered the far-reaching effects that the combination of colonialism and the criminal “justice” system has had on our people.

Comanche activist and politician Ladonna Harris described Native men and women as "equal until Euro-American Society and religion came in." Likewise, Wilma Mankiller, former Chief of the Cherokee people and activist, stated, "from the time of European contact, there has been a concerted attempt to diminish the role of Indigenous women" (p. 172) and cited a Native prophecy foretelling that “this is the time when woman's leadership skills are needed" (Janda, 2007, p. 167). We are increasingly leaning toward matriarchal and culturally egalitarian societies because we need them; we need the leadership, guidance, support, and balance. Today, across the country, relatives representing the white side of the medicine wheel are struggling as they face the same inhumane treatment that we as Native and Black people experience as the norm.

Native women are stepping into spaces of trauma to bring healing, at a cost to themselves and their families. They experience the harm that comes from doing so while being centered in both western and tribal spaces, and the toxicity of various forms of violence harms those with the best of intentions to bring healing, as in the dance for healing, just as they did for George Floyd in 2020 (Lemm, 2026). This reflects the love and medicine that women bring to healing. That’s why I tend to favor the ways of matriarchal societies and egalitarianism, and why I believe many others do too, whether from a tribal background or not. We recognize something essential in women who embody matriarchal qualities, and we observe it in women around us—women like my mother, Justine Heex Pį̨įwį̨ga Whitegull Archer.

Future Research Direction

Based on this research and my work within the criminal "justice" system, I carry forward the following directions for future research and practice:

1. Ho-Chunk Resilience Factor Framework Development. Working with the Clan Mothers, NARS Elders, and community members to develop the resilience factors identified in this study into a structured framework for use in Iron House programming and reentry services.

2. Gender Egalitarianism in Reentry. Examining gender oppression affecting both men and women within Native communities, with the aim of fostering unity and healing toward egalitarianism.

3. Institutionalization and Indigenous Male Roles. Studying the effects of institutionalization combined with ongoing gender oppression, stereotypes, and stigmas faced by Native men. Thosh Collins' recent work on western patriarchy and Indigenous male roles provides an excellent foundation.

4. White Bison Wellbriety and Ancestral Refusal Praxis. Exploring the alignment between Wellbriety's four laws of change and the ancestral refusal praxis concept developed in this study, with potential applications in correctional programming.

5. Desire-Based Program Evaluation. Developing evaluation methodologies for Indigenous programs that use desire-based rather than damage-centered frameworks.

6. Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Knowledge Documentation. Continuing the work begun by the Clan Mothers in this study to document and transmit Ho-Chunk matriarchal teachings, informed by the work of Hisgexją Horak and the Ho-Chunk Nation's cultural revitalization efforts.

7. Safety Zone Theory Application in Iron House Settings. Applying safety zone theory to develop protective spaces within correctional settings that center Indigenous ceremony and knowledge.

8. Indigenous Abolitionist Healing Framework. Developing a comprehensive framework that brings together Native feminism, abolition, and culturally grounded healing for use in both correctional and community settings.

Closing

My mother's medicine was turning challenges into strengths and harm into blessings. She gave that medicine to each of her children, calibrated to our individual gifts. She shared it with the community through her big voice. And she left it for her descendants, coded in our DNA, waiting to be activated by the drum, by ceremony, by prayer, by ikirut'i — by someone reaching out and grabbing your hand and pulling you along.

In the swan story, Heex Pį̨wį̨ga's time to walk on came. She left behind medicine teachings with each of her children. Her children are using their medicine right now, which is why you are reading this story.

This dissertation is my medicine teaching. It is my way of using what she gave me — compassion, the ability to turn challenges into strengths — in service to our relatives in the Iron House and in the community. It is my way of pulling someone along by the hand. It is my offering to my grandchildren's grandchildren, who I pray will live in a world where toxic resilience is unnecessary because survivance — rooted in ancestral knowledge, expressed through refusal, and nourished by love — has made it possible to not just survive, but to thrive.

My mother is resting on Ho-Chunk homelands now. But her medicine is alive. It is in my brothers and my sister. It is in our children and grandchildren. It is in these pages. And it is under the cedar, where those who need it will find it.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Informed Consent Form

Information About A UW Research Study

From Resilience to Survivance: The Life Journey of Justine Whitegull Archer

What is this study about?

You are being asked to participate in a research study about Ho-Chunk matriarchal ancestral strengths and knowledge. It is up to you to decide whether you want to participate, and you can choose to stop participation at any time.

We are asking you to be in the study because of (*one of the following will be selected depending on the recipient*) a) the knowledge you possess as a revered Elder, b) your personal relationship with Justine Whitegull Archer, or c) your knowledge and professional experience with Indigenous historic trauma and the impact of settler colonialism. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in this study.

The intention behind this research is to study Ho-Chunk matriarchal resilience factors, explore how this resilience may be inherent in present-day Ho-Chunk leadership, and ascertain the use of this resilience so that descendants can live a life of thriving, or survivance, rather than resiliency.

What will you be asked to do?

Upon agreement to participate in this study, you will be asked to share your insights and experiences as *(one of the following will be selected depending on recipient) a) a daughter/son, mother/father, and grandmother/grandfather of Ho-Chunk mothers and grandmothers, b) a family member during the early years of Justine Whitegull Archer's life in Black River Falls, or c) an Elder who has shared ceremony within both the Iron House and tribal communities.*

Participation will be virtual or in Black River Falls (location and time TBD) where we will engage in recorded engagement sessions with the possibility of follow up by phone or virtually (i.e. Zoom).

If at any time you wish to withdraw from the study, withdraw the interview information you provided, or both, you may do so at any time during the study.

We will meet as a group, with the option for follow-up meetings to be held virtually if necessary due to distance (researcher resides in Tacoma, WA).

Initial meetings will be held virtually or in Black River Falls (location and time TBD) with the *other (one of the following will be selected depending on recipient) a) Clan Mothers or b) members of the Traditional Court, c) family members, or d) Native American Reentry Services Elders.* This meeting will be both audio and video recorded to ensure accuracy in the transcription process. After the initial group meeting, follow-up one-on-one meetings May be held virtually or by phone. You will be provided a copy the final draft for your review prior to

the defense of the dissertation. The dissertation will be presented to the University of Washington in the spring of 2026.

Due to the challenging history of our ancestors, there is a potential for mental or emotional discomfort or duress, for example in the retelling of boarding school experiences, which may be triggering.

What will happen to the information you provide?

Information gathered during the research process will be kept confidential. Data will be stored with a code instead of your name. A list linking the code to your name will be securely stored and separate from the data.

Out of respect for the Indigenous Knowledge being shared, you may choose to have your name used to acknowledge your contribution to this dissertation, which will be published on the University of Washington's School of Education website. This information may also be used in future publications and/or works by the Principle Investigator, Winona Stevens.

This Indigenous research will incorporate personal and oral stories, traditions, and elements that are not considered the property of the University of Washington. Ownership of what should be shared and taught would be considered a practice of colonialization. The University of Washington disclaims ownership of any Indigenous Knowledge, research, or materials produced under this research process.

What can you do if you want more information?

Winona Stevens is the University of Washington researcher for this study and can be contacted at wjs4@uw.edu/253-230-0227.

If you want to talk with someone who is not part of the study team about the study, your rights as a research subject, or to report problems or complaints about the study, contact the UW Human Subjects Division at hsdinfo@uw.edu or 206-543-0098.

Name Of Participant	Participant Signature	Date

Name Of Witness	Witness Signature	Date

( ) *I choose to invoke my right to refuse to participate in this research. All documentation of my participation will not be used. This is submitted no later than February 1st, 2026.*

Name Of Participant	*Participant Signature*	*Date*

Appendix B: Letter of introduction and Invitation

Hinįkaragi [Participant Name],

My name is Winona Stevens. I am a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin and am currently enrolled in the University of Washington's Indigenous Educational Leadership doctoral program.

I would like to invite you to participate in a research study I am conducting. I obtained your information through (INSERT NAME/SOURCE). I am requesting your presence based on (select based on participant):

1. Your position as a Ho-Chunk Clan Mother and your knowledge and insight into Ho-Chunk culture, traditions, and ceremony.

or

1. Your position as a member of the Ho-Chunk Traditional Court and your knowledge and insight into Ho-Chunk culture, traditions, and ceremony.

or

1. Your relationship to Justine Whitegull Archer, and your knowledge and insight into family and Ho-Chunk community, culture, traditions, and ceremony.

or

1. Your position as a Native American Reentry Services Program Elder, and your knowledge and insight into Iron House/Indigenous incarceration, family, community, culture, traditions, and ceremony.

The purpose of this research is to investigate the history of Ho-Chunk matriarchy and ancestral knowledge, and how they inform resilience in descendants. The research will revolve around Justine Whitegull Archer, my mother, and her life's journey.

Research activities will be in the form of talking circles and listening engagements. Follow-up will be in person, by virtual platforms (Zoom or TEAMS), or by phone.

Your participation is completely voluntary, and you can choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. Your responses will be kept confidential and will not be shared with anyone.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Winona Stevens at wjs4@uw.edu or 253-230-0227. The Ho-Chunk Nation and University of Washington Institutional Review Boards have reviewed this study and found it to be in compliance with ethical guidelines [or, "This study is exempt from IRB review"].

Wa’iniginapsina, I appreciate your time and consideration.

Winona Stevens

Winona Stevens is a member of the Ho-Chunk Nation of Wisconsin. Her commitment to serving Native Americans affected by incarceration led her to launch Native American Reentry Services. Her organization has two programs: Iron House Medicine and HEAL for Reentry.

To further support our relatives involved in the criminal justice system, Winona's work has included being a trainer for White Bison's Wellbriety Training Institute, managing then administer the Washington State Department of Corrections American Indian and Alaska Native religious contract from 2013 to 2021 and as a consultant for agencies such as the American Probation & Parole Association's and Washington State's Juvenile Rehabilitation Administration.

Additionally, Winona serves on the following boards: Huy, Washington State's Statewide Reentry Council (Governor-appointed Tribal Affairs Representative), White Bison, and the University of Washington's Native American Advisory Board.

Her alma maters are Northwest Indian College and the University of Washington and holds a bachelor's in social welfare and master's in social work. Winona is currently a doctoral candidate in the University of Washington's Indigenous Educational Leadership Ed.D. program in partnership with Muckleshoot Tribal College.

Upon completion of her doctoral studies, she will utilize her research to address the needs of Native and Indigenous relatives within the criminal justice system through program development, Indigenous urban support systems, and the drafting and informing corrections legislation and policy.

Appendix C: Participant Support Resources

What is a Trauma Trigger?

A trauma trigger is anything that can remind someone of a past traumatic experience, often leading to strong emotional or physical reactions. These triggers can appear in many different forms, such as specific sights, sounds, smells, certain places, or even particular times of the year.

When faced with these reminders, individuals may experience intense feelings like anxiety, anger, or sadness, along with physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, sweating, or muscle tension.

It is essential to approach these conversations with care and empathy. Be clear about the topic at hand and check in with the others often to ensure they feel comfortable continuing the discussion. Listed below are examples of content (though not exhaustive) that might trigger an emotional or physiological response:

- Sexual Assault
- Abuse
- Child abuse/pedophilia/incest
- Violence
- Self-harm or suicide
- Eating disorders, body hatred, fat phobia
- Animal cruelty or animal death
- Kidnapping and abduction
- Pornographic content
- Hateful language directed at religious groups
- Classism Death or dying
- Pregnancy/childbirth
- Miscarriages/abortion
- Sexism and misogyny
- Mental illness and ableism
- Blood Quantum
- Racism and racial slurs
- Transphobia and trans misogyny
- Homophobia and heterosexism

Help By Phone

988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline
https://988lifeline.org/
Press #4 for Native specific support.
We understand that life's challenges can sometimes be difficult. Whether you are facing mental health struggles, emotional distress, alcohol or drug use concerns, or just need someone to talk to, our caring counselors are here for you. You are not alone.

Help In Person

Wellbriety Recovery Coaches
Oneida Recovery Nest, Cottage
Wellbriety-Circle Recovery Coaches
Recovery Talking Circle
recoverycoach@oneidanation.org
(920) 490-3950
1240 Packerland Drive
Green Bay, Wisconsin 54304
Every Thursday Evening, 6pm Central Time

Manitowoc Wellbriety Circle
Wellbriety Talking Circle Ceremony
Marv Schuler marvschuler@msn.com
(920) 901-9509
Lakeshore United Methodist Church
411 Reed Ave
Manitowoc, WI 54220
Every Thursday @ 7PM

Help Online

Native American Al-Anon/Wellanon Meeting (for those with loved ones in addiction):
Sharyl WhiteHawk
The American Indian Family Center-Khunsi Onakan Program
Tuesdays at 8:00 PM ET/7:00 PM CT/6:00 PM MT/5:00 PM PT
Link to Join Zoom Meetings: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89255163167...

Wellbriety/Medicine Wheel 12 Steps Meeting:
Sharyl WhiteHawk
The American Indian Family Center-Khunsi Onakan Program
Thursdays at 8:00 PM ET/7:00 PM CT/6:00 PM MT/5:00 PM PT
Meeting ID: 892 5516 3167
PW: 8jTAXX
Link to Join Zoom Meetings: https://us02web.zoom.us/j/89255163167...

Ho-Chunk Nation
Department of Health

PHAB

Mental Health Resources WI

988 SUICIDE AND CRISIS LIFELINE	211 WISCONSIN CONFIDENTIAL CONNECTION TO RESOURCES	CRISIS TEXT LINE
CHAT 988LIFELINE.ORG	CHAT 211WISCONSIN.COMMUNITYOS.ORG	CHAT WWW.CRISISTEXTLINE.ORG
TEXT 988	TEXT YOUR ZIPCODE TO 898211	TEXT NATIVE TO 741741
CALL 988	DIAL 211	MESSAGE USING WHATS APP

Created 8.20.25 MG

Appendix D: Follow up letter

Date: 01/01/01

RE: From Resilience to Survivance Research Participation

Dear [First Name],

I would like to take a moment to thank you for attending the [talking circle\ listening engagement]. I am honored you made time to be present in share your knowledge and insights. I appreciate the teachings in the information you gave, and I look forward to sharing the result with you as I move forward to defending my dissertation.

It is my hope that this work will, in turn, positively impact the Ho-Chunk Nation and Iron House advocacy by informing opportunities for growth and new, innovative programming.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to attend. I truly appreciate your support and look forward to staying in touch with you.

Please do not hesitate to reach out if you have any further questions or feedback about the event.

Pinagigi,

Winona Stevens

University of Washington Doctoral Candidate

253-230-0227

Wjs4@uw.edu

Appendix E: Interview Questions

Elders Questions	**Justine Whitegull Archer Relatives’ Questions**
Native American Reentry Service Elders • How do you define resilience? • How do you define survivance? • What will it take to get us from resilience to survivance? **Twelve Clan Mothers** • Can you tell me more about your role and the guidance you offer? How does someone get chosen to be a Clan mother? **<u>Ancestors</u>** • How did your Hi’unįs and Kunįkas influence lead to your position as a Clan Mother? • What teachings from your Hi’unįs and Kunįkas do you now instill in your family? • What legacy did the women in your family leave that people should know about? • Please tell me about your mothers and grandmothers. **<u>Descendants</u>** • What strengths do you see in your family that you attribute to your mothers and grandmothers? • What healing practices are done by the women in your families? Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically? • What legacy do you want to leave for your descendants? • What work is currently being done to position descendants for moving beyond being resilient to thriving? • Would each of you pick one thing that you feel is important to be passed on to the tribe’s next generation?	• What are your earliest memories of Mom? • Be it within the family, neighborhood, community or tribe, how did your Hi’unįs and Kunįkas lead? • What social justice issues affected your Hi’unįs and Kunįkas in their life journey? • What healing did your Hi’unį need? • What are women in your/our families doing now to heal? Mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically? • Who were we and who are we now as Ho-Chunk woman/men? • (Mind map) I’m going to share some words with you that others have used in describing Justine, please tell me your first thoughts: Matriarch, Feminist, Mama Bear, Fighter, Resilient, Survivor • **<u>Specific to Justine’s Children</u>** • What do you recall about family challenges in your youth? • What do you recall of her professional heartwork experiences? • Intergenerational trauma as a son and grandson, and IGT as a grandfather • What did IG Healing/resilience/strength look like as a son/grandson and grandfather? • What did Mom want for her grandkids, great grandkids and beyond? • **<u>Specific to Justine’s Family Members</u>** • What do you recall of her experiences in school? • What do you recall about challenges for Ho-Chunk children in schools? • What healing did your Hi’unį need?

Appendix F: Ho-Chunk Resilience Factors

Across all three research questions, the listening engagements and talking circles revealed resilience factors that have sustained the Ho-Chunk people — and specifically Ho-Chunk women — through generations of colonial disruption. These factors are not abstract principles extracted from a literature review. They are living practices described by the Clan Mothers, family members, and NARS Elders who carry them. They are what Justine Whitegull Archer inherited, what she practiced, and what she passed to her children. They constitute the ancestral knowledge that, when activated through refusal of colonial frameworks, becomes ancestral refusal praxis — the foundation for moving from resilience to survivance. The following Ho-Chunk Resilience Factors emerged from the research:

Woogixete (Love) and Nąąc hokihą (Compassion) as Foundation. Love was not a sentiment in these engagements; it was a practice. Laura Bluehorse-Swift's teaching that "wowakisake" — resilience — is love that sacrifices, reframes resilience itself as an act of love rather than an act of endurance. Justine's son Asa described her prayer life as love made visible — hands locked, eyes closed, praying all night. Clan Mother Roberta Decorah described offering comfort in grief not through words but through a hug from the heart. When love and compassion are the root of resilience, resilience is not toxic — it is sacred.

Prayer as Daily Practice and Generational Transmission. Prayer was mentioned 99 times across the 18 participants, functioning in at least four distinct ways: as daily practice (Clan Mother Cece Rave: "My grandma, she always used to pray. My mother too. That's what I do daily too"); as generational mentorship (Janice Rice learning to pray by shadowing her Gaga and Nąąnį); as placeholder for absent kin (prayer standing in for the comfort of a Nąąnį or Cųųwį who is no longer with us); and as medicine for healing and protection (prayer as the force against

harm, the release of pain, and the path to forgiveness). Prayer emerged as perhaps the most pervasive and enduring resilience factor in the data — a practice that persists across geographic displacement, religious diversity (Ho-Chunk Traditional, Native American Church, Christian), and generational disruption.

Aa hikiruti — "To Grab Someone by the Hand and Pull Them Along." Clan Mother Janice Rice shared this Ho-Chunk concept as the practice of mutual aid within kinship networks. It operationalizes the matriarchal kinship system described in Chapter 2 — not as an abstract social structure but as a living practice of reaching for each other. When ikirut'i is present, "it feels so good. Feels like you belong, feel like you're being protected, feels like you're being guided." When it is absent, prayer fills the gap: "that prayer takes that spot." Aa hikiruti is ancestral refusal praxis in action — inherited knowledge deployed as a tool for mutual survival that refuses the colonial model of individualism.

Matriarchal Kinship Roles — Nąąnį's, Cųųwį's, Teega's, and Clan Mothers. The traditional kinship system emerged as a resilience infrastructure. Nąąnį's and Cųųwį's provided safe spaces for teachings that daughters might resist hearing from their mothers — as Roberta Decorah explained, "if I said something to her, she wouldn't listen to me. So, I knew that my older sister would talk to her in a way that she would understand." The Teega's traditional responsibility for his sister's children provided male mentorship rooted in kinship obligation, not patriarchal authority — as James Fortner III experienced with his Teega Ted in the woods making water drums. The Clan Mothers, established by Myrtle Long in 2001, formalized a matriarchal connection for every Ho-Chunk clan member, providing teachings, knowledge, and belonging. These interlocking roles constitute a resilience system, not a single practice — each role reinforces the others, and when one is disrupted, the system adapts.

Resilience for Place — Connection to Homeland. The connection between healing and Ho-Chunk homelands emerged powerfully. Osceola's earliest memory of ceremony — a peyote ceremony with his mother in Wisconsin — grounds spiritual practice in specific geography. Four decades later, his brother Asa finds healing in the same place: "That mąąka way of life has brought me to almost two years clean and sober." Justine was brought home to the Decorah Family Cemetery after her passing, and Asa stated, "I feel like that healed her, putting her back in this bosom of Mother Earth here." Place is not incidental to healing — it is constitutive of it.

Discipline and Accountability within Love. Discipline appeared not as punishment but as community accountability. Clan Mother Bernice Blackdeer's mother taught her: "God gave you a brain and put it in your head and put it on your shoulder." Roberta Decorah's mother held her accountable: "if you did something, she'd hear about it. You had to say why did you do that? I didn't teach you that." The Gagas and Nąąnįs were known to be people you did not want to cross — not from cruelty but from standards. This discipline produced self-efficacy and the expectation that you would use your voice, use your brain, and answer for your choices.

Voice — "People of the Big Voice." Ho-Chunk means "People of the Big Voice," and the use of voice as advocacy was a resilience factor across all research questions. Justine "never held back and she spoke with conviction. She walked into the room like God sent her." Her mother and grandmother were known for standing toe-to-toe with anyone. Clan Mother Bernice accepted the role knowing it meant speaking truth to the next generation. Warren Gohl advised speaking from the heart in one-on-one conversations when someone is causing harm. Voice is not merely communication — it is the exercise of sovereignty in every space one enters.

Cultural Practice as Continuity. Sweat lodge, drum circles, talking circles, medicine wheel teachings, lacrosse, beadwork, sewing, basket-making, star quilts, preparing deer meat for ceremony — the specific cultural practices named by participants constitute a resilience infrastructure. These practices maintain intergenerational knowledge transfer even when formal kinship roles are disrupted. As Joisky Caudill taught the sisters at Mission Creek: hold onto your culture and traditions, no matter how little you think you know, because "it's going to turn into a rope, and pretty soon it's going to turn into a ray of light."

Forgiveness as Severance of Trauma Ties. In the swan story, forgiveness is what finally severed the Alcohol Spirit's connection to the wažokį. This is not forgiveness as absolution of the one who caused harm. It is forgiveness as refusal — refusing to allow the trauma bond to continue dictating the family's trajectory. It is an act of sovereignty over one's own healing.

Service Work as Healing. Osceola's description of his sister Winona as "the giver of bread" — someone whose healing comes through service — was echoed across participants. Clan Mother Roberta Decorah stated, "My life is no longer about me, it's about those behind me." Clan Mother Cecelia Rave described how encouraging young women encouraged her in return. Justine's entire advocacy career — domestic violence, fair housing, Iron House work — was service as medicine. The reciprocity of service produces healing in both directions.

Waną'į mąąšją (Strong Mind) — Healthy Resilience. Laura Bluehorse-Swift's insistence on using the Lakota "wowakisake" instead of "resilience" — "let's call it what it is, because we knew about it; it was one of our foundational values" — reframes resilience from a Western psychological concept to an Indigenous value. Healthy resilience, as described by the participants, is not the toxic resilience of enduring hit after hit. It is the strong mind that asks, when something bad happens, "Creator, what message are you trying to send me? What teaching

are you trying to give me?” It is resilience rooted in relationship with the Creator and Ancestors rather than resilience as solitary endurance.

Appendix G: Elements of Hochungra & Global Indigenous Societal Matriarchy Detail

Global Matriarchal Economics	Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Economics
GIFTING ECONOMY ○ **Tuareg N. Africa** – Circulating gifts among community is valued, creates kinship ties (p. 439) ○ **Central America**- Gifting economy communities managed by women (p. 265) ECONOMIC AUTHORITY & STEWARDSHIP ○ **Central America**-Goods distribution throughout to maintain equity, mutual aid, with women owning agricultural and domestic markets ○ Subsistence harvest economy managed by women *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012, p. 265)* ○ **African** proverbs project the worldview of women's agricultural, production stewardship *(Dipio, 2019, pp. 14, 16)*	GIFTING ECONOMY ○ Demonstration of kinship networking between Ho-Chunk & Omaha through reciprocal gifting of gifts and Helushka Society Dance *(Hinzo, 2016, p. 156)* ○ A gift cannot be refused, and due to the nature of reciprocal kinship relationships, a like gesture in response is to be expected *(Mountain Wolf Woman, 1961, p. 135)* ○ Herušga, or gift dance when gifting to visiting tribes occurred, also to gifting to poor tribal members, and those about to journey *(Dieterle, n.d.c)* ECONOMIC AUTHORITY & STEWARDSHIP ○ Ho-Chunk woman had rights and property, unheard of in colonial society. Their holdings led them to be targets of violence; settlers coveted the fruits of their resources including mines, land, and produce such as maple syrup, wild rice, and other staples ○ Ability to own land maintained through the Treaty of 1829 in which Ho-Chunk women were allotted land, considered a progressive acknowledgement *(Hinzo, 2016 p. 38)* ○ "The fact that my father did not care to obtain any land was because he was a member of the Thunder Clan. I do not belong to the earth, he said, ...I have no concern with land. This is why he was not interested in having any land. Mother...belonged to the Eagle Clan. She said...this means we will have some place to live, and so she took 40 acres." (p. 5) ○ Colonialism reduced men's ability to provide while increasing women's due to their traditional roles in agriculture, beadwork, basketry (p. 101) *(Mountain Wolf Woman, 1961, p. 135)* ○ 1800's Rock River Ho-Chunk women created hubs linked to larger Ho-Chunk networks across traditional homelands. Through resistance, they supported Ho-Chunk unity and survivance of the people and culture, through social and economic bonds and networking *(Kimmel, 2023)* ○ Agriculture being the primary sustenance lends to the argument that Ho-Chunk was matrilineal, possibly adapting to patrilineality post-contact with Europeans after an increased dependence on hunting and trapping. *Wisconsin Indian Resource Project. (n.d.)*

Global Matriarchal Politics	Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Politics
STRUCTURE & CONSENSUS ○ **Melanesia Trobriand Islanders**: Political "delegates of mother's and sister's clan" represented consensus (p. 11) ○ **Polynesian** men's & women's councils only acted in consensus with each other (p. 196); ○ **Tuareg N. Africa** – Consensus and power through assembly of the people p. (440) *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012)*	STRUCTURE & CONSENSUS). ○ Ho-Chunk leader Ho-poe-Kaw, Glory of the Morning, was chief at the time Jonathan Carver, British explorer came to meet her; could not comprehend/acknowledge the leadership of a female chief, viewed her as a figurehead because he engaged with the men around her, misinterpreting them as leadership and not deliverers of her messages. (Hinzo, 2016, p. 21) ○ "It is the eldest clan member who usually becomes the leader of the clan, who leads primarily by consensus" (Funmaker, 1986, p. 12) ○ "Although traditional Winnebago social organization is consensus-oriented..." (Funmaker, 1986, p. 171)
LEADERSHIP & DESCENDANCY ○ **Polynesian** matrilineal dictation of rank and title through bloodlines of the mother and the father's mother. (p. 194) *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012)* LEADERSHIP AND CONSENSUS	RELATIONSHIPS VIA INHERITANCE ○ Bilineal clan descendancy, if not through the father, then through the mother (Sherman, 1998, p. 36) ○ Leadership through matriarchal affiliation is found in many ho chunk oral traditions, such as Red Horn Cycle, and how men achieve status through relationships with mothers or wives (Jung, 2023, p. 126) ○ Ho-Chunk leader Ho-poe-Kaw, Glory of the Morning, was chief at the time Jonathan Carver, British explorer came to meet her; could not comprehend/acknowledge the leadership of a female chief, viewed her as a figurehead because he engaged with the men around her, misinterpreting them as leadership and not deliverers of her messages. (Hinzo, 2016 p. 21)

CONCENSUS & DECISION MAKING	CONSENSUS & DECISION MAKING
o **Polynesian** "The balance of feminine and masculine activities was also maintained". **Polynesian** villages had two councils, one men and one women, In which decisions were made And the action taken was only if both were in consensus. o **Samoan** Within aristocratic families a man's sister held ceremony o **Tongan** was held in high esteem and regard by the chief to the point that she was regarded higher than he. *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012, pp. 196-197)*	o Clan leaders ruled by consensus of the people of the tribe (Loew, 2015, p. 10) o Within traditional Clan systems, Ho-Chunk women held people accountable within their clan, community *(Thomas-Bear, 2025*

Global Matriarchal Culture	**Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Culture**
EGALITARIANISM o "Balance of feminine and masculine activities" across all family/village tasks and responsibilities (p. 196) o Central America-Gender switching/identity & same sex relationships accepted (p. 265) *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012)* o Within proverbs and folk tales, removing patriarchal lens reveals a less deprecating vision of women, and no superior/inferior emphasis of either gender (pp. 4-5) *(Dipio, 2019*	EGALITARIANISM o Homosexuality seen as "Served as a balance between men and women… Accepted and believed to be from God… was not to be shunned" (p.39) o As creations of Mother Earth homosexuals are accepted; in conversation not talked about because they go through life as everyone else does, treated same as others (p. 47) o "Lurie Writes that most persons she spoke to thought that the (tejacowiga) was a role that was highly honored and respected" (p. 22) *(Hinzo, 2016)* o Tejacowiga – Created by the moon offering men to change or die, sacred; represents mirror image (Dieterle, n.d.c) o Matrilineal and mother-centered logic is evident in Ho-Chunk culture through how mothers and grandmother carry "knowledge, kinship, ceremony, and continuity", making them central to the community as well as family. *(Thomas-Bear, 2025*
BROTHER-SISTER RELATIONSHIP o **Melanesia Trobriand Islanders** "social fathers, who are honor bound to see to the well-being of their sisters and their sisters children" (p. 11) o **Polynesia** Covenant "closest alliance…the relationship between sisters and brothers" (p. 194) o **Tuareg N. Africa** – Men take care of mothers and sisters as part of protecting matrilineal kinship ties (p. 434) *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012)* o **African** Relationship in which brothers have a responsibility over sister and her children, highly important relationship; also a relationship with mother's sister as a mother *(Dipio, 2019, pp. 6-7)*	BROTHER-SISTER RELATIONSHIP o "Among the Winnebago a man's sisters, especially his elder sisters, were very highly respected in all war prizes, such as wampum belts, wampum necklaces, etcetera we're always given to them." (p. 57) o (Warpath) "If you have performed any deeds of valor, recount them to your sisters and to your sister's children" (p. 68) *(Blowsnake, 1926)* o Men's support of women in his family includes the responsibility he held for his sisters and their children. *(Thomas-Bear, 2025)* o "Strong relationships existed between children and their mother's brother… The strength of this relationship through the mother's line is part of the evidence which suggests that the Ho-Chunk were originally matrilineal, since this type of relationship is characteristic of matrilineal societies. *Wisconsin Indian Resource Project. (n.d.)*
MARRIAGE o **Akan, W. Africa**: Kinship networks through marriage, leading to political alliance o **Tuareg N. Africa** –Women can initiate divorce quickly and at any time p. 434 o **Central American** – Weddings were unknown or secondary o **Samoan** Young men lived with wives parents (p. 194) *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012* o **African** Marriage was not viewed as transactional or irrevocably binding and easy to end. *(Dipio p. 6)*	MARRIAGE o One aspect of establishing political and economic kinship networks was through intermarriage, first with other tribes later extending to marriage for traders leading to French husbands becoming part of ho chunk communities. *(Hinzo, 2016, p. 22)* o Marriage was considered a "secular contract", differing from European culture and religion o Women of the newly married husband's family gifted to women in his wife's family o Men lived with in-laws for several years to contribute to wife's family o Became patrilocal after birth of children, living near husbands family o Divorced was easily obtained, for example for a violation of the Ho-Chunk value of a husband not exhibiting jealousy *(Mountain Wolf Woman, 1961, pp. 122-123)*

Global Matriarchal Spirituality	Ho-Chunk Matriarchal Spirituality
FEMALE DEITIES o **Polynesian** Hina/Hine (Maori) Islander moon goddess (p. 192) o **Polynesian** Po, the night birthing foundation of matrilineal Polynesian social order (p. 194) o **Polynesian** Mana wahine is the wisdom & power from female ancestors (p. 194) o **Tuareg N. Africa** Women related to heavens through the moon, men through the sun.p. 449 *(Göettner-Abendroth, 2012)* SACREDNESS OF WOMENHOOD, MOTHERHOOD o **African** Women's position as mothers and within the community centered her in the economically and spiritually among her people. *(Dipio, 2019, pp. 3)* o **North & South American Indigenous** Communities traditionally viewed women from the lens of life-giver and describes it as "a woman-centered sense of the universe". From this centered space, relations and connectedness to each other and Earth are the basis for our Indigenous principles, values and traditions that define us. *Grande (2015)* REVERENCE FOR ANCESTORS SACREDNESS & RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE	FEMALE DEITIES o Kunika, or Grandmother Earth, gifted us with tobacco and corn, and can give blessings for life or war powers. (Dieterle, n.d.b) o Hąhewira, Moon, is known to "give of her own substance", and gifts women long life during puberty fasts, and offers to men to become tejacowiga. (Dieterle, n.d.c.) SACREDNESS OF WOMENHOOD, MOTHERHOOD o "Women are sacred... Our grandmother earth is a woman, and an abusing your wife you are abusing her." (Blowsnake, 1926, p. 60) REVERENCE FOR ANCESTORS o Elders considered sacred due to closeness to death and spirit world (Mountain Wolf Woman, 1961, p. 112) SACREDNESS & RESPECT FOR ALL LIFE

Appendix H: Survival to Thrivance Spectrum

Survival	"The word survival does not sufficiently encompass the great strength, courage, and perseverance that it took for our people to remain intact as a tribal nation in the face of violence, colonial oppression, and policies of ethnic cleansing" (Lonetree, 2011) Survival is not an academic skill. It is learning how to take our differences and make them strengths (Lorde, 1984
Resistance	"resistance to insult and abuse is a powerful motivator precisely because it enables us to fulfill our longing to achieve our goals while letting us name the obstacles to those achievements" (Bell 2002, p. 65) "racism can be defied. One can infer that (Derrick) Bell does not think of racial resistance in terms of eradication; rather, he thinks of racial resistance as defiance. I think that Bell's idea of racial realism invites womanist theological thought to rethink its language of hope. Much of womanist theological discourse tends to frame hope through the language of eradication instead of the language of defiance. Taking its cue from belle's racial realism, are argue that womanist thought can better theorize resistance to structural racism by employing language of defiance. Defiance as a mode of resistance is not impotent or "giving up" in the face of racial justice. Instead, defiance functions as a disruptive ethics to structural (re)productions of racism, perpetually sludging the theoretical and practical force of racial logics and practices that denigrate black subjects." (Day, 2022)
Resilience	Wanąꞌį mąąšją: "Strong mind" Ho-Chunk, People of the Big Voice "the process and outcome of successfully adapting to difficult or challenging life experiences, especially through mental, emotional, and behavioral flexibility and adjustment to external and internal demands." American Psychological Association (N.D.)
Survivance	A Native sense of presence, the motion of sovereignty, and the will to resist dominance. Survivance is not just survival but also resistance, not heroic or tragic, but the tease of tradition, and my sense of survivance outwits dominance and victimry "an active resistance and repudiation of dominance, obtrusive themes of tragedy, nihilism, and victimry" (Vizenor, 2008, p. 11) Survivance is an intergenerational connection to an individual and a collective sense of presence and resistance, expressed through personal experience and the word (or language), particularly through stories. In Native communities on this continent, the knowledge of survivance is shared through stories. (Vizenor, 2013, p. 107). Survivance is defined as a relationship with our Ancestors from which we receive knowledge for healing. From our Ancestors, survivance is born of resilience, creating fertile ground from which we harvest hope and a vision for our descendants, nourished

	by ancestral knowledge and healing. It is a process in which our descendants, while standing on the shoulders of those who came before them, resist colonialism, while at the same time, the possibility of life untainted by its trauma is within their grasp. Here, the process blooms into a worldview in which our descendants not only survive but also thrive. (Stevens, 2025)
Thrivance	"we are here, we are productive, and we continue to thrive and contribute to today's world" (Baumann, 2023, p. 1) “the ability to use pre-colonial, settler colonial, and contemporary experiences (both negative and positive) to adjust, reset, build, and center Indigenous histories, languages, intellectual traditions and relationships with a focus on self-determination, collective wellness, and joy” (Jolivétte, 2023, p. 236)