

**Weaving The Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledge as a  
Pathway to Indigenous Wellness**

**Angel R. Williams**

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Supervisory Committee:

Michelle Montgomery, Ph.D., Chair

Paulette Blanchard, Ph.D., Committee Member

Sandy Littletree, Ph.D., Committee Member

## **Abstract**

This study examines how Indigenous people perceive and practice wellness and healing through storytelling, relationships, and connection to land. Rooted in Indigenous research methodologies and using the Cedar Rose as a framework, it emphasizes lived experiences and survivance while rejecting deficit-based trauma narratives. By employing conversational interview techniques and considering the researcher's positionality, the study treats stories as valuable data rather than as extractable material. The research advocates for decolonizing approaches in research, education, and wellness that honor Indigenous knowledge systems and emphasize relational accountability and self-determination.

*Keywords:* Indigenous Research Methodologies, Decolonizing Research, Relational Accountability, Survivance, Indigenous Wellness, Indigenous Healing

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At the core of what has been learned and embodied is the understanding that we are not alone, and that relationship is always the answer. The work of this dissertation project is likewise grounded at the heart in several moments and constellations of relationships, responsibilities, and dreams that extend far beyond the academy. An acknowledgement of our Indigenous communities and peoples who continue to find their way, and a deep gratitude to those who so generously entrusted me with their stories through this research. This work is shaped by the understanding that there are multiple pathways to Indigenous knowledge systems, relational ways of learning, and ancestral wisdom persists despite centuries of erasure and extraction.

The belief that we can only give what we have guides an educational pathway rooted in purpose and grounded in the role of motherhood. Ensuring the best possible opportunities for my daughter has always meant leading by example. Thank you, Missy. May you always be fierce and continually find your way back to yourself, back to love, and back to the knowledge that lives within you. Endless gratitude is held for the ways you teach me and for who you are.

To my partner, thank you for your unwavering support and love through this journey. You have held space, offered reassurance, and, most of all, kept me grounded and with perspective.

To my mom, thank you for always allowing me to process and thoroughly provide a basis for expanding on all the topics.

With heartfelt gratitude, an acknowledgement to future generations, especially those in the diaspora. May our choices nurture wellness and the balance needed for flourishing health.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

### **Positionality Statement: Locating Myself**

My name is Angel Williams, and I carry teachings, healing, and strength that come with a responsibility passed down to me from my ancestors. The Treaties of Point Elliott and Medicine Creek (Muckleshoot Indian Tribe, 2025) have given me the foundation to assert my personal sovereignty and protect my right to live as a Muckleshoot Tribal Member. These treaties are not historical artifacts; they are living agreements that inform how we understand land, responsibility, and belonging.

I live on the Quileute territory, known as present-day Forks and La Push, Washington, where the Quileute people have occupied these lands since time immemorial. I was brought to this community through customary guardian kinship, granted by a Pierce County court order, as an infant. Through my birth mother, I am part of the Dunbar Daniels family, which is of Muckleshoot and Tulalip descent. My biological father is Latino, and almost nothing is known about him. My late father, who raised me, was Donald Black Sr. of Quileute. My mother, who raised me, is Michelle Black of Tulalip. My home is shared with my partner, Dakotah LeClair, of Ponca, Oklahoma, and my daughter, Donny Williams, of Quileute. My family is large, mixed, and blended.

In alignment with Quinless' (2022) advocacy, which centers on a holistic understanding of health, education, and wellness from an Indigenous perspective, I am guided by the ongoing process of decolonization in my praxis. Licensed as an Independent Clinical Social Worker through the Washington State Department of Health, I am a School Social Worker through the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. I work at the Quileute Tribal School, a K–12 Tribal Compact School, where I provide school-based mental health counseling primarily to

Native students. I also founded Native Healing and Wellness PLLC, a telehealth private practice, to deliver culturally grounded, Indigenous-led mental health therapy services.

An introduction of identity and origin reflects the understanding that the identities we carry shape how we conduct ourselves. As a member of the Quileute community, my close ties foster a deep sense of connection to those whose relationships are most significant. These relationships strengthen my responsibility during my time in this territory and ultimately shape my sense of belonging.

### ***Knowing***

From an early age, there was a pull to support people who were experiencing hardship. The focus was on understanding what to say, how to respond, and how to be present in ways that could ease what others were carrying. This desire was never about having the right answers, but about learning how to sit with people in moments that felt heavy, uncertain, or painful. Even then it was clear that what people needed extended beyond surface explanations or quick solutions. Care required attention to what was not always visible, to what was felt, held, and often unspoken. This way of seeing continues to shape my understanding of healing, education, and wellness, and informing the approach taken in this research.

Over time it has become clear that meaningful responses do not come from rushing toward clarity or trying to fix what is in front of us. When pauses, uncertainty, or a sense of not knowing arise, there is value in staying with those moments rather than pushing past them. These spaces often hold important information about what is needed, even when it is not immediately clear. Disruption in the body and spirit can signal a loss of alignment, particularly when responses are shaped by pressure, expectation, or performance rather than truth. These moments are not obstacles but forms of guidance. Staying present with them allows something to shift

over time. What follows is not forced or rushed, but grounded in relationship, care, and responsibility.

Absolon (2022) describes the act of “re-search” as restoring Indigenous knowledge systems and an orientation inseparable from a “wholistic” practice, which requires researchers to intentionally engage with the spiritual, emotional, intellectual, and physical dimensions of the research process. This is understood as balancing these domains with our innate ancestral knowledge. When something is held long enough without understanding, a shift becomes necessary within the self. Returning to it afterwards reveals that the thing itself has changed. The process of changing something can involve learning, being in relation, praying, dreaming, and other forms of processing.

Not knowing is also knowing. Not knowing is not absence. It is a method and an invitation to slow down, listen, and allow understanding to emerge through relationship. In these moments, I have found that it is not the work itself I am being pulled away from; it is the dominant system’s imposed expectations that are competing with our own ways of knowing and the dominant system’s expectations about how we think, write, and express ourselves that can pull us out of balance. When movement toward overthinking prioritizes intellect over intuition, a sense of fragmentation can arise. This is not a personal failure. This is the impact of colonizing structures that reward disconnection from the body, the spirit, and emotion.

When only one dimension of ourselves is valued, the intellect is diminished. In these moments, our wholeness is compromised, not because it is lost, but because it is set aside or not included. Returning to alignment means coming back to our ways of knowing that center relation rather than performance. Long before entering academic spaces, my dad taught me the importance of speaking from the heart, which allows the mind, body, spirit, and emotions to

come back into relation with each other. This is not merely a technique. It is an ethical responsibility that defines who we are.

This work is primarily written for Indigenous people, particularly those engaged in education, research, and healing within systems that were not designed for us. Shaped by this understanding, accessibility is created, not by simplifying language or making the work more palatable, but by writing in a way that allows Indigenous readers to hear all the voices in this work, recognize themselves, and trust what is being offered. It is about not hiding behind distance and staying present to what is being shared, which is lived, relational, and felt in the body. It is for those of us who feel fragmented and are seeking ways to reclaim ourselves. Those who need this work will find it, and its spirit will reach you as well.

Long before the term *cultural safety* was known to me, culture and traditions were understood as medicine that sustains wellness and guides learning in a good way. My positionality in providing safety and education aligns with the concept of cultural safety, as described by Ball and Pence (2006) - environments where cultural identity, history, values, beliefs, and practices are not only accepted but also acknowledged, affirmed, and honored, thereby allowing security in expressing perspectives. Further, when approaching research and working with Indigenous peoples, awareness is intentionally raised about the impacts of colonization in ways that are safe and relational. Settler colonialism is rooted in white supremacy and has legacies across power structures and systems of social, economic, political, educational, and health. Settler colonialism lives in our families and our bodies. In contrast, my praxis centers communal processes, relational accountability, and collective healing.

### *Coming Home Through Land, Education, and Relationality*

I am a student in a doctoral program that was designed to be grounded in a collective approach tailored for Native scholars, emphasizing relational practices and centering Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Bill et al., 2022). The program is a partnership between Muckleshoot Tribal College and the University of Washington, Tacoma. We have built relationships across different institutions, disciplines, and states, enabling us to develop, grow, heal, and actively contribute to our communities. This program has strengthened cultural identity and educational engagement in ways once thought impossible. In many ways, it has been a homecoming.

Coming home has unfolded in layered ways shaped over the years through place, learning, and relationship with the land. This program is an act of resurgence, reconnecting me to traditional land-based practices (Quinless, 2022). One of our first lessons was a trip to Tomanamus forest, where we received embodied, land-based education and permission to give whatever it is to the land. The land is big enough to hold us. To understand what it means to slow down and listen deeply, and learn with the land, not just about it, because we are in a relationship with it. Similarly, Hardison-Stevens (2023) supports land as pedagogy through land-based practices, such as walking the land in silence, which center experiential, relational, and sensory learning. Through this intentional, embodied action in place, these practices can heighten a learner's understanding of interconnectedness, responsibility, and reciprocity.

The cohort is guided by the values of Community Grounded, Ancestral Knowledge, Relational Learning, Disrupt and Dismantle, and Healing (University of Washington, Tacoma, 2026), which are lived out in how we share our stories, care for one another, and engage. This has also been a homecoming, marked by coming to know the self more deeply, seeing in relation

to others, and learning to care for the self. As Celidwen (2024) describes, engaging in kin-based relational practices situates Indigenous knowledge systems within an ecological framework that emphasizes responsibility and interconnectedness. Being on traditional ancestral lands is more than a physical presence; it is a return to the lifeways, waterways, and places that hold our ancestors' memories and knowledge. The rivers, mountains, forests, prairies, and wetlands have sustained my relatives. We are in relationship with the land and all those who inhabit it, both seen and unseen. Being here reminds me of my responsibility as a Muckleshoot, a mother, an educator, and a social worker, one that extends beyond human relationships to the land itself.

### **Context and Purpose**

This research is grounded in Indigenous experiences, voices, and knowledges, examining how identified pathways support healing and wellness within the context of climate justice and colonial injustice. Climate justice is understood here as the unequal impacts of environmental change on Indigenous peoples, whose lands, waters, and ways of life have been disproportionately disrupted by systems they did not create, and for whom relationships to land are inseparable from health and well-being (Hill et al., 2024). Gilio-Whitaker (2020) demonstrates that Indigenous environmental justice struggles are rooted in ongoing conflicts over land, sovereignty, and survival that emerge from colonization, rather than being limited to contemporary environmental concerns alone. Climate justice is not a separate condition but one that is shaped through ongoing colonial processes. This study holds that Indigenous wellness is inseparable from relationships to land, waterways, and non-human relatives, and that disruptions to land are disrupted to the conditions that sustain physical, cultural, and spiritual well-being.

Colonial injustice refers to the enduring structures of settler colonialism, including the dispossession of land, the disruption of cultural and relational systems, and the extraction of

Indigenous knowledge. Whyte (2018) describes settler colonialism as a form of ecological domination that disrupts relationships between Indigenous peoples and their environments and undermines collective continuance. These ongoing conditions continue to shape the environmental injustice Indigenous communities experience.

While existing quantitative research and data often document disparities, harm, and inequity across Indigenous communities (Walter, 2017), this study does not treat those accounts as the only or defining story. This study draws on approaches that center lived experience, relationality, and meaning making. This work remains in conversation with Indigenous scholars who name these conditions while also emphasizing Indigenous strength, continuity, and relational responsibility. For example, Quinless (2022), examines how the loss of culture, language, land, and children through colonial systems has shaped Indigenous experiences of harm, while also pointing to the importance of recognizing ongoing practices of care, connection, and healing that persist despite these conditions.

Building from this foundation, this research creates space for multiple understandings of interconnectedness and for the ways Indigenous communities continue to live, adapt, and sustain wellness across generations. This study is guided by Tachine and Nicolazzo's (2022) *Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice*, a framework that centers relationality as both a way of knowing and a way of conducting research. Within this approach, knowledge is not treated as something to be extracted, but as something that emerges through relationships, carrying with its responsibilities of accountability, reciprocity, and care between the researcher, knowledge holders, and communities.

Evjen & Shanley (2015) emphasize the need to identify common ground in mapping Indigenous presence and understanding. This work is located explicitly within Indigenous

worlds. Rooted in my Muckleshoot identity, this writing is offered first to our people and communities, especially youth, scholars, and those living in the diaspora who are navigating education while seeking to remain in relationship with who they are and where they come from. Their acknowledgment of the importance of identifying places where understanding may begin is commendable. This work is not aimed at establishing common ground for inclusiveness or mutual comfort. Others may read this work and find meaning within it, but it is not my responsibility to render Indigenous knowledge equally accessible to all audiences. Instead, this writing serves the communities to which accountability is held, carrying generosity, respect, and responsibility together while remaining clear about its purpose and its refusal to dilute or generalize Indigenous knowledge. This reflects a current place of growth and responsibility. At this point in the journey, there is no urgency to orient outside the Indigenous world, trusting that such clarity of purpose functions as a form of self-care.

Tuck (2009) stresses the importance of the characteristics by which we frame our communities, informing the spaces and the need to move beyond damage-centered research, where we stop thinking of ourselves as broken. She describes the desired framework and key component as Survivance. She draws on Vizenor's (2008) concept of survivance, which moves beyond survival in the face of cultural genocide to create spaces of renewal as a Native presence with sovereignty and the will to resist dominance and victimry. This work shifts focus away from a deficit narrative and uses survivance as a critical place of inquiry, drawing on Indigenous knowledge and strengths to capture Indigenous ways of knowing. Parallels between climate change and traditional ecological knowledge are examined to honor how this knowledge is not only cultural memory but also a living system essential to moving beyond mere survival. Changes in our environment also disrupt our relationship with the land.

It means this work is about dreaming again. It is about imagining and creating beyond survival, beyond constant harm, and beyond exploitation. In this way, this aligns with what Tuhiwai Smith (2012) describes as ‘imagining’ as an Indigenous project, which is a process of envisioning futures beyond the limits imposed by colonial conditions. The context is that we do not internalize harm that was never ours to carry. The context is that when something feels off, whether witnessing lateral violence, internalizing oppression, or experiencing harm within our own families, these experiences support ideals that work against who we are. The context is reframing harm as structural within systems rather than personal. It is about what it feels like to be regulated, to live well, and to pass that wellness forward to our future kin. Its purpose is resurgence. Indigenous stories, voices, and knowledge serve as a resurgence and a means of self-determination, highlighting the spirit that underlies our ecological and ancestral knowledge, which is interconnected with creation and ultimately benefits our well-being. These voices are tools, meant to be used. As Wilson et al. (2019) emphasize, identity exploration and cultural resurgence are forms of research rooted in community and relationality. It is not only about understanding ideas; it is about feeling and believing something deeper. To know that you carry medicine. You carry light. You carry love. You are already whole and enough. If you feel fragmented, it is not because something is wrong with you. Different questions are invited, ones that attend to the conditions that have shaped you. Our people did not come this far only to come this far. We have always had our own institutions, our own ways of being, and systems that met all our needs. What has been disrupted is not our knowledge, but our belief in it. This work aims to restore that belief and to remind us that leadership does not look like authority or achievement, but purpose. From our plant relatives comes a lesson about purpose - simply to live. This research works to reclaim how we live, love, and heal for future generations.

## **Decolonizing Praxis – An Open Letter to my Grandmothers**

The following letter to the Grandmothers of my Lineage situates my life and educational journey, expressing how I personally experience and live decolonizing praxis. It responds to the many definitions of decolonization that risk becoming abstract or desensitized. This letter grounds the concept in lived experience and relationship, which shape how I approach research and the research process. While I would not write a letter to my Grandmothers in APA style, its presence here reflects the pathways I have had to move through. Education has been a site of adaptation, and I hold this form alongside the spirit of the letter, rather than in place of it.

*Dear Grandmothers of My Lineage,*

*When I say grandmothers, I do not only mean one ancestor, but the many women whose prayers and love have made my life possible. I write to all my grandmothers who carried knowledge through colonization, who have always protected our ways of being, and who continue to guide us through blood, memory, body, and spirit. I did not walk beside you in the physical world, but I know you from dreams, feelings, and all the ways I see you in spirit. I imagine you in all that you are, in the beautiful grandmothers I have seen and known throughout my life, and in the ones, I continue to witness. All walking with strength, care, and wisdom. Through them, I learn what it means to grow into the kind of elder or ancestor I hope to be (Abeyta, 2021). I believe deeply in what our people tell us and teach us - that the prayers of our ancestors protect us. I may not know your stories, but I can feel them. Through feeling, I heal, because healing occurs when our pain is brought to consciousness and held by spirit and culture (Duran, 2006).*

*I have been in education for many years. For most of my life, school taught me what I needed to know to adapt to this world. I learned to follow standards, measure competence*

*through grades and exams, and locate the white man's "truth" in books written so far removed from our lands and stories. I learned western ways of knowing and left parts of myself at the door. I am now realizing these disconnections and have a language for them. It took me a while to begin questioning whose knowledge I was learning and who was being centered by it. I thought that learning the history of disciplines and how fields developed was education itself, without understanding how deeply colonial systems shaped what counted as knowledge and who got to belong.*

*Grandmothers, decolonizing, and learning to live did not begin for me as theory. It began as a lived journey shaped by experience, reflection, and action. Guided by Paulo Freire's (1970/1993) understanding that reflection and action belong together, I took on the responsibility to think critically about the conditions that shaped my life and to learn new ways of becoming that could move me beyond fixed and imposed ways of thinking. During the second year of this program, we were not only asked to study praxis, but also to live it. To move beyond awareness and into embodied action through our daily lives, relationships, and heartwork (Minthorn, personal communication, June 2023). This was no longer just something we studied; it became something we lived.*

*I came to understand decolonization as peeling away the layers that had been placed on me, so I could feel the lifeblood of healing justice and plant myself again in my true self. (McCaslin et al., 2008) I learned that decolonizing begins in the mind, where creative, consistent decolonial thinking reshapes the brain and lays the foundation for the change needed. Undoing the effects of colonialism requires conscious attention to physical, psychological, mental, and spiritual impacts. And when we remember the wisdom and beauty of our traditional ways,*

*rejecting colonial lies, we are opened to dreams of liberation, and resistance becomes possible again (Yellow Bird & Wazyatawin, 2012).*

*Grandmas, now I understand that healing is not only necessary for my personal needs, but also for the collective. It is a journey of raising consciousness toward wellness and reconnecting with identity, community, and purpose. Along this journey, I have learned that my body and very existence are political. Simply living as an Indigenous woman within colonial systems is in and of itself an act of resistance to not only the past violence imparted on us but also ongoing power structures (Brayboy, 2005). I have come to understand this in different ways at the same time, seeing myself as part of both the past and present. I draw on Grande's (2015) work on the relationship between American Indians and education, especially her point that the Church and State worked together to take Native lands and knowledge. This reminder keeps me mindful and helps me stay close to what you and all our ancestors endured, not just about surviving, but about preparing us to live differently.*

*There was a time when I worked in community mental health and slowly began to burn out. I did what the system expected. I assessed, documented, and met productivity demands, reducing healing time to 50-minute sessions to maximize billable hours. Decolonizing praxis has taught me to recognize patterns when I fragment myself. I now know how and when I started to drift away not only from relationships, but also from being right in relationship. I had supportive colleagues and supervisors, but the system could not hold me in the way I needed. I could not be fully seen because I could not be fully myself.*

*There is no separation between personal and professional because they are the same. It is more about standing in systems while remaining whole. It is not about leaving work at work; it is about learning to carry the work in a good way. I returned to seasonal teachings. Spring*

*became my heart and emotional health. Winter became my physical body. Summer became my spirituality. Autumn became my mind and mental health. Raising consciousness brought hard realizations, such as understanding that my physical weight protected me (Taylor, 2018) and that my beliefs and behaviors intersected with dominant paradigms, a process also called healing ethnostress (Cajete, 2015). Through this, I learned what it truly means to restore balance.*

*Grandmothers, something shifted at my core. My beliefs about myself changed. I began to understand something I carried as a babe, preverbal and in utero, knowing, simply by feeling the power of my medicine. I imagine this comes from all my grandmothers who have guided my life and continue to do so, especially my mother, who raised me. I know in my bones I am loved, protected, and forever guided.*

*I have learned to gather my medicine by preparing and holding space for healing, reclaiming narrative, and strengthening attachment through love and culture. Healing is cyclical, not linear. Beyond trauma, we move toward restoration. Tears are sacred messengers of release, and the answer to crisis is collective care. What I carry forward are teachings, tools, and truth (Findlay, 2005).*

*Through decolonizing, I finally understand that we make education for us and about us. Education can be rooted in identity, community, connection, and holistic well-being. It can center relational practices and traditional knowledge. It focuses on witnessing rather than fixing, and on honoring stories through reciprocity, responsibility, and respect. Decolonizing praxis has been my educational home coming. It taught me how to live, lead, heal, and be in relation to land, water, language, and community.*

*And now grandmothers, an extension of this journey is decolonizing research. Research cannot be neutral or detached. It must be relational and accountable. It must serve our people rather than extract from them. It must honor story as theory, lived experience as knowledge, and healing as part of the process.*

*I hope to be all that you ever dream of, and more, for our future kin. I walk this path for you and all those yet to come. I may not know you, but I know your prayers live in me. And through this work, I am learning how to listen to them.*

*With love and responsibility,*

*Your Granddaughter*

### **Statement of Problem**

The problem is the colonial legacy and the injustice of ongoing harm to Brown and Black bodies. Racism is the central problem that systems and structures are built upon that have created inequity and harm, which Iyamah (2023) refers to as the ongoing and wide-ranging wounds experienced by Black, Indigenous, and people of color. This harm manifests across power structures in politics, education, health, society, and economics and is continually reinforced within these systems.

Mullan (2023) argues that the root of the disease lives in individuals as internalized white supremacy, and within systems, such as the mental health industrial complex that is rooted in capitalism and imperialism and found in our histories as colonial harm against our ancestors. Lucana & Elfers (2020) approach mental distress from an Indigenous healing perspective, viewing it not as a result of individual psychology, but as stemming from relational imbalance. They argue that colonialism is an ongoing disruptive force and that symptoms should be seen as

entry points to the healing process rather than endpoints. The problem is that we have normalized mere survival on multiple levels.

I have never questioned my identity as Indigenous; that part I have always known and believed at my core. It is the disconnection from my traditional homelands, biological parents, and kinship community as an infant that left me yearning and with a void throughout my upbringing. Cajete (2015) recognizes that colonization causes diaspora, which is the loss of community we experience, and that naming the collective experience is a means to frame our understanding of empowerment and to reestablish and revitalize healthy, nurturing communities. Like many others, I came to understand that the problem started long before birth. My story was just history repeating itself. The history of ongoing colonization continually disrupts our relational ways of being, our relationship to land, culture, knowledge, and all our relations. As Gonzales (2020) writes, these teachings and knowledge are not meant to be extracted from their roots. Living in the diaspora and through a healing journey, the spirit and power of our medicine knowledge persist, despite and in response to colonization. It just looks different because we were forced to adapt. brown<sup>1</sup> (2017) describes intentional adaptation as an emergent strategy, the process of changing to fulfill. We adapt so that what matters can continue to live.

Parekh et al. (2020) acknowledge 530 years of harm to thousands of Indigenous nations. As such, we must navigate multiple layers of consideration, including identity, intergenerational, and historical trauma, cultural fragmentation, and their influence on mental health, when working with the American Indian population. Among the American Indian and Alaska Native population, there are disproportionately high levels of suicide, substance use, unresolved grief, incarceration, depression, anxiety, and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. These conditions are

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<sup>1</sup> adrienne maree brown intentionally does not capitalize her name as part of her political and relational commitments; this choice is honored and maintained here.

often framed as individual problems rather than systemic and structural consequences. Children are symptom carriers of our families, and our own symptoms speak to the societal structure of relational imbalance. All offer opportunities for healing; however, these issues are compounded by ongoing discriminatory systems, culturally incongruent treatment models, and inadequate access to resources.

Trauma is the term used when harm becomes complex, layered, and uncontainable within dominant systems. At its root, it is historical, racial, and relational. The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) (2024) conceptualizes trauma as experiences or circumstances that result in lasting adverse effects on mental, physical, social, emotional, or spiritual well-being. Our health systems continue to treat trauma as an individual experience despite its collective and intergenerational origins, as personally observed through participation in multiple professional trainings and certifications, including Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing, Internal Family Systems, and Dialectical Behavioral Therapy.

While these approaches offer tools for symptom management, they remain rooted in western epistemologies that prioritize cognition, behavior, and individual regulation. There is a shortfall in addressing the source of the pain, which is collective grief, spiritual injury, and land-based disconnection. Gutiérrez (2022) refers to this process as unburdening legacy burdens, another way of describing the process of healing from trauma. We must move beyond these limited practices, including diagnostic and pathologizing survival responses to colonial violence, and reimagine what treatment and wellness mean. Indigenous scholars emphasize that our culture acts as a form of treatment by restoring connection, identity, spirituality, and collective belonging. Centering our healing on Indigenous ways of knowing and being and honoring our

tribal sovereignty and self-determination are key to achieving Indigenous health equity (BlackDeer, 2023; Gone, 2013; Yamane & Helm, 2022). When looking at the system and treatment together, the results of healing through these modalities might meet clinical standards, but without addressing the others, this limits care.

This research contributes to a rethinking of mental health and wellness that honors and uplifts Indigenous perspectives. This is done by centering Indigenous voices and lived knowledge through story that captures how communities are already practicing and living knowledge.

### **Justification**

This research is justified not only by the numerous calls for healing practices, by and for Indigenous people, but also by gaps in the literature that fail to explicitly center and draw on the lived-experience and knowledge identified within communities to which this work is accountable. Coates et al. (2006) support this by arguing that social work should move beyond cultural competency and away from approaches that function as forms of intellectual and cultural colonization, instead centering an ecospiritual perspective that recognizes interconnectedness, which aligns with and honors Indigenous ways of knowing.

Briere & Scott (2015) explain how a clinician's view of trauma and trauma-related outcomes, along with their beliefs about the overarching goals and functions of treatment, significantly affect the process and outcome of therapy. For me, the same holds in research. Understanding the source of harm informs how questions are asked, interpreted, and engaged. At the heart of Indigenous suffering are the effects of colonialism. True liberation is acknowledging the source of pain and knowing where we come from, so we can know where to go. Duran (2019) refers to this process of colonization as a collective soul wounding of intergenerational

trauma, emphasizing not only historical violence and cultural genocide, but also ongoing systemic oppression.

Wilson et al. (2019) *With Love in Research and Reconciliation* resonates with this research, as it professes a profound hope and intention for wellness among youth in a world that attacks our land, bodies, spirits, and control through capitalism, heteropatriarchy, and white supremacy. It names what we see in Indigenous communities, including the extraction and exploitation of knowledge; it also acknowledges settlers within our own families. These words connect with Absolon (2022), who offers self-location as a means of identifying oneself truthfully, highlighting its ability to anchor responsibility, relevance, and relational accountability. She speaks to what many of us often experience - using our image, appropriating our culture for profit, or even including us for the sake of appeal. Indigenous people come from the land because we are not separate from creation. Our spirits are strong, and, as Frost (2022) articulates, *We Are the Medicine*. Frost acknowledges that without good intentions, the underlying paternalism and savior complex are met with trauma stories and tears, and without fundamental change, they contribute to the ongoing complicity in Indigenous marginalization and oppression. She further recognizes the time and effort spent educating others about Indigenous issues, even as we are still figuring this out ourselves. This research takes these messages seriously by grounding them in responsibility and self-location.

Talking about race and racism, especially in the current political climate, can be controversial. If we were born into a system that was designed to erase and harm us, at the very minimum, we should be able to start to see it. It is easy to conform, comfortable to allow, and actually safe to do nothing. However, who and what does it continue to serve? It is one of those things we are blamed for. Million (2013) describes this concept as the “Indian Problem,”

highlighting how it becomes about health, and further articulates how trauma becomes the discourse in articulating the experiences of First Nations people.

My educational pathway has taught me that growth and learning bring us to new places that require healing. With new experiences and age, we encounter spaces that are not always anticipated, revealing intergenerational wounds. It is no different in research. Absolon (2022), Gutiérrez (2022), and Mullan (2023) make it clear that trauma not only lives within the individual, but within disrupted worldviews and knowledge systems, and that colonial histories and chronic stress have already shaped our communities. It is about understanding how our ways of knowing, being, and relating have been interrupted. Traditional western research contributes to this interruption, making it essential to understand how knowledge is extracted, categorized, and separated from the relationships and interconnectedness that make it holistic, and to question not only whose knowledge is valued, but also whose has been silenced.

When barriers arise in trauma and healing, they are understood not as accidents, but as features of the system's design. When we look at obstacles and life's challenges, we often find underlying processes at work. When challenges are too big because they are rooted in several hundred years of oppression, we start to internalize the messages and embody them as our identity, believing it is who we are. This applies to many social issues, particularly as conditions compound over a lifetime. Then, when we start to unravel which is what and how, it can become overwhelmingly difficult to articulate and understand. Furthermore, Quinless (2022) underscores the importance of re-storying historical trauma in a way that suitably reflects and challenges the legacies of colonial power structures, highlighting its ability to aid Indigenous peoples in coping with the adverse effects of colonization.

## **Chapter 2: Indigenous Knowledge and the Cedar Rose Framework**

### **Introduction to Indigenous Knowledge and the Need for Decolonized Research**

The theoretical framework for this study draws on *Weaving an Otherwise: In-Relations Methodological Practice* by Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022). They define an action-oriented qualitative research process with a clear before, during, and after, using weaving as a metaphor for its practice of cultural survivance, love, relation, and ceremony; together, they weave stories, tools, practices, relations, dreamers, thinkers, cultural workers, ideas, and writers. Their framework serves as the foundation for this research, which expands on and uses the Cedar Rose as a research metaphor. Positioned as both the weaver and researcher, knowledge, narratives, and other elements are blended to theorize the research journey. Through a reframing of the traditional literature review, research is decolonizing by grounding the work in living knowledge, honoring Indigenous voices, situating relationally, highlighting lineages of thought, and leading with my positionality.

Drawing on Justice's (2018) critique, literature as story has been deeply shaped by histories of racism, classism, and arbitrary power, influencing which narratives are valued, legitimized, and carried forward. Justice goes on to express that storytelling traditions, particularly those recognized as "literature," have often been defined by those in positions of authority, marginalizing Indigenous voices while elevating dominant cultural frameworks. In response, this work engages Indigenous voices whose stories uplift, sustain, and restore.

One early influence came from Dr. Billye Sankofa Waters (personal communication, 2024), who encourages placing scholars in relationship with one another, while continually reflecting on who our crew is and who is being brought into this work. I have limited personal familiarity with some of the people I cite in this work, while others I have encountered only

through their teachings. Engaging their work along this journey has functioned as a form of relational medicine, as witnessing their stories supported healing and an affirmed sense of self. This understanding guides the research intention. The hope is that the stories gathered and woven may offer similar possibilities for others, allowing people to see themselves reflected with dignity, complexity, and care.

Indigenous ways of knowing are grounded in lived experiences, often passed down through generations, and in observing and being in nature. The Muckleshoot Tribe affirms that the Muckleshoot Language is the Language of this Land. The Muckleshoot Language Program discussed its process for developing a “Mount Rainier Prayer Song,” with Elder Wisdom and guidance (Lindgren, 2023). Members collectively used traditional medicine from the land and spirituality while visiting the land with intention. Muckleshoot Tribal member Stephanie Lindgren spoke about teaching, embodying mind and heart in a good way on the land while in prayer and receiving the gift of song. In the Muckleshoot language, the song translates to, “Our most sacred. We are here humbled. For all you provided us. We pray for you. Today and always.” Lindgren (2023) indicated that she felt and knew it was the right thing, and that it was her ancestors and good all around her. This knowledge is relational; the Cedar, the land, our ancestors, and us. It is spiritual and collective.

Our knowledge and stories are deeply interconnected with the language and the land. The late Lillian Pullen told the story of an old widow whose body turned into a memorial known as Crying Lady Rock, located at present-day Second Beach in La Push, Washington. The Quileute people had secret societies in which spirits guided different pursuits of spiritual power, such as the fisherman and weatherman societies. The widow’s son carried a personal guardian with spiritual power. He was generous in sharing his catch with the longhouse village and embraced

traditional beliefs through dance and song in the Quileute language. One day, when he did not return from fishing, the mother went to a member of the weather society to ask about her son. She was instructed on where to walk and found her son's body. She felt her soul leave her body and enter the underworld, where her son's soul had recently entered. Her grief and her son's spiritual power transformed her body, leaving behind the memorial rock. The rock sings, and in the Quileute language, it translates to "Crying at the beach," "Her soul is sickened," "That crying one," and "turned to stone forever" (Powell, 2022).

In *Teachings of the Tree People*, (Jennings et al., 2006), Miller describes the tree people as our grandparents, whose long lives and wisdom offer teachings about time, endurance, and continuity. Through their presence, trees demonstrate how knowledge and relationships with the land extend beyond a single lifetime, becoming part of the people who learn from them. Through this, ancestral teachings and relationships with the natural world continue across generations. The forest itself becomes a place of learning, where trees serve as our first teachers, showing through their growth and interconnected roots, how collective life and balance with Mother Earth can be sustained. Miller explains that ancestral customs, language, and knowledge exist in layer systems, like a rainforest, holding many forms of understanding for those who are willing to listen. The knowledge that sustains communities is rooted in the continued practice of ancestral ways, yet there have also been periods when teachings stopped because communities were struggling simply to survive. These interruptions created breaks in knowledge transmission and contributed to cultural estrangement. Elders remain important knowledge holders, even as age and illness threaten the continuity of what they carry, reminding us both of the resilience and fragility of intergenerational learning. The forest also teaches us about renewal and responsibility. A fallen tree, often called a nurse log, continues to support life after it falls,

becoming a foundation for moss, plants, and new growth. This demonstrates how life and knowledge continue even after loss. Trees are understood to hold memory within their rings, bearing witness to generations and experiences that shape the land. Miller also reflects on how changing social and environmental conditions, including leaving reservations for the military or higher education, have altered relationships with land and tradition. Even so, the land continues to communicate through the air, water, and animals by inviting people to listen and respond with care. When these relationships are neglected or the land is treated without respect, the environment's ability to sustain life is diminished. The seasonal framework depicted in Figure 1 reflects these teachings by illustrating how Indigenous wellness has long been embedded in relationships with the land and in seasonal cycles of gathering, learning, ceremony, and storytelling that sustain physical, spiritual, and communal well-being.

**Figure 1** *Seasonal Framework of Indigenous Wellness*



*Note.* Developed by the author based on “Teachings of The Tree People” shared by Bruce Miller.

There are stories we belong to, and there are stories we come to know through relationships. Sometimes we are not the ones who carry the center of the pain, yet we are close enough to witness our loved ones continue to live through it. Kovach (2018) supports this notion, describing a story as an experience held in memory that can be relational and noting that a story’s power can facilitate healing. The land acknowledges and understands our experiences because it carries knowledge and our languages. These teachings reflect Indigenous ways of

knowing and the idea that Indigenous knowledge is relational, lived, and carried through story and place (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Nature is a teacher, showing us how emotions and spirit not only live in our bodies but also move through the land. Nature can teach us how to become unstuck and what can happen if we stay in a place we should not for too long.

My work at the intersection of mental health and education is a lot like the natural intersections found in nature. Imagine a bald eagle soaring high in the sky, gaining the biggest possible picture, feeling the warmth of the sun without getting burned, and being regulated by light. Flight patterns are complex, intentional, assessing need and connecting resources, fostering well-being, and creating safety and community culture-specific learning environments. My role is a delicate balance between different ecosystems, where the survival of one system depends on the health of the other. Our work at these intersections, and the interconnectedness of their environments, depends on the collaboration of these systems to address students' diverse needs. The eagles in any system do not operate or exist in isolation; we are part of a larger network.

Indigenous knowledge is not to be separated into categories as we do in our system of education, mental health, or spirituality. After all, our wellness never existed in fragments. As Cajete (2000) describes, our knowledge is holistic and interconnected, as are our bodies, kin, and the land. To listen to Crying Lady Rock is to listen to Indigenous theory rooted in place, and to know that our healing and understanding arise through relationships with ancestors, community, and land. Our emotions have always belonged to the land, and the land knows them. This is education. This is mental health. This is wellness. None of it can be separated.

Simpson (2017) and Smith (2012) emphasize that Indigenous knowledge systems are relational, land-based, and carried through stories, ceremony, and linguistic structures that cannot be fully captured or translated into colonial language. Our language reflects how we understand

reality, and when Indigenous knowledge is articulated outside Indigenous languages, its meanings can become fragmented, simplified, or misinterpreted. When Indigenous knowledge is forced into western academia and beyond, these forms cannot fully hold its depth or dimensions.

The work of Monture-Angus and Stiegel Bauer (1996) is honored for demonstrating how western legal education can be navigated, for highlighting that law is not neutral, and for grounding herself in Haudenosaunee ways by asserting and refusing to displace Indigenous knowledge systems. She discussed the limitations of a non-Aboriginal worldview and language and on moving justice forward in Aboriginal communities. In doing so, she dispelled myths and revolution, and advocated for tradition over Canadian law. She introduced herself as a Mohawk woman, which affirms truth and knowledge, highlighting that “law” translates to “the way to live most likely together” in the Mohawk language. She defined peacemaking and restoring balance by encompassing multidimensional aspects within the community. She highlighted that even though such legal systems did not exist, this does not mean we cannot reclaim the values, recover our own system, and have space at the community level rather than the political level for legal rights. She focused on Aboriginal people, stating that our law is a family law and urging us to exercise our responsibilities. She stressed self-governance and said she needed to be responsible as a Mohawk woman and that she had the right to live in her territory; then she would have justice.

Decolonizing research means rejecting an extractive approach, one that is counter to traditional western educational colonial approaches that treat Indigenous knowledge as data to be analyzed rather than truly embodying stories, voices, traditions, or practices holistically as active knowledge. As a researcher, participation in the process is integral rather than detached or positioned as entirely objective. Relationality is deeply ingrained. Research is not neutral, and all

of its parts leading up to this point are interconnected with a movement toward appropriate treatment. For me, it is praxis at the intersection of mental health and education; treating Indigenous people from an Indigenous perspective because our experiences of harm are inseparable from the land, history, and ongoing colonial systems. This is a move away from individual pathology, productivity, and universality. The Cedar Rose framework guides relationality, holding story, ceremony, and a critical place of inquiry to understanding. The Cedar Rose is used to express understanding, informing how connections between the Indigenous knowledge framework and the methodology are articulated.

### **The Cedar Rose and Healing**

Talking about health, wellness, survivance, colonial injustice, and climate justice is challenging because it risks either glorifying Indigenous resilience or focusing too much on suffering. Hardships Indigenous communities have faced are acknowledged, while refusing to let trauma become the defining narrative. Decolonizing is not about justifying or dismissing history. It is about understanding how the past influences the present. This framework does not minimize harm or dwell on it. Rather, it creates space for clarity, accountability, and connection. Healing starts with acknowledgment, not denial.

The Cedar Rose is a meaningful metaphor for healing because Cedar inherently holds lessons. Cedar grows slowly, enduring storms, fires, droughts, clearcutting, neglect, and displacement, conditions it did not choose. When we gather Cedar for weaving, we often do not know what hardships the tree has faced. Some bark is resilient and flexible, while other bark is fragile or damaged. During weaving, we incorporate all parts of the Cedar. We gently soften and split the bark, and when parts are damaged, we resize and repurpose them. These pieces are not lesser. They are still complete in their own way, simply requiring different handling. Like

weaving, healing is not about discarding what is broken or replacing it with something new. It is about doing the best we can with what we have, knowing all parts still belong.

Cedar did not choose what happened to it, and the weaver does not respond with blame. How could we blame the Cedar for surviving what it did? In the same way, our bodies, minds, and spirits adapted to colonial violence. Pain alone is not effective resistance. Pain is a signal. Dry Cedar shows stiffness and fragility, symptoms of deprivation - deprivation of water, warmth, safety, and care. Before Cedar can bend and weave pliantly, it must be soaked, warmed, and handled correctly. This process cannot be rushed without harm. Yet colonial systems continue to demand productivity and compliance while denying the conditions necessary for healing, forcing dry Cedar to bend before it is ready.

As the Cedar Rose blooms, its petals gradually emerge. These petals represent different aspects of life, including relationships, generations, and parts of the self, such as mind, body, spirit, and emotions. Each new row develops from the same piece, sharing the same grain and history, and stays connected to the center. We all carry our petals and pain in unique ways, shaped by where tension was held and where space was created.

Healing is not about achieving perfection but about finding balance. The tightly woven areas indicate vigilance and strength, while the more open parts symbolize movement, breath, and flexibility. Both qualities are crucial. Too much tension can lead to fractures, whereas excessive looseness cannot hold the structure. Our nervous systems, like Cedar trees, have developed these patterns as survival strategies. The goal is not to eliminate these adaptations but to respond to them with care, patience, and purpose. Much like a weaver, we learn when to hold tightly and when to loosen, trusting that each part has a role and that from one strand, a complete whole can emerge.

Becoming a weaver raises questions about authority and recognition. Even as we weave and practice what has been taught, questions persist about who decides when someone becomes a weaver. This questioning is part of my practice in consciously asserting sovereignty. Just as healing is ongoing, so is the reclamation of knowledge and identity. There is no fixed arrival point. Weaving, like healing, is always in motion and shaped by time, practice, relationship, and responsibility. Our experience and energy levels shift, deepen, and change. That movement and shifting itself is part of the work.

For generations, our knowledge systems have been interrupted. Sometimes this looks like missing generations who were unable to teach. Maybe our kin was physically present to learn, but they could not reach a place of listening because of whatever they were going through. Sometimes it is the loss of access to land, materials, or language. Sometimes our teachings were never recognized as education within colonial systems. Regardless of how they appear, these interruptions are not accidental. These are the consequences of systemic cultural suppression caused by boarding schools, forced removals, land dispossession, and, for many of us, separation from our homelands and kin. This understanding is informed not only by history but also by personal experience. When we weave, we remember. We remember not only what was taken but what endured.

### **Introducing the Cedar and Weaving**

Time immemorial refers to the time before time, when nature was our source of wellness. All answers can be found within our communities, languages, and the land. Like the journey of the Salmon, healing is not a destination; it is a process. Though we carry the cultural legacy burdens of our ancestors' trauma, we also carry their resources (Gutiérrez, 2022). The teaching *We Are One*, has guided understanding throughout life. This concept applies to all within

creation - ancestors, non-humans, waterways, land, cosmos, etc. Growing up, songs, stories, and traditions were learned from outside of my own tribe, and these teachings returned to the same values of connection and responsibility. In this way, Figure 2 shows that our cultural pathways, though different, lead us to the same meaning and sense of belonging.

When it comes to healing and wellness, responsibility for healing does not rest solely with individuals but with the collective, through relationships with ancestors, kin, and land. Healing takes many forms, and lasting healing is carried through teaching, ceremony, story, and intentional personal care. Each part of the healing process has something to honor, uplift, or share so others can have the opportunity to access it. Jacobs & Narvaez (2022) remind us of relational practice as care is understanding how others care for us, which teaches us how to care for them, grounded in reciprocity and responsibility.

**Figure 2** *Nature's Pathways*



*Note.* Photograph by Archie Black (2023), originally shared on Facebook. Used to represent pathways within nature and the relational journeys reflected in this study.

The Cedar is a source of knowledge, our relative, and is used in ancestral teachings, providing cultural grounding. The Cedar Rose framework is more than a conceptual model; it is a living, sacred metaphor grounded in ancestral wisdom and teachings. Salmón (2020) explores the relationality of people and several plants in his book *Iwigara*, which translates to "breath," a concept of soul or spirit. He describes the significance of Cedar in Pacific Northwest cultures, including physical and spiritual uses. He discusses Cedar in one culture's creation story, attributing its beauty and the location of the hills and mountains. All parts of the Cedar tree are used for medicine and in ceremonies, and they are deeply connected to cultural practices. He describes medicines as sacred and central to our ways of life, identities, and relationships with our landscape, and discusses the natural and spiritual realms. Cedar is not just symbolic; it embodies the relational, spiritual, and cultural dimensions of research practice. Cedar, as a material and a spiritual property, guides the methodology. Table 1 situates the overall organization of this study within the guiding framework.

**Table 1** *Cedar Rose as Relational Structure in Decolonizing Research & Healing Framework*

Chapter Focus & Purpose	Key Components	Guiding Relational Reflections	Storywork	Decolonizing Praxis
Chapter 1	Positionality and situated knowing	Who am I in this work?	Self-story as locating knowledge	Naming the colonial context
Positionality & Coming Home	Coming home through land	What responsibilities do I carry?	Story as remembering	Refusing neutrality
Locate self, land, and responsibility	Decolonizing praxis	Where do I come from?		Locating accountability
Establish relational accountability	Statement of the problem Context			

Chapter Focus & Purpose	Key Components	Guiding Relational Reflections	Storywork	Decolonizing Praxis
	Purpose			
	Justification			
Chapter 2	Story as Theory	What ways of knowing guide this work?	Indigenous stories as theory	Refusing western dominance in theory
Indigenous Knowledge & Theory	Survivance	What teachings already exist?	Land, ancestral, and community teachings	Centering Indigenous knowledge
Cedar Rose Framework	Cedar Rose Teachings			
	Survivance			
Chapter 3	Story	How do I listen and move in a good way?	Storywork principles guiding method	Resisting extractive research, protecting knowledge, and honoring protocol
Methodology for Decolonizing Research	Ceremony Relationality	How do I protect what is shared?	Story as method and ceremony	
Enact Indigenous and Decolonizing Research Practices	Critical inquiry of place			
Chapter 4	Shared through relationship, silence, and refusal	What teachings were shared?	Stories as teachings and lived knowledge	Refusing overinterpretation
Teaching Shared		What do the stories ask of me?		Honoring limits
Hold and Witness through Story				

Chapter Focus & Purpose	Key Components	Guiding Relational Reflections	Storywork	Decolonizing Praxis
Chapter 5	Discussion, implications, praxis, boundaries, and futurity	How do I carry these teachings forward?	Story guiding praxis and future care	Returning knowledge to the community
Returning the Teachings		Who am I accountable to now?		Ongoing relational accountability
Responsibility and Reciprocity				

*Note.* This table, created by the author, provides an overview of the dissertation structure, illustrating how each chapter aligns with the Cedar Rose Framework and contributes to a relational approach to decolonizing research and healing.

### **Preparing**

Preparing the Cedar involves more than soaking the materials; it also means preparing myself and nurturing relationships. Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022) discuss the foundations of pausing, coming to know, and strengthening relationality, reflecting on what moves us, scares us, and with whom we are in the community as essential. My positionality informs and motivates me in this work, especially when we need to heal a “soul wound,” which is a process of emotional, spiritual, individual, and/or collective healing from historical oppression (Duran, 2019). Ongoing engagement with communities has revealed issues understood as originating from historical trauma. These realities are both moving and frightening. The significance of these issues leaves us no choice but to make our lives and work bigger. Prolonged stillness and inaction create an unease that feels like surrendering agency or choice, equally unsettling. In such moments, inaction risks submission to the default operations of a system's control and power.

Tuck and Yang (2018) dream and work toward social justice, describing it as solidarity and grounded in the ethic of incommensurability. They pose the question, *Toward What Justice?* This work is situated as an action in response to their imperative and in answer to a call to unite under the rising sun of social justice. Tuck and Yang discuss what is rising in our justice projects and point an arrow toward them. My dissertation is a project that demands justice with the intention of serving future generations of Indigenous people.

Through pausing and coming to know, we recognize that some stories will never be told. Phillips et al. (2018) principle that storying claims voice in the silenced margins highlights knowledge, recall, analysis of power, resilience as a tool of self-determination, and decolonization. Much of my kinship and generations past remain unknown because of disconnection; however, reflection, imagination, dreaming, and prayer continue. In spirit, I call upon ancestors for strength, guidance, and to walk beside me. In research, I can honor.

Grenz (2024) states that Indigenous knowledge is not gained in a lab or even in books, but rather through the cumulative transmission of knowledge over time, through stories and lived experience, and that it requires understanding and knowing it by engaging the mind, body, emotion, and spirit. This understanding is continually reinforced through the ability to conduct research, made possible by the trust and guidance of several tribal leaders who have extended this opportunity. Muckleshoot Tribal Council Woman Virginia Cross shares aspects of her leadership and commitment to the Muckleshoot Tribe over the past forty years, while honoring several leaders who came before her. She expressed and emphasized education, sacrifice, family, and community. She spoke about the priority of social programs, including health, housing, veterans, and elder programs. She discussed the Tribe's purchase of the Tananamous forest, stating the intention not to develop it and to keep the land for tribal members to fish, hunt, and

gather. She voiced her pride that the Muckleshoot people have come from nothing and overcome struggle and uncertainty by modeling and sharing her personal story (Children of Setting Sun Productions et al., 2023). This reveals that research preparation is not about individual achievement, but a relational process made possible by the guidance of past and present leadership and the many forms of support available to our community.

### **Gathering and Weaving Story**

Researching Indigenous knowledge in the present moment requires attentiveness to the interconnectedness between people, land, language, and lived experience. Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022) discuss the ongoing nowness, speaking to the interconnectedness of body/mind/spirit, honoring the moment, and witnessing and raising the concept of answerability. Patel (2015) points out that settler colonialism trains people to see each land and knowledge as property, stressing that any decolonial project manifests a praxis of ethics. She discusses answerability, highlighting responsibility, accountability, and being part of it, learning as a transformation, being in relation, becoming, unbecoming, and constant inquiry. She also discusses our answerability to knowledge, which makes me consider my pursuit, production, existence, discovery, and relationship to it. Figure 3 offers a visual grounding of this relationality, illustrating how land-based practice carries and transmits knowledge across generations through cedar gathering.

**Figure 3** *Cedar Bark Gathering*



*Note.* Photo of Donny Williams gathering cedar bark on May 13, 2025. Photo taken by the author. This image reflects land-based practice and the intergenerational transmission of knowledge through gathering.

Chilisa (2020) discusses postcolonial Indigenous interview methods as symbols and artifacts that store worldview, connection, and knowledge. In the Cedar Rose framework, each Cedar strip represents an individual voice, lived experience, and story, trying to capture just that. Highlighted here are a language teacher’s journey of reclamation and continuity, reflections on food sovereignty and food systems, and the presence of innate ancestral knowledge that persists across generations. Rather than treating these narratives as isolated data, this study treats them as independent Cedar strips, honoring Indigenous ways of knowing that are thriving, embodied, and enduring.

Elise Bill-Gerrish (2023) shared her journey as a Muckleshoot Language teacher. She discussed how oral language holds the history of the Muckleshoot people, connects us with our ancestors and the natural world, and provides the perspective of generations past. In doing so, she drew dynamic parallels to COVID-19 that reflect her identity and worldview as a Muckleshoot High Class, a leadership rooted in encouragement, kindness, and the use of cultural knowledge to help others. She reviewed her experience providing language courses, touching on the personal impact, arriving at a place of safety to reclaim movement beyond survival rooted in generations of painful history, facilitating intergenerational healing, and creating the opportunity for her daughter and mother to speak beqesulucid.

Valerie Segrest (2025), a Muckleshoot Tribal Member, uses Indigenous knowledge as a pathway to heal by advocating for food sovereignty and traditional food systems. Segrest (Personal communication, October 5, 2024) reminds us of what our ancestors did for thousands of years - learn from the land. She recognizes the changing of the seasons, describing the process of letting go of things that do not serve you, just as the leaves fall. She discusses our people's relationship with the land, stewardship, recognizing color changes in plants, detoxifying, and moving energy to the roots to sustain us through winter. Her offering of dandelion root tea brings the community together through nourishment, reflecting her value of generosity. She centers the dandelion for its resilience and resourcefulness, honoring its interconnectedness and the lesson from Dr. Rita of Thirteen Grandmothers of Alaska, who taught her to be Big Medicine and to be like the dandelion. She poses the question: How do we be like the dandelion and be like medicine in the world, just as the dandelion breaks up the soil and brings minerals to the surface? She acknowledges the impact of colonization on our children, including removal from the outdoors, altered taste buds, reshaped preferences toward sugary and fatty foods, and a loss of

connection to our place and to nutrition. She also discusses how the foods we eat are tools for reconnecting and guiding us back to memory and belonging.

We have innate knowledge and the ability to know. Healing is a matter of listening and allowing all that is spirit to flow through us as we walk in a good way, thereby aligning us with our purpose. Lisa Boivin is a member of the Deninu Kue First Nation, scholar, artist, and mother. She uses image-based storytelling (see Figure 4) as a tool of strength and spirit, that is, ancestral knowledge, to express who she is, where she is from, and what she studies. Her images serve as a form of reconciliation, and in that spirit, she indicates that if you search hard and long enough, you will find the answers in our cultural teachings. She acknowledges a dark history of colonialism on her canvases, represented in the aggressive color of black because it is everywhere all the time. She emphasizes that we all come with Medicine, inner wisdom, and, through the mother's prayers.

As you can see in the picture in Figure 4, the mother reaches up to the sky and brings them to the baby in utero. The flowers represent ancestral teachings, illuminating strength and resilience. Strawberries, little hearts, the only berry strong enough to wear her seeds on the outside, provide her with instructions on what it means to be a Dene woman. She carries caribou medicine and heals intergenerational trauma, namely, generations before that returned from residential school and found there were no more caribou. Caribou teach their young the trails so they can survive. The absence of the caribou shows us that our medicine changes from generation to generation. Our medicine is so strong that sometimes we do not even know we carry it (Greenwood et al., 2022; TEDx Talks, 2016).

**Figure 4** *Relational Determinants of Indigenous Health*



*Note.* Artwork by Lisa Boivin, reproduced from *Introduction to Determinants of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Peoples' Health in Canada* (M. Greenwood, S. de Leeuw, R. Stout, R. Larstone, & J. Sutherland (Eds.) (2022), p. 101).

### **The Cedar Rose**

Tachine and Nicolazzo (2022) discuss the after-process as a community-based sharing that fosters learning and creates opportunities for advancement beyond the teachings. Absolon (2020) emphasizes that those who came before have created pathways of Indigenous knowledge that guide us in restoring wholeness to our relationship with each other and the natural world. Just as an ancestor is a bald eagle in the sky, it is essential to highlight clear connections between tribal ecological knowledge and natural resources.

What will it look like to answer my research questions? Grounded in ancestral wisdom, this work contributes to the ongoing decolonizing of praxis and extends the healing-centered approach articulated by Mullan (2023) and Gutiérrez (2022). We help our relatives find their pathways through traditional ecological knowledge and see themselves in stories to unburden

generational legacies. We define ourselves through the critical place of our stories in survivance, wellness, strength, culture, and tradition (Williams, 2025).

Wilson et al. (2019) discusses the notion of duality in knowing the opportunities for learning and teaching, speaking to the challenge of learning to discern what to hold onto and what to leave behind by using self-discipline and reflection as tools for connecting to truth. In practice, my experience is known and understood before it can be passed on. Part of relational accountability is that the shared sacredness becomes part of each other's stories.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This study design prioritizes participant agency, relational accountability, and respect for the sacredness of shared stories while creating space for multifaceted and diverse expressions. This qualitative research study is grounded in Indigenous and decolonizing methodologies (Clarke & Yellow Bird, 2021; Linklater, 2014; Lee Ormiston, 2019; Smith, 2022; Tuck & Yang, 2021) that center relationality, story, and lived experience as ways of knowing. My positionality shapes my approach to this research as a mother, Muckleshoot Tribal member, and clinical social worker. Locating myself within this research is essential and speaks to the researcher's accountability to relationships, communities, and the knowledge shared through story.

This research is guided by an understanding that healing and wellness are not separate from relationship, land, or lived experience. This study invited participants to semi-structured conversational interviews, in which they shared stories about their understandings and experiences of healing and wellness in their own lives. Kovach (2019) supports conversational methods as an ethical means of gathering knowledge through story. The interview questions served as a guide for invitation rather than fixed questions, inviting participants to determine the knowledge, teachings, and experiences they wish to share. In this way, meaning was co-created through relationship, listening, and witnessing.

My perspective as the researcher is not neutral, as it is shaped by my own healing journey and by my relationships within Indigenous communities. This study affirms that stories shared are interpreted through my lens as both an Indigenous person and a researcher. Reflexivity and use of self are integral to the research design, with attention to how my relationships, experiences, and responsibilities influence the research process.

Participant recruitment used a relational snowball sampling approach, with participants identified through existing relationships and community connections, guided by the principles of relational accountability (Absolon, 2011; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2022). The first level of recruitment involved direct, relationship-based invitations to individuals known to the researcher who have experience or knowledge of Indigenous healing, wellness, and traditional practices. If additional participants were needed, a second recruitment phase was planned through broader community outreach, including professional networks, tribal organizations, and social media platforms. This layered approach respects relational protocols while ensuring the study recruited a sufficient and diverse group of participants.

The research is guided by commitments to respect and reciprocity rather than a focus on representativeness. Its purpose is to honor participants, their voices, their communities, and their stories by attending to the depth and significance of healing and wellness as they are carried forward for future generations. This study intentionally does not center on a single tribal community or a single interdisciplinary field in order to avoid generalization. The insights offered here are not meant to stand in for all Indigenous communities. Instead, this work creates space for multiple understandings of interconnectedness and for the distinct pathways that can lead toward shared places, even in the presence of colonialism and ongoing environmental injustice. It invites the reader to witness how practices are lived, held, and adapted, and understood across cultural and generational context.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions were designed to explore how Indigenous individuals not only understand, but experience their healing and wellness through stories, lived experience, and their own traditional ecological knowledge. These questions invited reflection and offered insight into

how participants' own wellness and healing have been shaped, especially by culture, place, and intergenerational relationships.

- How do healing practices that draw on tribal ecological knowledge contribute to the reclamation of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in the context of climate change and intergenerational heritage?
- What personal and/or collective experiences have led to the reclaiming and revitalization of tribal ecological knowledge in the face of colonization and modern challenges?
- How do ancestral teachings or land-based practices serve as sources of healing, empowerment, and resilience for individuals rediscovering their ecological knowledge?

### **Study Design**

This qualitative study consisted of individual, semi-structured, conversational, story-based interviews (Kovach, 2019) with Indigenous participants with lived experience related to healing and wellness, guided by open-ended questions that serve as invitations. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes, depending on context, and was conducted either in person or via Zoom. I sent an invitation flyer (Appendix A) to participants. Based on participants' responses, I began the consent process (Appendices B, C, D, E) and discussed ongoing consent with participants, including sending participants a copy of the guiding interview questions (Appendices F and G) to allow ample time to reflect on and process the stories they wish to share.

Participants and I determined whether we could proceed with the interview, including details about location (in person or zoom), whether it would be recorded, and whether the participant would be named. Participant interviews were video- and audio-recorded with consent

to support transcription, analysis, and future gifting of a copy of the interview, including future publications beyond this project, to the participant. Participation in the study was anonymous by default; however, participants could choose to be named in the study to honor their identity and tribal affiliation. Participants were allowed to participate in the research whether or not they chose to remain anonymous or did not wish to be recorded. I took notes on my computer during the interview.

### ***Cultural Honoring Gifts***

As an expression of gratitude and respect for participants' time and contributions, each participant received a cultural honoring gift. These gifts were intentionally sourced from an Indigenous vendor, Salish Glimmer and Greenery, who works closely with plant relatives. During the summer, I met with the vendor, fostering a meaningful connection and engaging in a conversation that guided the selection of the gifts.

I felt a particular draw toward, recognizing its medicinal properties and significance. Based on this conversation and meeting, the artist crafted cultural honoring gifts that reflect these themes. The gifts presented and gifted to participants include:

- Citrus dandelion root tea,
- Dandelion-infused massage oil,
- Dandelion-infused sore muscle salve, and
- A large Cedar Rose, woven by the researcher, using Cedar gathered in the Pacific Northwest.

These items were selected not only for their practical and healing properties, but also as symbols of interconnectedness and appreciation. The act of weaving the Cedar Rose and sourcing the

dandelion-based products embodies the relational and reciprocal values at the heart of the research process, honoring both participants and the traditions they represent.

## **Research Methods**

### ***Storywork***

Building on Justice's (2018) ideas about stories that harm, and others that heal, this research supports advocacy for storywork (Archibald, 2008) as a method that challenges negative narratives while honoring the strengths of Indigenous storytelling. While pain, loss, and harm are consciously acknowledged, depictions that reduce Indigenous peoples solely to trauma are refused. Therapeutic work reveals how Indigenous individuals embody spirit, love, light, and knowledge alongside their struggles. These qualities are relational and experiential, shaping how they connect, endure, and heal. By considering stories in their full context, storywork becomes both an ethical obligation and a healing practice that sees Indigenous life as a whole.

When a close family member of my late father, who also holds a respected role within our community, came to me, he shared a message about my dad. He told me that my dad came to him in a dream and said my first and middle name, Angel Renee. He said he did not know exactly what it meant, but he knew it was a message. I had many thoughts about what it meant, not only about what my mom was going through but also about what my dad's family might be going through. In that moment, I trusted my feelings and leaned into relationships to guide me. I cried because this visit immediately acknowledged and affirmed me, as well as the way he used my middle name throughout my life. I believe our ancestors have many access points where we can meet them if we listen. This time, it was through kin and relationship. It felt like all the meanings came at once, for what I understood for myself and what I thought about all our relationships. All it took was that moment to take deep reflection on the current state I was in and

what he was telling me, something I already knew but needed to know differently. Kovach (2009) explains that, in Indigenous methodologies, meaning making is grounded in story, relationship, and lived experience rather than in abstraction or detached analysis. Knowledge is not separate from the person who carries it; it is shaped through memory.

Of course, I called my mom and talked to her about this. Her interpretation was that my dad loves and misses me and still carries me. I find both of our understandings to be true. Archibald (2008) stresses that the storyteller has a responsibility to others, as stories hold significant power to protect and heal; they are living spirits, our ancestors. A story's presence can facilitate presence, creating a spiritual kinship with our ancestors and offering love and care. I miss him so much, and I miss him most for who he was to my mom. I regularly stay in touch with my mom, but for whatever reason, it had been longer than usual. In Indigenous ways of knowing, stories do not always require a single meaning to be valid; they hold space for layered truths to coexist. I have heard my dad say my first and middle names in several ways. The way it was said to me felt familiar, as if it were traveling through time and arriving just when I needed it. This reflects Brayboy's (2005) Tribal Critical Race Theory Tenet, affirming that stories are not separate from theory and that stories create what is real, serving as a source of ways to live.

Within storywork and in experiences such as these, a full understanding of what the story means for each person is not possible. What can be understood and acknowledged is the meaning stories hold for the self. This research uses storywork as a method because it reflects how knowledge has moved through my life, relationships, and communities as conversations and moments in time. Meaning can unfold across time and place through listening, remembering, and being accountable to relations and to the stories themselves.

## *Relationality*

Wilson (2008) argues that, rather than viewing ourselves as in relation to others or things, we are the relationships we hold and are part of. He speaks to the essence of relational accountability as authentic, accurately reflecting, and building upon the relationships between the ideas and participants. He also emphasizes ensuring the community benefits from the research and the need to contextualize yourself within your community.

When we develop relationships with people, part of their stories stays with us. What they have experienced, and our role as listeners or witnesses to their experience, becomes part of us. This is how we become responsible for our relationships. The knowledge is inseparable from the relationships that sustain it. This supports relationality as central to my research method, shaping how participants are invited and how knowledge is exchanged. Existing relationships form the context of this work, understood as sites of ethical responsibility and care. This method creates space for reciprocity. Reciprocity for knowledge is returned to the community through my praxis and through generosity in sharing teachings. This approach allows for open recognition and thanks to participants, naming the ways their presence and contributions have been witnessed and learned over time, and why they fit the research.

This approach supports Indigenous and community sovereignty and must move beyond consultation toward practices that return decision-making power to families and communities. Findlay's (2023) Gathering Our Medicine framework shows that healing initiatives are most effective when communities define their own priorities, the meanings of wellness, and pathways forward, grounded in local kinship systems and relational worldviews. Rather than positioning external practitioners as experts, the framework recenters families and communities as the primary knowledge holders and agents of change.

### *Critical Inquiry of Place*

This research uses a critical inquiry into place, grounded in an Indigenous understanding that holds that place shapes who we are and how we live (Simpson, 2017; Tuck & Yang, 2021). Place carries our memories, language, and responsibilities, all of which are essential and speak to our identity and well-being. Place is not something we separate from; it holds our stories and teachings. Tuck and McKenzie (2015) highlight the value of lived experience in place-based research, viewing place research as a subjective means of understanding perceptions and emotions that embody consciousness through personal experience, especially in people's relationships and attachments to the natural world. They emphasize the significance of memory and historical data in shaping place and social life. Using critical inquiry into place is not just about the physical aspects; it is also about capturing a person's connection and understanding how, and whether, it has shaped their worldview or who they are.

When I first began this project, I experienced uncertainty and discomfort from not wanting to appropriate Indigenous knowledge or speak in ways that generalized Indigenous experience. When paying closer attention to place, it became clear that it was not just a physical location but a relational and ethical guide for inquiry. This draws on lived experience and reflects how I conduct myself, shaped by living in the diaspora. Understanding that those who live in the diaspora can carry these relationships symbolically and relationally, rather than through continuous presence (Evjen & Shanley, 2015).

When participants share their stories of connection to the land, these narratives may invite metaphorical, relational, or material acts of mapping. This draws on Goeman's (2013) work on (re)mapping, which approaches place not as a fixed location to be documented but as a relational and political process shaped by colonial histories and an ongoing Native presence. Her

work asks us not to try to recover a lost path or draw better maps of Native lands, but to question how space itself has been produced by colonial power and how, despite this, our people continue to live, move, and remember when up against these structures. Seasonal tourism in rural areas produces spatial dissonance as environments are shaped to accommodate visitors rather than local presence. My presence at some of these beaches and trails feels out of alignment because they are marketed for consumption, not for my belonging.

Using a critical place of inquiry, I share a story about Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women alongside Blue Jay (see Figure 5), nature's physical reminder and messenger, which serves as an access point to ancestral presence through place. This telling holds connections among land, memory, and responsibility. Blue Jay is a Muckleshoot story about two sisters gathering roots for the family. One night, the sisters made a camp because it was too late to go home. The older sister wished that two stars in the sky were each of the sisters' husbands. The White Star is for the older sister, and the Red Star is for the younger sister. The older sister's wish came true, and the sisters went to the sky world to live with their new husbands. The younger sister gave birth to a baby boy while living in the sky world. The younger sister became very homesick. She thought about going home every day, and one day, while digging for roots, she dug too deep and discovered a way home using a Cedar bough ladder. Everyone celebrated the sisters being home, and during the celebration, the younger sister's baby was kidnapped. The sister cried and asked Blue Jay to help find the baby. Blue Jay discovered Dog Salmon had taken the baby to the Underworld. The passage to the underworld was a hole. On Blue Jay's first attempt, he got stuck. On the next attempt, he got through. Blue Jay found that the baby had grown into a man and asked him to come home. The man said he could not come home but would soon. And when he does come home, everything will be changed. The man gave Blue Jay

something to prop in his mouth so he could return safely. The man stated that Blue Jay's head shape will remain and serve as a reminder of the age when the world changed (Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory et al., 1982).

**Figure 5** *MMIW and Blue Jay*



*Note.* Image reproduced from Northwest Regional Educational Library et al. (1982, p. 19).

Included as a symbolic representation of Blue Jay as messenger and connection to ancestral presence through place.

In the legend, I understand the three worlds as places and their connection as a state of being. While in the sky world, there was a longing for the home that is familiar and comforting. When in the Homeworld, there is a wish for more. The underworld represents a significant transformation. Home is wherever we are, both as a place and as who we are. In grief, my mom taught me that we do not always know why we are called home. I understand this as our next home. Grief is what we experience when our home is in different places. Grief has a spirit. Just as the sister dug trying to find her way home, grief is digging deep into our memories and spirits.

My baby sister, Virginia Castaneda of Muckleshoot, died at the age of twenty from strangulation at the hands of a white man who suffered from mental health issues. Though all of

Turtle Island is Native land, she was disconnected and removed from the lands and community she was deeply connected to at the time of her murder. Her ashes were spread at the mouth of where the Quillayute River meets the Pacific Ocean, right in front of James Island. We brought her out by canoe and honored her in song and prayer.

Tuck & McKenzie (2015) highlight scholars who conceptualize the pedagogy of land as more than material, encompassing spiritual, emotional, and intellectual aspects. The sacred site where she rests, woven across generations of Quileute history and memory, becomes part of Mother Earth. Celidwen (2024) defines ecological belonging as a realization of being part of the collective Mother Earth system. We are the land, and the land holds us. The land is living and breathing, holding the memories of our people and our ancestors. The land carries not just grief but all of our emotions and facilitates our healing. When the land is exploited and used as a resource, it is more than the destruction of ecosystems; it is the silencing of our spiritual connections and the loss of the legacy our ancestors left for future generations.

My sister shared that when she sees the Blue Jay, she feels like it is our sister (see figure 6). This is why we refer to them as our non-human relatives. Blue Jay is not just a bird; it is a living spirit, our kin. Blue Jay is a messenger between worlds, carrying memory with a physical reminder. Seeing my sister as a Blue Jay teaches me the pain, hurt, and grief of how our world changed when we lost her, but it did not kill her spirit. Even if we get stuck in our grief, we will always get through. Through the spirit of grief and the transformation of the underworld, a mark remains forever. We do not leave grief; we honor and carry it.

It took me a long time to find my voice, and a dear friend showed me how to do it while crying. Grief is a natural process and part of life that teaches us valuable lessons. It teaches us to be more present and mindful, to use our senses to connect with our ancestors, and to remember

that we are never alone. We are all part of creation, and our non-human relatives serve as access points to our ancestors, offering us guidance. Just as the Dog Salmon returns home, I find solace that one day, our life cycles will align, and our home will be in the same place as we are.

**Figure 6** *Returning Home: Sisterhood, Place, and Grief*



*Note.* Personal photograph of the author with her sisters (date unknown). This image is included as sister-center representation of relationality, reflecting shared experiences of coming home and grief.

### ***Refusal***

Indigenous scholars have articulated refusal not as something that is absent, but as a sovereign practice that protects knowledge. Tuck and Yang (2014) describe refusal as a deliberate boundary practice that interrupts damage-centered research. They critique how social science often extracts and highlights Indigenous pain as data, which can reinforce harm rather than disrupt it, and assert that some knowledge is not owed to the academy. There is an awareness that within current systems, even well-intentioned research can become a byproduct of the very structures it seeks to change. Once knowledge is taken up by the academy, it can be absorbed, repurposed, and used in ways that continue to uphold systems. Centering trauma risks producing harm, which reinforces deficit narratives. This consciousness shapes the need for

refusal, not only in what is shared, but also in how knowledge is engaged with and carried forward.

Similarly, Simpson (2014) positions refusal as an enactment of sovereignty within research itself, where refusal becomes a matter of jurisdiction, the right to determine what is shared, how it is shared, and what remains unsaid. She builds on Robert Warrior's concept of Literary Sovereignty, expanding this thinking into ethnographic practice, emphasizing that Indigenous peoples hold authority not only over their lands and governance, but also their stories and how they are taken up in research. This is not a limitation, rather a practice of care. Extending this into praxis, Lopez and Calderón (2022) describe pedagogies of refusal as practices that resist extraction and commodification while centering relationality, storytelling, and community knowledge. Together, these works frame refusal as a method of sovereign practice and a relational ethic grounded in care, which guides this approach.

This section speaks to what is being refused. There is a refusal to put in the parts that many already know about Indigenous pain. While not all readers may know these histories, it remains true that colonization and racism have disrupted Indigenous ways of being. There is a refusal to provide full accounts of pain and heartache that are already carried and known within communities. Pain and trauma are known, personally and collectively, and this work does not center or uplift that pain. It engages refusal and data sovereignty as a method grounded in the understanding that Indigenous peoples are not reducible to what has been done to them. Data sovereignty is the recognition that the participants who share their stories are the ones who speak voice to their experiences and have done the work of living, healing, and being well, therefore, remain the holders of these stories. These stories do not belong to this research or to the

researcher. This work is carried out as a witness with a responsibility in how they are spoken about, written, and held.

The literature review, among other parts of this work, reflects moments of intentional reframing. In such places, decisions are made about what to include or exclude altogether, and refusal is present. This is an attempt to move away from traditional western academic expectations that prioritize distance, categorization, or completeness. These choices are not made for the sake of doing something different, but to remain aligned with integrity and accountability.

A researcher bears the responsibility when a story is shared or heard, as they have the choice of what to share and what to withhold, influencing the research process. Refusing to share means avoiding revealing anything that cannot be retracted, especially when dealing with deeply personal experiences, such as those involving pain, which can carry shame and impose external meanings about Indigenous identities.

Refusal functions as a practice of wellness by protecting stories not meant for consumption and by interrupting the extraction of pain as data, shifting the focus toward continuance, relationality, and wholeness. This aligns with an Indigenous understanding of knowledge as living, relational, and accountable, rather than something to be fully extracted, archived, or consumed. What is shared does not primarily belong to the academy; it belongs with the knowledge carriers and lives within community, continuing in relationship. This method keeps this work grounded as Indigenous research and reflects an effort to stand whole, together, within academia through story.

### **Justification of Methods**

The justification seeks to uplift the care and nurturing of our communities and people, by our people, despite the challenges of settler colonialism. Indigenous knowledge promotes healing

and wellness by teaching us to create space, express love, and engage in reciprocity, fostering community safety. Montgomery (2023) describes how our ways as Indigenous people sustain a constant, nourishing environment through action, empowerment, and the use of our knowledge, despite sociopolitical climate justice and disparities.

Duran (2019) emphasizes the importance of the healer's identity and spiritual identity within the therapeutic environment in clinical work, as the healer embodies the healing energy and is constantly aware of their own soul's healing process. Mullan (2023) supports recognizing how our identities, positions, and privileges influence the therapeutic relationship. My positionality and training in clinical work have informed my research work. I need to recognize and incorporate key concepts of identity and healing into my research when working with Indigenous populations.

Hart's (2010) discussion of Indigenous worldviews and the creation of an Indigenous research paradigm strongly aligns with my personal worldview and experiences, particularly in acknowledging that we are complete as we are, rather than dividing our identities. His framing of knowledge as relational and rooted in relationships depicts how I have come to know through my own relationships and responsibilities. I seek to reject Eurocentric expectations and align with Indigenous research methods that transform knowledge production.

Charlton et al. (2020) argue that well-being and health are closely linked to identity, highlighting the importance of understanding healing from an Indigenous perspective and worldview, which emphasizes that connection and interdependence with the natural and spiritual worlds. According to them, "Mental Wellness is focused on the whole person. Human beings have four dimensions: mental, spiritual, emotional, and

physical. Disconnection occurs when one of these dimensions is disrupted, leading to ill health” (p. 73-74). This perspective is used to understand and articulate how participants restore balance and look beyond treating symptoms and to understand whatever experiences they may have had in countering.

### **Knowledge Holders**

Participants included adults 21 years and older who identify as Indigenous. Participants willing to share, discuss, and reflect on their experiences of traditional knowledge or other pathways contribute to healing and wellness in the context of climate justice and in the face of colonialism.

### ***Sampling Procedures***

The sampling procedure used a relational, snowball-based approach grounded in community connections, engaging individuals across disciplines and walks of life within Pacific Northwest tribal communities with which I am connected, reflecting Indigenous approaches to research rooted in relationship, community, and relational accountability (Absolon, 2011; Chilisa, 2020; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2022; Wilson, 2008). Participants were intentionally invited based on existing or emerging relational connections and their lived knowledge relevant to healing, wellness, and decolonizing praxis.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

This study received exempt determination from the University of Washington Intuitional Review Board (see Appendix H). Beyond this intuitional process, the protection of my relatives is ensured by grounding my research in the foundational ethical research practices outlined by Kirkness & Barnhardt (2016): Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility. Because the

central methodology is a story, I coupled this with the spirit of Archibald's (2008) key principles of respect, responsibility, reciprocity, reverence, holding, interrelatedness, and synergy.

### **Data Analysis**

In this study, data analysis adopted a decolonial approach, centering Indigenous voices and knowledge to understand healing and wellness practices grounded in relationships to land, story, and community. Both participants and I contributed to the analysis through a relational, interpretive process.

Data were generated through multiple forms of interviews. Participant were offered the option to have their interviews auto recorded via Zoom; recording occurred by consent. For those who agreed, interviews were recorded and later transcribed using Rev.com, and the transcripts were reviewed for accuracy.

Not all participants consented to recording; in these cases, I relied on detailed recollection and created interview notes following each conversation, including the stories I could most fully remember. I acknowledge that not all stories shared can be captured in writing, reflecting the limits of memory and honoring the importance of participant choice within a relational research process.

Following data collection, I organized the material first by participant, then by story. Stories were organized by number, then by the types of stories participants chose to tell. For recorded interviews, analysis was grounded in full transcripts. For non-recorded interviews, analysis was guided by interview notes developed from recollection. These forms of data were held in relation to one another rather than treated as equivalent, recognizing differences in depth and detail.

Analysis moved from stories to teachings. Rather than fragmenting narratives into discrete codes, I engaged with each story as a whole, asking what teachings were being shared through participants' experiences. This process involved revisiting and listening when a recording was available, and returning to interview notes when it was not, spending time not only with the story itself but also reflecting on its meanings, the feelings it carried, and the responsibilities it called forward. Through this sustained engagement, teachings emerged across stories, revealing connection to land, relationality, and healing. These teachings were understood as interconnected rather than separate, aligning with the Cedar Rose Framework and its grounding in Indigenous ways of knowing and relational pathways.

## **Chapter 4: Teachings Shared – Holding & Witnessing Through Story**

The purpose of this chapter is to present the findings of this study in a way that honors the stories, teachings, relationships, and responsibilities. In writing this chapter, tension emerged between speaking toward academic expectations and trying to justify Indigenous knowledge systems in ways that risk placing stories into forms that lose their meaning. This approach reflects the ability to carry these teachings into academic spaces without losing their spirit. Stories and teachings are placed in relationship with one another to reflect unity, not uniformity. This weaving is not meant to place the stories into categories or to reshape them to fit academic expectations, but rather to be seen as a collective strength.

### **How Teachings and Stories Are Shared in This Study**

The Cedar Rose structure guides the organization of this chapter; it shows that knowledge develops through movement, return, reflection, and connection, rather than in a straight line. Silence and refusal are also knowledge. Findings are presented as teachings observed and shared through a relational process, not as fixed results.

Before answering the research questions, it is necessary to speak to the relationships that made this work possible. The participants in this study are not objects of study. They are living Indigenous knowledge. They are relatives, community members, and tribal members. They are Elders, aunties, uncles, grandparents, siblings, mothers, fathers, daughters, and sons. They are people from whom teachings have been learned over time. They are co-teachers. They are knowledge holders who choose to share, and people who gifted stories that must be carried with care. Rather than presenting results separate from the people who shared them, this chapter reflects how meaning emerged through story, relationship, and lived experience. The research questions are answered through their teachings.

There are many kinds of stories and even more reasons to share them. Some stories teach. Stories in which people bear witness to one another serve as a way of processing. Stories that share joy. Stories that are difficult to articulate. Stories that do not belong to everyone. Some stories are shared for healing, and some stories must remain within the relationships in which they were given. Some allow us to be seen, heard, and witnessed. There are some that help us understand ourselves and each other. There are stories rooted in culture and tradition, and stories that carry instruction about how to live. Some stories try to express what is felt, but words and silence cannot always fully communicate everything intended. There are stories that connect us and stories that remind us of when connections are broken. Traditional stories tell us where we come from, such as family and community stories, as well as personal stories of transformational growth. There are dream stories, stories of grief and loss, ancestor stories, and spiritual stories. There are stories of ceremony, language, and identity. There are stories of place, stories of action that show what is done, and stories that reveal who we are.

All stories speak to relationships. Stories cannot always be separated from the context in which they are shared without losing their meaning or spirit. Many aspects of stories can exist simultaneously, and not all are meant to be told the same way or in the same place. Some stories are meant to be told only in the present moment, witnessed rather than repeated.

Knowledge carriers shared experiences involving addiction in their families, suicidal thoughts, self-harm, sexual violence, and the loss of kin, including dealing with the murder of loved ones. These experiences exist and shape who we are, yet not all of them belong in this work. Becoming close to that pain does not mean it is ours to share. Not everything that is known should be written, and not everything that is written can carry what was felt. Some readers may want fuller accounts, but the answer remains the same. The answer is relationship. Healing

begins in relationship to oneself, to family, to community, to land, to spirit, and even to pain.

Wherever the starting place may be, the path returns to the same place. This chapter is not about defining our Indigenous people by what has been done to them. It is about transformation, endurance, and persistence. We are still here. Bearing witness to these stories recognizes that we are not meant to carry things alone.

### **Returning to the Research Questions**

The research questions are not answered separately or in a step-by-step way. The teachings shared in this study respond to the questions all at once. The stories, experiences, and reflections of knowledge carriers do not belong to a single question, and they cannot always be separated without losing their meaning. A single teaching may speak to all of the questions at the same time, and different stories may return to the same understanding from different directions. Findings are presented through the stories and teachings that were shared, but the way they are woven together should not be seen as a reduction of their meaning. Each story is whole in itself. Each teaching carries its own strength and can stand on its own, and any one of them could lead to the same pathways of understanding.

Ideally, these stories would remain in their fullness, held within the relationship and context in which they were shared. The knowledge here appeared through cycles of relationship, reflection, and experience. Some teachings were spoken, some shown through action, and many remain unspoken. It is not only answering the research questions, but also how the answers came into being through the story. The research questions that guide this work are restated below as a way of returning to the intentions of the work before sharing the teachings that speak to them:

- How do healing practices that draw on traditional ecological knowledge contribute to the reclamation of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in the context of climate change and intergenerational heritage?
- What personal and/or collective experiences have led to the reclaiming and revitalization of tribal ecological knowledge in the face of colonization and modern challenges?
- How do ancestral teachings or land-based practices serve as sources of healing, empowerment, and resilience for individuals rediscovering their ecological knowledge?

### ***Healing Practices, Traditional Ecological Knowledge, and Indigenous Sovereignty***

Healing practices rooted in traditional ecological knowledge serve as powerful acts of sovereignty and self-determination, particularly in contexts of climate change and intergenerational heritage preservation. These practices manifest through direct relationships with land and water, where Indigenous people maintain autonomy over their healing processes outside colonial systems.

Sky, Marion, Cedar, Jonette, and Lola shared stories of water as a healing practice and land-based ceremonies. Sky shared a story about being at the beach. This story was meaningful to her, as it described feelings of solitude and strength. It was as if that action was cleansing everything inside of her, which she connected to a ceremony her kin had experienced Marion shared,

I will go to the water. If I go to the river, I will sit there, and I will close my eyes. I think about a driftwood or a leaf or something going by and, whatever it is that is hurting me or, whatever I am thinking about, I am just going to put it on that driftwood. I can watch

it float down the river and let the water take it away from me, carrying my problems and worries downstream.

Cedar talked about going to the trees and to the fire when he needs healing. He also talked about speaking his thoughts into the fire during ceremony. Jonette credited a teaching she inherited from an Elder at a wellness conference in Nisqually that taught her about letting go,

...To take whatever I am carrying that is in my mind, in my heart, that burdens me. Find a cedar tree. Or if you do not have a cedar tree nearby, then any tree. Then put your hands on that cedar tree and give your problems to it. But once you do, you have to let it go.

You let it go; do not carry it anymore. And he said that the cedar tree will carry it up, and then it carries it to the universe. It will travel and resolve the problem.

Lola shared how an elder taught her a water-based healing practice during a family crisis. She elaborated,

Ancestors used to go down to the water when they felt like they could not do something, and they needed ancestral strength and wisdom. They would go down to the river and wash their faces three times. Then they would cry out, whatever they would cry... You just got to cry it all out. Let that out. And then you got to pray to your ancestors, and you got to wash all those tears off your face and let go of that sadness.

This teaching enabled Lola to navigate grief while maintaining cultural integrity and autonomy.

Healing is understood as an embodied way of being, learned through subsistence-based life. Raven described this as, "It is who I am. It is how I grew up." She shared that she grew up surrounded by elders, hearing and speaking her Native language often, and learning through action rather than explanation. She explained that it was not about thinking or feeling in a separate way but about doing. Her childhood included moose camp, fish camp, trapping, and

attending school in the village. Through these experiences, healing was not something separate from daily life, but lived through daily life, relationship with land, and action.

Sky and Marion shared their knowledge and experiences of traditional plant and tree relatives, as well as the relationship between medicines and offerings. Sky talked about her grandmother, who she described as a healer. Her grandmother gathered medicines, made tinctures, and picked devil's club. She said that whenever her grandmother gathered anything from the land, she prayed first and gave thanks. She explained that this taught her that healing is not just about the medicine itself, but about respect, gratitude, and the relationship with the land. These practices embody self-determination through maintaining traditional ecological knowledge and spiritual protocols independent of colonial systems.

Marion described a powerful healing experience that occurred when she was leaving a relationship. A friend took her to a sacred place where a circle of large, old cedar trees stands. Upon arriving, Marion felt something powerful in the land itself. She brought an offering, sang songs, and went around to almost every tree, placing her hand on each one and praying about this relationship. That night, Marion had a dream about the place, and in the dream, she stood alone among the trees, and the trees/Creator spoke to her. The dream showed her two different cedar trees - on the right, a fallen cedar covered in moss, spiderwebs, and small trees growing from it, representing being used by others. On the left stood a strong, round tree about three feet wide, with other fallen trees leaning against it for support. The message asked Marion to choose; would she lie down and let people use her like the fallen tree, or would she be the strong tree that others could lean on? Marion described this experience as guiding her to answer her question about what to do, helping her realize that, despite being beaten down in relationships where people told

her what she was not, she could get up and act, and that by sharing her situation, she could help others.

Cultural practices like canoe journeys explicitly reclaim Indigenous presence and sovereignty in ancestral territories. Lola described the spiritual power of paddling the waterways of our ancestors. She went on to describe the feeling of ancestral presences and that, with every landing protocol, the feeling grew stronger at each place. She expressed,

I have always been raised in my culture. It has always been who I am, but that true spiritual connection to who we are as Indigenous people and that there are no borders, that we are all Indigenous, just strengthened me in a different way.

Canoe journeys served as powerful collective experiences of cultural reclamation, and the physical act of traveling traditional waterways reasserts Indigenous presence and connection to territory.

Community-based healing practices also represent collective self-determination. During COVID-19, when colonial funeral practices were restricted, Marion described the facilitated alternative healing ceremonies,

Whatever you are thinking, however you are feeling, whatever, writing down on paper, if it is one specific person, whatever you want to say to that person that had passed, if it was good or bad, you can just write it down, have a ceremony where you have food, were all getting together... And then we read the note or whatever and put it in the fire and just let it go.

This demonstrates sovereignty through creating culturally appropriate healing spaces when colonial systems failed to meet community needs.

### ***Reclaiming and Revitalizing Traditional Ecological Knowledge***

The revival of traditional ecological knowledge arises from traumatic colonial histories and deliberate cultural sharing, often triggered by personal crises exposing colonial system's shortcomings. Knowledge holders shared intergenerational heritage and healing practices related to the transmission of knowledge and healing colonial trauma. Knowledge comes from observing and listening to elders, mothers, and grandmothers. Cedar spoke about learning by watching the old people when he was younger and listening to the messages they gave him. Nessie spoke about learning many of her life teachings from her grandmother. She shared that her grandmother taught her how to be a mother and how to take care of herself and her family.

Jonette shared her experiences of not only spending a lot of time with her grandma, but also for future generations,

I try to protect my younger ones to teach them, so they do not forget who their great grandma was. And I try to make them go to my mom's house as often as possible when we have dinners and stuff, because my mom is becoming a lot like my grandma. I watch her, and it makes me happy and sad at the same time.

That consistent cultural immersion created a foundation for maintaining ecological and cultural knowledge.

Dawn shared heartfelt sentiments about not only feeling proud when teaching others cultural crafts, but also about the deeper meaning of watching her mom teach her daughter how to sew. She shared stories of her involvement in collective efforts to revitalize cultural practices that emerged from recognizing community needs. This developed into comprehensive cultural education, encompassing beading, moccasin-making, vest-making, and drum painting. These practices aim to heal the lasting effects of colonial policies like residential schools and forced

assimilation by deliberately choosing different ways of living. People break intergenerational cycles of trauma and abuse for their children and future generations. Dawn described this as, “I do not want my children ever to have to feel any of that.” Sky described this as something that took courage, and she felt that by doing this, she was able to break patterns that had affected previous generations.

The impacts of boarding schools created both loss and motivation for cultural revitalization. Jonette described her father as

taken away from his family when he was three years old, and he grew up in boarding school, and they moved him. He did not even go home when kids got to go home to see their families during breaks and stuff. He did not go home. His family only knew their language.

This separation caused language loss but also inspired later generations to recover what was lost.

Mothers and grandmothers played crucial roles in ensuring the transmission of cultural knowledge. Lola described her mother’s explicit teachings about “Always sharing what you know.” Further expressing,

There are some people who did not have any culture, and you do not ever say anything bad to those people. You teach them. They need to know those things. And maybe they do not have parents that know the culture, and you are helping them learn who they are and where they are from.

This generosity in sharing knowledge ensures cultural continuity.

Marion described the healing power of singing and drumming, and how she engages in many of these practices, including times she has felt homesick. She sang to her children as well as used dream time, describing,

And when I would sleep, I would dream about the Foghorn... when I would hear the Foghorn, it would make me so homesick. But if I am going to go to the water and pray, then I am going to go bring my rattle to the water and be in the water and sing the song and take it away.

This intentional engagement with place creates powerful healing experiences. These practices maintain a connection to homeland and culture despite physical distance. The physical act of creating fosters community bonds and emotional healing. Physical engagement with cultural practices creates healing through embodiment.

Dawn described how beading provided therapeutic processing during grief, the biggest project that I did was literally right after Kimberly passed away, we had her cremated. So I bought necklaces and had her ashes put into all of them... I took each vial and beaded it for my mom. She loved hummingbirds, so I beaded a hummingbird on her necklace... that was really heartfelt because I put so much work into all of them, and not want to do anything else, but I did not want to be around people either.

This practice allowed the space to process grief while maintaining connection to loved ones that passed and honoring family relationships.

Daily spiritual practices maintain connection and provide strength. Lola described her prayer practice,

Prayers have really been my center as a woman, and I am also asked to do community prayers all the time... I pray in every area. Every time we get in the car on a trip, we pray as a family. We all hold hands and pray for safety. And I was raised that way. My grandma taught, you always pray. If I see an animal, we pray, please keep them safe... if I see EMTs or police, please keep them safe if they try to help somebody.

This constant practice of prayer maintains spiritual connection and community care.

### ***Healing Through Land and Ancestral Teachings***

Ancestors are regarded as sources of strength, protection, and guidance. Ancestral teachings and land-based practices provide profound healing and empowerment for individuals rediscovering ecological knowledge, operating through direct spiritual connection, embodied practice, and intergenerational continuity. Nessie shared that ancestors are a source of strength and that every Indian has a song. She explained that our cry can turn into song, and that song gives life. She spoke about how important it is for a person to know their song and to carry it, because it connects them to who they are and where they come from. Cedar said that he takes time each day to listen, and that when he listens, the ancestors speak back. He believes that the ancestors protect him and guide him, just as they did when they were alive.

An ancestral connection can be felt through dreams, prayer, and a tangible presence during ceremonies, reminding people they are never alone. Raven shared that she has been dreaming often, including dreams of relatives who have passed away. She described the feeling that her family in those dreams was telling her to go home. When asked what feels important moving forward, she spoke about the need for critical consciousness and a strong sense of self. She said that people need to open themselves up and reflect on where they come from, not only in terms of family lineage, but as an ongoing process of remembering and reconnecting.

Nessie spoke about a feeling she has carried throughout her life that when she forgets something important, the ancestors come to remind her. She said, “When I forget, they come to me.” She described this as a reminder that she is never alone. Cedar described how something came very close to hurting his child but did not, and he believed this was proof that the ancestors

are present and that their protection is real. Lola reflected on the Canoe Journey landing at Bella Bella, describing,

I was sitting there praying, and it was so amazing because I was looking at the shore, and I could see the ancestors dancing. The old ancestors... the whole shore was just people ready to celebrate the landing. And we were in a big flotilla of canoes. We were all connected.

Remarkably, Lola's mother simultaneously saw ancestors in the canoes, creating a shared spiritual experience that validated their connection.

The personal and collective healing from these practices helps reclaim sovereignty by strengthening identity, community unity, action, adapting traditions, and ecological stewardship. Sky spoke about this by affirming she often returned to the idea that healing comes from understanding where you come from, learning from what you have lived through, and deciding what you want your life to be, even when the past has been difficult. Nessie emphasized the need to love ourselves, know where we come from, and learning to forgive and further emphasizing the importance of getting to know our identity, understanding our roots to feel strong, and carrying the lessons given by those who came before. Lola spoke strongly about how we conduct ourselves, not only representing ourselves, but also our families, our people, and our tribal community. The intentional teaching of identity and origin stories preserved knowledge across generations.

Penoke and Dawn spoke to community unity and action. Penoke expressed that part of leadership is making sure people feel they belong and are supported, and that maintaining culture means looking after one another as a community. He emphasized the importance of Indigenous people standing together, stressing that Native people should not be fighting each other, but

instead should support one another across tribes and communities. When he spoke about “we,” he often meant Native people collectively and the many tribes that share similar struggles and goals. He described unity as something necessary for protecting rights, maintaining culture, and ensuring a stronger future for Native communities. Dawn shared her experience of deliberation, intention, and dedication in her work, aligning with efforts to make the community a better place.

Cedar emphasized the importance of listening to ancestral guidance. He keeps an altar in his home, which serves as both a spiritual place and a daily reminder of how he wants to live. He described lighting the altar, singing, praying, and ringing bells, especially in the mornings. He said that he takes time each day to listen, and that when he listens, the ancestors speak back. He believes that the ancestors protect him and guide him, just as they did when they were alive. This daily practice creates an ongoing relationship with ancestors who provide guidance and protection.

### **Cross-Teaching Analysis**

In keeping with a decolonizing Indigenous research approach, this study used a cross-teaching analysis (see Figure 7) as a relational way of listening across stories to notice where teachings meet and speak to one another. Rather than coding in a conventional sense, the teaching shared by each knowledge holder was placed in relationship using the Cedar Rose framework. This visual representation reflects the layered, circular, and interconnected nature of Indigenous knowledge. From each participant, four to six central teachings emerged, and when considered together, several shared entry points became visible across stories. These included ceremony, land-based practices, intergenerational healing, purpose, culture, tradition, and responsibilities held within family and community. These are not separate themes, but relational pathways through which experiences of healing and wellness are described.

Figure 7 Cedar Rose Cross-Teaching Analysis



*Note.* Author created visual depicting interconnected teachings across knowledge carriers' narratives.

One of the most striking patterns that emerged through this cross-teaching process was the consistency with which teachings returned to a relationship with the land. Land was expected to be present, yet its presence across nearly every story was more extensive than anticipated. In modern life, many of our environments are arranged in ways that create separation from the natural world, with daily activities often happening indoors or within constructed systems that

promote disconnection. Because of this, the many ways participants described staying connected to land, water, animals, and seasonal ways of living stood out as especially meaningful. These connections were not always formal or ceremonial but, repeatedly, they serve as a grounding force in stories of identity, strength, and healing.

The analysis also challenged common assumptions about the source of healing. Wellness can sometimes be understood as coming from ceremonies, cultural activities, or specific practices themselves. However, across stories, healing was described less as the result of the practice alone and more as the result of the relationships within them. The relationship among the person, the practice, the land, and the community gave the practice meaning. Healing was spoken about as a process similar to nature, cyclical, ongoing, and alive. Healing is a spirit. The medicine was not described as something outside the person, but as something already within them, becoming active through connection, intention, and participation. For example, a water ceremony was not understood simply as performing an action, but as entering into a relationship with water, with ancestors, with self, and with responsibility. The practice cannot be separated from its context because the healing exists within the relationship itself.

Through the Cedar Roe cross-teaching analysis, the teachings shared by participants came to be understood as part of a living system rather than an individual technique. Each teaching stands on its own while also connecting to others, forming a collective pattern of knowledge. Across knowledge holders, healing was described not as a single event but as relational continuity, grounded in staying connected to land, teachings, community, and the medicine already carried within each person.

## **Witnessing and Limits of Interpretation**

This section speaks to the witnessing and the limits of interpretation, acknowledging that not all meaning can be analyzed, categorized, or fully explained. Within a decolonizing research framework, this section stands in place of conventional ideas of validity. Rather than proving truth through distance, objectivity, or measurement, trustworthiness is grounded in relational accountability, respectful witnessing, and the responsibility to carry knowledge in a good way. The limits of interpretation are not viewed as weaknesses but serve as reminders that some parts of knowledge exist beyond what can be written and honoring those limits.

What cannot be captured in analysis is the *nowness* of the moment, the way presence is felt when stories are being shared. The emotions that move through the body and the relational space that exists between the person speaking and the person listening. Million (2008) speaks to this through her concept of *felt theory*, where she explains that knowledge is not only produced through analysis but through lived experience, emotion, and what is carried in the body. Her work reminds us that these felt moments can often be dismissed or left out of academic writing, but they are critical forms of Indigenous knowledge in which stories and emotions are not separate from meaning but are meaning itself.

During conversational interviews, emotions surfaced in ways that could not be separated from the stories themselves. There were moments when tears came unexpectedly, not from personal focus, but from feeling the depth of what was being shared. These reactions were not the focus of the research; they are part of being human within the research process.

The presence of ancestors was strongly felt in these moments as if the stories carried more than the voices in the room. It brought awareness of how knowledge moves across generations and that the people telling their stories are not alone. There was a sense that their

ancestors know our ancestors and that the co-creation of knowledge being done is now part of something much older that continues through us. This contributed to the understanding that we are not separate from one another, but connected through land, lineage, and responsibility. Feeling this during conversational interviews could not be fully analyzed, yet it shaped the way the stories were received. The emotion in these moments reflected the power of witnessing knowledge that has been carried for generations and shared again in the present, creating a connection that felt both personal and collective.

Some stories cannot be fully interpreted because they exist in experience, not words. When one knowledge holder described a dream that guided them, or another shared the feeling of being out on the land at a certain time of the year and when knowledge carriers spoke about being in the water, among trees, or engaging in action orientation, their moments carried meaning understood in the body, in memory, and in spirit. Witnessing in this way became less about interpretation and more about validation of the knowledge being shared.

Through this process, it became clear that much of what had taken years to search for within academic spaces was already present in the lives of knowledge holders within our communities. The teachings were always there, but the ways of learning how to listen for them had to be relearned. Answers to questions about healing, wellness, and knowledge came from relationships, stories, and time spent with those willing to share. Hearing these stories brings responsibility because what is learned does not remain only within the research. The teachings must be carried forward in ways that may support others, especially in communities and with youth.

## **What the Teachings Ask of Me**

In closing, the teachings shared through this work call for reciprocity and the continuation of relationships. The knowledge carriers who contributed to this research remain part of the same living community, and the responsibility does not end with the completion of this study. They were chosen and asked to participate because of who they are. These relationships and efforts do not exist solely within the research process but continue beyond it. This involves offering support and asserting ourselves when opportunities arise, not out of obligation, but because it is who we are and how we live in relationship with one another. Just as support would be given to others in communities and relationships valued, there is a responsibility to stay present, respectful, and connected to those who have shared their knowledge.

The responsibility lies in upholding these teachings through practice. They shape the way work is carried out, especially in the community and with youth. This does not mean the teachings always have to be spoken about directly, but that they remain accessible when needed. There is an ability to remember, and in moments when the work calls for it, these teachings guide responses, listening, and actions. In this manner, knowledge endures through us, our relationships, and our intentions.

More than a deeper sense of responsibility, this work carries an honor. It is an honor to be trusted with stories, to witness what was shared, and to feel the presence of ancestors within the process. These moments create space for both personal and collective healing. To witness another person in this way is not only to learn from them, but also to grow within oneself. Carrying these teachings strengthens the ability to live and work in a good way and to continue developing praxis with greater care, humility, and awareness.

These reflections lead into the next chapter, which focuses on returning to the teachings and considering how this will be done from the current place of understanding, context, and responsibility. Just as people continue to grow and adapt, so too must praxis be living and responsive.

## **Chapter 5: Returning the Teachings: Responsibility, Reciprocity, and Praxis**

In a decolonizing Indigenous approach, this chapter is not meant to conclude the study but to return the teachings, as the work does not end once the stories have been shared. What has been given carries responsibility, and this chapter reflects on what the teachings are asking of me, how they are meant to be carried forward, and who I remain accountable to.

Think about the number of people you know and then consider how many people you are truly accountable to. Not in a formal sense, but in a deeper way where someone knows you well enough to see who you really are. A good friend once told me; they are the only person in the room they cannot see. How many people can tell you the truth about yourself, remind you of who you are, or notice when you are not living in a good way? There were times when that circle was very small; however, this research has expanded that circle for me. Through these relationships, accountability becomes something lived rather than just required. It is a level of connection where being known also means being responsible to one another.

This is similar to what happens in leadership when we are asked to do more, be more, and carry ourselves with purpose. The more we step into those roles, the more we are seen, and the more we must live in ways that reflect who we say we are. To me, this is linked to health. The more people we can connect with honestly, the more we are seen, and being seen allows us to live with purpose and pride. Relationships become part of how we stay whole.

When speaking about increased responsibility, it does not mean pressure or burden. It is the kind of responsibility that builds character and keeps us connected. It is the kind of responsibility that comes from being in relationship with others, from knowing that how we live matters, and from understanding that we remain well by staying connected to the people, the teachings, and the communities that help shape who we are. In this way, responsibility is not

something that weighs us down, but keeps us anchored and grounded, inspired and alive in the work we are meant to do.

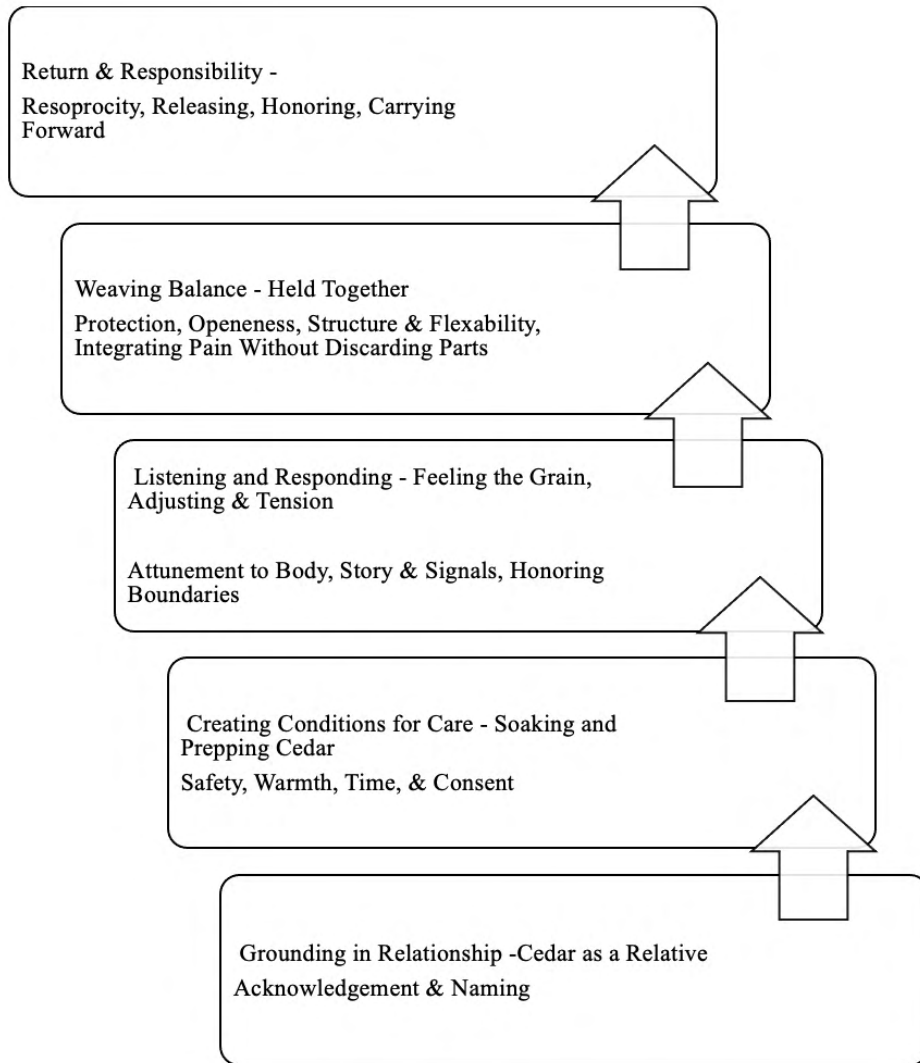
### **Carrying the Teachings Forward**

Following the Cedar Rose Framework, this section provides a healing approach for carrying the teachings forward, based on the stories shared by the knowledge carriers. Moving the teachings into practice means receiving what was shared and letting it shape how we understand, listen, and engage in the work. Instead of simply repeating the teachings, this process involves sitting with them and seeing how they relate and come together in a new way.

Looking across the stories this way revealed some teachings as foundations, while others showed movement through different stages of experience, similar to storywork, where listening calls for reflection and action. Each knowledge holder shared stories from different points in their journeys, yet their teachings remained connected. This reflects what is often taught in Indigenous ways of knowing, where the circle reminds us that people can be at different places at different times but still belong to the same whole.

As stories were shared, it became evident that healing does not follow a single, linear path. People come from diverse backgrounds, whether in remembrance, learning, struggling, or seeking balance. The visual framework (Figure 8) below illustrates that healing is interconnected, offering entry points based on the voices of knowledge holders. It is not designed to show steps but rather to emphasize movement, relationships, and the cyclical nature of healing, with each individual progressing uniquely. At any stage within the framework, one can return to relationships, ground oneself, seek balance, listen more attentively, or reconnect with guiding responsibilities. Just as cedar weaving involves returning to adjust, soften, or realign, healing is a process that allows revisiting previous states rather than moving forward solely.

**Figure 8** Cedar Rose Weaving: A Healing Framework



*Note.* Framework developed by author using SmartArt. This figure represents Cedar Rose weaving as model for healing, emphasizing relational processes, interconnectedness, and the integration of multiple ways of knowing and being.

### ***Grounding in Relationship - Cedar as a Relative - Acknowledgement and Naming***

Grounding in relationship involves acknowledging one's identity and connections. Nessie was taught that your name represents not just you but your entire family. Lola was taught to introduce herself by stating her name, tribal affiliation, and ancestral bloodlines. Acknowledging the past is also a key component; Cedar was able to make sense of feelings he had carried for a long time after his mother acknowledged that sometimes her distance stemmed from him reminding her of his father. This acknowledgement helps to understand and ground one's personal story.

### ***Creating Conditions for Care - Soaking and Prepping Cedar -Safety, Warmth, Time, and Consent***

Creating conditions for care involves providing a safe and welcoming environment. Jonette's grandmother's home served as a warm, safe hub for the community, especially when the power went out. Penoke spoke of leadership as making sure people feel they belong, are welcomed, and are supported. Giving oneself time to heal is also crucial, Dawn spent a significant amount of time in deep grief before she was ready to re-engage with the world. Consent is vital, as shown when Lola was invited to a ceremony while pregnant; she prayed and consulted her mother to ensure she felt safe and could trust the person before agreeing to participate.

### ***Listening and Responding - Attunement to Body, Story and Signals - Honoring Boundaries***

Attunement involves listening to the body and spirit. Raven learned to sense underlying issues beyond physical symptoms, seeing how the body carried hardship. Cedar described a turning point when he realized his lifestyle was hurting him and that “something inside him was going to explode” if he did not change. He also takes time each day to listen to the ancestors,

who he believes speak back. Nessie feels that when she forgets something important, her ancestors come to remind her. A powerful dream gave Marion a clear message from the trees about choosing to be a strong support for others rather than being used. Honoring boundaries was demonstrated by Cedar's refusal to allow alcohol near him or on the breath of others around him. Sky also learned to set limits for herself when dealing with family members who struggled with substance use.

***Weaving Balance - Protection, Openness, Structure and Flexibility - Integrating Pain Without Discarding Parts***

Protection is sought through spiritual and physical boundaries. Cedar protects his health and spirit by not allowing alcohol around him. He and others believe that ancestors are present and provide protection. Jonette's mother used to place cedar above the door for protection. A balanced life can integrate multiple belief systems without contradiction, as shown by Sky, who grew up with traditional ceremony, Catholic beliefs, prayer, and smudging are interconnected parts of her life. This flexibility is also seen in Cedar, who respectfully carries teachings from communities he is a part of. Structure is provided through daily spiritual practices, such as maintaining an altar as a reminder of how one wants to live.

Pain can be integrated without discarding parts of oneself. After losing her daughter, Dawn spent time alone beading, which allowed her to be herself while processing grief. She later found purpose in fighting for justice, including changing legislation, and improving the community. Lola, while in deep mourning, was able to participate in social dances because she felt her mother's teachings to represent her people, allowing her to honor her grief while still engaging with her community. Sky learned to set limits with struggling family members rather than trying to force change, an act that took courage and helped break generational patterns.

### ***Return and Responsibility - Reciprocity, Releasing, Honoring, Carrying Forward***

The practice of reciprocity is evident in Sky's teaching that healing is not just about the medicine itself, but also about respect, gratitude, and relationship with the land, as taught by praying and giving thanks before gathering anything. Another example is when fishermen would bring fish to Jonette's grandmother after she provided them with breakfast and coffee all day.

Cedar describes the act of releasing burdens through ceremony, including speaking thoughts into a fire, burning juniper, and trusting the fire to understand and help let things go. Another method from Marion involved visualizing putting what is hurting you onto a piece of driftwood and letting the river carry it away. An elder taught Jonette to give her problems to a cedar tree, which would then bring them up to the universe for resolution.

Honoring those who have passed is seen in how Sky feels her late partner's presence is still with her, bringing both sadness and comfort. Nessie also feels her grandmother still comes to her in dreams. This concept extends to honoring one's work. For example, Lola's mother taught her that it is an honor if a project she started continues even after she is no longer leading it.

Teachings are carried forward through actions, such as passing on cultural knowledge, which Dawn does with a sense of pride that the culture will. Lola spoke about the responsibility to represent one's family and community in a good way. This is a teaching that she carried forward and passed down to children.

### **Teachings in Relation to Literature**

The previous section centered the voices, stories, and teachings of knowledge holders as they were shared, allowing their experiences to stand on their own without too much interpretation or restriction. These stories provided insight into how healing, wellness, and

relationships are understood and experienced. It was through listening to these stories and their teachings that this next framework began to take shape. The Cedar Rose continuum of being emerged from what was witnessed, not as a way to define or categorize, but as a means to understand patterns of movement, relationship, and balance.

This section returns to the literature to situate and support this framework. While it is possible to understand how knowledge carriers may move between different states of being along the continuum, their specific experiences within these layers are not explicitly mapped or cited. This choice was made to avoid overinterpreting or fragmenting their teachings. Instead, the framework reflects an understanding that was informed by their stories as a whole. This section is my attempt to connect their teachings to the literature shared in previous chapters, not to validate, but to show what was learned through relationship, story, and lived experience.

### **Continuum of Being: A Decolonizing View of Relational Balance**

As knowledge holders shared their stories, they often named different parts of their lives in ways that reflected movement rather than fixed states. Some shared stories of struggles, addiction, abuse, or feeling disconnected. Others talked about moments of change, when they chose to live differently, forgive, set boundaries, or reconnect with cultural practices. Some described feeling safe, strong, and at home when they were in community, on the water, in ceremony, or connected to their ancestors. These descriptions did not fit into categories of well or unwell but instead showed a range of experiences that people can go through over time.

Listening to these stories shaped an understanding of healing in practice in a different way. Rather than viewing experience as a problem to be solved, it can be understood as a place along a continuum of being, a space that allows us to hold multiple truths at once. A person can be struggling and still be strong, disconnected and still searching, grounded in some life domains

but feeling lost in others. Seeing healing in this way requires us to look beyond clinical labels and pay attention to where someone is relationally, culturally, and spiritually. This understanding led to the development of the continuum of being (Figure 9) as a way to describe what participants were showing through their stories.

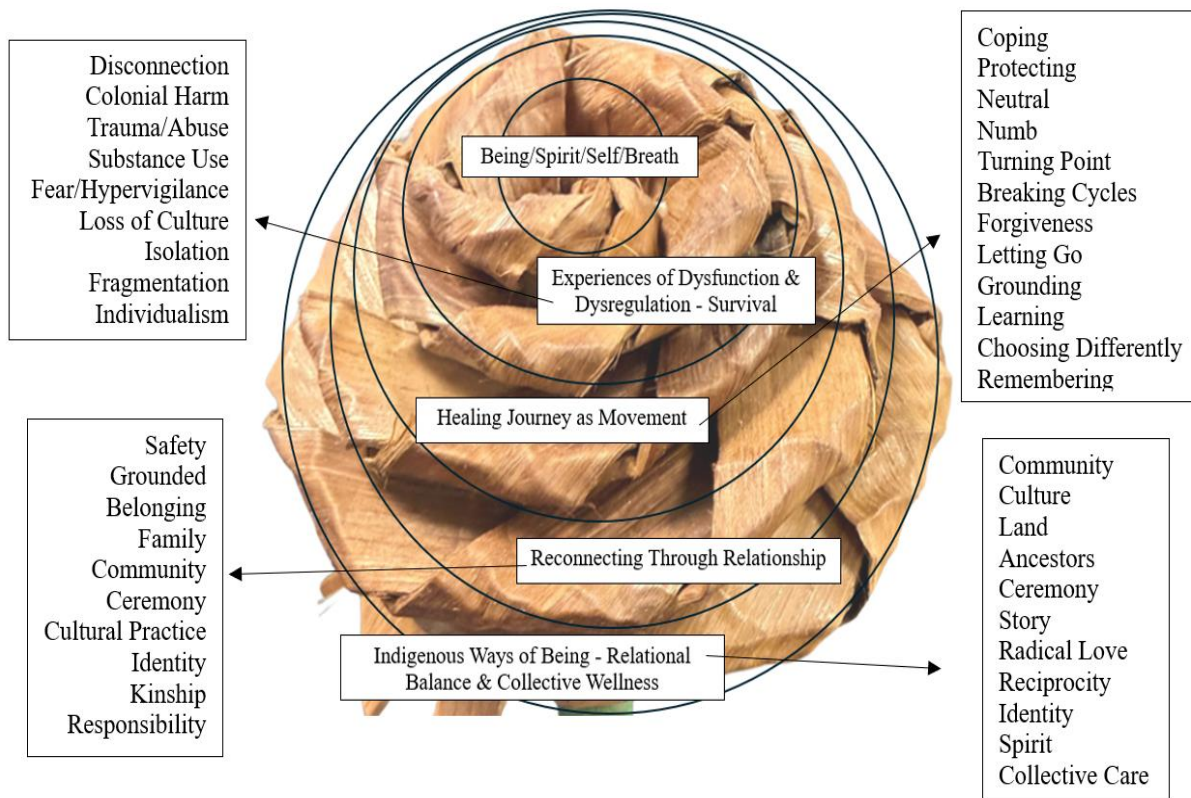
This continuum of being represents a range, moving from disconnection and survival toward safety, relationship, community, and Indigenous ways of being. This continuum does not suggest a straight line or final destination. People may move back and forth depending on their experience. Balance is understood as something that must be restored repeatedly. The Cedar Rose provides a way to understand this continuum visually and relationally. Rather than a line with one end defined as dysfunction and the other as health, the Cedar Rose reflects a movement toward wholeness. Each part of the rose represents different aspects of being, and balance is found when the whole is in relationship.

### ***The Center: Being***

At the heart of this framework is being. This is the space where spirit, breath, and relationship originate. It is the core of who we are, the part of us that exists before trauma, colonization, and disconnection. It is not something that needs to be created or fixed, but something it has always been present. It is a place of knowing who you are, where you come from, and how you belong. In Internal Family Systems, this refers to self-states characterized by Calmness, Curiosity, Compassion, Confidence, Courage, Clarity, Creativity, and Connectedness (Anderson, 2017).

McVicker (2026) describes how, within the Kituwah and kinship worldview, there is a spiritual presence that flows through the center. The core remains intact and holds the capacity for healing regardless of what has been experienced. She further explains that this center is deeply relational, a center in relationships where spirit, land, ancestors, and community are part of how we come to know ourselves.

**Figure 9** *Continuum of Being: A Decolonizing View of Relational Balance*



*Note.* Author developed framework illustrating relational balance.

Similarly, Salmón (2000) describes this through kincentric ecology, which is the understanding that humans are part of an extended ecological family in which land, animals, and all living beings are our relatives, and that life is sustained not only by recognizing but also by maintaining those relationships. This center holds the teachings passed down through generations, the songs that carry memory, and the prayers that connect past, present, and future.

It is the space where we know our names, our lineage, and our place within the web of relations that extend across time and territory.

### ***The First Inner Layer: Survival Experiences***

Moving outward, the first inner layer reflects experiences of survival and coping and holds the impacts of historical and ongoing trauma. This includes disconnection, colonial harm, trauma, abuse, substance use, fear, hypervigilance, loss of culture, isolation, and fragmentation shaped by systems that have disrupted Indigenous life across generations. These experiences are not isolated and are rooted in histories of forced assimilation, displacement, and cultural suppression that continue to influence our realities today. Duran et al. (1998) describe this as the soul wound, a collective and intergenerational trauma that is carried spiritually, emotionally, and relationally. They emphasize that these impacts extend beyond the individual, shaping families and communities, and disrupting our relationships to land, identity, and belonging. Within this layer, survival may appear as coping, hypervigilance, emotional numbing, and withdrawal. These are not just signs of dysfunction, but as adaptive responses to ongoing conditions of harm, though they are often misunderstood within education, social work, and therapeutic systems.

Wilbur and Gone (2025) further challenge the dominant understandings of resilience, expressing that resilience often focuses on adapting to harmful conditions rather than transforming them. They introduce the concept of health survivance, discussing that Indigenous well-being is rooted in the ongoing presence, resistance, and continuation of culture and community. In this way, this layer holds both the weight of trauma and the strength of persistence, reflecting survival as more than survival. Survival is complex, relational, and significantly, tied to harm and resistance.

### ***The Second Layer: The Healing Journey***

The next layer is a healing journey, marked by movement - coping, protecting, neutrality, numbness, turning point, breaking cycles, forgiveness, letting go, grounding, learning, choosing differently, and remembering. These are not steps in a sequence but movements that individuals return to over time. This layer reflects intentional action. For some, it might be when they choose differently by leaving harmful relationships, let go of identities tied to dysfunction, and engage in practices that support well-being. Practices previously discussed by knowledge carriers, such as going to the water to pray, releasing grief through ceremony, journaling, working with plant medicines, such as sage and cedar, and maintaining routines that support and create stability. It also includes using guidance from elders, and mentors whose teachings support individuals through transition and help them reconnect with their own strength and inner knowing.

Starks et al. (2010) describe healing as a relational and ritual-based process supported through community, culture, and shared practice. Escobar (2025) similarly describes healing as a process of remembering and reconnecting with land, water, and more-than-human world, further elaborating that these relationships are active sources of care and knowledge. Cross et al (2019) explain that well-being is understood through a relational worldview that balances mind, body, and spirit, suggesting systems such as education must support relational environments rather than interventions aimed at individuals. In this layer, healing is not defined by arrival, but by a willingness to continue moving, returning, and choosing differently.

### ***The Third Layer: Reconnection***

The third outer layer represents reconnection to and return to relationship, including safety, grounded, belonging, family, community, ceremony, cultural practice, identity, kinship, and responsibility. The reconnection is not about becoming something new, but about

remembering and reclaiming what has been there. This layer includes returning to ceremony, language, and cultural practices as well as reconnecting with land through presence, listening, and receiving guidance. It may include dreams, visions, and messages from ancestors that provide guidance during times of struggle. It includes engaging across communities, recognizing shared experiences, and understanding that healing can be supported through multiple cultural teachings.

Renfrew & Hamley (2025) remind us that land, identity, spirituality, and well-being are deeply connected and cannot be separated. They remind us that land is not just a place; it holds our memories, histories, and a living relationship as something to connect with, not just physically, but spiritually and relationally. They highlight how Māori youth use spirituality, also known as Wairua, to reconnect, which can be done through moments of stillness, prayer, ceremony, emotional awareness, or simply being on the land. They go on to describe how these experiences are felt rather than explained, emerging through emotions and sensations, creating a sense of belonging that cannot be easily captured in words. Reconnecting restores relational ties across time. Being on ancestral lands or engaging in cultural teachings allows connection to those who came before us, and those yet to come.

Oman (2025) describes mantra practice as more than mere repetition, as a form of language embedded in spiritual traditions that links individuals to meaning, memory, and the sacred. He highlights that these practices are relational, connecting people to larger systems of belief and shared experiences, while also fostering psychological and spiritual growth. Additionally, Oman stresses the significance of spiritual practices, which tie individuals to broader traditions, relationships, and their worldview. This aligns with reconnection, where healing means returning to land, culture, spirit, and community. Practices like prayer and

ceremony aren't isolated but re-engage us with teachings, ancestors, and enduring ways of being, restoring balance across interconnected aspects of being.

### ***The Outer Petals: Indigenous Ways of Being***

The outer layer reflects Indigenous ways of being as lived and relational, grounded in community, culture, land, ancestors, ceremony, story, radical love, reciprocity, identity, spirit, and collective care. This layer is not about the absence of dysfunction or dysregulation. Instead, wellness was once understood as simply being neutral or symptom-free, but it has come to be recognized as something more. It is about expression and embracing our Indigenous ways of being, how we show up, connect, and care for ourselves and each other in a meaningful way.

As described by Jacob et al. (2025), Indigenous knowledge systems are living heritage, carried through relationships, community, and intergenerational practice. Similarly, Alfred and Cornthassel (2005) describe resurgence as an active process of returning to the land, culture, and community, resisting colonial systems that attempt to disconnect Indigenous people from these relationships. They emphasize what it means not just to love, but to radically love. This extends beyond the individual to collective care.

Straits et al. (2022) support the notion that Indigenous approaches to wellness are grounded in collective resilience, in which space and care are enacted through community, ceremony, shared responsibility, and relationships with the land and all living beings. These ways of being can show up in small moments like gratitude or being present, and in larger moments like ceremony, dreaming, and gathering. Moore & Miller (2018) describe gratitude as a ceremony, explaining that practices of giving thanks are not merely symbolic but relational acts that connect people to land, ancestors, and all living beings, reinforcing responsibility, reciprocity, and collective balance.

Our dreams are also ways of knowing and sites of relationship where knowledge, guidance, and connection to ancestors and spirit are received, and where dreaming itself becomes part of how we stay connected with life and restore balance (Gonzales, 2013). These are just a few spaces where we can remain whole. The outer layer is not a place we reach and stay in, but a state of being we move in and out of, reminding us that wellness depends on how we live in relationship.

Healing is not reaching the outer edge and staying there; it is moving within the Cedar Rose and returning to the relationship when balance is lost. When looking at healing in this way, we can ask where people are within the Cedar Rose, examine what relationships have been disrupted, and what teachings or connections may help restore balance. This means supporting healing not only through interventions but also by creating conditions where culture, community, land, and identity can be present. The continuum of being and the Cedar Rose together offer a decolonizing way of understanding practice in which wellness is measured not by individual regulation but by the ability to live in relationship.

### **Implications for Practice/Decolonizing Praxis**

The teachings shared by participants have implications for understanding healing and for informing how practice itself must change. In this work, decolonizing praxis means approaching social work, therapy, education, and research in ways that highlight healing as relational, cultural, and grounded in lived experience rather than the limits of individual symptoms or clinical definitions of functioning. Stories from the knowledge holders describe experiences often described as dysfunction or dysregulation that are connected to intergenerational trauma, loss of culture, disrupted relationships, and the ongoing effects of colonization. Because of this, practice must focus on the environment and conditions in which the individual is responding, not

just individual regulation. It is imperative that we create space for reconnecting with family, community, land, ancestors, and our cultural ways of being.

Knowledge holders also described harm that stemmed from systems that attempted to control or erase Indigenous identity, such as being raised in environments shaped by residential school legacies, substance use within families, abuse, foster care, and relationships marked by violence. These kinds of stories are not just personal problems but are shaped by broader histories that inform how people have learned to adapt and survive. In this way, what might be labeled as dysfunction within western clinical frameworks can also be understood as responses developed within conditions of disruption and loss.

At the same time, participants described their healing as something that did not occur individually, but through relationship, including community gatherings, ceremony, time on the land, prayer, forgiveness, and guidance from elders and ancestors. These relationships and practices were essential to becoming safe and grounded, which suggests that supporting healing requires us to look differently at what wellness means. To me, it means allowing space for cultural identity, honoring ceremony, recognizing the role and importance of community, and understanding that balance comes through connection rather than symptom reduction or back to baseline functioning.

We approach decolonizing praxis differently by listening to people and their stories in order to understand their stories holistically, without separating the emotional, cultural, mental, spiritual, and relational domains. Listening this way helps us see healing as something that moves, changes, and returns over time, rather than as something measured at a single point.

## **Implementation, Boundaries, and Limitations**

Chapter 4 discussed the witnessing story and the limits of interpretation, recognizing that not all meaning can be fully analyzed or explained. Validity or trustworthiness was grounded in relational accountability, witnessing, and the responsibility to carry knowledge in a good way. Some meanings exist beyond what can be written, including presence, ancestral spirit, emotion, and the relational spaces in which stories are shared. From this, this section focuses on the limits of implementation and extends how this is understood in practice.

### ***Implementation***

Implementation is better understood as praxis rather than merely applying findings to a fixed model or intervention. It is an ongoing process of living, practicing, and returning to knowledge within relationships. The continuum of being and healing framework developed in this research serves as a tool to support this process. This tool offers ways to reflect on relational balance and to identify one's position within experiences of wellness and disruption. This can help individuals consider how relationships with themselves, family, community, and land can be restored or strengthened. This tool is not separate from life; its meanings emerge through use, reflection, and relationships. This tool is actively engaged in practice, storytelling, and teaching. Implementation happens alongside research, not just after, as part of the everyday praxis.

Implementation is relationally sustained. The process of completing this work required returning again and again to balance and wellness while navigating high demands. This did not occur in isolation but within community. Being in relationship with coheart members and others who created space for support, reflection, and accountability. While this space was present, there remains a need for more intentional and sustained relational structure within academic environments that support Indigenous ways of learning and being. This work becomes most

meaningful in the places where it is hardest to practice, within our families and close relationships. Learning to remain present, to take responsibility, and to continue showing care even in difficult moments are the same teachings that have guided this research. The ability to practice these within family life brings the work into lived experience.

Despite the ongoing impacts of colonization, Indigenous pedagogies can remain centered within education and community as relational learning and teaching, and through these practices and approaches will further support how knowledge is understood and carried (Chrona, 2023). Learning within this work was understood as an ongoing process of restorying. Roberts (2024) defined re-storying as education continually shaped through relationships, experiences, and reflection, through which we understand ourselves, histories, and relationships to one another, to the land, and to future generations.

This work extends beyond human relationships. Indigenous knowledge research is shaped not only by interactions with people but also by relationships with the natural and spirit worlds. Research occurs within a broader relational network that includes land, place, ancestors, and the unseen, which informs understanding and guides process (Mertens et al., 2013). These relationships inform how knowledge is received, understood, and carried forward. Implementation must remain grounded in these relational contexts, not separated from them. Implementation is not about producing outcomes but about staying right in relationship. It is the process of returning knowledge in ways that are accountable to community, grounded in lived experience, and sustained through ongoing connection.

### ***Boundaries and Limitations***

Understanding the boundaries of this work is like understanding the structure of the Cedar Rose. The Cedar Rose continues to offer guidance where the rose does not open all at once

and does not reveal every layer at the same time. Each layer unfolds in response to the conditions around it, while the center remains protected until the time is right. In the same way, what can be shared, interpreted, and carried forward in this work is shaped by what is appropriate, relationally held, and what remains protected.

The limitations of this work are shaped by intention. This work was grounded in a commitment to Indigenous youth, scholars, the diaspora, and education and social work. The findings are framed within these contexts and are not intended to represent a universal Indigenous experience. Similarly, the knowledge holders do not represent universal perspectives, and their stories remain with their own communities, histories, and relationships. This work should not be universalized or generalized. As part of this section, I share another form of weaving (Figure 10) to represent the multiple ways of being and knowing within Indigenous knowledge systems. This tells us there are many forms of weaving.

**Figure 10** *Cedar Weaving Belt*



*Note.* Cedar Belt made by Olivia Washington-Nelson, Muckleshoot; photograph by the author.

This next image (Figure 11) shows there are multiple ways of creating, knowing, and being, including carving, ceremony, storytelling, language, and land-based practices. Indigenous knowledge systems are complex and shaped by place, community, and relationship. What is included here reflects only a partial understanding and does not capture the full complexity of these systems. What cannot be captured in interpretation cannot also be fully implemented because both understanding and practice depend on the present, relationship, and readiness.

**Figure 11** *Sasquatch Mask Carving*



*Note.* Mask carved by Robert Taylor Sr., Tulalip. Photograph by the author.

There were limitations within the research process itself. Engaging deeply with stories required time, space, and the ability to sit with what was shared. It was necessary to pause, reflect, and allow all that needed to emerge for this work to come into fruition. It took applying what was learned repeatedly to restore balance and relationships. This reflects that Indigenous research is not just an intellectual process; it requires engaging with other areas, including the body, spirit, and relationships. The boundaries are not defined by what is missing but by what is held with care and capacity. What is shared reflects what can be carried in this way. Other meanings and what will be carried forward stay within the knowledge holders, community, and the relationships beyond this work. Recognizing these boundaries is part of honoring the knowledge, not limiting it.

## **Future Research and Futurity**

This work raises ongoing questions about healing, practice, and the conditions in which Indigenous knowledge is experienced. While culture, tradition, and relationships are understood here as central to healing and wellness, this research encourages deeper exploration into what it means when these pathways do not resonate with everyone. This includes those living in the diaspora and navigating extreme circumstances of disconnection, as well as those whose relationships to culture are complex, disrupted, or still developing. Future research must create space for these realities without assuming that the pathways described here are universal. There is still a need to examine how Indigenous ways of knowing and being can exist within and transform clinical and educational systems. When therapeutic practices are shaped by structures, such as insurance billing companies, relational, communal, and culturally grounded care can become constrained. This raises questions about how collective and relational approaches to healing can be practiced within systems that prioritize individualism.

At the same time, there is a risk that Indigenous concepts such as communal processes may be misunderstood when working with individuals. In response, a framework was developed in this work to address this issue, alongside the recognition that when such frameworks are brought into these systems, they may be absorbed in ways that replicate the very structures they seek to challenge. Because of this, future research must stay attentive to how knowledge is used, who it benefits, and uphold relational accountability. Even small shifts over time are important. Changes at the level of everyday practice can create opportunities that go beyond just surviving in these systems. They open space to reimagine what healing and education can look like.

When considering futurity, the focus shifts from mere survival to what it truly means to live well. A mentor's teaching highlighted that everything a person does is inherently Indigenous

because they are Indigenous. This understanding was deeply shifting, strengthening identity, and grounding this work in lived experience rather than something separate from it. It affirms that this work is not confined to research or professional spaces but is lived through everyday relationships, choices, and responsibilities. Futurity is not something separate from the present because it is something already being lived. It exists in the ways relationships are maintained, in how care is extended to one another, and how spaces are created for Indigenous ways of knowing and being, even within systems not designed for them. At times, this requires moving between worlds, adapting while holding on to what is core.

As Harjo (2019) describes, futurity is not fixed or singular, but in constant motion, shaped by people, relationships, and practices that sustain community. Her work teaches us that futurity is collective and relational, allowing for multiple ways. It is present in the way communities continue, adapt, and create despite ongoing conditions of colonization. It is carried across generations where each generation is an opportunity to strengthen what has been passed down while creating new opportunities. Futurity also holds what has not yet been realized. It is not something to be reached, but something to practice. It lives in how relationships are sustained, how accountability to community is maintained, and how spaces are created to live fully within Indigenous ways of being while continuing to learn, adapt, and carry teachings forward.

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## Appendix A – Invitation to Participate



Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness

# INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE

Research Project

### Who Can Join

- Indigenous adults (any tribal Indigenous background, including American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian, or other Indigenous peoples) aged 25+ living in the US
- Anyone willing to share stories about healing, culture, and connection to land, community, or ancestors

### What You'll Do

- Take part in a 60-90 minute conversation, either online via Zoom or In person
- With your permission, the conversation will be recorded to ensure your story is captured accurately
- Reflect on your experiences including: traditional or cultural healing practices- ceremonies, rituals, land-based practices, spirituality, dreams, medicines, storytelling, art, song, dance, or other expressions
- Ways you have stayed grounded, connected, or healed while living away from your ancestral homelands or community
- Participation is voluntary and your story will remain anonymous unless you choose to be identified
- Cultural honoring gift as a thank-you for sharing your knowledge

### Purpose

- Center Indigenous voices and wisdom in research
- Share knowledge that strengthens cultural wellness and healing practices
- Contribute to a body of work that honors our ancestors, land, and community resilience
- Help ensure that future generations of Indigenous people can learn, heal, and carry forward these traditions

### For More Information

Angel Williams  
willia8@uw.edu  
360-640-0108

Approved by University of Washington IRB

## Appendix B – Consent to Participate in Research Study

### Consent to Participant in Research Study University of Washington

#### Study Title

Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness

#### What is this study about?

#### Purpose

You are being asked to participate in a research study about Indigenous knowledge, healing, and wellness as a response to colonialism to support climate justice. This research is being conducted as part of a doctoral dissertation project. It is up to you to decide whether you want to participate. If you choose to enroll, you can stop participation at any time.

#### Eligibility

We are asking you to participate in the study because your identity as an American Indian/Alaska Native provides a valuable perspective on how Indigenous individuals practice healing and wellness. You must be 25 years of age or older and live in the United States. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in this study.

#### What will you be asked to do?

#### Procedure

If you agree to participate in this study, we will ask you to engage in a conversation guided by open-ended questions lasting approximately 60–90 minutes, conducted via Zoom or in person, if applicable. With the participant's permission, Zoom interviews will be recorded using both camera and audio to ensure accurate transcription and analysis. In-person interviews will also be audio-recorded, with the participant's permission. The approach is based on Indigenous and decolonized ways of doing research, which focus on building respectful relationships and honoring the knowledge and experience shared by participants. Participants will receive a cultural honoring gift for their participation.

#### What will happen to the information you provide?

#### Confidentiality and Identifiable Information

The researcher will obtain direction and indirect identifiers throughout the research process. Both the researcher and research team will have access to this information, including demographic information (self-identified American Indian/Alaska Native identity or affiliation), contact information (phone number and/or email for scheduling interviews), signed consent forms, recorded interviews, researcher handwritten notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis review. These identifiers will be used only to manage, organize, and analyze the data. De-identified transcripts will be analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to identify themes and patterns. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, all identifying information will be removed, and pseudonyms will be assigned and used. Only de-identified data will be used for publication and presentation unless specified otherwise.

#### What can you do if you want more information?

#### Study Team

Angel Williams is the lead researcher at the University of Washington for this study and can be contacted by email at [willia8@uw.edu](mailto:willia8@uw.edu) or by phone at (360)640-0108. You may also contact Dr. Michelle Montgomery at [montgm2@uw.edu](mailto:montgm2@uw.edu). **Talk to someone else.** 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](mailto:hsdinfo@uw.edu) or 206-543-0098.

## Appendix C – Consent Statement for In-Person Interview

### Consent Statement for In-Person Interview University of Washington

#### Study Details

**Title:** Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness

**Lead Researcher:** Angel Williams

#### By signing below, I acknowledge that:

I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the procedures involved. I voluntarily agree to participate and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I understand that the researcher will collect both direct and indirect identifiers throughout the research process and will grant the research team permission to access and manage my data, including demographic information, a signed consent form, a recorded interview, the researcher's handwritten notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis review materials.

I am aware that transcripts of interviews will be de-identified and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to identify themes and patterns relevant to the research. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, all identifying information will be removed, and pseudonyms will be assigned and used in place of real names or other identifying details, unless otherwise noted (see the *Optional Consent to Be Identified* form). I understand and agree that only de-identified data (with all personal and identifying information removed) may be used in this study and in any future academic publications, presentations, or other public dissemination efforts related to this research.

#### Additional Notes or Considerations (if applicable):

*(Please note any specific conditions, preferences, or other agreements not covered above.)*

---

Participant Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix D – Consent Statement for Zoom Interview

### Consent Statement for Zoom Interview University of Washington

#### Study Details

**Title:** Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness

**Lead Researcher:** Angel Williams

#### By signing below, I acknowledge that:

I have read and understand the purpose of this research study and the procedures involved. I voluntarily agree to participate and understand that I may withdraw at any time without penalty.

I understand that the researcher will collect both direct and indirect identifiers throughout the research process and give permission for the research team to access and manage my data, including demographic information, a signed consent form, recorded interview (video and audio), the researcher's handwritten notes, interview transcripts, and data analysis review materials.

I am aware that transcripts of interviews will be de-identified and analyzed using qualitative data analysis software to identify themes and patterns relevant to the research. Once the data has been collected and analyzed, all identifying information will be removed, and pseudonyms will be assigned and used in place of real names or other identifying details unless otherwise noted (see the *Optional Consent to Be Identified* form).

I understand and agree that only de-identified data (with all personal and identifying information removed) may be used in this study and in any future academic publications, presentations, or other public dissemination efforts related to this research.

#### Additional Notes or Considerations (if applicable):

*(Please note any specific conditions, preferences, or other agreements not covered above.)*

Participant Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix E – Optional Consent to be Identified and Review Contributions

### Optional Consent to Be Identified and Review Contributions

#### Study Details

**Title:** Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness

**Lead Researcher:** Angel Williams

Some participants may wish to be named or acknowledged in this research to honor their contributions, protect knowledge in specific cultural contexts, or assert authorship over their shared experiences. While the default practice is to use pseudonyms and remove identifying information, participants may choose to be identified in publications or presentations.

By signing below, I acknowledge that:

- I understand that being identified in this research may carry potential risks, including the loss of anonymity, privacy concerns, or unintended social consequences.
- I understand that the researcher will take special care in how my identifiable information, name, or affiliation is shared, and will consult with me on how I wish to be represented.
- I understand that I have the right to review any direct quotes, summaries, or representations of my contributions before they are included in any publication, presentation, or public dissemination of this research.
- I understand that I may revoke my permission to be identified at any time before the final publication, and my information will then be anonymized.

I agree to be identified by name and/or affiliation in this research.

Please indicate how you would like to be named (e.g., full name, community role, tribal affiliation):

#### Additional Notes or Considerations (optional):

*(Please include any specific conditions, preferences, or cultural considerations you would like the researcher to respect when sharing your contributions.)*

---

Participant Name (Printed): \_\_\_\_\_

Participant Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F – Interview Questions

### Gathering the Story

#### Opening / Relationship-Based Invitation

##### Starting With Your Connection to This Study

- *I'd like to begin by asking about how you came to be here today.*
  - How did you hear about the research study?
  - In the materials or conversations that reached you, what resonated or moved you to participate?
  - Was there something that felt important, timely, or meaningful for you to share?  
*(Alternatively, if they were invited and know them personally)*
- The researcher states why they were personally invited and describes based on relationality.

#### Intergenerational & Historical Context

##### Understanding Context Without Centering Harm

This part of the conversation acknowledges the histories we carry without framing us as damaged or broken.

- When you think about your family, community, or ancestors, what teachings, strengths, or stories come forward about how they navigated and survived colonialism?
- How do those intergenerational experiences show up in your own life, healing, or wellness today?
- Are there ways you've reclaimed or re-learned practices, values, or knowledges that support you?

#### Pathways to Healing & Wellness

##### Your Personal Healing Pathway

- How would you describe your own pathway to healing or wellness?
- What experiences, practices, people, or teachings have supported you along your journey?
- When you think of what keeps you well today, what comes to mind?

#### Indigenous Healing Modalities

##### Story Sharing About Healing Practices

This is your invitation to share a story, moment, or experience connected to healing.

- Is there a story you feel comfortable sharing that reflects your healing, wisdom, or cultural connection?
- Are there traditional or cultural healing practices, ceremonies, land-based practices, dreams, or spiritual experiences that have been meaningful to you?
- This could include anything: art, relationships, plants and medicines, storytelling, song, dance, water, movement, prayer, teachings from loved ones, or experiences that helped you return to or deepen your sense of self.
- And in places where cultural practices may have been disrupted, what other practices or experiences have supported your wellness?

#### Living in the Diaspora

*(Only if relevant to participant)*

**Connection While Away from Homelands**

- If you have lived away from your ancestral homelands or community, how have you maintained connection to your identity, culture, or sense of belonging?
- What has helped you stay grounded, well, or connected while living in the diaspora?

**Future Generations / Climate & Collective Wellness**

**Carrying Forward Knowledge & Hope**

- What teachings, stories, or messages would you want future generations to carry forward?
- When you think about climate challenges and the wellbeing of our communities, what wisdom do you believe is most important to remember or return to?
- What do you hope your story, experiences, or knowledge can offer to those who come after us?

**Closing**

**Final Reflections**

- Is there anything we haven't talked about that you feel belongs in this story?
- Anything else you want to share to honor your journey, your family, or your community?

## Appendix G – Semi-Structured Interview Guide

### Principles

Interview principles are based on relationality and ensuring the researcher continually reinforces and aligns with Kirkness & Barnhardt's (2016) Four Rs of Respect, Relevance, Reciprocity, and Responsibility.

### Purpose of the interview

Gathering stories to weave how individuals draw on traditional ecological knowledge to heal, reclaim, navigate colonialism and climate challenges. Identify, honor by witnessing, participant experiences, teachings, inner knowing, and perspective. This work is for the ancestors, ourselves, and for future generations.

### Interview Structure

Length: 60-90 Minute Interviews

Location: in person -identified place and audio record with consent  
Zoom -video/audio record with consent

### Interview Script

- Provide an overview of time together and state intentions, thanking the participant for choosing to share.
  - This work is very personal to me and provide self-disclosure of what feels authentic related to cultural disconnection, and own pathway to healing. Something along the lines of, throughout my life and professional working career, I thought therapy was the top, a place where people and families to go to “fix” themselves, what I found is that is it actually all of our systems that need fixing. That we carry ancestral wisdom that is medicine for our healing and to be well. We all heal in so many different ways and I want to highlight those ways. That maybe your story will help other people see themselves.
- Conduct/review consent including video/audio recording, confidentiality/privacy, and future presentation/publication.
- Inquire if researcher can answer questions, emphasis and encourage the participant to please ask at any time about anything.
- Gather the story and use questions as guide
  - Question what drew them to the call for participants or if they are a participant the researcher identified, researcher state why researcher wanted to interview them
- When nearing the end of time of 60-90 minutes, determine by checking in with the participant, how they are feeling and provide feedback/follow up questions the researcher is interested in, and about how long we still have together
- Once we reach a good stopping point, researcher conduct resourcing if necessary
- Provide overview and summary of what we discussed today. Researcher addressed if follow up is needed and offer participant to please reach out of they have anything they missed. Discuss details of where to send cultural honoring gift or provide it if in person.

## Appendix H – -Institutional Review Board (IRB) Exempt Status



### RE-DETERMINATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

November 19, 2025

Dear Angel Williams:

On 11/19/2025, the University of Washington Human Subjects Division (HSD) reviewed the following application:

Type of Review:	Modification / Update
Title of Study:	Weaving the Sacred: Stories of Healing and Traditional Ecological Knowledges as Pathway to Indigenous Wellness
Investigator:	Angel Williams
IRB ID:	MOD00024381
Funding:	None

#### Exempt Status

HSD re-determined that your proposed activity is human subjects research that qualifies for exempt status (Categories 2 and 101). This determination may or may not be based on the Limited IRB Review process.

- This determination is valid for the duration of your research.
- This means that your research is exempt from the federal human subjects regulations, including the requirement for IRB approval and continuing review.
- **Depending on the nature of your study, you may need to obtain other approvals or permissions to conduct your research. For example, you might need to apply for access to data or specimens (e.g., to obtain UW student data). Or you might need to obtain permission from facilities managers to approach possible subjects or conduct research procedures in the facilities (e.g., Seattle School District; the Harborview Emergency Department).**
- HSD does not make determinations on behalf of other institutions. If other institutions are involved in the research, they may need to make their own determination or they may decide to be guided by our determination.
- **If you obtain federal funding or other support for this research, inform HSD immediately.**

Only certain types of changes to exempt research require that you submit a modification in Zipline. For information about what changes require a Modification, refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#). If you are unsure if your proposed changes require a modification, contact your [HSD team](#) before preparing the modification.

HSD does not review or approve consent plans and consent materials for exempt research. **Researchers are still responsible for providing subjects with information about the research prior to their agreement to participate.** Refer to the guidance on [Exempt Research](#) for details about 4333 Brooklyn Ave. NE, Box 359470 Seattle, WA 98195-9470  
main 206.543.0098 fax 206.543.9218 hsdinfo@uw.edu [www.washington.edu/research/hsd](http://www.washington.edu/research/hsd)  
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