

Stories of Resilience:  
Identity and Belonging Among Intersectional Women  
Social Entrepreneurs in the Pacific Northwest

A dissertation  
submitted to the faculty of the  
Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies  
School of Leadership Studies  
of Gonzaga University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy

By  
Katherine M. Greenland  
March 2023


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Stories of Resilience:  
Identity and Belonging Among Intersectional Women Social Entrepreneurs  
In the Pacific Northwest

Katherine Marguerite Greenland

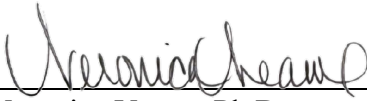
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Ken Gambrell, Ph.D.  
Dissertation Chair

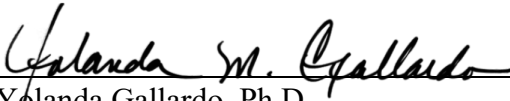
4/19/2023  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Chris Francovich, Ed.D.  
Committee Member

4/19/2023  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Veronica Veaux, Ph.D.  
Committee Member

4/19/2023  
Date

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Yolanda Gallardo, Ph.D.  
Interim Dean, School of Leadership Studies

5/23/2023  
Date

## **DEDICATION**

This dissertation is dedicated to

My children

Rowan Eugene Trelstad Rognstad

and

Laila Rose Trelstad Rognstad

May you reach for the stars,

Remembering that

You stand on the shoulders of giants.

I love you always in all ways.

## IN MEMORIAL

In memory of my grandmother

Dorie Mae Thorpe Nelson

February 13, 1928 — January 20, 2021

Dorie — Gee Gee as we called her — was a devoted mother,  
grandmother, wife, and educator.

Although she passed away while I was halfway through my doctoral program,

her example of resilience, perseverance, and innovation

has been a constant inspiration for me.

She sang many songs to me as a child.

This is one of my favorites:

Nothing's impossible

I have found

For when my chin

Is on the ground

I pick myself up

Dust myself off

Start all over again.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This doctoral journey took place during the COVID-19 pandemic, political insurrection, and Black Lives Matter movement. As I write, there is a surge of wildfires near our home in the Pacific Northwest and a tangible warming of the rest of the planet. I have learned about my own resilience during this journey. Gonzaga's Doctoral Program in Leadership Studies has taught me to adapt to challenges, work smarter instead of harder, persevere through the unknown, and take it all one step at a time. These experiences have helped me develop a new self-confidence, a stronger ability to articulate myself, and a deepened awareness of my own identity in the context of an increasingly polarized world and the leadership issues I studied.

Thank you first and foremost to my great-grandmothers, grandmothers, mothers, aunts, cousins, and all my female ancestors who came before me who were smart, driven, and capable but never had the opportunity or choice to achieve doctoral degrees for themselves. I have felt these women lovingly at my back, supporting my doctoral journey every step of the way.

Much of this dissertation was written on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Hot Springs, Montana. I am forever grateful to the Flathead Tribe for welcoming me as a visitor. Without overexposing the big medicine of that place, I will simply share my gratitude for the guidance, kindness, and healing I have received during each of my visits to Flathead territory. The spirit of the land and water is strong there and has influenced who I have become as a scholar and writer.

Thank you to my family for supporting me throughout this process. I am forever grateful to my mother, Laurie Nelson, for cheering me on, reminding me that I come from *nanu* (resilient) ancestry, and for loving and believing in me. Incredible gratitude to my husband, Shelby Rognstad, for encouraging me to apply for grad school, taking care of our children so I could attend classes and write my dissertation, and reminding me what I'm capable of. Gratitude to my Circle of Elders: Tanesha Ross, Cosetta Romani, Ivo Grossi, Shannon and Jim Meldrum, Clementine and Jason Bear, Brietta and Rick Leader for holding space for me, listening to my stories of loss and grief during the pandemic, and offering grand gestures of support at moments when I needed them most. Gratitude to my children, Rowan Eugene and Laila Rose, for being patient while Mama went to school to achieve something big so that you know that you can be a doctor one day, if you wish.

Thank you to the Upper Columbia United Tribes, including the Spokane, Kalispel, Coeur d'Alene, Kootenai, and Colville tribes for inviting me and my family to join annual canoe paddles each summer during my doctoral journey. In many ways, what I learned while in the canoe on the river has been just as important to my growth as what I learned while writing this dissertation. The spirit of the land is strong around the Gonzaga University campus. A deep bow of gratitude to the Spokane Tribe of Indians for their ongoing stewardship of this land since time immemorial. Thank you to the board of the Pacific Sámi Searvi, who helped me learn about my culture and heritage so that I could find my own sense of identity, belonging, and resilience along the way.

Thank you to my esteemed colleagues at Gonzaga University, whose friendships nurtured me throughout this journey. Thank you to my colleague and friend, Dr. Veronica Veaux, who walked ahead of me in the DPLS program, mentored me throughout my journey, and supported my academic culmination as an esteemed member of my dissertation committee. Thank you to my advisor and committee chair, Dr. Kem Gambrell for challenging me to see deeper layers of context in life, and begin my answer to every question with, “it depends.” Thank you, Dr. Chris Francovich, for working closely with me on my dissertation in its initial stages and teaching several amazing courses during my program. Thank you, Dr. JoAnn Barbour, for helping me learn how to write doctoral research papers and teaching one of my favorite courses, Organizational Theory. Thank you, Dr. Shann Ferch, for your mentorship with my transcript and for helping me develop a pathway to graduation. Thank you, Dr. Joe Albert, for sharing your love of identity and narrative inquiry through the stories and narratives of your own love and loss. Thank you, Wendy Thompson, for being my friend, mentor, and inviting me into the Native House, *sčintx<sup>w</sup>*, where I found refuge, comfort, peace, and a feeling of being home.

Thank you to my participants and co-creators of this work: Colleen Echohawk, Kate McAlister, Shannon McGuire, Joelle Bogenholm, and Ilana Rubel. May our collaborative work contained within these pages make all our ancestors proud. Thank you to my editors: Meredith Brooks, Josh Misner, Hugo Munday, Aracelita Nelson, Connie Nelson, Jan Nelson, Jorge Nelson, Laurie Nelson, Mari Nelson, Reid Nelson, Indie Audra



Bois-O'Sidhe, Shelby Rognstad, Ville Söderbaum, and Peg Weddell. This work is a collective achievement.

My lived experience has instilled in me deep gratitude and compassion for women in poverty, single mothers, and victims of domestic violence. My prayer is that this research will benefit women who are struggling by unearthing new ways to better serve them. I am the first woman in my ancestral lineage to earn a doctorate degree. The letters behind my name invoke a call to shatter the glass ceiling of higher education for all women, everywhere. This dissertation is an artifact of that shattering. You, the reader, are witness to its magic and participant in its ripple effect.

## PROLOGUE

This dissertation is an offering of love woven from paradox, grit, injury, resilience, reflection, grace, gratitude, and a beginner's mind. I continue to search for artifacts from my ancestral history to understand how my lived experience influences my fractured sense of identity and accounts for my lost sense of belonging. In some cases, ancestral stories, cultural traditions, ceremonies, and sacred knowledge have been omitted to preserve and protect those who carry them and to honor traditional ways of being, specifically who can share what knowledge and with whom.

Much of my academic journey required an ongoing and tireless translation from my lived experience of pluralism and paradox to the academic world of written formalisms and absolutes. Some of the meaning may have been lost in translation as the written word doesn't replace oral traditions, dreams, meditations, ceremonies, and embodied experience. As such, I have done my best to use language and terms that most closely describe what I'm trying to communicate, all the while respecting that not all ancestral knowledge is to be shared publicly.

The intent of this work is to re-story the bloodlines and rivers of ancestral knowledge, cultural identity, and resiliency while navigating within the same oppressive systems that erased them in the first place. We exist on a living, breathing planet that changes constantly as it circles around the sun. As such, this work represents my understanding of truth today, knowing that tomorrow brings change.

## ABSTRACT

Cultural oppression results in adverse identity outcomes, including internalized oppression, cultural erasure, and identity dysfunction. Yet, scholars still have opportunities to articulate recovery outcomes, such as revitalization, reconstruction, and reinvention, as well as generally positive adaptive outcomes like resilience, consciousness, and well-being. Humans overcome oppression by weaving their experience of resilience through communicative processes. Understanding how people talk about their identity experiences is helpful, specifically in identifying sustainable and practical opportunities for interventions that foster resilience. Women are central to strategies intended to grow individual, family, and community resilience. Studies show that increased diversity, including gender, leads to greater innovation, creativity, and organizational performance (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). However, at the current rate of change, women will not achieve gender pay parity until 2059 (Lacarte & Hayes, 2019). Even with support, women seeking a seat at the leadership table often operate in unjust and inequitable systems not designed for them, necessitating the development of increased resilience to become leaders within spaces previously not occupied by women. This research explores how women leaders with intersecting identities talk about resilience, with the aim of contributing significant new knowledge to the growing research on women's leadership, identity, resilience, and social entrepreneurship studies.

*Keywords:* Resilience, Identity, Belonging, Social Entrepreneurship, Women Leaders, Intersectionality

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

*Clumsy at first, from generations of sitting on the sidelines, we stumble until we find the rhythm. We know these steps from deep memory, handed down from Skywoman, reclaiming our responsibility as co-creators. Here in a homemade forest, poets, writers, scientists, foresters, shovels, seeds, elk, and alder join in the circle with Mother Cedar, dancing the old-growth children into being. We're all invited. Pick up a shovel and join the dance.*

— Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass* (2013)

Buorre beaivi (Good day). Mu namma lea Katherine Greenland (My name is Katherine Greenland). Mun lean amerihkalaš sámi nisu (I am a Sámi American woman). Dál orun Amerihkas (I live in the United States). Mu váibmu lea mu ruoktu (My heart is my home). Dat čuovvu mu gokko váccán (It follows me wherever I go). By greeting you in the north Sámi language, I am participating in the language revitalization and cultural recognition of my ancestors. According to my elders, I am a descendant of white<sup>1</sup>, Indigenous<sup>2</sup> Sámi<sup>3</sup>, diaspora<sup>4</sup> immigrants. My identity is connected to my family's

---

<sup>1</sup> I choose consciously to not capitalize racialized whiteness to bring awareness to its social construction and discredit the dominant normative paradigm of my white identity, just as bell hooks (1989, 2000, 2013, 2014) does not capitalize her name to focus attention on her message rather than on herself.

<sup>2</sup> Following Johnson's (2007) precedent, I consciously capitalize Indigenous and Native to recognize the developing international identity of these words and to focus on their self-determination efforts toward sovereignty.

<sup>3</sup> Sámi are Indigenous to northern Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia and have been stewards of those lands since time immemorial.

<sup>4</sup> Diaspora refers to people who have been dispersed from their original homeland. As a descendant of the diaspora, I focus on diasporic immigration as fleeing economic hardship, political instability, and religious persecution for the dream of better life chances.

diaspora story of cultural displacement. My sense of belonging is connected to the experiences of my family's search for belonging in a culture where they have often felt like outsiders. I have inherited a resilience that only comes from generations of people who had to be strong in the face of adversity. As such, this research is about identity, belonging, and resilience.

My mother taught me that doing something in a good way starts by offering a gift. I began this doctoral journey with an offering of gratitude to the earth and a prayer to be guided by my ancestors, known and unknown, to complete my doctorate in a good way. The notion of reciprocity was explained to me as a child in simple terms: what you offer to the universe is what you will receive in return. My mother taught me how to make offerings to the land as a young girl, saying prayers of gratitude for the seven directions, and leaving food for the plants and animals. I learned early that I am connected to my family, ancestors, and all life through the land, water, and stars.

I was taught these principles through drum making, singing songs in four-part harmony, and other musical traditions. There's an interesting musical history as you travel through our family timeline, starting with our ancestors with their drum ceremonies and chants, fast forwarding to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with relatives who were professional pianists, composers, and violinists, and finally jumping to contemporary times where we were immersed in Broadway musicals, community theatre, church choir, and family bands. In my family, doing something in a good way means offering a gift of song to share gratitude, respect, and reverence. When an elder family member begins to sing, everyone quiets down and pays attention.

My grandmother imparted most of her wisdom and reverence to me through songs she sang to me repeatedly, which I now sing to my daughter, such as “From Whom All Blessings Flow,” “For Health and Strength,” and “Start All Over Again.” Some of my favorite childhood memories were family gatherings, where my grandmother would inevitably call us all together to sing. When we sing together as a family, it is always loud and full of feeling, where the emotion and passion behind the singing are somehow more important than the words. The music itself seems to carry a secret message separate from the words that is felt in the quiet corners of the body.

For example, when we sing, “Jesus Loves Me,” the feeling reaches far beyond concepts of Jesus, Christianity, or even religion. Our songs are acts of reverence, as if the meaning behind what we sing transcends the limits of what words can convey. My grandfather was a choir director for his entire career. I grew up in his choir room, watching him direct his singers with a passionate presence as if orchestrating a multi-colored sunset. My grandmother was a career music teacher, and I grew up singing with her all the time. Music was how they communicated life’s most important truths. My mother is a lifelong musician, and my aunts and uncles are all musicians as well. I play several instruments, as do my children. The last thing we do together at night is sing.

Although we occasionally went to church as a family, it was not for religion, but rather, the music. That is, attending church appeased any social pressure to acculturate to a Christian God, but it was through our ancient connection to music that we really felt our Creator. There’s something special about that connectedness you experience with the others who are singing, many of whom are complete strangers, and many of whom may even have conflicting philosophies and values to your own. For a moment you let go of

any aversions you may have to “the unknown”, or to “people who are different than me”. Perhaps you even let go of one’s own fears (e.g., “I’m not a good singer”). The ego subsides, you join together, and you collectively create something beautiful.

As a little girl, I remember sitting in my infant car seat in the choir room at the local community college where my grandfather worked, watching him gracefully direct the choir. He was like a holy ceremonialist, moving his arms like a dancer before the entire group responded, listening to each other, and blending their voices in perfect *a capella* harmonies, timing, and nuance. Many of the songs were in languages I did not know, but I knew what the music communicated by the feelings they evoked. This, the feeling and experience of God through music, was the truest gift my grandfather and grandmother provided.

In college, I joined a gospel choir at a Baptist church because of the reverence I felt in the singing. Through ceremonies of music during my childhood and young adulthood, I learned how the act of ceremony cultivates fertile ground for sharing stories, values, and important knowledge, as well as connecting with family, friends, and other important people. Music is how I learned about ceremony, and it was ingrained in me with loving care by multiple generations of family.

My family is made of tightly-knit and carefully-tended relationships. When we lost my grandmother in 2021, we suffered the loss of our matriarch and greatest superhero. Now, when I sing the songs grandmother taught me, I am showing respect for her life. Singing my grandmother’s songs maintains my relationship with her by singing her spirit into the space we share together. When I sing my grandmother’s songs to my daughter, she gets to know her great-grandmother through the songs she taught me,

which I now share with her. If my daughter chooses to sing these songs to her children someday, it will fill my heart with pride.

My mother is a traditional drum maker, singer, and composer in her own right. She has taught three generations of our family how to make, care for, and play drums. My daughter is only 10 years old and already understands how to pray, sing, make ceremonies, honor the seasons, and start everything important by offering a gift. Her generosity makes me proud, and it makes her grandmother proud. My daughter communicates her deepest feelings through song, whether singing while playing the drum her grandmother made strictly for her or singing to herself when she thinks no one is listening.

Through our traditions, songs, and ceremonies, the women in our family maintain deep relational connections with each other as a matriarchal support network. We have many unspoken traditions that reinforce our relationships with each other, including practices of reverence through ceremony and song, reciprocity through offering gifts to the land and each other, and relational ways of showing respect for elders, both verbally and nonverbally. This is not something we talk about much; it is simply what we do.

The women in our family are the bosses, organizers, communicators, and the reason that family is possible, meaning that being a woman in our family includes inherently natural leadership. This work seeks to gather the yarns of our family's matriarchal leadership style, which is common to so many Indigenous<sup>5</sup> communities worldwide and weave them together with the contrasting yarns of westernized leadership,

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<sup>5</sup> Indigenous communities are not a monolith. Indigenous people are unique, with their own beliefs, history, and traditions. I refer to "Indigenous communities", not to ignore variation and diversity, but to highlight widespread cultural commonalities that are found amongst Indigenous communities globally.

where women struggle to find a place for themselves. What follows is an exploration of westernized women's leadership.

### **Women Leaders**

Women leaders, often outside of their conscious awareness, develop expectations for not only their performance but also those of other group members based on perceived leadership traits established by white men (Lucas & Baxter, 2012). Group order, which is constructed through social norms, perpetuates the notion that male leaders are more competent than females, regardless of their objective merit or contribution (Berger et al., 1977). Because women fall at a lower status order than men, both historically (Pugh & Wahrman, 1983) and currently (Lorber, 2001, Hyland et al., 2020), they must work harder to prove their competency as effective leaders while working within the same organizations.

For example, in 2019, women earned 82 cents for every dollar earned by men (U.S. Census, 2020). As Upright (2017) noted, although much has been done to forward gender justice, a significant income wage gap still exists among genders. This and other gender injustices have held women back from having equal opportunities for full participation in leadership roles historically dominated by men. Furthermore, gender inequality has gotten worse since the COVID-19 pandemic (Carli, 2020). Finding coalescence between a woman leader's identity and the organizational identity she represents may require personal reflexivity and sociocultural understanding.

Exploring organizational identity at the intersection of women-leader identity may help when unpacking gender oppression faced by women in leadership. The term *organizational identity* emerged from Mead's (1934) social identity theory and is applied

to organizations, specifically concerning how reflection and negotiation embed identity in organizational culture (Hatch & Schultz, 2002). The term *woman* is defined as an adult female human (Merriam-Webster, 2021); and for the purposes of this dissertation, includes all humans who self-identify as women and/or all humans who are seen as and treated as women by those around them.

The term *leader* is defined using Stodgill's (1959) argument that leadership is a relationship, and a leader, therefore, is a person with a working relationship among members of a group, makes contributions solicited by the group, acquires status within the group, and fulfills the role of being in relationship with the group through the leadership process. *Identity* is a broad set of ascribed and achieved cultural meanings that individuals attach to themselves (Gecas, 1982). Combining the terms, *leader identity* is a specific and achieved state referring to the parts of one's identity tied to membership in the social category of leaders (Tajfel, 1982).

### **Women & Resilience**

Cultural oppression results in adverse identity outcomes, including internalized oppression, cultural erasure, and identity dysfunction (David, 2013). Yet, there are still opportunities for scholars to articulate recovery outcomes, such as revitalization, reconstruction, and reinvention, as well as generally positive adaptive outcomes like resilience, consciousness, and well-being (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Humans cope with and approach oppression by weaving their experience of resilience through communicative processes (Buzanell, 2010), and with respect to women, specifically, Wakefield and Zimmerman (2020) postulated that "Supporting women change agents involves responding to their desire to stay in the struggle, avoid burn-out, and foster resilience,

both individually and collectively” (p. 159). As women incorporate practices to strengthen resilience, the authors also asserted:

. . . in all sites of change – the personal, household, community, government, and in our economic, social-political and cultural institutions – are urgently needed in this transitioning world. A revitalized system is needed, rooted in relationships and communities, and that recognizes existing individual and collective capacities for resilience, imagining, and living transformed futures in the present moment.  
(p. 170)

As women struggle against unjust and inequitable systems that had been designed by and for men, they require increasing levels of resilience to succeed within leadership spaces not occupied by women previously.

### **Women Social Entrepreneurs**

Women are central to strategies intended to grow individual, family, and community resiliency (Ersing & Caruson, 2017; Tian & Bush, 2020; Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020). Women leaders need resiliency strategies to help them define success for themselves and break through glass ceilings (Gatto & Thome, 2020; Hymowitz & Shellhardt, 1986) on their own terms. This research explores how women leaders with intersecting identities talk about resilience in their work and life as social entrepreneurs. This research aims to contribute significant new knowledge to the growing research on women’s leadership, identity, resilience, and social entrepreneurship studies in the post-COVID era.



## **Research Need**

This research intends to explore the ways in which women nurture belonging and resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities through their stories. A post-colonial perspective (Ashcroft et al., 2013) provides one of two theoretical underpinnings for this research to embrace and examine the nature and impact of inherited colonial power relations. Postmodern feminism provides the second theoretical perspective (Crotty, 1998), with its critical, anti-essentialist, and fierce commitment to breaking down traditional binaries of self and other. Ontologically, this study leans toward an embrace of the process (Hernes, 2014), which is woven throughout the research journey, as taking a process view reveals the complexity of relationships between intersectional identity, belonging, and resilience, especially considering the personal nature of participants' stories.

Findings from this research could empower women leaders who aspire to: 1) integrate deeper layers of work-life balance; 2) prioritize collaboration over competition; 3) decolonize power imbalances; 4) nurture brave space for courageous conversations; and 5) cultivate and sustain resilience for themselves, as well as their families and communities. This research contributes new knowledge of communication strategies necessary to nurture women's identity and resiliency. More importantly, this line of research could provide restorative pathways for historically marginalized people, including women of color and impoverished women to develop resilience as they continue to rise to leadership positions around the world.

## **Significance**

This research is important to the growing need for effective leadership solutions during times of crisis. As organizations, communities, and individuals experience increasing pressures from environmental, public health, sociocultural and economic challenges, this research responds to the need for dynamic, interconnected solutions offering adaptive responsiveness and maximizing resilience capacity for a world in transition. Furthermore, this research contributes insight to both the study of women's leadership in a post-COVID era, as well as resilience by providing case analysis and emergent, real-time themes as experienced during the global COVID-19 health crisis.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Adaptation:** A successful turning point allowing individuals, a community, or an organization to thrive in a new or challenging environment. The adaptive process is both conservative and progressive by enabling a living system to take the best from its traditions, identity, and history in the future (Heifetz, et al., 2009).

**Axiology:** Moral ethics guiding the search for knowledge and discernment of information's worth (Wilson, 2008). Axiology is a term that acknowledges the value-bound and value-laden construct of social inquiry. A research study will be influenced by the researcher's values, methodology, and methods (Chilisa, 2012), necessitating acknowledgement of initial values and biases.

**Epistemology:** The study of the nature of thinking or knowing (Wilson, 2008). Also known as research methodology, an epistemology is the series of subjective truths underlying the human experience (Chilisa, 2012). Community stories, belief systems, and

claims of spiritual and earth connections are legitimate sources of epistemological knowledge.

**Intersectionality:** A heuristic term focusing on dynamics of difference in the process of identity development, perfection, resistance, and regulation, including race, gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and religion. Intersectionality involves recognizing that all aspects of a person's identity compound and complicate the marginalization they face (Crenshaw, 1989).

**Relational ontology:** The theory of the nature of existence or reality (Wilson, 2008). Relational ontology addresses the nature of being and how worldviews related to being are implicated in the social construction of realities (Chilisa, 2012).

**Resilience:** The capacity of individuals, communities, and organizations and their holding environments to contain disequilibrium over time (Arendt, 2013; Azmat et al., 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009), which is colloquially termed a person or community's ability to bounce back after encountering a setback or challenge (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Sharrieb et al., 2010).

**Social bricolage:** The process of combining and applying diverse resources to new problems and opportunities. Social bricolage creates something from nothing using resources in the found environment to fulfill a creative process that develops something of value (Baker & Nelson, 2005).

**Social Entrepreneurship:** The profitable action of finding better ways to create and sustain social value by doing business for good (Anderson & Dees, 2002; Hamby et al., 2010). Social entrepreneurship is exercised when a person or group addresses critical social needs through recognition and catalyzation of opportunities to do so through a

process of bold action and innovation (Dees, 1998; Mair & Marti, 2006; Peredo & McLean, 2006). The term, entrepreneur, is derived from the French *entreprendre* and the German word *unternehmen*, both meaning to undertake or get involved.

**Thrive:** To live up to an individual, community, or organization's highest values. Thriving requires adaptive responses that distinguish what is essential from what is expendable and innovative so that the social system can bring the best of its past into the future (Heifetz, et al., 2009).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to gather stories from women social entrepreneurs as they talk about their complex identities and how their approaches to social entrepreneurship nurture belonging and resilience. Specifically, my interest in this research is to provide a foundation and framework to further support resilience building among intersectional women within social entrepreneurship spaces.

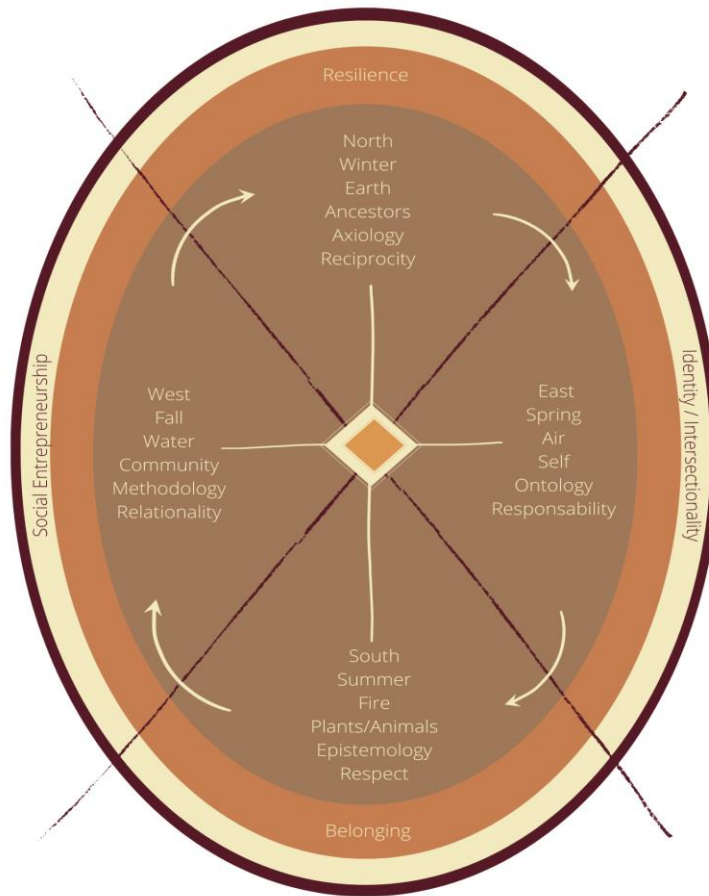
Another purpose of this dissertation is to help me further align my lived experience and research praxis with aspects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies. With this intent, I am retrieving parts of my history to “recognize how certain lived experiences contributed to my fragmented sense of identity and shaped my lost sense of belonging” (Martin & William, 2019, p. 57). My research involves the story work inherent in narrative inquiry methods (Smith, 2019) while privileging a process-relational worldview (Chilisa, 2012) and Indigenous ethics (Smith, 2012) to conduct research that stays true to my positionality and the communities of practice in which I am embedded.

## **Guiding Questions**

1. What are women social entrepreneurs' stories about their complex intersectional identities?
2. What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around belonging and how their business creates a space of opportunity for belonging?
3. How do women social entrepreneurs' narratives culturally contextualize doing business for good and what are the social change causes important to them now?
4. What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around resilience and how their businesses create a space of opportunity for resilience?

## **Conceptual Framework**

To begin designing my conceptual framework, I engaged in a cultural practice that included asking my ancestors, both known and unknown, for guidance. My conceptual framework accounts for directionality, seasonality and the four elements mapped to their respective research paradigm entities (Wilson, 2018), ethics (Kovach, 2009), methods (Chilisa, 2012), and methodologies (Smith, 2012), all viewed through the theoretical lenses of identity, belonging, resilience and social entrepreneurship (Figure 1). Thus, my conceptual framework is designed intentionally to capture multidisciplinary phenomena linked to different (physical and academic) bodies of knowledge (Jabareen 2009). Because the research questions draw from and are relevant to my lived experience, the conceptual framework is an amalgamation of lenses through which I see the world.



*Figure 1: Conceptual Framework*

My conceptual framework is designed as both a drum<sup>6</sup> and a cartographic wayfinding tool (Keski-Säntti et al., 2003). The sun deity at the center, *Beaivi*, is integral to Sámi culture, as Sápmi territory is known as land of the midnight sun (Gaski, 1996). South Sámi drums often feature *Beaivi* at the center, orienting the framework in time, via the four seasons, and in space, via the four cardinal directions just like a compass (Gaski,

<sup>6</sup> I created this drum as a conceptual framework unique to my research, disrupting the western academic model of co-opting published images of drums already represented in peer-reviewed sources. As Keski-Säntti et al. (2003) noted, Sámi drums are specific to the maker and only represent that person's experience. In this case, using an image of a drum that I did not make with my own hands would be cultural appropriation and spiritually harmful.

1993). The sun is symbolically centralized because it orients to the ethereal sky above, while the animal hide stretched over the wooden frame orients to the materiality of earth below. The importance of the sun as central to life has both historic and modern relevance. Even now as I write this, the sun warms my skin and kindles my inner light.

Thus, the conceptual framework drum provides a three-dimensional wayfinding apparatus, allowing exploration through space and time. Due to cultural erasure practices like boarding schools, language illegalization, and drum confiscation, Sámi are now wanting their stories to be heard. This conceptual framework intends to give voice to and amplify this knowledge by citing Sámi scholars to ground its creation in a historical context. It also follows the assertion from Keski-Säntti et al. (2003) whereby each drum is personalized to the maker and specific to the to the knowledge, skills, and purpose with which the maker walks.

To use this conceptual framework, research begins in the east and continues clockwise toward the south, and west, and ends in the north<sup>7</sup> (Joy, 2015). The season of spring is associated with the direction of the east because it marks new beginnings. Summer sits in the south, the direction of the hottest season of the year. Fall is in the west, a time of harvest and gathering. Winter is in the north, the direction of the long, dark night and signaling a collective turning inward. The element of air belongs to the east, as the first breath of new life while springtime winds clear out stagnancy, making room for new growth. Fire is kept in the south, which fuels the summer season. Water

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<sup>7</sup> While Joy (2015) asserted the role and function of the Sámi drum is for its maker/shaman, or *noaidi*, to use in acting as an intermediary between the human world and natural world, this conceptual framework is used to facilitate an intermediary between western colonialism and Indigenous or otherwise marginalized voices that do not receive adequate and/or accurate representation in the literature.

belongs to the west, as it brings the return of the rains. Earth sits in the north, as plant, animal, and human energies move from limbs to trunks and downward into the roots to be conserved for the winter. These are only a few of the connections between the four directions, the elements, and the seasons.

Moving outward from the center of the conceptual framework, we find four ways of orienting toward life. East carries an orientation toward self as new beginnings often start with introspection and sprout self-expression. South carries an orientation toward the Earth, her plants, and her animals because she is our original source of belonging. West carries an orientation toward community as this is where we gather with loved ones to share the fall harvest together. North is oriented toward our ancestors, the direction of the cosmologies, and our ancestral stars.

Weaving together an ethical research paradigm, we begin to see how research can be a ceremony specifically for the purposes of this dissertation. East holds an ontology of responsibility: a way of being that embodies life as a gift and responsibility. South holds an epistemology of respect: a way of knowing that privileges interconnectivity and is understood through mindful and reverent attention. West holds a methodology of relationality: a worldview that centers all our relations, including plants, animals, people, rocks, water, wind, and all life such that we can sense the impact of our collective actions on both past and future generations. North holds the axiology of reciprocity: a practice of values that begin with an offering of gratitude and continue by engaging ongoing reciprocal synergies outward. By applying an ontology of responsibility, an epistemology of respect, a methodology of relationality, and axiology of reciprocity, I begin to ceremonialize the concepts of identity, belonging, resilience, and social entrepreneurship.



Moving toward the outer rings of the conceptual framework, four research concepts of identity, belonging, resilience, and social entrepreneurship come into view. Belonging is placed in the south as the direction of our original belonging to the planet, plants, and animals. Resilience is placed in the north as a source of deep connection to our ancestors as we remember them through our stories and story work. In the outermost ring, identity and intersectionality are placed in the east as a lens through which we view ourselves and relate to our environment. Social entrepreneurship is placed in the west, as a practice that weaves together economic, social, cultural, and environmental threads of reciprocity in community. By placing these research concepts within the four directions of the conceptual framework, my ceremony comes into full view.

This conceptual framework has become the altar for my dissertation research. Relationships between pieces of the altar give birth to my research questions. Identity is felt and experienced through the lens of ontological responsibility before being investigated through the research question: What are the stories of women who navigate complex intersectional identities? The intended outcome of inquiry in the east is to provide a foundation for intersectional women to deepen the coherence between their many identities.

Belonging is felt and experienced through the lens of epistemological respect while being explored through the research question: How are women's narratives around social entrepreneurship nurturing belonging for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities? The intended outcome of inquiry in the south is to nurture a sense of belonging for women by creating a brave space for courageous conversations to occur where individuals take responsibility for being understood.

Social entrepreneurship is seen through the lens of methodological relationality, and is examined through the research question: How do women social entrepreneurs' narratives culturally contextualize doing business for good and what are the social change causes important to them now? The intended outcome of inquiry in the west is to find ways to support women social entrepreneurs in prioritizing collaboration over competition with the goal of advancing social justice and equity, together.

Resilience is seen through the lens of axiological reciprocity, and is researched using the research question: What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around resilience and how their businesses create a space of opportunity for resilience? The intended outcome of inquiry in the north is to contribute new knowledge toward communication strategies and restorative pathways for women as they continue to rise in leadership positions. These interconnections carry the drum beat for my ceremony in this dissertation.

I designed my conceptual framework with inspiration from the South Sámi Drum. Being in the presence of these drums affirms and influences who I have become and who I am becoming through this work. Figure 2 is a South Sámi drum from Ernst Manker's (1938) *Die lappische Zaubertrommel: eine ethnologische Monographie*, likely originally owned by Anund Nillson Taubma of Åsele (Åsa Viridi Kroik, 2007), with Beivi (sun) in the center.



*Figure 2: South Sámi drum from from Åsele Lappmark.*



*Figure 3: South Sámi drum gifted to me*



*Figure 4: South Sámi style drum I made with my mother.*

Figures 3 and 4 are images of South Sámi drums that I carry. The drum in Figure 3 was gifted to me by my Sámi / Anishinaabe and Metis-Anishinaabe friend, Indie O'Sidhe. This drum includes Beivi in the center and symbols depicting Sámi culture and life including reindeer herding and traditional ear marking practices. Figure 4 displays a drum I made with my mother. It is the first drum I ever made, and I have been taught to give it away as an offering of reciprocity and respect. Traditional Sámi drums are typically crafted from reindeer hide on pine frames. The drum I made with my mother acknowledges the Coastal Salish land I grew up on, using Nootka Alaskan Yellow Cedar taken with gratitude from a downed tree on an abandoned logging site in British Columbia. The buffalo hide was salvaged from a U.S. ranching operation. The way these materials are harvested — prayerfully and with respect to the land and the spirit of the animal — provides resilience for the entirety of the conceptual framework and toward the

future. With the conceptual framework as the ceremonial alter, my research ceremony is conducted through the research methodology.

### **Overview of Research Methodology**

Indigenous research is interdisciplinary by nature and has been referred to as an umbrella term that includes research possibilities in the fields of education, law, sociology, social work, health, and environmental studies (Kovach, 2017). While Indigenous research can be quantitative or qualitative, within qualitative research, “Indigenous research can include community-based, ethnographic, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies” (Kovach, 2017, p. 215).

Indigenous methodologies reflect a collective We rather than an individual I (Denzin, 2008). Humans experience and demonstrate respect, relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity in social environments. However, Indigenous peoples exist within a colonial structure that not only adheres to a distinctive definition of what it means to be human, but to unique social and moral codes based upon that definition. From an Indigenous perspective, westerners are also a conglomeration of the We (Cordova, 2004). In this way, the researcher’s methodology can also be a political act. Indigenous methodologies require tribal relationships and the epistemologies that come with them. According to Kovach (2017), the four tenets of Indigenous epistemology presume that knowledge:

- Is holistic and implies empirical, experiential, sensory, and metaphysical possibilities.
- Arises from interconnectivity and interdependence.

- Is animate and fluid.
- Arises from a multiplicity of sources, including non-human sources.

Indigenous people are often recognized as holding epistemological insights into how human beings can live sustainably and resiliently (Whyte, 2017). Since Indigenous epistemologies are specific to Indigenous cultural frameworks, they are also specific to those who have relationships within Indigenous communities. As I continue to deepen my relationships within the Sámi communities in Sápmi, as well as Indigenous tribes here on Turtle Island (colonized as United States), being in relationship informs my epistemology and influences who I am becoming.

### **The Metaphor of Bricks & Threads**

Jimmy et al. (2019) offered a social cartography using the metaphor of construction bricks as settler-colonial transcendence sensibilities and knitting threads as Indigenous immanence sensibilities. Whereas brick sensibilities emphasize individuality, goal-oriented, and accumulation-focused, thread sensibilities emphasize interwovenness, relationships, and intro-inter-spection (Jimmy et al., 2019). Therefore, those from the thread space who want to be heard in those institutions need to learn to translate their message into a mode of communication that is legible to the dominant brick sensibility. This is not only deeply frustrating but often ineffective, pushing an orientation toward non-generative manifestation. (Jimmy et al., 2019, p. 16)

Bricks and threads can be navigated through a process of braiding, which is envisioned as a practice that situates the space at the edges of bricks and threads with the aim to orient each toward generativity without erasing their differences, uncertainties, and contradictions (Jimmy et al., 2019). Braiding is “not an endpoint, but rather an

ongoing and emergent process. It is not possible to determine what braiding will look like before it occurs” (p. 22). To prepare the space, braiders must digest the implications of historical and systemic harm, recognize generative and non-generative manifestations of bricks and threads, and invest in principled action-oriented commitments for the long haul.

My positionality embraces the metaphor of bricks and threads to create a container for interconnective braiding. Threads within our family include the weavers listed in our genealogical primary source documents, as our family ancestry is full of weavers, knitters, and spinners of the thread. This, along with music, is our pathway to our heritage. Just as I watched my grandmother spin wool into yarn and then use the yarn to crochet, braid and knit handcrafts for her family, I also invoke the heritage of craft by examining the brick and thread sensibilities within myself, adding immanence to the process and coherence of braiding as a practice.

Braiding is a healing practice as paradoxes within my identity are woven together, while maintaining integrity of the individual pieces, to create a unique whole. Put into practical application, I consciously turn away from claiming an Indigenous methodology as I did not grow up on a reservation, I am not claimed by a tribe, and I remain acutely aware of how I am different from those who did grow up on reservations and are claimed by tribes. Embracing a tapestry of paradox, my focus remains on deepening relationships within Indigenous communities I am embedded, honoring the diaspora story and heritage of craft that my ancestors brought with them as immigrants, and staying curious about Indigenous knowledge that continues to resonate with me.

Further unfolding my specific methodology, I walk with a relational ontology that was taught to me by the women in my family. Relational ontologies include: 1) prioritizing doing things in a good way, 2) ceremony that invokes respect and gratitude, 3) cultivating and sustaining high-context relationships, 4) walking with an internalized sense of responsibility to elders, plants, animals, and future generations, 5) offering creative, communicative, and political activism that “gives back” through a social and environmental justice lens. Relational ontologies and accountability are often connected, and found among Indigenous research methodologies (Davidson, 2019; Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous research methods differ from methodologies in that they can be used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to decolonize research. Shawn Wilson (2008) suggested that research is ceremony:

The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between our cosmos and us. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world. Through going forward together with open minds and good hearts we have uncovered the nature of this ceremony. (p. 137)

Thus, research done in a good way is ceremonial in its demonstration of respect, responsibility, relationality, and reciprocity. These four tenets become a form of ceremony in and of themselves. Next, a process ontology is applied to Indigenous ethics of philosophy to explore what it means to conduct research “in a good way.”

### **Ontological Grounding**

Ontological assumptions of reality are socially constructed entities that vary from culture to culture, individual to individual. The ethical implications of using Indigenous



ethical principles and methods in academic research require a process ontology that values the journey over the goal. Process ontology looks at subjectivity as a complex and open-ended set of relations” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 1), by prioritizing the means over the ends. Additionally, process ontology centers on relationships as a natural disruptor of settler colonialism. Therefore, combining process ontology with Indigenous ethical principles in research is a mindful act of decolonization of the research process itself.

By privileging the voices of Indigenous philosophers, we begin to see how original thinkers highlighted interconnectivity and co-creation between all life, including women, plants, and animals. According to Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2019), implications are ethical in nature as well:

Through intellectual and spiritual journeys into story practices we are drawn deeper into the Indigenous way of being. Our bodies soak up, heal, and transform through the emotional resonance of the knowledge journey in Indigenous storywork. Through interrelational dimensions of storywork we transcend time and space, connecting on deeper levels of understanding with each other, with all living beings, with the earth and the multiverse. (p. 12)

I resonate deeply with Archibald’s assertion here, as I lose all sense of time and space when I enter the moment of story sharing or story receiving. The entanglement of colonization is disrupted by the dimensions of storywork, through its interconnective and interrelational paradigms.

This research is also grounded in the ontology of resilience. “Investigations into the language of resilience locally, nationally, and globally would inform discussion about rebuilding, cultivation, difference and exclusion, and particularities of both every day and

extraordinary disruptions and adaptation” (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018, p. 26). The ontology of resilience focuses on how resilience is being constructed, communicated, and infused with meaning by individuals, families, and organizations. Understanding how different people talk about resilience is useful specifically in identifying sustainable and effective opportunities for interventions that foster resilience (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018). In braiding together a process ontology with an ontology of resilience, we are ready to explore the process by hearing women’s stories of resilience.

### **Indigenous Feminist Ethics**

Indigenous Feminist ethics is inclusive of those aspects of life that western ethics leaves behind, namely women, children, elderly people, animal people, plant people, and rock people. Bagele Chilisa (2012) argued that to be a reflective activist, “a postcolonial indigenous feminist researcher must listen with compassion and love to women and make visible the healing method that women employ when they communicate their life experience” (p. 309).

This study began in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. I personally lost a close friend to COVID, while my mother struggled with long COVID symptoms, both my husband and I as well as many of my siblings tested positive for COVID. “Those who cope successfully and function above the norm in spite of adversity have valuable knowledge to share” (Tusaie & Dyer, 2004, p. 4). This research applies a resilience lens as a way of highlighting the complex and adaptive nature of our rapidly changing times and how that impacts our identities and ways of belonging.

My research aims to turn inside out the historical Indigenous research paradigm where Indigenous people are gazed upon by researchers. My inside-out approach aims to

embrace an inward Indigenous perspective and then gaze outward into the western world of women and businesses, responding to it from that place. What results then, is an abductive data analysis process that calls out colonizing forces as experienced in the everyday lives of women with marginalized intersectional identities who engage in business for good.

### **Overview of Research Methods**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that studies the way humans experience the world and the qualities of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, Moen, 2006, Spector-Mersel, 2011). Narrative inquiry is viewed with a relational ontology because humans are constantly in a process of creating narratives in their lives (Caine et al., 2013, Spector-Mersel, 2011). While situated within the field of qualitative research, narrative inquiry cuts across all social sciences and has been used in literary theory, education, history, sociology, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, art, film, and leadership studies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Thus, narrative can be used to explore a variety of research questions.

Narrative can focus on complex ways that individuals or groups experience the world (Fisher et al., 2018). These lived experiences may be, “read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 2). Narratives can also be ways that people live their lives and share stories about their lived experiences to build a “strengths-based identity” (D’Cruz et al., 2019. p. 94). For this reason, narratives are often used to conduct research around identity (Allaire, 2018, Moen, 2006).

The population for this study included five women who self-identify as social entrepreneurs. Participants held diverse intersectional identities along race, ethnicity, orientation, age, ability, and religious practice. In accordance with Indigenous ways of doing research in “a good way,” participants were invited based on their pre-existing relationship with me. All participants are in the Pacific and Inland Northwest of the United States and have been in relationship with me for at least two years.

The intention of this research is to reveal new ways for women to nurture belonging and resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. The theoretical underpinning of this research embraces an Indigenous feminist perspective (Crotty, 1998) in its critical, anti-essentialist, and fierce commitment to breaking down traditional binaries of self/other. An ontological lean toward and embrace of the process (Hernes, 2014) is woven throughout the research journey. Taking a process view reveals the complexity of relationships between intersectional identity, belonging, and resilience.

### **Positionality Statement**

What follows is my positionality statement, also known as a reflexivity statement, which offers a review of literature on postcolonial Indigenous feminist research methodologies woven together with my personal identity work through the Indigenous research method of storytelling. Chilisa (2012), Kovach (2009), Smith (2012), Smith et al., (2019), and Wilson (2008) articulate critical synergistic perspectives while framing postcolonial Indigenous feminist theory and research methodologies emerging from New Zealand, Botswana, Canada, Australia, and the United States. These theories are used to inform my positionality statement. Reflexivity is used as a conversation starter between

the authors to reveal ontologies, axiologies, and epistemologies in visioning and practicing research.

The purpose of this reflexivity statement is to position myself in terms of my own personal identity using an Indigenous research lens while highlighting feminist perspectives, theories, and practices that indigenous research methodologies embody. Furthermore, my positionality statement includes a literature review of six peer-reviewed research texts written about indigenous research methodologies grounded in identity, decolonization, ceremony, storywork, and education. This positionality statement examines the context and nuance of personal identity in, around, and throughout the process of conducting research enveloped in an Indigenous framework.

### **Importance of Reflexivity**

Reflexivity allows me to see my research interests through the lens of my biases, assumptions, and blind spots. Through this process, I may be able to identify where I am perpetuating my confirmation biases or enabling systemic oppression. Telling my own professional biography and how I came to be the researcher that I am today is a powerful opportunity to help me identify ways in which I can use my social capital and professional privilege to support those who are more marginalized or disadvantaged. Acknowledging the lenses through which I approach my research is critical to self-awareness and ethical research.

In a postcolonial feminist paradigm, ethnic identity is more than colonial notions of blood quantum and registered tribal membership (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2019; Wilson, 2008). Understanding identity in terms of ethnicity and citizenship requires a situated knowledge of family history tied to place. From a Sámi perspective, Storfjell (2003)

asserts that in addition to examining our positionality, we must also, “take productive measure to ensure that the space we map for ourselves is in fact the space from which we wish to speak on Sámi space” (p. 160). What follows is a reflexivity statement, divided into three core areas of focus including locating the self in terms of identity, cultural grounding as a connection to community, and decolonizing perspectives.

### **Ethnicity & Citizenship**

I am Katherine Marguerite Greenland, daughter of Laurie Nelson and George Greenland II, granddaughter of Dorie Thorpe, Eugene Nelson, Betty Beckman, and George Greenland Sr. My mother’s side of the family came from Norway and Sweden, settling in Wisconsin and Nebraska. My father’s side came from Norway and Germany, settling in Iowa and North Dakota. We carry a few stories and artifacts from Norway and Sweden. Some of which indicate our connection to Sámi ancestry.

One story, I will share here, because it informs my ethnic identity. My maternal great-grandmother, Helmine Christianson, emigrated from Norway to the United States in 1906, at the tender age of ten. Her mother Kristine had a shop in Norway that went under because she didn’t have the heart to collect debts from families who couldn’t afford to pay for food. Her father Peder was a fisherman. Helmine’s family was very poor when they left Norway in hopes of better opportunity. As they disembarked the Norwegian ship “Hellig Olav”, after weeks in steerage during their Atlantic crossing, went through customs at Ellis Island. Constance Strom, Helmine’s cousin, who was with them, had a 6-month-old. The baby died, most likely from the result of that crossing.

No one in the family spoke English. When they arrived to the United States at Ellis Island, the family was afraid to ask any questions for fear that they might be sent

back to Norway. When Helmine needed to use the bathroom, her mother told her to stay quiet so as not to draw attention to herself. And so, the young girl was forced to urinate in her pants. In the immigration documents, next to her name is a note stating that she had symptoms of “melancholia”. This was a response of deep sadness and the loss of leaving friends, family, and home behind in hopes for a new start.

Despite her parents’ lifelong tie to Norway, Helmine and her family moved away from their motherland during the peak of the forced assimilation, when industrialized schools forced Sámi children to become Norwegianized by criminalizing the Sámi language and culture (Aikio, 1999; Pietikäinen, 2003). My grandmother Dorie was a first-generation American and carried ethnic ways of being taught to her by her immigrant parents. We are in the process of searching for our Sámi relatives from the Indigenous territory of Norway but very little documentation exists. This territory is known as Sápmi. Sápmi is a vast expanse of mountains, rivers, and tundra running along the northern coastlines of what is now Norway, Sweden, and Finland, and stretching into the Kola Peninsula of Russia. I continue to search for living relatives in Sápmi and feel called to return to the land my ancestors left. I am looking forward to making a pilgrimage to Sápmi later this year.

Recently it was confirmed through DNA testing that Helmine was likely Sámi. As DNA testing is not the best way to define ethnicity, however, we continue to prioritize finding ancestors and relatives, and developing kinships with them. My daughter Rosie is the tenth generation from our earliest known ancestors. As Rosie approaches adolescence I can feel a circle of closure forming, where our ancestors are reaching forward to connect with my mother, my daughter, and myself. I feel called to enter a ceremony that

allows us to reinhabit the original lands and spaces where our ancestors still live. My mother and daughter feel the call too, in their own ways.

My father is Norwegian and German, and I do not have many stories of his side because my father and mother divorced before I turned one year old. I spent some weekends and holidays with my father's family. His mother took care of me on occasion as a child and she taught me the value of growing food, putting up the harvest in jars, and bringing the family together over homemade meals and warm conversation. But it was different with my father's family. We did not sing or spend much time together outdoors as we do in my Sámi American family. Music, nature, and art were rarely discussed. It felt as though I lived a completely different life with my mother than I did with my father. Consequently, much of my life has involved a search for my own identity and sense of belonging as well as a deeper connection to my Sámi culture and heritage.

### **Gender Identity**

Postcolonial indigenous feminist research methodologies refer to “the process of critique, decolonization, and indigenization of Euro-Western methodologies and the theorizing of methodologies that are informed by the theoretical perspectives and the worldviews of third world feminisms” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 295). Central to these feminisms is the construct of gender, specifically, that gender is viewed differently in different cultures and is used to oppress people in different ways (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). As a cis-gendered woman, I am privileged to have a body that affirms the way that I feel inside.

That said, I am still being oppressed by the power dynamics of institutionalized sexism. Various feminisms are distinguished according to their own aims of ending



patriarchy that problematize gender inequality (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009). Cartesian dualism is a western paradigm that I have always intuitively been suspicious of because it only offers two ways of being for 10 billion people. I resonate more with Chilisa and Kovach's accounting of Indigenous gender statuses and roles, which tend to be more fluid and sacred because it innately feels good, right, and even commonsensical to me. As such, my research passion and professional work as a strategic communications consultant often mean that I am helping leaders take responsibility for being understood considering their diverse identities and roles.

### **Racialized Identity**

As a person with light skin, I am privileged based on my skin color alone. I try to unpack my understanding of my whiteness as an ongoing process rather than a destination. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) and Bagele Chilisa (2012) recognized what Kimberle Crenshaw coined as "intersectionality" in 1989 with the assertion that race impacts privilege and power in ways that cannot be disentangled from other subject positions. However, a postcolonial indigenous feminist research paradigm is situated in an intersectional context that predates Crenshaw so the idea that we are more than the sum of our parts is inherently indigenous and feminist (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012).

My awareness of race started in elementary school. I had many friends who were not white and lived a childhood of relative colorblindness. Some scholars argue that women in non-western societies have been marginalized and their voices distorted by colonialism and globalization, as well as by western feminist theory and research (Chilisa, 2012). I first became aware of my whiteness in second grade when other children asked me if I was mixed. Because my skin is olive and can get dark in summer, I

was often asked if I am mixed Latina or Black. Because I spent time every day playing with friends who were Hispanic, Asian, and Black, I noticed that we were treated differently by teachers, parents, and other white friends. It was then that I began paying attention to the ways that skin color is associated with privilege.

When I was 14 years old, we moved to the suburbs and my mother enrolled me in an all-white public school. I remember the cognitive dissonance I experienced when I went to the first day of school and asked, “Where is everyone? I see all the white people. Where is everyone else?” I had no conception of segregation, white flight, redlining, the prison industrial complex, or the criminalization of Black life at the time. But I knew something was not right and it was that first year of high school that I felt most alienated and uncomfortable. That experience propelled me toward a career in sociology and social justice. I still feel like part of my soul cannot breathe when I am in all-white spaces. Even while writing this dissertation at Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, I still find myself asking, just as I did in high school: “Where is everyone?”

### **Socio-Economic Status**

Chilisa (2012) noted that, “postcolonial indigenous feminist research requires researchers to bring into the research framework issues of class, ethnicity, and agency of non-western women and to recognize that the expressions and experience of patriarchy vary from one context to another” (p. 297). I grew up in a working-class family in the cities of Kent and Tacoma, Washington. I am the lovechild of two community college students who eloped before they graduated and then became pregnant with me. My mother carried me in her belly through her 20th year, giving birth to me a few weeks after her 21st birthday.

My father, an alcoholic, began beating my mother when she was pregnant with me. I share this traumatic story because it is relevant to my social class in that domestic violence is a common connection to poverty among women. The story also highlights the socio-economic class I was raised in with a single mother who had to be a parent and breadwinner at a young age. When I was 9 months old, my father shoved my mother to the ground when she was holding me in her arms, and I fell into a pile of broken glass. My mother said it was the sight of blood dripping down my infant head that gave her the courage to leave him. We stayed in a shelter for battered women for a while, and then my grandparents took us into their home. Some of my first memories were time spent with my grandparents, as they would often take care of me while my mother was in school or working multiple jobs.

I was raised on government assistance programs like food stamps, shelters, and WIC (women, infants, and children). My mother was very resourceful, worked many jobs, and always found ways to supplement her modest income. We rented, never owned. We shopped at the grocery store. We ate a lot of beans and rice because it was cheap. On special occasions, we would “go out” for dinner, which meant driving through fast food. Although I grew up in the rainy Pacific Northwest, our clothing was either passed down from relatives, or bought from secondhand stores or whatever was cheapest. I remember being cold in the winters as a child, walking to school on rainy days and arriving soaked with a bone-chilling shiver that would take hours to warm.

In high school money was not as tight, but the reality of poverty was always just around the corner. I got jobs babysitting and cleaning toilets, saving up to buy my first car. My senior year in high school was spent living with a wealthy host family in the

Montecito foothills of Southern California. This experience starkly contrasted my childhood, as my host family had private jets, expensive cars, and large estates. It affirmed that my lived experience is deeply connected to the grit and grind required of those who struggle with economic scarcity.

When I graduated high school, my mother told me she was not able to help me pay for college. “You can be whatever you want to be if you work hard enough. But you are going to have to figure it out yourself,” she said. She had heard the same message from her parents. Much of my resourcefulness and perseverance are a product of having grown up in a lower-middle-class family and learning the value of hard work and persistence from strong female role models like my mother and grandmother.

### **Religious Upbringing**

My family has a history of on-and-off memberships with the Lutheran church. Both grandparents’ connection to church was through music. Grandfather Eugene was the choir director and Grandmother Dorie was the organist in every church they attended over the years. They adopted a sort of nomadic lifestyle while playing music in seven different churches because they had moved so many times. They also had all their children in their choirs from the moment they could sing, including my mother, Laurie.

For me, going to church as a child was centered around spending time with family and singing as a feeling that invokes the experience of the sacred. I remember sitting next to my grandmother during the sermon or listening to my grandfather who was always the loudest singer in the congregation. His valorous voice boomed, on key, far above the choirs and everyone else, as if to invoke the sacred in and of itself. Afterward, the whole family would gather to share a meal. Any potential relationship with Christian doctrine

went unexplored for me; and, paled alongside years of quality family time, singing loudly, and eating good food in close proximity to my elders.

Epistemology seeks to find the center of knowledge and truth (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019). My personal epistemology is tied to my relationship with organized religion, but in a unique way. Religion, doctrine, or Christianity as a lifestyle was never discussed or adhered to in my family. Even as a child, I knew that we went to church because we were supposed to, and not because it was a good way to connect to our Creator. Our family held undiscussed knowledge and truths that made us different from other Lutherans in the church. I knew it as a child.

Singing is part of our ceremony. Singing has always connected us with the sacred, and in church, would always draw attention. My grandparents loved singing in church, and that is what kept them going back. Church gave us the public space and permission to do our singing ceremony. Family has been the center of importance for as long as I can remember, and the church was just another place we went together. Epistemologically, the church was the place we found ourselves, but singing together was our true ceremony and way of connecting to the sacred. It still is to this day. In 2021 when my grandmother Dorie Nelson passed, she'd already had her gravestone engraved with the words, "Music Heals." It was the healing power of music, not religion, that was always impressed upon me. During the process of writing this dissertation, I had the words "music heals" tattooed on my arm, in Dorie's handwriting, as a demonstration of personal significance. This significance has directed the ceremonial nature of my research, as I yearn to better understand the nature of identity, belonging, and resilience for myself.

## **Ability & Disability**

For most of my life, I have been able-bodied. Then in 2016, a car accident left me with a traumatic brain injury. I was not able to drive, read, make decisions, or even parent without help. Navigating disability highlighted my ever-present relational axiology, as my family became my largest support. Axiology is what's in your heart, what you value, and what you hold as common sense (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). I do not remember much of the first four months after the accident. My mother helped with my young children, and she also drove me to and from work. My sister and aunties would also watch the kids. My grandmother visited, always pouring words of encouragement, love, and hope over me to heal me. When I offered words of gratitude, I was told, "That's just what we do," as my mother often reminds me when we talk about the specific means of accountability, respect, and reciprocity that our family practices in times like these. I would not be here today if it were not for them, and that's why I fondly say that family is the glue that holds me together.

Becoming differently-abled changed the course of my life forever because my personality changed significantly because of the injuries I sustained. In relearning basic skills like reading and driving, I developed new compassion for those who live with a disability. I relate to people on the autism spectrum now because of my sensitivity to light, sound, and processing variables. Since the car accident, I have had three subsequent concussions. In the last two, I did not hit my head but was reinjured just from quick movement. This has caused me to have a new awareness of the sensitivity of my situation. I now feel the need to be cautious in everything I do, with the ongoing sense that each day is truly a blessing. I do not take life for granted.

My disability is invisible to most people except those who know me well, even though on the inside it has changed me into a completely different person than who I was before the accident. On the bright side, life eventually became more fun when I had to take myself off the hook to be perfect. I'm not the A-type, hyper individualist I was before the accident. But the new me is much more easygoing, and I like that part of myself better. This dissertation is proof to myself that I can heal, and in that healing, I can help others who walk with invisible injuries of the body, mind, and spirit, to be able to adapt and bounce back from life's challenges.

### **Ceremony as Ontology**

This section is perhaps the hardest and most vulnerable part of my positionality statement. Talking about ceremony brings up feelings of guilt, shame, and vulnerability that likely go back many generations. "Most importantly, the intergenerational process of remembering and telling the stories of long ago is facilitated by cooperative research" (Smith, 2019, p. 20). I do not know if my ceremonies can be articulated as separate from my family's ceremonies. Some of the ceremonies I have participated in are not my stories to share. To honor research and writing ethics, and out of respect for my elders, I will share just a few small examples of what a ceremony looks and feels like to me.

As a teenager, my mother taught us "old ways" of connecting to the land and reverencing natural environments. Whenever my mother drummed, chanted, made herbal medicines, or went out to the forest, my grandmother would not only ask her how it went, but she would join when she was able to. I remember rites of passage to usher my pubescent brothers into the men's circle. There were ceremonies to help relatives during difficult times. While my mother was usually the one in charge, my grandmother loved

our ceremonies and loved being part of them. Wilson (2008) wrote that ceremony is like research in an Indigenous paradigm. This parallels my understanding of the best process for coming to new knowledge, as I was taught that if you want to ask or learn something significant, it is always done with reverence and in the context of ceremony.

Because of my mother's relationship to the land, she was able to acquire new insights which led her to have my grandparents' DNA tested. What she learned in ceremony was confirmed with science. At which point, many ways of being and stories about our family history and ontology began to make more sense.

Similarly, Chilisa (2012) wrote that ontology is "the body of knowledge that deals with the essential characteristic of what it means to exist" (p. 23). My ontological perspective is grounded in ceremony, which is the process of coming to new knowledge that is connected to my existence and purpose. While this makes complete sense to me, the term and definition of ontology do not holistically represent my ideas. Ontologies can be carried, passed down, put to sleep for several generations, and then woken back up through ceremonies of remembering. My grandmother, auntie, and both sisters have embraced my mother's ceremonies of remembering in their own way. My brother has since chosen a partner who has her own ways of remembering by connecting with nature. Ceremony is inseparable from knowledge acquisition. Ceremony is inseparable from life.

### **Decolonizing Perspectives**

Using a decolonizing perspective requires me to continue to challenge my assumptions with the hopes of revealing a way to conduct research that feels less problematic to me and gives me more peace as I think about myself as a researcher.

"Decolonization is a process which engages with imperialism and colonialism at multiple



levels” (Smith, 2012). Chilisa (2012) suggested that decentering the notions of ‘research’ and ‘problem’ allows the researcher to take a strengths-based approach. A decolonized perspective also focuses on reclaiming as opposed to a deficit-based approach that focuses on indigeneity as a problem in and of itself. For the purposes of this research, I take a strengths-based approach to reclaim what is and what has been there all along.

### ***My Assumptions***

One of my assumptions has been that legitimate research involves solving a research problem. “Research is all about unanswered questions, but it also reveals our unquestioned answers” (Wilson, 2008, p. 6). Challenging assumptions helps me to uncover the ways in which I am a product of the imperialist system in which I grew up. I want to decolonize my mind to make room for what I need to remember. My journey is to recover my identity and make room for my authentic humanity. Therefore, my ceremony includes a conscious de-centering from the ordered disorder of imperialism and recentering on the organic harmony of nature.

### ***My Biases***

While cultural biases are a natural part of human brain development, there’s a dangerous and slippery slope toward stereotyping, prejudice, discrimination, and systemic oppression. A postcolonial Indigenous feminist approach decolonizes imperialism and colonization in several ways, including engaging bias (Chilisa, 2012; Smith, 2012). I used to teach my college students to use their sociological imagination and practice participant observation to gain awareness of their biases. I continue to maintain that practice for myself as I always have more to learn about my biases.

Identifying personal biases highlights values, preferences, and priorities which can be used as self-determination and sovereignty tools, or as weapons of war.

Positivism, the idea that one can prove or disprove what is real and rational through scientific testing, feels like a dangerous theoretical framework because it assumes that humans can remove their biases by performing science. This false assumption created a dark history of sorcerous oppression including eugenics, medical experimentation, and genocide.

My bias toward women is a product of identifying as a woman and being raised by mostly women. My bias toward people of color and especially Indigenous people is largely due to my personal relatability, resonance, and affinity with these groups. It is not that I do not trust white people; I do not trust whiteness, the system of racialized privilege, and the people who stand in their white privilege irritate, anger, and sadden me. I tend to feel more comfortable, safe, and able to be authentic around BIPOC friends and white friends who consistently engage their own personal bias work. I am on a perpetual journey toward understanding my biases, blind spots, and assumptions and I am always open to learning more.

### ***Staying Humble***

Taking personal preparations for this research involved reflecting on the insider/outsider status to situate myself in the context of the work. As a scholar, I often feel alienated when I attempt to place my own diaspora-influenced perspectives and stories ahead of the western academic canon. I have learned a lot about my own identity from my students when I taught for eight years as a professor of sociology, commonly lecturing on topics of privilege and power dynamics of status and identity. I continue to

learn from my community, professors, and am incredibly grateful for every teacher who has contributed to my learning over the years.

That said, I have never been a leader in Indigenous spaces because my family has lost its language and stories, I did not grow up in Sápmi and I have white skin. In postmodern research, reflexivity is critical because awareness of self locates privilege and political examination in creating knowledge (Kovach, 2009). This journey of seeking to understand postcolonial indigenous feminist methodologies is asking me to search for my own story from the archives of my blood memory.

### ***Centering Worldviews***

Stories carry in them our identities, placing them in relationships with all that we belong to (Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2019; Wilson, 2008). My mother believes that now is the time to remember our family stories and preserve them. “The stories that we hang on to are our blood memory and the new stories we tell are our ceremonies” (Martin & William, 2019, p. 65). When my mother and I have the same dream at the same time, we believe that it is a family story sent to us from our ancestors that is waking up. I hope to find the methodology that makes space for more of this blood memory to permeate safely in American culture.

I recently had the privilege of attending the first online *International Indigenous Research Conference*. This experience raised many questions for me. What does a community that is not racist look and feel like? What does a university that truly values Indigenous knowledge look like and feel like? What could research and knowledge production look like if Sámi perspectives were the framework for generating new knowledge? I listened as panelists Linda Tuiwai Smith, Jo-ann Archibald, and Jason

DeSantolo discussed the importance of paying attention to Indigenous global stories and amplifying their situations during the pandemic by offering to lend a hand.

Smith noted “decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or research or western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes” (Smith, 2012, p. 41). Indigenous methodologies can include using the land and stars as primary sources to better understand place-based cultural practices. Sámi culture and tradition are centered around relationships to land and sky which is an understanding I grew up with, so this may be one area where I have more of an insider perspective.

As such, my methodologies necessarily enfranchise the Indigenous ways of being and becoming that are specific to Sámi American people and culture. The research questions serve as the direct link between my story and the stories that unfold because of this research ceremony. The stories hold wisdom that applies to my life and the lives of those I am interviewing. The outcome of this research ceremony aims to give back to the Black, Indigenous, people of color and women’s communities. As a personal work, my dissertation embodies both a methodological and metaphorical set of practices that I can hand to my daughter and say, “This is for YOU. You belong HERE.”

### **Overview of Dissertation**

Chapter I of this dissertation provided my background as a researcher, the purpose of the research, conceptual framework, methods overview, and a decolonized approach to the research. Chapter II will provide a review of the literature and supporting information which will discuss individual and organizational identity, resilience as a process,

relationships between social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth as well as social entrepreneurship and how it is being used for social change. Chapter III will provide a background of my process-relational ontology combined with an Indigenous ethical framework and the Indigenous research method of narrative inquiry will provide a rationale for utilizing it as a way of conducting research for this dissertation. Chapter IV will provide a summary of findings that emerged from interviews with participants. Chapter V will provide a discussion and insight into promoting women leaders' resilience, limitations, future research, and conclusion.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

*Decolonization, however, does not mean and has not meant a total rejection of all theory or western knowledge. Rather, it is about centering our concerns and world views and then coming to know and understand theory and research from our own perspectives and for our own purposes.*

— Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012)

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to gather stories of women social entrepreneurs regarding their complex intersectional identities and how their approaches to social entrepreneurship nurture identity, belonging, and resilience in themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. This chapter contains a literature review of individual and organizational identity to support the research. This chapter also reviews the literature on individual and cultural resilience, as well as social entrepreneurship as a driver for social change.

It is important to note that this review includes literature primarily written by women and people of color as part of its synthesis. The rationale behind this focused approach is to forward the overall understanding of the topic of women in leadership, specifically, to include women scholars and unearth new solutions for changing the dominant normative paradigm of leadership as a white patriarchal construct. Including voices from the margins also reveals ways for white women and privileged women, to leverage their whiteness and privilege, to be effective social equity leaders. Following the synthesis is a discussion of research gaps in this area.

## **Women Leader Identity**

Women leader identity is what Ashforth, et al (2008) described as, “a self-referential description that provides contextually appropriate answers to the question ‘Who am I?’ or ‘Who are we?’” (p. 327). For the purposes of this paper, women leader identity refers specifically to women leaders in the workforce. In 2009, women were recorded as making up half the U.S. workforce for the first time in history (U.S. Department of Labor, 2008). Even though women make up half of the workforce, 91 percent of Fortune 500 corporate board chairmanships are still held by white men (Franklin, 2017). Despite girls and women now outperforming boys and men on many academic indicators (Freeman, 2004), men remain in more positions of leadership. With leadership comes power and privilege.

The purpose of examining women leader identity in relation to organizational identity is to uncover ways in which women are finding belonging and resilience within the leadership roles that they occupy. This work is needed as women continue to enter leadership positions in the workforce, and as there are significant gaps in scholarly research around belonging and resilience for women leaders, leading, in leadership.

## **Power and Privilege**

Because power and privilege beget influence and status, men have more influence than women on gender-neutral tasks. Power and influence can be looked at as two parts of the same process - whereby power has the capacity to change behavior, and influence enables the practice of using power to affect behavioral change (French & Raven, 1959). Power can change our course of action without changing our beliefs but influence changes our beliefs which leads to change in action. Given that women wield less power

and influence than men based on gender alone (Lips, 1991), then it is no wonder that women tend to resist taking leadership positions where their credibility and legitimacy are likely to be called into question (Ely et al., 2011). All these social components add up to a status disadvantage that may impact women leader identity.

### **Status Disadvantage**

According to Eagly (2007) *status disadvantage* is a phenomenon where more people prefer male bosses over female bosses (including women) and it is, therefore, more difficult for women to enter and succeed in male-dominated leadership roles.

Overcoming status disadvantage requires women leaders to assimilate to male-centered leadership traits that are stereotypically attached to male gender roles.

Acting more like men results in a *double bind*, where women leaders must demonstrate both the relational qualities expected of them as women and agentic qualities expected of them as leaders (Carli & Eagly, 2018). Because these two qualities live on opposite sides of the masculine and feminine spectrum of behavior, being perceived as cold-hearted, bitchy, or over-emotional often results from swaying too far in one direction or the other. Even when a woman is willing to act more like a man to be taken seriously in leadership roles, she still faces several barriers to advancement that men do not face.

According to Hymowitz and Shellhardt (1986), women leaders advance slower than men in the workplace because they are not hired into positions of leadership as often as men, a barrier referred to as *glass ceilings*. Because of this barrier, not all opportunities for women lead to success. In fact, some glass ceilings are known as *glass cliffs* in disguise, if the woman is set up for failure from the start (Hewlett et al., 2008). Repetition



of experiences like glass ceilings and glass cliffs can impact a woman's identity, both in the way that others perceive her and in the way that she internalizes it for herself. Since "women" and "leaders" can be mutually exclusive terms, women leaders often hold identity narratives as women first and leaders second, even as their male counterparts are just labeled "leaders."

### **Identity Narratives**

The notion that a leader looks like something specific also means that a leader does not look like something else equally specific. Sinclair (2011) discusses the often-contrasting understandings that arise at the intersection of identity and leadership research. These idealizations are highly contextualized, vary from culture to culture, and are significantly impacted by increased social surveillance. The notions of identity as work (Sinclair, 2011; Snow & Anderson, 1987), identity as commodity (Sarup, 2022), and identity as tokenism (Niemann, 1999), gives rise to debates around personhood, gender roles, and social norms, and opens the door to more feministic perspectives of observation, reflexivity, and intuition.

In terms of women leaders, gender identity narratives involve doing identity work to "look like" a leader within their given socio-cultural context (Kreiner et al., 2006). It is important to note here that identity work is not just associated with gender roles. The need to perform cultural identity may result from stripping minority individuals of their cultural identity by asking them not to wear cultural clothing or hairstyles in the workplace (Khanna & Johnson, 2010). The inverse of this is also true. For example, an Indigenous woman might have to perform identity work associated with her gender on

top of the identity work to look “Indigenous enough” to people outside of her community for them to take her identity seriously.

According to Ashforth et al (2008), these gender identity narratives are enacted through directional cycles of sense breaking, which is moving away from an undesirable identity image, sense-making, which is reconstructing identity to fit the expectation of the role at hand, and sense-giving, which is projecting a more desirable identity by the way one dresses, moves, speaks, and acts. Weick et al (2005) argued that cognitive constraint, or restrictions from human information processing abilities, influences action formation along micro and macro levels of identity, expectation, and frame. “To deal with ambiguity, interdependent people search for meaning, settle for plausibility, and move on” (Weick et al., 2005, p. 419). However, in high cognitive constraint situations, relative plausibility may be all that is needed for new individual and organizational identity meaning to crystallize.

### **Intersectionality**

Critical race theorist and feminist Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* in the late 1980’s as a heuristic term focusing on the dynamics of difference and recognizing that all aspects of a person’s identity both compound and complicate the marginalization they face (Crenshaw, 1989). As such, race, gender, ethnicity, ability, age, and religion can become significant and relevant players in the process of identity development, embodiment, resistance, and regulation. According to Davies and Harre (1990), intersectional identities are formed by both the human as subject and the community one is situated in as the observer. Davies and Harre (1990) noted:

A subject position incorporates both a conceptual repertoire and a location for persons within the structure of rights for those that use that repertoire. Once having taken up a particular position as one's own, a person inevitably sees the world from the vantage point of that position and in terms of the images, metaphors, storylines, and concepts which are made relevant within the particular discursive practice in which they are positioned. (p. 46)

Sociologists such as Giddens (1975), Gergen (1971), and Goffman (1959) questioned the role of self and environment in the production of identity, however, while acknowledging the power of social forces, such as collectivism and individualism, on one's ability to shape how their intersectional subject positions are perceived by others.

Intersectionality has proven to be a concept that has been, "deployed in disciplines such as history, sociology, literature, philosophy, and anthropology as well as feminist studies, ethnic studies, queer studies, and legal studies" (Cho, et al., 2013, p. 787). The dynamics of intersectionality and identity maintenance form tension and contradiction. This contradiction emerges from an image of subjective reality, essentially illustrating how easily women with intersecting identities can face barriers due to systemic oppression. For example, one of the most common barriers faced by racialized women is stereotyping.

As a result, Black women's agency as a leadership quality is erased by stereotypes of Black aggression making it difficult to gain traction as a female leader of color in white spaces. Thus, due to their intersectional subject positions, it cannot be assumed that adding together subject positions of racial blackness and female gender will equal black

women's experience (Crenshaw, 1989). Thus, there are many cultural tensions and contradictions in the research on identity as it relates to race.

To get an accurate view, one must also look at how the two subject positions of race and gender affect and change each other by virtue of their proximity and relationship. According to Crenshaw (2017), addressing race first and foremost is critical to intersectionality because race lies at the center of all intersectional identities. This phenomenon often results in Black women having to prove competency by educating white group members to dispel racial tropes (hooks, 2015).

Another example includes the difference between perceptions of women of color versus men of color and how that affects chances for advancement in leadership. High rates of incarceration and the criminalization of Black life mean that Black men are being locked up in prisons while Black women are being locked out of advancement opportunities (Carbado et al., 2013). The Black male voice is literally removed as his physical body is removed from community spaces. The Black female voice is erased by removing her subjectivity as a human. Understanding the saliency of subject positioning helps to paint the landscape of intersectionality as a blueprint that is nuanced according to the individual context. Part of this context is informed by systemic racism. The most important of which are rewards, punishments, and resources conferred to some over others through systemic racism, known as white privilege.

### **Racism and White Privilege**

Feagin (2013) defines racism as systemic oppression where privilege and power are given to some groups and not given to others, based on race alone. White privilege is described as a location of advantage, a situated perspective, and a set of cultural practices

for which white people are meant to remain oblivious (Frankenberg, 1997). Furthering this phenomenon, Tallbear (2007) purports that white men have declared for themselves the moral and intellectual authority to determine meanings and identities. To counter this, conceptualizing race as a systemic and socially constructed framework requires emancipation from historically oppressive epistemologies of white supremacy to adapt more effective systems for gender equity and inclusivity.

As Crenshaw (1989) noted, racism is systemic oppression that dehumanizes, and poisons white people differently than it does Black, Brown, and Indigenous people.

Privilege and power leach the white person's ability to consider nuance in situations and breeds a fear of difference based on a lack of understanding (Crenshaw, 2017).

Additionally, white people can develop white savior complexes (Cole, 2012) that infect their families, stripping progeny of empathetic and compassionate abilities, and being incapable of having egalitarian relationships with diverse groups of people. This creates a responsibility for white women leaders to identify how they can be anti-racist in their efforts to advance gender equity. This is where the ethics of a process-relational ontology comes into play.

### **White Women**

If women leaders are to gain traction in gender equity, they must navigate difficult pathways including issues with childcare needs, sexism, racism, classism, and discrimination based on many intersections of women leader identity (Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010). For example, while most women are tuned into the privileges that men have that women do not have, many white women do not understand the privileges they carry due to their race.

Because white women share the same skin color as most western male leaders, they tend to focus on issues of gender discrimination without experiencing the influence of race and ethnicity on perceptions of leadership (Suyemoto & Ballou, 2007). While white women face *glass ceilings*, women of color face thicker barriers posed by the combination of racism and sexism to create what some scholars call *concrete walls* or *sticky floors* (Bell & Nkomo, 2001; Betters-Reed & Moore, 1995). While most women of color and trans women are tuned in to the privileges that all men and white women have, which they do not have, there may still be an opportunity for women of color to reflect on heterosexual privilege or ability privilege. Exploring feminism can help further the understanding of women's intersectional identities.

### **Feminism**

Feminism seeks to end sexism just like anti-racism seeks to end racism (Chilisa, 2012, Crenshaw, 1989, Kovach, 2009, Warren, 1996). Cartesian dualism is a western paradigm that only offers two ways of being, whether its rational or emotional, evil, or sacred, and belonging to either culture or nature. Thus, when it comes to human gender, dualism presents a social construction of either male or female. But feminism is more than ending sexism. Feminism also embraces the fact that gender is a social construction, meaning that humans are assigned a sex at birth based on anatomy, chromosomes, and hormones, but they may demonstrate their gender in more fluid ways.

Feminism seeks to free all people from the tyranny of sexism (hooks, 2000). Not just cis-gendered women, but also individuals who do not ascribe to the gender binary. "Cisgender" is a term describing someone who identifies with the same sex that they were ascribed to at birth (Johnson, 2012). Since binaries are part and parcel of patriarchal

oppression, then it is important to articulate intersectional feminism outside of the gender binary. For the purposes of this research, the term *women* embraces what Browne (2011) calls “womyn,” that is individuals who were born as women in terms of embodiment and feeling.

Deanne Curtin speaks to the toxicity of sexism, calling for a feminine antidote that, “makes a central place for values of care, love, friendship, trust, and appropriate reciprocity-values that presuppose that our relationships to others are central to our understanding of who we are” (Warren, 1996, p. 141, 143). This is also why a language of rights, such as human rights and animal rights, does not do feminism justice. It only reinforces a hypermasculine view of dominance and subordination based on positionality. The influence and implications of intersectional feminism illustrate how women can use their intersectional positionalities to advance gender equity for all women.

### ***Intersectional Feminism***

In feminist theory, Carastathis (2014) asserts that intersectionality has become the predominant way of imagining the relationships among oppressive systems which construct our multiple identities as well as our social locations in hierarchies of power and privilege. Whereas with sexism, power and privilege are given to men over women, based on gender. In the same vein as racism, power and privilege are given to people with white skin over people of color, based on race.

White individuals are a product of their social conditioning and prisoners to a white worldview that shapes and influences their racial reality (Bell, 2004). Women leaders with a white worldview would not know how to effectively lead or advocate for people of color because they do not share their lived experiences. According to Dovidio

et al., (2002) most white Americans do not consciously value social justice, consider themselves good, moral, and decent human beings, stand against overt forms of racism, or believe they would actively fight against injustice and unfairness. White women would need to actively rebel against social conditioning and take certain actions to ally themselves with women of color for the purpose of advancing gender equity. An ethic of relationality can provide the framework to foster an allyship.

An Indigenous ethical framework of doing things ‘in a good way’ requires consistent and ceremonial demonstrations of respect, relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity (Archibald, 2008; Atleo, 2006; Kovach, 2009; Tuck & Yang, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Focusing on the empirical connection between women and nature; and, perhaps more importantly, between people of color, children, the poor, and nature reveals that women of color are more dependent than men on trees and forest products while also being the primary sufferers of environmental degradation, economic oppression, male-biased practices and norms (Warren, 1997). It is women who perform most of the water-collection work and agricultural labor while receiving the least amount of training, tools, or land ownership rights.

Women of color are often overlooked in gender equity conversations and their erasure is reinforced every time white women speak for *everyone* as women. The multidimensionality of Black women’s experience as both raced and gendered has led to the erasure of Black women (Crenshaw 1989). This is further compounded by the fact that feminist studies are rooted within a Eurocentric framework (Warren, 1996). Thus, feminist studies are not adequate in addressing racialized sexism in America. Furthermore, while feminism is a useful tool to explore gender equity, it is not the end of



the road in gender equity research. Indigenous feminism poses a useful model that integrates both gendered and racialized bodies in its framework.

### ***Indigenous Feminism***

Indigenous feminism is a post-colonial feminist perspective (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019; Wilson, 2008). Leading research scholars articulate critical synergistic perspectives while framing postcolonial indigenous feminist theory and research methodologies emerging from New Zealand, Botswana, Canada, Australia, and the United States. Various feminisms are distinguished according to their own aims that problematize gender inequality (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009).

Chilisa (2012) and Kovach (2009) account for Indigenous gender statuses and roles, which tend to be more fluid and sacred. Indigenous feminist theory grows from Indigenous ontology and epistemology of relationships that form a mutual or shared reality (Wilson, 2008). Indigenous feminist axiology and methodology serve to, “maintaining accountability to these relationships” (Wilson, 2008, p.71). Therefore, an Indigenous feminist paradigm is relational and comes with relational accountability.

Smith (1997) also discusses anticolonialism, encouraging feminist theorists to “more seriously grapple with the issues of colonization, particularly colonization of Native lands, in its analysis of oppression” (Smith as cited in Warren, 1997 (p. 22)). Ironically, many feminist theorists do not take seriously Native struggles, even while they themselves are living on unceded Indian land.

Postcolonial Indigenous feminist ideologies can include theory and practice to promote land back initiatives, deconstruction of dams to restore waterways, microfinance lending for small businesses, and other programs to empower marginalized women, food

sovereignty movements, women's reproduction education, healthcare services, and domestic violence prevention, among others. Conceptualizing advancement in gender equity requires emancipation from historically oppressive systems of white body supremacy to more effective systems for social equity as gendered allies.

### ***Summary***

This section provided a focus on personal identity to forward our overall understanding of intersectionality and Indigenous feminist paradigms as social constructions of reality. The review in this section has intentionally included marginalized thought leadership to unearth new solutions for changing the dominant normative paradigm of leadership as a white hetero-patriarchal construct, found later in the section on Social Change. Including voices from the margins also reveals ways for white women to leverage their privilege to be more effective gender equity leaders. In the next section, I point to resilience as a common theme among intersectional women leaders who work as allies, change agents, and community builders.

### **Resilience**

Resilience refers to the human ability to respond, bounce back, and reintegrate after adverse and stressful life experiences (Buzzanell, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Sonn & Fisher, 1998; Thomas et al., 2016; Wexler, 2014). The capacity to adapt and flourish in trying times is both an internal characteristic or trait as well as cultural or learned through nurturing (Southwick et al., 2017). Staci Haines (2019) described resilience as:

Our ability to bounce back – like moss after we've stepped on it - means to find our intactness again. It is our ability to 'come back' to ourselves, physiologically and psychologically, from traumatic hyperalert states to calm, cohesive states. It is

the ability to regain a sense of hope and imagine a positive future. Resilience allows for safety, belonging and dignity to be re-established. (p. 195)

Research in resilience focuses primarily on the individual and has its roots in the literature around resilience in children (Cicchetti & Garmezy, 1993; Cowen, et al., 1995). There is also a literature need in resilient responses to oppression within minoritized communities, especially regarding the United States specifically. While the negative outcomes of cultural oppression are widely addressed, including internalization, cultural erasure, and dysfunction, there are still opportunities for scholars to articulate recovery outcomes such as revitalization, reconstruction, and reinvention as well as generally positive adaptive outcomes such as resilience, consciousness, and well-being (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Cultural revitalization is particularly important regarding building cultural resilience.

Revitalization is one response to oppression that is communicated through rejection of the dominant cultures and attachment to cultures of origin (Bulhan, 1980). Revitalization can happen in groups through churches, extended social networks, affinity associations, and other groups that provide spaces for raising awareness, community building, participation, and belonging. “These groups and networks provide opportunities and structures that moderate the impact of oppressive systems” (Sonn & Fisher, 1998, p. 468). Thus, resiliency processes are activated collectively by humans in groups as a natural function of culture. To better understand resilience, it is important to explore how resilience is constructed and communicated.

The process of resilience is different from personal psychological characteristics or learned behaviors. “In process, we can see resilience as dynamic, integrated, unfolding

over time and through events, evolving into patterns, and dependent on contingencies (Buzzanell, 2010, p.2). Resilience looks different in different contexts. For this reason, it can be helpful to imagine resilience as a design aspect rather than mistaking the individual personality for the process itself.

Human resilience is woven through communicative processes (Buzzanell, 2010). Buzzanell (2010) offers five exemplars of communicating resilience as a design aspect in the process of communicating resilience. They are 1) crafting normalcy by producing a system of meanings to assert and perform the mundane in trying times, 2) affirming identity anchors through an enduring cluster of discourses that community members can rely on when they are in relation to each other, 3) maintaining and using communication networks by building up and using social capital, 4) putting alternative logics to work through collaborative sensemaking, and 5) legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action to reframe the situation as one of constrained hopefulness. These five processes can be used as springboards for communicative strategies that foster resilience.

### ***Ontology of Resilience***

Ontology is the study of being (Crotty, 1998). “Ontological assumptions are concerned with what constitutes reality, in other words, *what is*” (Scotland, 2012, p. 9). An individual, organizational, or community resilience paradigm may contain its own ontological assumptions. Further, resilience processes are culturally contextualized. Therefore, different cultural paradigms contain diverse ontological assumptions of reality.

Ontological assumptions of reality are socially constructed entities that vary from culture to culture, individual to individual. “Investigations into the language of resilience locally, nationally, and globally would inform discussion about rebuilding, cultivation, difference and exclusion, and particularities of both every day and extraordinary disruptions and adaptation” (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018, p. 26). The ontology of resilience focuses on how resilience is being constructed, communicated, and infused with meaning by individuals, families, and organizations. Understanding how different people talk about resilience is useful specifically in identifying sustainable and effective opportunities for interventions that foster resilience (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018).

### ***Community Resilience***

A newer body of work critiques individual-centered models of resilience because they do not contextualize the larger social community in which individual adaptation and resilience takes place (Kirmayer et al. 2009; Richardson, 2002). Considering social and cultural dimensions of resilience is important for Indigenous communities and women in accounting for historical and systemic trauma (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008) because it allows space for notions of identity, belonging, and resilience to embrace the interconnectedness of people with each other and their environment.

Community resilience is most often referred to in terms of disaster relief in developing nations and marginalized communities (Brodsky et al., 2011; Faxon et al., 2015; Lenette et al., 2013). Tian and Bush (2020) demonstrate how and when women political leaders in China interweave processes through identifying resilience enactment. Indigenous community resilience is often described in terms of tribal sovereignty to counteract colonization and forced assimilation measures, but also to claim and celebrate

Indigenous wisdom and values (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012; Smith et al., 2019; Wilson, 2008).

Syedullah and Leiner (2021) outline five steps for mutually reinforced resilience practices within Black communities: Step one invites us to jump ship and stay fugitive through a fusion of moving out of our comfort zones and stepping up to our working edge. Step two invites us to practice fusion by allowing ourselves to be transformed through and in service to the work for liberation. “Liberation practices aren’t liberatory unless they are beyond the zones that we have been socialized toward, past the reaches of white supremacist thinking and praxis and into something ancient.” (Syedullah & Leiner, 2021, p. 26). Step three invites us to engage in radical care work by healing backward, ward including spiritual healing, ancestral grieving, grounding work, and earth medicine that brings us back into our bodies. Step four invites us to engage in community study through reflection and collaboration. In step five, Wakefield and Zimmerman invited us to cultivate an emergency response by congregating to liberate:

We are now in a historical period of increasing crisis, where oppressive worldviews have caused significant political, economic, and ecological instability. Patterns of domination, extraction, and supremacy that fuel violence and cause inter-generational trauma thrive on breaking down marginalized people's spirit, imagination, and resilience, particularly those who challenge the status quo. (p. 156)

### ***Women and Resilience***

Women are central to strategies intended to grow individual, family, and community resiliency (Ersing & Caruson, 2017; Tian & Bush, 2020; Wakefield &

Zimmerman, 2020). “Women shoulder a number of critical roles in community resiliency, such as caretakers for children and the elderly, food producers and providers, health guardians, economic agents, and in many cases as head of households” (Ersing & Caruson, 2017, p. 50). And yet, as women react to the trauma of emergency they may disconnect from their bodies, sensations, direct experiences, and other women, as well as their own humanity, creativity, and ways of knowing and being that, can counteract violence and make another world possible (Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020).

There is often a “lack in both the prioritization of skills in conflict resolution and the use of positive power in the building of capacity to support women’s leadership” (Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020, p. 166). This lack of cultural prioritization and capacity building has been highlighted by the US Supreme Court’s overturning of *Roe v. Wade* in June of 2022. According to Webb (2019), humans are now in a time of transition:

Gender-based inequality is one of the main barriers to building resilience, as it limits the way women and girls, men and boys in a community and society can respond to and manage change. (Webb et al., 2019, p. 1)

Individual women who receive support to get a seat at the table of leadership often find themselves operating in unjust and inequitable systems that were not designed for them. Therefore, it is important for women to develop increasing resilience if they are to enter spaces that women have previously not occupied. “Supporting women change agents involves responding to their desire to stay in the struggle, avoid burn-out, and foster resilience, both individually and collectively” (Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020, p. 159).

Furthermore, Wakefield and Zimmerman assert that practices that strengthen resilience, “in all sites of change – the personal, household, community, government, and

in our economic, social-political, and cultural institutions – are urgently needed in this transitioning world. A revitalized system is needed, rooted in relationships and communities, and one that recognizes existing individual and collective capacities for resilience, imagining, and living transformed futures in the present moment” (Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020, p. 170).

### ***Belonging and Resilience***

Having a sense of belonging arises from personal involvement in a system or environment such that humans feel they are valued as part of it (Hagerty, et al., 1992). Belonging is a basic human need, like shelter or food, that enables a person to see the value in life and bounce back from hardship (Bonnie & Williams, 1999). Social belonging is an experience that can come from social networks like family, friends, businesses, ceremonies, sports, etc. Alizadeh et al. (2018) report connections between having a sense of belonging and increased resilience in women with breast cancer. Slavich et al. (2022) connected the need for social belonging to the outcome of increased resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic. In this context, social belonging involves interpersonal connectedness.

Environmental belonging refers to one’s relationship to the Earth as the source of all life, a planet that all humans belong to together. Moral terrains form a “web of value layered over places through discourses that establish normative practices and socio-environmental belonging” (Figuroa & Waitt, 2008, p. 328). In this case, environmental belongingness influences social belongingness through communication between people. Whyte (2016) uses the term *collective continuance* to describe systems of responsibilities between humans adapting without sustaining preventable harms. Whyte’s argument is



that environmental justice movements promote social justice for the people who live and belong to those environmental spaces. Thus, there is entanglement between environmental and social belonging.

### ***Resilience Defined for the Purpose of This Study***

For this research, the term resilience is rooted in an action research paradigm involving a cyclical process of investigation, action, and evaluation which results in a change in practice. “Participants and researchers are both engaged in the dialectical task of unveiling reality, critically analyzing it, and recreating that knowledge (Friere, 1970, p. 51). This research assumes Buzzanell’s (2021) definition of the term:

Resilience explains how people communicate to reintegrate from and engage in meaning making about disruptive events to construct new normal. Resilience is cultivated over the course of individuals’, families’, communities’, and nations’ lives in particular socio-historic-economic and political conditions. (p. 46)

This definition of resilience highlights the fact that while minoritized people are incredibly resilient, and especially minority women, the development of this resilience and its necessity has been forced by colonial and western cultural oppression. Many intersectional women may be sick of being called resilient or burdened by the pressure of having to be resilient by necessity, and yet continue to face reality with a staunchness that allows them to make meaning of hardship and improvise new solutions (Coutu, 2002). The implication of this research aims to attend to the need for, “additional research and theory building focused specifically on the processes of resilience,” within the field of communication to advance scholars’ knowledge of it (Afifi, 2018, p. 7).

## **Organizational Identity**

Organizational identity formation begins with a process whereby organized groups of individuals are simultaneously engaged in creation, emergence, and becoming (Ashforth et al., 2008). Creation and emergence highlight the *what* and *when* of organizational identity, while becoming emphasizes *how* individuals take on aspects of organizational identities for themselves. To some degree organizational identity encompasses individual identity, in so far as organizational identity formation transpires through individual perceptions, interpretations, and actions that result from a series of organizationally structured priming, editing, and triggering mechanisms (Weber & Glynn, 2006).

Grounded in a process ontology, it starts to become clear how individual thinking and organizational acting are closely related (Toukas & Chia, 2011). “Organizational embodiment, the materiality of structuration, and organizational history, each in their respective contributions, bring space and time into organizational theory” (Hatch, 2018, p. 267). The process of how organizations make collective sense of external situations, causes, and outcomes happens in association with individual meaning-making within the organization. To further understand how organizational identities form and transform, it is important to consider how individual meaning-making processes, as well as group articulatory modes, role agency, and temporality influence organizational sensemaking and identity.

## **Individual Meaning Making**

Humans are meaning seekers. Exploring the relationship between individual meaning-making capacity and organizational identity perceptions provides a deeper

awareness of how organizations understand themselves (Abes et al., 2007). Kegan (1980) suggested that meaning making systems shape the individual experience, organize thinking and feeling, and give rise to individual behavior.

Transformative meaning making happens when an individual finds the edge of their understanding, presses through that edge, and constructs a new, transformed meaning at the other side (Garvey-Berger, 2004). The process of individuals participating in meaning making activity for organizational identity structures involves actors performing acts of articulation that turn circumstances into collective sensemaking springboards for action (Hernes, 2014; Shultz & Hernes, 2013; Weber & Glynn, 2006; Weick et al., 2005). Because of this potentially influential relationship, organizational identity can follow interpretations of individual meaning-making in ways that are highly contextualized and nuanced. Significant individual meaning-making may occur within the context of organizational events that trigger changes to the organization's identity.

### **Organizational Sense Making**

At the organizational level, collective sense-making and identity work can be transformational, because it is subject to distinctions including strategy, technology, structure, and routines (Hernes, 2014). Organizations make sense of collective identities through events that, "provide meaning structures with historicity and direction" (Hernes, 2014, p. 99).

Events can also be directional, in the sense that they influence organizational and individual identities, based on the past and moving into the future through the becoming of the present. Once the individual sense-making process has revealed new organizational meaning-making structures and identity connections, organizational articulatory modes

are activated to communicate new meanings throughout the internal network, and in many cases, externally to the public.

### **Articulatory Modes**

Weick et al., (2005) defines articulatory modes as systems of communication. Turning to the notion of articulatory modes which are systems of communication, we come to understand how organizational identities are communicated and solidified between individuals and groups. Identity construction is an iterative process that turns external as well as internal organizational circumstances into constructions that can be communicated and comprehended through words (Weick et al., 2005). In this way, communicating the results of individual meaning-making is both a mental cognitive process and a socio-cultural process.

As meaning is constructed, it becomes a placeholder from which to take collective action. Language, situations, organizations, and environments can all be spoken into existence, forming the layers of organizational identity and becoming-ness. Identity construction differentiates the process of individual meaning-making from the discipline of cognitive psychology, as meaning-making influences the giver as well as the receiver (Weick et al., 2005). A current example would be the social media mogul Facebook recently changed its name to Meta (Dwoskin, 2021). Following the release of internal documents, Facebook moved away from its identity as a singular platform, to embrace a new identity as the universe of virtual reality where people roam freely through their personal avatars. A major organizational identity shift like this one requires a certain amount of organizational agency to officiate successfully.

## **Role Agency**

Role agency speaks to the amount of agentic power conferred upon a given organizational role that remains static regardless of the individual occupying that role. According to Abdelnour et al. (2017), agency is dissociated from individuals to include, “a capacity or quality that stems from resources, rights and obligations tied to the roles and social positions actors occupy” (p. 175). Role agency is owned by the organization and fulfilled by individuals within their prescribed roles. As in the case with Facebook, strong agentic conditions among executive leadership roles enabled the organization’s identity to change fluidly from Facebook to its newest iteration: Meta (Kraus et al., 2022).

Role agency, motivated by success, survival, and public legitimacy, can either stand in the way of wholesale organizational change or enable broad change, depending on the rights and obligations tied to the roles that individuals play. *Identity conflict* can result when individual stakeholders with high role agency clash at the individual, relational or collectivistic levels (Brickson, 2005). Organizational practices such as avoidance, discretion, and overlooking commonly decouple the causes of identity conflict from its effects, with the goal of organizational identity management and maintaining the public image of control (Meyer & Rowan, 1977).

Larger organizations may choose to replace practices such as reflexivity and fluidity with rationality and good faith to appease stakeholders and increase profitability. Such rationality can result in staunch yet ambiguous messaging to avoid organizational accountability for mistakes, at the sacrifice of authentic reflection, or taking responsibility for such mistakes.

Executives serving within their organizational roles, and perhaps leaders in general, invoke what Meyer and Rowan (1977) call rational institutional myths, by materializing retrospective images to form categories, written texts, conversations, and actions. Taking it one step further, Meyer and Rowan (1977) assert that “the more an organization’s structure is derived from institutional myths, the more it maintains elaborate displays of confidence, satisfaction, and good faith, internally and externally” (p. 358). Such images help to form mental boundaries related to mechanisms of ideas and beliefs, that can guide organized actions (Hernes, 2004). When public-facing rationalization skews the organization’s truth, it can cause cognitive dissonance among individuals who collectively hold roles as prescribed by the organizational agency.

Cognitive dissonance is broadly viewed as the state of having inconsistent thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes, as in holding the perception of contradictory or paradoxical information (Festinger, 1957). When individual cognitive dissonance occurs, organizational procedural memory (an organization’s shared memory as held by the collective of actors in their roles), as well as declarative memory (an organization’s collectively held history), are the basis for individual interpretive and re-interpretive meaning-making (Weick et al., 2005). When many individuals experience dissonance together, organizational identity crises may become a risk.

Affecting lasting social change within large organizational institutions can be challenging because collective meaning-making structures may fail to adapt to new challenges (Kegan, 1980). Because no singular person is held responsible for organizational procedural memory, it is a slippery slope to “old guard” declarative narratives, making authentic and lasting organizational change difficult. Declarative

memory and its narratives solidify over time as individuals who were held accountable for procedural memory change positions, leave the organization, or retire (Weick et al., 2005). Shifting from decision making as a reaction to a crisis, to sense making of the nature of said crisis, can reframe new possibilities for organizational agency, equivocality, transience, unfolding, and emergence (Weick et al., 2005). Meaning structures can also be temporal in the sense that they take place over time and are fixed to a time.

### **Temporality**

Organizational identities unfold over the passing of time (Feldman, 2000). As individuals within the organization consider the organizations past and future, they can curate an organizational becoming that reflects the organizational identity in the present. Organizational becoming involves looking to the past in view of a possible future. Making sense of the past informs the present and highlights future possibilities for organizational identity (Hernes, 2014). At the same time, organizational identity remains closely linked with the temporal perspectives of the individual meaning-makers (Schultz & Hernes, 2013). The process of organizational sensemaking requires examining the organization's external world through a temporal lens to influence identity outcomes and organizational actions (Weick et al., 2005).

At both the individual and organizational levels, connections between identity and temporality reveal insight into the temporal landscape of meaning-making. Length, breadth, and depth of time in the use of organizational memory correlates with formulating respective future identities (Shultz & Hernes, 2013). "Living presents are characterized by temporal float, which signifies reversibility of experiences during the

encounter” (Shultz & Hermes, 2013, p. 75). Reversibility of experiences may indicate the possibility for change in the way that organizational pasts connect to organizational futures, by highlighting their inconsistencies in living presents. When inconsistencies in values, goals, or norms emerge, identity conflicts or negative identity narratives can develop.

Inconsistencies in identity may arise through cues from textual, material, and oral memory forms correlating with the time horizon, scope, and depth of claims for future identities (Schultz & Hermes, 2013). The notion *living presents* invokes organizations as ongoing accomplishments, where creation, emergence, and becoming is shaped by both past and future. Constructing and reconstructing identities is an act of connecting with past and future interpretations through a process of sense-making.

Reflecting on the past is an act of remembrance, similarity, and evocation (Hernes, 2014) while looking toward the future evokes aspirations and expectations. As Hernes (2014) noted, “Acts of articulation take place in the flow of the present but become events of articulation at the closure of the present, to be constructed as parts of event formations at other presents” (p. 122). The process of temporal meaning-making can evoke emotion and power of future aspirations and fresh identity possibilities.

### **Organizational Identity & Women Leader Identity**

Examining organizational identity at the intersection of women leader identity reveals powerful ways that women are finding belonging and resilience within their leadership roles that are situated in historically male-dominated spaces. To identify with an organization, one must have what Haslam and Ellemers (2005) asserts is an identity as a member of the organization. Identifying as a member requires the woman leader to



situate herself in the context that comes along with a set of cognitions, affect, and outcomes expectations of the role she plays. Czarniawska (2011) argued that words are “taken for granted because in most cases they were coined by people with authority or power, and not because they have a direct relationship to reality” (p. 369). This suggests that even the language used to communicate women leader identity is subjectively male.

Both inherent embodied experience and environmental factors, such as language affect how women leaders come to learn and view their identities within their leadership positions. Praxeology, in the case of women leaders, is not so much a cognitive perspective as an embodied action practice. Embodied leaders, or embodied action practitioners of leadership, absorb new identity information by experiencing themselves in a wide variety of contextual practices. As the woman leader brings her individual identity, embodied and cognitive processes included, into the fold of client organizations, that in turn influences the sense-making process and becoming-ness of the organization itself.

Within organizational cultures, individual thinking also plays a role. Toukas and Chia (2011) suggest that process-oriented people use strategy, intuition, and context to make leadership decisions. Hernes takes it one step further to suggest that one’s understanding is sometimes constructed arbitrarily “as distinctions are made to seem like neat lines even when in reality, they are mere fuzzy gradations” (2004, p. 14). While not exhaustive, Hernes’ work indicates that there are more than concrete boundaries keeping organizational identities together.

Organizational identities are infused with individual stories and artifacts from the past, individual meaning-making in the living present, and directed toward future

individual aspirations (Hernes, 2014). To the extent that there is alignment between individual and organizational identity, women who own their stories, having developed themselves as skilled sense makers, and who can articulate future-forward visions may likely find themselves in leadership roles in the workplace. Identity misalignment may cause identity conflict. The identity demands of being a woman leader may be renegotiated, cognitively decoupled, buffered, and enacted sequentially or chronologically ordered to prevent further identity conflict (Ashforth et al., 2008).

Emulation, whether forced or willfully committed, can eventually lead to affinity toward the organizational group identity.

### **Identity Coalescence vs. Identicide**

Identification can either take the form of a noun that marks a sense of stability or a verb that illustrates the process of becoming. Self-referential answers to the questions, “Who am I?” and “Who are we?” reveal a *coalescence* between self and group (Ashforth et al., 2008). Some identifications can be tried on like new clothes while others can be forced through *identicide* or identity erasure (Ashforth, et al., 2008). While situated identification takes a transient form due to the many hats one wears, deep identification involves defining oneself in terms of the organizational group.

Identicide is the effect of an oppressive forceful decoupling of one’s identity through the illegalization of cultural identities and forced assimilation into the dominant group. Forced emulation from the dominant group causes the minority group to emulate ways of being and knowing without buy-in. Forced emulation is a cultural assimilation practice that can have dangerously oppressive results. Historical examples of forced assimilation include Indigenous children being taken from their families and culturally

subordinated at residential boarding schools (Jacobs, 2006). In another example, the American slave trade forced white settler colonialism on Africans, leaving many without knowledge of their heritage or ancestry.

Forcing minority groups, including women, to emulate dominant cultural practices to assimilate them to dominant paradigms is a signpost of power and privilege dynamics. Seeing oneself as negatively impacted by one's own privilege, lacking empathy, for example, and desiring to do something about it may be impossible without the vulnerable feeling of shame (Spelman, 1991). While some organizations aspire to move beyond co-suffering to respect for individual agency and insurgency of those on the margins, many fall short of their aims.

Crotty (1998) suggested that women must work in solidarity with each other, to “engage in a movement for deliverance from oppression and the attainment of equality” (p. 162). Such synergies reveal the future of identification solutions for meaning structures in transition. If organizational life is pulsations of living presents within an unfolding pattern of collectivity, then gender identity reflexivity stands as a relevant driver for future research. The next section addresses some of the social change modes of deliverance that women leaders are invoking in response to organizational shortfalls.

### **Social Change**

The previous section outlined the identity challenges that women leaders face within their organizations and communities of practice. This section moves to an appreciation of resilience strategies that women leaders use in overcoming identity challenges and affecting social change. This section is organized into three core areas of focus, including resilience strategies that women leaders are using to resist identicide,

social entrepreneurship as a social change action, and the implications of social entrepreneurship on gender equity advancement and inclusive growth.

### **Resilience Strategies for Resisting Identicide**

Fortunately, there are inspiring examples of women leaders who have resisted forced assimilation to define themselves in terms of their own sovereignty within non-dominant groups. Many American Indian female leaders are valued for their skills of listening, patience, and contemplation developed as innovative strategies to accomplish a task (Portman & Garrett, 2005). Active listening is a skill whereby women can hear each other's stories to better understand their subjective experiences. Listening is most opportune in the personal and professional spheres of networking.

Empathy is a strong element of identifying with, or perspective-taking using one's imagination, to experience a possible range of feelings, contexts, and subjectivities. American Indian "Medicine Way" traditions recognize a relationship between empathy as connectedness and "being" as an act of sovereignty (Portman & Garrett, 2005). When "being" receives much of its power from connectedness, our sovereignty as women depends on our individual empathetic skills. Connecting this to process-relational ontology, perhaps the best way to evoke empathy is to develop the sovereign self in relation to everything around us so that we may live in accord with the natural flow of life energy.

### **Toward Identity Coherence**

Coherence is an interconnection of diverse elements, relationships, or values, with congruity and consistency (Merriam-Webster). Finding coherence between a woman leader's identity, and the organizational identity she represents may require personal

reflexivity and socio-cultural understanding. Not that individual identity is more important than organizational identity, but rather that both are necessary.

For example, a personal revelation that comes out of cognitive dissonance may cause the individual to vote differently, volunteer, or donate money to minority-interest groups, therefore influencing the future of that group (Davis, 2004). In other words, it is not enough to sulk about the humanistic problems of women leader identity in isolation—one must also participate with organizational identities and disrupt them publicly.

An inspiring example of women leader identity coherence with organizational identity can be found in the political campaign of Idaho State Representative Paulette Jordan (Paulette for US Senate, 2020). The way that Paulette Jordan ran her political campaign was different from the way that her opponent Jim Risch, or any other opponent before or since. As a young, progressive, lesbian, Native American, Paulette's identity had a direct relationship with the kind of relational, respectful, responsible, and reciprocal tactics of her campaign. Her identity as a women leader also influenced her administration's identity within the context of her spot on the Idaho House of State Representatives. By hearing the stories of successful women leaders navigating their individual identities in coherence with the organizational identities they represent, more can be learned about how women leaders are continuing to find belonging and resilience.

### **Identity Cross-Cutting**

Women leaders may find coherence in the workplace with one of their intersecting identities but resistance with their other intersecting identities. Many large organizations incorporate differentiated systems, meaning that a woman leader may have more than one job title, retain membership in disparate departments, serve on diverse task

forces, etc. (Ashforth et al., 2012). Some of her identities may be nested within others, while others are cross-cutting, such as a cross-functional team, union, or friend group. Ashforth et al., (2012) asserts here that “the more nested the cross-cutting identities that the individual views as self-defining, the more multiple identifications she is said to have” (p. 347). Casting women leader identity in dualistic terms is too simplistic.

Individuals, including women leaders, are capable of simultaneously defining themselves in terms of multiple identities, including a holistic intersection of personal and social identities (Postmes & Jetten, 2006). Meanwhile, with the onset of the Coronavirus global pandemic and ongoing civil unrest, the world has seen record-high unemployment rates as well as mandatory school closures globally. As children school from home and non-essential workers scramble to find work, a model of inclusive growth is critical for struggling people who face the most difficult challenges resulting from current global instability. Women may turn to social entrepreneurship as a resilience strategy to form cohesion of their intersecting identities by becoming the organizational identity writer and taking up new opportunities for advancement within that curated space. Now is more important than ever to develop scholarly knowledge of how women are engaging in social entrepreneurship for the purposes of identity coherence as a resiliency strategy.

### **Social Entrepreneurship**

Over the last 20 years, social entrepreneurship has become an increasingly important international cultural phenomenon (Short et al., 2009). Social entrepreneurship is a term that has many definitions broadly centered around finding better ways to create and sustain social value (Anderson & Dees, 2002, Hamby, Pierce & Brinberg et al.,

2010). Social entrepreneurship is exercised when a person or group addresses critical social needs through recognition and catalyzation of opportunities to do so through a process of bold action and innovation (Dees, 1998; Peredo & McLean, 2006; Mair & Marti, 2006). The term “entrepreneur” is derived from the French word *entreprende* and the German word *unternehmer*, both generally mean to undertake or get involved with. While entrepreneurship is widely researched, a review of the social science literature by Short et al. (2009) found only 152 articles on social entrepreneurship starting from 1991 (Dacin & Dacin, 2011).

The first entrepreneurship education was taught in 1938 at Kobe University in Japan in partial response to the great depression. The first entrepreneurship course in the United States was introduced in 1947 at Harvard University, at the height of the second world war and its ensuing economic collapse (Markgraf & Klenk, 2013). In both cases, entrepreneurship education grew from a need for more inclusive growth during times of economic instability. Social entrepreneurship is often thought of a collaborative or team-oriented activity. This is primarily because positive impact is maximized when more people resource their time and energy toward the social good effort.

What makes social entrepreneurship socially centered is that business opportunities are driven by social goals, often involving a mission or vision to create positive social impact. “Wealth is just a means to an end for social entrepreneurs” (Dees, 1998, p. 3). Money does not need to be involved for entrepreneurship to be social. Social entrepreneurship can take several forms, including business ownership with a mission for good, nonprofit engagement, and corporate social responsibility that requires giving more than 10% of profits back the community.

Volunteerism, community development, non-profit organizations and foundations can all engage social entrepreneurship principles so long as they are producing beneficial social outcomes. That said, the goal of profitability may be a close priority in comparison to social and environmental objectives (Peredo & McLean, 2006). Basically, it is the illustration of commitment to providing social value through action that differentiates social entrepreneurship from other forms of “cause branding” or “green washing” so often seen in corporate marketing strategies.

Origins of social entrepreneurship first show up with the notion of the entrepreneur as an embedded agent within the institutions and opportunities they are immersed. Embedded agency involves the conditions that an individual experiences (Affuah & Tucci, 2012). These conditions may have to do with the subject positions including ascribed statuses such as race, gender, age, class, ability, and ethnicity as well as achieved statuses such as level of education, annual income, and positioning in terms of power and privilege dynamics. Individual personality characteristics, such as risk-tolerance, balanced judgment, opportunity-recognition, passion, and innovativeness, may also influence decision making and outcomes.

### **Social Entrepreneurship for Social Change**

Social entrepreneurship and its connection to social change and economic development is a subject of interest by scholars and policymakers (Madhooshi & Samimi, 2015; Perinni & Vurro, 2006; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006). Social entrepreneurship for the purpose of social change often aligns with three criteria: 1) offers a core task or service that is oriented toward a specific group, 2) demonstrates financial sustainability with



financing or resource mobilization over time, 3) musters the support of the identified community.

Madhooshi and Samimi (2015) offered that there are two requisite aspects to the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social change. A social entrepreneur is an enterprising, visionary, and realist person who applies entrepreneurial skills and principles using creativity and innovation in generating business ideas and implementing them for the remedy of social problems (p. 105). Thus, social entrepreneurship in the context of social change is a process of social value creation that meets social needs by creating new ventures or innovative business models.

For some researchers, founder motivations are important to research, with an emphasis on compassion and resourcefulness (Mair & Marty 2006; Shaw & Carter, 2007). For others, the focus is on the individual-opportunity nexus which pushes beyond the agency-versus-structure debate that is so prevalent in social theories of human behavior (Arendt, 2013). The individual choice to engage in social entrepreneurship means that the individual must observe and believe in the realistic feasibility within their individual opportunity-nexus. Newer research defines social entrepreneurs as engaged in bricolage, taking whatever resources are around them to create new and innovative combinations which can be applied to new problems and opportunities. These are just a few topics that social entrepreneurship research explores.

### **Women as Social Entrepreneurs**

Women are often cited as natural social entrepreneurs due to their innate relational and collaborative leadership capabilities. “Inclusive innovation activities with new and creative ideas that promote the social and economic well-being of a

disenfranchised member of society are increasingly being viewed as creating synergies to generate shared value, which ultimately supports inclusive growth” (Azmat et al., 2015, p. 252). Women’s social entrepreneurship efforts do not always get media and political attention because they often exist within informal networks rather than in formal economies (Ahl, 2006, Datta & Gailey, 2012).

Yet, women’s business efforts have made significant economic impact across the world (de Bruin et al., 2006). Ahl (2006) calls for future research in women’s social entrepreneurship that offers a shift in epistemological position that, “account for factors outside the individual entrepreneur or her business such as legislation, social norms, family policy, economic policy, structure of the labor market regarding the degree and type of women’s participation, and so on” (p. 611). This dissertation intends to address that research need.

### **Social Bricolage**

Bricolage is a French term referring to the process of making do by applying combinations of resources at hand to new problems and opportunities (Baker & Nelson, 2005). Bricolage could be as simple as making something from nothing, while one who engages in bricolage is a bricoleur. Other scholars view bricolage as using objects in the found environment in a creative process to develop something of value to the community (Garud & Karnoe, 2003). Newer research defines social entrepreneurs as engaged in bricolage (Desa, 2011).

Di Domenico et al. (2010) suggested that social entrepreneurs are engaging bricolage that demonstrates theoretical underpinnings for a model that resists the model of man as a rational calculator. Instead of mobilizing activities that toward further

obtaining an advantaged resource position or working to shape near-term reality, *bricoleurs* engage in something different. “They use resources on hand to solve the problem in a new way or combine existing resources to potentially unlock a new source of value” (Di Domenico, et al. 2010, p. 8). In the case of women social entrepreneurs, the bricoleur is making do, by refusing to surrender to the constraints of their situational limitations engaging bricolage by improvising new ways to create value. That is, taking whatever resources are around them to create new and innovative combinations which can be applied to new problems and opportunities. The results of bricolage may come from an individual social entrepreneur (Baker, 2007) or an organization practicing social entrepreneurship (Garud & Karnoe, 2003).

Organizational bricolage is operationalized as material bricolage, labor bricolage, and skills bricolage, which all serve as dimensions for new ventures (Shane, 2003). While some entrepreneurs conduct business haphazardly by implementing negative events, forced assimilation tactics, and identity conflicts, social entrepreneurs engage as bricoleurs by nurturing synergies between complex social identities to foster coalescence, integration, creativity, experimentation, and play. In this way, social entrepreneurs act as bricoleurs by piecing together what resources are available to create something of value for the community.

### **Gender Equity**

Gender equality as it relates to equal rights for all humans was made part of the Universal Human Rights Law by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948 (UN Declaration of Human Rights, 1948). The concept of gender equity, however, deals with the allocation of rewards, punishments, and resources in accordance with recipients’

inputs and contributions (Adams, 1963). Studies show that increased diversity, including gender, leads to increased innovation, creativity, and performance in organizations (Horwitz & Horwitz, 2007). And yet, based on data from its widely respected Global Gender Gap Index, “WEF estimates that it will take the United States another 208 years to reach gender equality. At the current pace of change, gender equality won’t arrive in the U.S. until the year 2227” (Gates, 2019). Gender equity is not a problem that can be solved in one lifetime.

Central to the construct of gender equity is that gender is viewed differently in different cultures and is used to oppress people in different ways (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 2012). For example, a cis-gendered woman is privileged to have a body that affirms the way that she feels inside. However, the same cis-gendered woman still experiences oppression by the power dynamics of institutionalized sexism. This example is one of several reasons why true gender equity has proven difficult to achieve.

Another way to understand why it is so difficult to achieve gender equity is through the Differential Imperative. In her book on Ecofeminism, Warren (1996) wrote:

. . . the characterization of the genuinely, properly, characteristically, or authentically human, or of human virtue, in polarized terms to exclude what is taken to be characteristic of the natural is what John Rodman (1980) has called “the Differential Imperative” in which what is virtuous in the human is taken to be what maximizes distance from the merely natural. (p. 162)

The Differential Imperative is a move toward an ethnocentric attitude of emotional superiority and rationalized control. Before the sixteenth century spurred the heavy wheels of industrialization to power forward, most cultures lived with a closer

relationship to nature through the necessity of a daily connection to food propagation, seasonal cycles, and socio-cultural tradition. Without this living reminder of being in relationship with nature, Warren (1997) contended that the mechanisms of colonization perverted the human gaze of nature as an abstraction.

Consequently, the same humans whose ancestors would possibly track moon cycles, hunt food, and make the most of what they needed with their own two hands, instead chose to follow the Differential Imperative model, producing the toxic side effect of loss of depth and concern for both women and nature (Warren, 1996). As industrialization forced many men to leave their land and wives behind to seek work in the mines, fields, and factories, so too did it force the mental distance between self and nature. Nature's cyclical seasonality was swapped for planned orderliness and the facade of control began to dominate the normative paradigm.

At this point, one might wonder how the Differential Imperative gained traction. Sir Francis Bacon blamed the lost power over nature on the fall of the Garden of Eden, due to the uncontrollable nature of a woman (Merchant, 2006). As the scientific method gained power, it also fueled capitalism's hunger for resource exploitation and the permanent relegation of women to the home (Warren, 1996). Fast forward 500 years to the present day; and women continue to struggle to free themselves of the tyranny of dualism where they find themselves, along with nature, still otherized and stuck at the margins. It makes sense then, that a good first step toward advancing gender equity is to understand the intersections of women's lived experiences.

When a Black woman moves through an equity barrier, she brings with her a minority status and so do all other women who walk with her (hooks, 2000). The same

cannot be said for white women with white privileges (McIntosh, 1990). While most women have experienced being victims of gender bias including numerical minority status, perceived lower social standing, and subjection to negative stereotyping, women of color are often not counted as women at all (Crenshaw, 2017; hooks, 2000). Just like sexism is every woman's problem, this paper asserts that racism is also every woman's problem.

Understanding intersectionality as it relates to feminism is one way for white women to become more effective leaders, not for the sake of white women's advancement, but for the bigger problem of racism which must be addressed for women, any women, to truly gain gender equity for all women (hooks, 2000). To overcome this ambiguity, allyships may be formed between white women and women of color, for the purpose of inclusive gender equity advancement movements and initiatives.

### **Toward Allyship**

An ally is someone who demonstrates a) a nuanced understanding of institutional racism and white privilege, b) continual self-reflection of one's own racism, c) commitment to using racial privilege to promote equity, and d) engagement in actions that interrupt and challenge racism, e) active participation in coalition-building with people of color, f) overcoming societal forces that attempt to silence white allies (Spanierman & Smith, 2017). A feminist ethic is contextualist, structurally pluralistic, "in-process," inclusive, subjective, and provides a place for values marginalized by patriarchy (Warren, 1997).

A feminist ethic of intersectionality recognizes human-ness through its interconnectivity with all of life (Warren, 1997). When white women reach out and

network with women of color with an intent to listen rather than speak, they re-evaluate their mental models about minorities (Flores & Matkin, 2014). White women need to be wary of the tendency to minimize racial differences in their desire to connect with women of color as women.

Women with white privilege may be able to understand what it feels like to be marginalized in gendered spaces, and yet still hold privilege in racialized spaces. Examining the intersectionality of feminism reveals powerful ways that white women can leverage the responsibility that comes with white privilege to advance gender equity for all women. There are certain tools that white women can wield on the path to becoming allies for racial equity in partnership with women of color. These include vulnerability, listening, empathy and action.

### **Vulnerability**

According to Brené Brown (2012), vulnerability is defined as uncertainty, risk, and emotional exposure:

Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want greater clarity in our purpose or deeper and more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path. (p. 34)

Vulnerability is akin to showing one's underbelly in the face of the enemy. To be vulnerable as an anti-racist act is to acknowledge how one is situated within systemic racism (hooks, 2015). For many white people, the luxury of bypassing race is due to the assumption that they cannot be affected by racism (Crenshaw, 1989). But racism is toxic for all people – a truth that needs to be internalized and shared in vulnerable ways.

White allies seeking to deepen their ability to be vulnerable should reflect on questions that illuminate ways they are deeply disfigured by racism. Practicing allyship as a verb, not a noun (Animus, 2015), means reflecting on the following questions to be able to take mindful action: How do you experience your color consciousness? How does your race affect your thought-ways and lifeways? How have you benefited from white privilege? How have you contributed to the oppression of Black and Brown bodies? Why is racism your problem too? Seeing oneself as deeply disfigured by privilege and desiring to do something about it may be impossible without the vulnerable feeling of shame (Spelman, 1991). Vulnerability may be a solvent practice to move beyond co-suffering to respect for agency and insurgency of action of those on the margins.

### **Listening**

Anti-racist gender equity advancement requires listening. According to bell hooks (2000), white women can become better listeners to gain a holistic understanding of how to be politically anti-racist. White women can begin by listening to women leaders who embody non-white leadership frameworks. For example, many American Indian female leaders are valued for their skills of listening, patience, and contemplation to develop innovative strategies to accomplish a task (Portman & Garrett, 2005). Active listening is a skill whereby women can hear each other's stories to better understand their subjective experience.

Listening may be most opportune in the professional, personal, and political environments. Flores and Matkin (2014) argued that when white women reach out and network with women of color with an intent to listen rather than speak, they re-evaluate their mental models about minorities. A good listener will be able to hear feelings



without demanding control of the conversation and experience sameness without erasing differences.

While white women listeners have the power to redirect social constructions of privilege, many choose to turn a deaf ear. One only needs to recall Sojourner Truth's 1851 speech at the Women's Rights Conference in Akron, Ohio where she famously said, "Ain't I a woman?" "Even today, the difficulty that white women have traditionally experienced in sacrificing racial privilege to strengthen feminism render them susceptible to Truth's critical question" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 154).

If white women were actively listening to Sojourner Truth's question, perhaps more progress might have been made over the last 170+ years to advance gender equity for all women. Therefore, women of color are often overlooked in gender equity conversations and their erasure is reinforced every time white women speak for *everyone* as women.

### **Empathy**

Empathy is a strong element of identifying with - or perspective-taking using one's imagination - to experience a possible range of feelings, contexts, and subjectivities. There is an important role that empathic crossings within cultural spaces can play in the development of anti-racist coalitions (Davis, 2004). While the consequences of racism and sexism are related, white women cannot *relate* to women of color because of their shared gender alone. Empathy soothes the gaps of difference.

Given the pervasiveness of "sympathy" by white women around the oppression of women of color, policy change and action to reduce such oppression is disproportionate to vocalized concerns. It may be that talking about, or even crying over, the oppression of

marginalized people does not actually change anything. Empathy necessarily evokes a self-reflective alienation from white privilege and highlights the important role of empathetic identification in forming anti-racist sensibilities (Davis, 2004). A white sympathizer who claims sameness based on gender effectively erases the subjective experience of people of color. Hence, emotional catharsis is a privilege often only afforded to white women and may result in little more than apathy.

Whereas empathy is an active cognitive process using the imagination which can lead to public forms of anti-racist action. When “being” receives much of its power from connectedness, then our sovereignty as women depends on individual empathetic skills (Portman & Garrett, 2005). The best way to evoke empathy may be to develop the sovereign self in relation to everything around us so that we may live in accord with the natural flow of life energy.

### **Informed Action**

Scholars argue that recovering the connections between the private arena of personal reflection and the public arena of political and social action is critical to creating cultures of inclusion (Carruthers, 2018, Crenshaw, 2017, Davis, 2004, hooks, 2015). Public-facing action is direct social action taken in the context of community public space, as opposed to personal reflection and other internal work that one can do from the comforts of their home.

As such, public-facing action should not replace private reflection. Rather both are necessary (Davis, 2004). For example, a personal revelation that comes out of personal reflection may cause the individual to take new actions such as voting differently, volunteering, or donating money to minority-interest groups. Many people

began to donate to the Black Lives Matter Movement after George Floyd's murder. In other words, it is not enough to practice vulnerability, listening, and empathy – an anti-racist ally must also protest and disrupt. Action is the most public-facing tool that a white woman can use toward advancing gender equity. Without anti-racist action, white women cannot be racial equity leaders.

One form of action is through one-on-one mentorship. Mehra et al. (1998) explains that disproportionately fewer women of color advance to higher levels due to limited access to informal networks of influence. White women generally have more access to networks of influence, which they can share with women of color to eliminate barriers to advancement (McIntosh, 1989) Sharing anti-racist tools with other white women also activates organizations and empowers communities. Action includes white women lobbying for clear promotion processes in organizations, and then sharing that information with women of color. The difficulty arises when white women refuse to make room in spaces where they are privileged. Active mentorship is an important component of intentional allyship.

When a culture group moves from being the central focal point of their own cultural story to the margins of someone else's story, their identity is erased, and they are easily controlled. Chimamanda Adichie talks about the dangers of the single story (Adichie, 2009). If you want to oppress a group of people, you tell their story and start referring to them by saying, "And secondly..." Thus, another action practice is highlighting stories from marginalized voices (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Sharing stories, with permission, in one's own words, and on one's own terms can be a successful action practice for allies.

What women need now is to tell their own stories, with themselves as the central characters. Their story might begin with, “It all started when she....” Stories that highlight all women’s worth other than their reproductive or productive capabilities. Stories that include all the ways in which we contribute to the richness of culture. A herstory. Consequently, white women can tell stories of racial injustice as it relates to their lived experience of white privilege. In addition to calling attention to racialized privilege, white women can use their white privilege to call out racist behavior in other white people and advance inclusive gender equity as allies.

I assert here that white women are not doing enough to push the needle forward on anti-racist allyship that advances gender equity. The time is long overdue for white women to secede from their historical alliances with white men and separate from the privilege imbued by virtue of their shared whiteness. Emboldened on the wings of the #MeToo movement and inflamed by the overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, white women are well-positioned in the current political landscape to take a critical stance on race issues and become accomplices with women of color toward deeper inclusivity and equity. This starts by advancing gender equity to include Black, Brown, and Indigenous Women. This is easier said than done.

American politics provides an example of why advancing gender equity is easier said than done. In 2022, only two women in the House of Representatives associated themselves with women’s issues and environmental issues during a time when going to war meant the continued rape of human bodies and the Earth. If war, water, and women are connected by political praxis and psychological systems, then all three of these should be political priorities. The few women who do hold political power are behold to the

sexist political system that was not designed for them to make transformative changes within. It is possible that they are not priorities exactly because of how integrally connected they are. The political realm was not designed by women, does not protect women, and cannot advocate for women's needs and issues.

When a community of people believes that something is theirs and they are given the knowledge and opportunity to act as authority figures, only then can they fully participate in the protection and advancement of it (Loer, 1997). This is true whether we are considering African women in the village of Kondo who are responsible for bringing water to their families or white American women in Congress who are responsible for making decisions for their constituencies.

In a male-dominated society, the "power-over" structure keeps women and nature in subordinate roles (Warren, 1997). As a result, many women still find themselves occupying caretaking roles while men are doing the thinking work and decision-making. The balance of doing one thing and dreaming about something else can leave the dreamer to feel as though she is wearing many hats. Men can only get away with "power-over" politics so long as women remain silent and go along with the status quo.

### **Gender Equity and White Privilege**

One's ability to demand gender equity is inherently a white privilege. This conclusion reveals the need for white women to change the narrative of gender equity by doing two things: 1) Publicly and universally acknowledge that gender equity is a racialized issue, and 2) leverage existing white privilege through vulnerability, listening, empathy, and action to include Indigenous, Black, Brown, and Queer bodies and their subjectivities. Therefore, the advancement of gender equity is anchored to its

intersectional complexity. If intersectional feminisms are pulsations of living presents within an unfolding pattern of collectivity, then intersectionality and leadership are relevant drivers for future research.

Politics of white dominance suggest the need to tread white female ally-ship carefully. Gender equity for white women only is not gender equity at all. When white women include Black, Brown, and Indigenous women in their conceptualization of gender equity, then it becomes possible to see that gender equity advancement requires race equity advancement.

### **Freedom Dreaming**

The Black feminist concept of freedom dreaming invites the feminist to reflect on what the end of systemic oppression would look and feel like (Carruthers, 2018). By imagining what one is doing, seeing, and feeling when being truly free, the next steps become clearer. “Freedom-dreaming is one of the most significant things any human can do” (Carruthers, 2018, p. 29). In answer to the question of what we can do about the problem of patriarchy, sexism, and misogyny, freedom-dreaming is an embodied resiliency practice that would benefit feminists of all skin colors. Our dreams feed our hope for a more just world. By listening to the freedom dreams of Black, Indigenous, women of color, non-binary and queer women, white feminists can begin to find a place for themselves with intersectionality and feminism.

The task of resisting our own oppression does not relieve us of the responsibility of acknowledging our complicity in the oppression of others (hooks, 2000). Identity development is complex and requires “attention to multiple and intersecting identities and the sociocultural contexts in which identities are constructed and negotiated” (Jones,

2009, p. 287). Understanding identity as a locus of multiple intersections is one way for white women to become more effective leaders, not for the sake of white women's advancement, but for the bigger problem of race that must be addressed for women, any women, and all women, to truly advance gender equity. The next section outlines the relationship between gender equity and inclusive growth.

### **Inclusive Growth**

Inclusive growth has become a major challenge for countries across the globe and increasingly here in the United States due to uneven market forces that help the rich get richer while the poor are pushed further into the margins. Subsistence marketplaces are often referred to as "base-of-the-pyramid marketplaces" which carry the potential to deliver both economic and social benefits that promote inclusive growth (Azmat et al., 2015). While growth can have ethical motives and involve moral responsibility, the capitalist model of profit-driven motives results in uneven growth distribution that often enables further financial oppression of marginalized groups.

An emerging body of case research focuses on lifting women to promote inclusive growth, especially within transitional economies (Dato-on & Al-Charkaakh, 2013; Datta & Gailey, 2012; Estivalette, Andrade et al., 2018; Loh & Dahesihsari, 2013). These research cases take place in Iraq, Indonesia, Brazil, and India respectively. Though the geographic differences affect nuanced embeddedness, all four cases rest on the principle that by improving the status of women through education and resources, nations with transitioning economies create more inclusive growth opportunities.

Much of the international research described inclusive growth as having outcomes related to increased empowerment, resilience, and personal fulfillment for the women

participating in the research studies. Hillary Clinton said, “Women’s rights are human rights.” While inclusive growth differs in developed and developing countries, there is some research on inclusive growth in developing countries that is increasingly relevant to developed countries, especially as Covid-19 and ongoing social unrest push more people into the margins. Furthermore, there is a research gap in women’s rights and specifically, women’s resilience as it relates to inclusive growth. Small rural communities in America resemble transitioning economies in developing nations.

As a field still in its infancy, social entrepreneurship scholars are still struggling to connect social entrepreneurship to inclusive growth in measured ways (Dacin & Dacin, 2011). This is primarily because of ongoing debates around conceptual clarity as well as boundaries of the field, and perhaps most importantly, whether social entrepreneurship is a legitimate standalone field of research at all. While social entrepreneurship does have a direct impact on rates of inclusive growth in subsistence marketplaces, there remain several gaps in the literature that warrant future study.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Drawing connections from the literature presented here, a silhouette of holes emerges between identity, belonging, resilience, and social change. Research using a process view (Hernes, 2014) can provide rich and varied data that produces cross-case replication, longitudinal replication, process representation, and abstract generalizations (Langley et al., 2013). Process questions related to women leader identity might include: 1) How is individual identity influenced by organizational identity? 2) Where are there paradoxes in the gender intersection of organizational identities? 3) How does time and flow influence the complexity of organizational identity formation? Additionally,



process research could illuminate the mysteries of identity forming and adaptivity at the group, organizational, and institutional levels.

Complex adaptive systems provide another opportunity for research. Complex adaptive system models are characterized by their agents with schemata, self-organizing networks sustained by imported energy, coevolution from chaos, and system evolution based on recombination (Anderson, 1999). New directions in complex adaptive systems research include strategic demographic change, social connectedness, nonlinear networking, tending, and befriending, guidelines for an evolving agency, and predicting the emergence of outcomes.

Foucault (1982) suggested that power dynamics transform our collective answer to the question: Who are we? Research in this area could reveal how power relations are spreading throughout organizations in a post-religious hegemonic era. Research in this area could illuminate, for example, how the pandemic has changed the capacity-communication-power of women social entrepreneurs.

### *Conclusions*

While the notion of bricolage has been studied in relation to social entrepreneurship, there remains a need for a more nuanced and developed concept to explain the role of bricoleurs in resource constrained marketplaces (DiDomincio et al., 2015). There may also be a research need to help explain how social entrepreneurs integrate their operant and operand resources to effectuate inclusive growth. This includes but is not limited to a bottom-up approach to facilitating inclusive growth in both subsistence marketplaces as well as more developed economies. Examining the forces present for individuals who try their hand as social entrepreneurs, as well as

success rates and best practices also require more research. Looking at the rates of mobilization and access to necessary resources would provide more insight into the individual opportunity-nexus as well.

Finally, standards for measuring the social impact of social entrepreneurship are underdeveloped and would provide further understanding of the correlation between social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth (Rawhouser et al., 2019). Impact measurements would require theory building for institutional and social movements, collaborative networks, identity creation and maintenance, and cognition at the intersection of social entrepreneurship and inclusive growth. Social impact research on the individual bricoleur and the collective rate of inclusive growth would add critical insight to current research in this area.

What's needed now is research on how women who hold intersectional identities are using social entrepreneurship to gain access to and sustain an experience of belonging and resilience for themselves, their families, and their communities in the United States. This highly relevant research could be used to make data-driven decisions that empower, uplift, and fulfill women in the margins.

This research does not intend to exclude men. Rather, it assumes that highlighting women in the research will also be relevant to all people. Women, with their many intersecting identities influence organizational identity in different ways than men. This research does intend to highlight how women in leadership might find belonging and resilience in historically male-dominated spaces. Perhaps even more importantly, research implications could be dedicated to finding restorative pathways for historically marginalized people, including women of color and poor women, toward increased

belonging and resilience as they continue to rise in leadership positions in the United States.

## CHAPTER III

### METHOD/METHODOLOGY

*Relationships don't just shape Indigenous reality; they are our reality. Indigenous researchers develop relationships with ideas to achieve enlightenment in the ceremony that is Indigenous research. Indigenous research is the ceremony of maintaining accountability to these relationships. For researchers to be accountable to all our relations, we must make careful choices in our selection of topics, methods of data collection, forms of analysis and finally in the way we present information.*

— Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (2008)

In the ceremony of maintaining accountability to my community, I have chosen strategies of inquiry that reflect my worldviews. Chapter III will provide a rationale for the use of process-relational ontology and methodology combined with the Indigenous research ethics and method of narrative inquiry as a way of conducting research for this dissertation. Chapter III goes into further detail regarding methodology and methods. Qualitative research methods are proposed to gather a new understanding of the complex relationships between identity, belonging, and resilience in women social entrepreneurs. The method of narrative inquiry was used for this research to capture people's stories and experiences of real life in their own words.

#### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this narrative inquiry is to gather the stories of women social entrepreneurs as they talk about their complex identities and to learn how their approaches to social entrepreneurship nurture belonging and resilience. Specifically, my

interest is in providing a foundation and framework to further support resilience building among intersectional women within social entrepreneurship spaces.

Another purpose of this dissertation is to help me further align my lived experience as a social entrepreneur with intersecting identities and my research praxis with aspects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies. I am retrieving parts of my history to “recognize how certain lived experiences contributed to my fragmented sense of identity and shaped my lost sense of belonging” (Martin & William, 2019, p. 57). My research involves the storytelling inherent in narrative inquiry methods while privileging a process-relational worldview and Indigenous ethics so that I can conduct research that stays true to my positionality and the communities of practice in which I am embedded.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This dissertation aims to present a theoretical lens of Indigenous philosophy to decolonize contemporary philosophical underpinnings and research. As all research is guided by a set of philosophical underpinnings (Held, 2019); and this theoretical framework weaves together Indigenous ethics of doing research ‘in a good way’ with a process-relational ontology to present a decolonized way of addressing contemporary research needs utilizing the oldest wisdom known to humanity.

As a descendant of white Indigenous (Gaski, 1993) immigrants, I learned Indigenous ways of being without the privilege of personal connection to Indigenous lands and communities. As a Sámi American, many of my ethical perspectives are closely aligned with Indigenous ethics and philosophies here on Turtle Island (also known as the United States). The theoretical framework for my dissertation emerges from

and aligns with the personal and familial ethics that I was taught by my family and community. As such, this theoretical framework weaves together Indigenous ethics and methods with a process-relational ontology for a decolonizing approach. Indigenous ethics of doing things in a good way includes research methods, ethical standards, and practices that resonate and align best with what my mother taught me as a child. More about Indigenous ethics is discussed in Chapter III.

To me, doing research in a good way to me means being accountable to my family and community, conducting research that is relevant to and benefits my communities of practice, adding value to something bigger than me by centering my work within frameworks of justice and sustainability, and acknowledging my role in the research process the whole way through. This aligns with Wilson's (2008) point that, "relationality seems to sum up the whole Indigenous paradigm" (p. 70). Smith (2019) asserts that decolonization of research methods can help to reclaim control over Indigenous ways of being and knowing. As such, this inquiry explores Indigenous ethics to disrupt the settler-colonial ethics inherent in the dominant normative ethical paradigm. Furthermore, a discussion of Indigenous ethics is applied to research ethics for the doctoral scholar as a way of grounding this theoretical framework in ethical praxis.

### **Methodology**

Methodology refers to how knowledge is passed or gained and the way that people come to know what they know (Kovach, 2009; Wilson, 2008). Western research methodologies standard to white heteropatriarchy do not give us the opportunities to create decolonized research. The social science methodologies are not necessarily relevant to the rest of the world or to the needs of a world in transition. According to

Cordova (2004), an Indigenous research paradigm recognizes that western paradigms are not universal. Indigenous methodologies reflect a collective sense of “We” rather than an individual “I.” Humans experience and demonstrate respect, relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity in social environments of which they are a part. Cordova (2004) explained:

Indigenous peoples exist, however, within a colonial structure that adheres, not only to a different definition of what it is to be human, but to the very different social and moral codes that are based on that different definition. From an

Indigenous perspective, westerners are also a conglomeration of the We. (p. 175)

Kovach (2017) asserted that Indigenous research is interdisciplinary by nature and has been referred to as an umbrella term that includes research possibilities in the fields of education, law, sociology, social work, health, and environmental studies.

While Indigenous research can be quantitative or qualitative, within qualitative research, “Indigenous research can include community-based, ethnographic, grounded theory, phenomenology, narrative inquiry, decolonizing and Indigenous methodologies”

(Kovach, 2017, p. 215). In this way, the researcher’s choice of methodology is a political act. Indigenous methodologies require tribal relationships and the epistemologies that come with them. Kovach (2017) offers four tenets of Indigenous epistemology:

- Knowledge is holistic and implies empirical, experiential, sensory, and metaphysical possibilities.
- Knowledge arises from interconnectivity and interdependence.
- Knowledge is animate and fluid.
- Knowledge arises from a multiplicity of sources, including non-human sources.

Because Indigenous epistemologies are specific to Indigenous cultural frameworks, they are also specific to those who have relationships within Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people are often recognized as holding epistemological insights into how human beings can live sustainably and resiliently (Whyte et al., 2017).

As a descendant of Indigenous immigrants who chose to assimilate to American culture, I learned Indigenous ways of being without the privilege of personal connection to Indigenous lands. As such, I do not claim to hold an Indigenous epistemology or methodology. As a Sámi American, many of my ethical perspectives are closely aligned with Indigenous ethics and philosophies here on Turtle Island (also known as the United States). My methodology for my dissertation research emerges from and aligns with the personal and familial ethics that I carry. Thus, the methodology for this research incorporates Indigenous ethics and methods, a process-relational ontology, and a decolonizing approach to honor my ancestral roots and non-western influenced worldviews.

### **Philosophical Assumptions**

I am not an objectivist as I do not see a single absolute truth that is generalizable across cultures. I am not a radical constructionist in the sense of only believing what can be proven, as I believe that things do happen whether we are aware of them or not. As Crotty (1998) noted, “The long journey we are embarking upon arises out of an awareness on our part that, at every point in our research-in our observing, our interpreting, our reporting, and everything else we do as a researcher- we inject a host of assumptions” (p. 17).



Methodologies include a process and design that links the concepts of identity, belonging, and resilience through a literature review and narrative inquiry research method. My philosophical stance informs my methodology, as well as my subject positions of being a white, Indigenous woman living in the United States and a descendent of white, Indigenous immigrants from Norway and Sweden. Being a native English speaker, I hold a theoretical perspective that can be explained and defined in English. Limitations include that I cannot assume intersubjectivity or achieve an understanding of a paradigm that does not express itself in English.

### **Process Ontology**

The ethical implications of using Indigenous philosophy and methods in academic research require a process ontology that values the journey over the goal. Process ontology looks at subjectivity as a complex and open-ended set of relations” (Braidotti, 2006, p. 1), by prioritizing the means over the ends. Additionally, process ontology centers on relationships as a natural disruptor of settler colonialism. Therefore, combining process ontology with Indigenous ethics in research is a conscious act of decolonization of the research process itself.

### **Methodology vs. Methods**

Indigenous research methods differ from methodologies in that they can be used by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to decolonize research. Scholars agree that Indigenous methodologies naturally privilege Indigenous epistemologies, axiologies, and ontologies in the research praxis and application (Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Tuck & Yang, 2021; Wilson, 2008). Indigenous research methodologies are place-based and people-centered because they are embedded in Indigenous ways of knowing

(Smith, 1999; Tuck & McKenzie, 2015). While the research method changes with the place, the people involved, and the context, the methodologies remain connected to one's worldview. To discuss Indigenous research methods, it is first important to understand Indigenous ethics.

### **Ethics**

In the timeline of ethics, Indigenous people first developed a philosophical approach to ethics more than 50,000 years ago (Chilisa, 2012; Kimmerer 2013). By looking at the ethics of Indigenous peoples and their philosophies, we come to a historically grounded understanding of the gestation and birth of human philosophy. Indigenous scholars often refer to respect, relationality, responsibility, and reciprocity as tenets of ethical practice (Archibald, 2008; Atleo, 2006; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019).

More recent ethical theories of deontology, utilitarianism, and Aristotelian virtue ethics do not account for the full range of human experience. To decolonize this dominant normative western paradigm, we must look back farther than the patriarchal ethics established by Greek and Roman philosophers, to the matriarchal epistemologies established by Indigenous philosophers. To understand the wisdom of the oldest ethical principles in the world, we must seek the philosophies of First Peoples. Kovach (2009) offered three reasons why Indigenous scholars desire to transform western dominance:

Indigenous scholars' desire to transform the exclusive domain of knowledge creation immersed in western thought and held in the dominion of western universities has its basis in at least three reasons: (a) to carry on a struggle borne by historical momentum; (b) to make visible the connection between cultural

longevity, Aboriginal rights, and postsecondary education (with research being inherent to academic higher learning); and c) to bring not only Indigenous bodies but Indigenous knowledges into the academy. (p. 158)

Understanding the ethics of Indigenous moral philosophy makes music from the patriarchal voices of western philosophy by bringing dissonant elements of cartesian dualism and rationalist separation of nature from culture, back into harmony with all life. I use the metaphor of music here to invoke the feeling of my grandmother singing to me as a way of contrasting how I have come to understand ethics from the western ethical paradigm. Indigenous ethics reach back in time, before western assumptions that men ought to dominate and control everything around them; and instead celebrate women, plants, and animals as co-creators in the experience that all life is having together.

Examining leadership through an Indigenous research paradigm includes inquiring into the identity of women, femininity, and nature. If we are to inquire as to the nature, present, and future of women in leadership then we must consider Indigenous ethics that have been carried by First People for thousands of years before modern male philosophers were ever babes in their mothers' arms. Such explorations require a significant divergence from existing fields of inquiry on ethics.

### **Contrasting Settler-Colonial Ethics**

More recently in the timeline of history, approximately only 5,000 years ago, Greek and Roman philosophers proposed a system of western colonial ethics that were created for, by, and about European men (Maldonado-Torres, 2007). "The history of philosophy, including the history of ethics, has been constructed from male points of view, and has been built on assumptions and concepts that are by no means gender-

neutral” (Held, 1990, p. 679). In the exclusion of women from this newly hatched code of ethics, most of the life was left out, including ethical standards for plants, animals, and the Earth herself.

To understand western philosophy, and why it excludes women, plants, animals, and the Earth, we must start with the father of modern philosophy. Descartes introduced his method of doubt in the early 17th century to quell the ubiquitous thirst for certainty in a project to deconstruct Aristotelian metaphysics. Doubting mysticism was caused by the drought of human dignity in the face of contemporary science. Doubting everything until it could be proven real, was supposed to elicit indubitable results and a sense of certainty amidst uncertain times.

Living with persistent suspicion of everything led Descartes to determine that one can only be certain of their mental experiences, hence his famous quote, “I think, therefore I am.” He quickly realized that not all thoughts are real, which rationalized in his mind that humans are imperfect. Once humans were believed to be imperfect, the stage was set for a perfect higher power to be identified within theology, policy, and philosophy, thus creating a false triarchy between mind, body, and God. And so, it was determined by western philosophers like Descartes and their religious sponsors, the church, that men have rational souls, plants have nutrient souls, and women and animals have sensory souls.

Late 17th-century Kantian philosophy entrenched a split between reason and emotion, masculine and feminine, by focusing on agentic individuals. The problem with Kant’s philosophy is that his laws of human rationality completely excluded women, children, the elderly, and disabled people as well as all animals and nature. When

masculine was associated with rational political culture and feminine was tied to emotional relational nature, Cartesian dualism spread to men and women, solidifying gender roles and norms.

Further distinctions between men in the public domains and women in the private spheres discounted the experience of women and exiled them from having leadership or authority in public domains of the state and law (Held, 1990). This led to Bentham's work in the late 17th and early 18th centuries about ways that men can find happiness as moral and rational beings, often having to do with fulfilling pleasures of the flesh. Building on this, Mills' late 18th-century work provided ways that men could bring the best possible good to the greatest number of people through their good decision-making.

The account of human nature and political order as male-centered effectively erased the human rights of women, children, elderly, and disabled people and sent them with the plants and animals to the domains of murder and oppression using the fabricated attitude of superiority as justification. Held (1990) elucidated how male-centrism impacts the ways in which women are viewed culturally:

These images, of the feminine as what must be overcome if knowledge and morality are to be achieved, of female experience as naturally irrelevant to morality, and of women as inherently deficient moral creatures, are built into the history of ethics" and yet there stands a contradicting power amongst women who, "must be trained from childhood to submit to the will of men lest their sexual power led both men and women to disaster. (p. 682)

European systems of ethics did not apply when problem-solving for women and nature. They still do not. When women's voices are excluded, history has shown that all of humanity as well as nature suffers.

The dominant normative paradigm of white, male-centered ethics continues into the present day to be used as justification for colonization and what our Indigenous ancestors probably would have never dreamed of, or if they did, their dreaming would have been some sort of dystopian future-gazing (Whyte, 2017). Settler colonialism is not what our ancestors dreamed for their future generations. Indigenous people are living in an apocalyptic dystopia, far from the ethical center of Indigenous philosophies of doing things in a good way. The impact has turned the western gaze toward anthropocentrism, as humans see themselves as the center of all life, leaving the rest of life as objects for extraction, profiteering, domination, and manifest destiny dominion.

Karan Barad (2003) asserts here that concepts are not ethereal, disembodied or functions of vaporous mental consciousness applied to separate the real and physical world. It is no longer relevant or even sustainable to proceed ethically with this Cartesian division of binaries. Connections between ethical philosophies and gender and nature are entangled (Held, 1990). We can no longer pretend that the Aristotelian, Cartesian, and Kantian approaches to ethics apply to women. When applied to women, they become altogether different ethics.

Western ethical concepts of self are positioned from a male point of view and asking women to conceptualize their identities according to them is suggesting that they abandon their own moral concerns as women. Ficklin et al (2022) argued that the only way to unravel western patriarchy is through decolonization:

Western colonial structures hold that western approaches and thoughts are more valuable than other approaches or ways of knowing. Decolonization aims to undo this narrative. It dismantles these pervasive structures and the imbalanced power that hierarchies that are inherent and ingrained in this western system (p. 54).

Historically, female traditions and ceremonies were outlawed as Indigenous women were murdered publicly or went missing and their children were forced into boarding schools, while any non-complying fathers were incarcerated (Kingston, 2015; Lucchessi & Echo-Hawk, 2018; Palmeto, 2015; Woolford, 2015). The atrocious number of missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls resulted in the #MMIWG movement, including events for communities, websites to bring public awareness, and policy briefs that compile publicly available information for families of victims.

### **Doing Research in ‘A Good Way’**

Colonial patriarchy ethics were constructed from male points of view and therefore do not account for or address female issues and needs. When exploring the terrain of women’s identity and belonging we must follow an older ethical framework that is relevant to the female experience. Indigenous ethics recenters both women and nature. According to Whyte et al. (2017) Indigenous peoples include nearly 400 million people around the world, including the Sámi people of Scandinavia,

. . . whose communities, policies and nations exercised self-determination according to their own social, cultural and ecological systems - that is, governance systems - prior to periods in which other human groups dominated them various combinations empirical invasion, colonial exploitation and occupation, and settlement in their territories. (p. 5)

Distinct Indigenous tribes often relate in mutual solidarity with other tribes globally because of their situational similarities and goals for self-determination and sovereignty from settler colonialism.

Indigenous ethical guidelines often refer to the four principles of responsibility, respect, relationality, and reciprocity when doing work in a good way, that is, a way that would make the ancestors of the researcher as well as the research participants proud (Atleo, 2006, Smith, 2019). “Far from providing mere additional insights which can be incorporated into traditional theory, feminist explorations often require radical transformations of existing fields of inquiry” (Held, 1990, p. 679). Earlier versions of these ethical guidelines included respect, relevance, reciprocity, and responsibility (Kirkness & Barnhardt, 1991). Smith (2019) connected the four principles of Indigenous ethics to academic research:

These four principles place the emphasis on the researcher to become “story ready.” In a story research process the researcher must listen to Indigenous Peoples’ stories with respect, develop story relationships in a responsible manner, treat story knowledge with reverence and, and strengthen storied impact through reciprocity. (p. 2)

What follows is an overview of the four Indigenous ethical guidelines (Atleo, 2006; Archibald, 2008; Held, 1990; Kovach 2009; Smith, 2019, Tuck & Yang, 2021; Wilson, 2008) of responsibility, respect, relationality, and reciprocity that establishes the ethical framework for Indigenous philosophy.



### ***Responsibility***

Responsibility comes along with an internalized sense of interconnectivity with all of creation. As a researcher, responsibility means using the research to assist the community (Archibald, 2008). This means taking care to provide materials, resources, and time to ensure the community makes sense of the research. Research needs to be grounded in community needs and it is the researcher's responsibility to develop relationships of accountability so that the community understands, consents to, and benefits from the research.

Responsibility as a practice, privileges an Indigenous worldview and keeps the researcher accountable to community. Shawn Wilson (2008) shares how research is ceremony through the ways that Indigenous people revere and ritualize the process of generating new knowledge. I engage in culturally specific rituals and practices as part of my writing process. This is my way of taking personal responsibility daily and staying connected to doing research in a good way.

Responsibility also includes being held accountable to all living beings, including non-human life. This perspective may be reflected in the absence of a split between spirituality and governance, or between nature and culture (Atleo, 2006). That is because they are connected. "Over millennia, this may have ensured a partnership with "Nature" in which cultural logics were/are embodied as sacred practices and behavioral strategies enhancing the abundance of the landscape by promoting diversity and sustainability in a territory" (Held, p. 2). In this way, being in relationship with nature enables one to feel a sense of personal responsibility for it.

### ***Respect***

Respect is a concept grounded in traditional ecological knowledge that can be understood from an Indigenous cultural perspective as well as a techno-scientific and socio-economic perspective (Atleo, 2006). This philosophy of oneness acknowledges that “all things are sacred and deserve to be treated with respect” (Atleo, p. 5). Respect is demonstrated over time and is measured in both words and actions. It is not something one ever finishes or moves on from. Demonstrating respect is both a ceremonial and connective action (Wilson, 2008).

Indigenous epistemology engages Indigenous research in the area of respect because of the interconnection between all life (Kovach, 2009). Respecting one’s relations means recentering elders, women, plants, and animals in their rightful place as kin (Kimmerer, 2013). Respectful research includes participants in developing terms of process, who it will benefit, and how (Jimmy et al., 2019).

### ***Relationality***

The term, relation, is given to all living beings because we are wholly integrated like a web (Kovach, 2009). Relationality is the forming of a relational space, or container of intention, from which relata can emerge and begin to relate (Barad, 2003). Maintaining good relations generates meaningful praxis. Atleo (2006) described a “philosophy of oneness” in which all of life is sacred and deserves to be treated with respect and revered as gifts (p. 5).

This sense of oneness is demonstrated in cultural practices that promote diversity and sustainability but also promote *survivance*. *Survivance* is an Indigenous term that Gerald Vizenor described as the combination of survival and resistance strategies

focusing on presence over absence, renunciation of dominance, and the heritable right of Indigenous people through their relationship with the land they've lived on since time immemorial (Vizenor, 2008).

Relationality is central to examining leadership in a good way because it highlights the interconnectedness of all life. "The relationship of land and specific sites is central to identity... self-identity is anchored in place" (Atleo, 2006, p. 2). Settler colonial Europeans were seen as "floating" because they did not have a relationship with the land. Postcolonial Indigenous ethics weave together people, animals, plants, rocks, and ancestors through their living and breathing relationships.

### ***Reciprocity***

Doing research in a good way means ensuring the full dissemination of findings to the community. It also means that the nature of the research topic is relevant to the community being researched so that findings add value to the strength and sovereignty of the community. This requires cultivating relationships throughout the research process, starting long before the research begins and continuing after the research is over.

Stories are a form of reciprocity because they carry gifts of wisdom. Stories create a relationship between the teller and the listener. The space that is created between them becomes an embodied and dialogic process of reciprocity (Kinloch & Sand Pedro, 2014). Trust is built between the storyteller and the listener. Stories are the past's way of giving to the future. As Tuck and Yang (2021) note, "storywork is Native futurity in practice" (p. xi). Reciprocity can also be given in the form of song, land, animals, prayers for offerings of gratitude, and appreciation. In this way, reciprocity can also be a demonstration of respect for the interconnectivity between all life.

Upon reviewing the tenets of Indigenous ethics, it becomes clear that doing research in a good way requires consistent demonstrations of responsibility, respect, relationality, and reciprocity. Such demonstrations are especially important within the community where the scholar is conducting her research. Research methods done in ‘a good way’ are also ceremonial in their demonstration of responsibility, respect, reciprocity, and relationality. These four tenets become a form of ceremony in and of themselves.

### *Anticipated Ethical Issues*

Addressing the above issue that Crotty puts forward around situated freedom, it is important to acknowledge that the study sample, race, does not account for unsuccessful or unlisted women social entrepreneurs. So, all women have some “success” or “resilience” to report since they are still in business. Crotty (1998) pointed to Friere when imagining humans as conscious beings endowed with creative imagination and situated freedom:

As conscious beings, humans are endowed with creative imagination. This means that they find themselves confronted not by brute factuality, or sheer material circumstance, but by what can only be described as a human situation. This is a situation that holds creative possibilities, for humans are able to see it not only in terms of what it is but also in terms of what it can be. They can do something about their situation and, precisely as human beings, they are called to do something about it. This, and only this, is the kind of freedom human beings enjoy. It is situated freedom, an embodied freedom – not the freedom to realize absolute, abstract ideals as such, but the freedom to address themselves to their

situation, seize upon its growing points, and out of the worst to create the better.

(p. 149)

Data may highlight stories, processes, approaches, and best practices of those social entrepreneurs who have demonstrated a great deal of resilience based on being selected for this inquiry.

To address anticipated ethical issues, this research follows the policies and protocols of the International Review Board (IRB) which was established after research abuse was continuously perpetrated on marginalized and vulnerable populations, including Indigenous and Native people (Smith, 2012). According to Smith (2012), marginalized groups have a clear delineation:

Marginalized populations are often described as groups who have little access to power – for example, women, ethnic minority groups, gay and lesbian communities, children, and youth. Vulnerable populations are also marginalized from power but are considered particularly vulnerable because they have even less individual agency to provide informed consent (p. 207).

The IRB was formed after the Holocaust, influenced by the 1964 Helsinki Declaration, the 1974 Nuremberg Code of Ethics (1974), and the 1979 Belmont Report, and followed by the 2005 UNESCO Universal Declaration on Bioethics and Human rights. All of which unfortunately came too late for Native people who had already been colonized by settler colonialism (Smith, 2012). Many marginalized groups, including Indigenous and women, continue to be exposed to research abuse despite the IRB protocols. Some have formed their own codes such as the Te Ara Tika Guidelines for Maori Research Ethics, which puts forward a framework for research ethics and

committee members (Hudson et al., 2010). This study follows precedent from Atleo (2006), Archibald (2008), Archibald (2019), Held (1990), Kovach (2009), Smith (2019), Tuck & Yang (2021), and Wilson (2008) on Indigenous research ethics of responsibility, respect, relationality, and reciprocity; and in addition to following IRB protocols.

### **Expected Impact**

Friere (2018) remarked, “Functionally, oppression is domesticating” (p. 51).

Additionally, Crotty (1998) commented on Freire’s work, adding:

This is the culture of silence. The oppressed are submerged in their situation and, as long as they remain so submerged, they cannot be active subjects intervening in reality; they cannot become engaged in the struggle for their own liberation. They need help to emerge and engage in that struggle. (Crotty, 1998, p. 155)

This research aims to help women in America to emerge and engage in the struggle for resilience and inclusive growth in business. At best, my outcomes will be suggestive rather than conclusive. There will not be any ‘one true way’ of seeing things presented in the outcomes. In fact, outcomes may be delivered in the form of more informed questions.

### **Methods**

Narrative inquiry is a qualitative method that studies the way humans experience the world and the qualities of life (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Moen, 2006; Spector-Mersel, 2011). The narrative is viewed with a relational ontology since humans are constantly in a process of creating narratives in their lives (Caine et al., 2013; Spector-Mersel, 2011). While situated within the field of qualitative research, narrative inquiry cuts across all social sciences and has been used in literary theory, education, history,

sociology, anthropology, linguistics, psychology, art, film, and leadership studies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Thus, narrative can be used to explore a variety of research questions.

Narratives can focus on complex ways that individuals or groups experience the world (Fisher et al., 2018). These lived experiences may be, “read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us what conventions demand” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990, p. 2). Narratives can also be ways that people live their lives and share stories about their lived experiences to build a “strengths-based identity” (D’Cruz et al., 2019, p. 994). For this reason, narratives are often used to conduct research around identity (Allaire, 2018; Moen, 2006).

As a research method, narrative inquiry studies are aimed at understanding lived experiences (Bruce et al., 2016; Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Moen, 2006). What distinguishes narrative inquiry from other qualitative frameworks is the fact that there are no automatic starting or finishing points (Andrews, 2021). This method aims to explore personal experiences without reducing them to generalizable theories, thereby enabling narratives to be co-constructed between researcher and participant (Moen, 2006). Therefore, narrative inquiry invites researchers to be in relationship with those they are researching (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Data is the representation of stories told by the person being interviewed. Data is also generated by the researcher participating in the meaning-making process (Caine et al., 2013).

Evans-Winters (2021) argued that narrative inquiry methods are known for being more ontologically accessible to the researcher and community because they are part of our norms, traditions, rituals, and beliefs persist within our families, communities,

schools, workplaces, and/or spiritual and religious traditions. When using narrative inquiry as a research method, language and experience are interdependent. Bruce et al (2016) might add here that such interdependence requires an open-ended and fluid approach that is the hallmark of emergent design research processes.

Bruce et al. (2016) asserts that emergent design is structured essentially to allow for an evolution in the research process as the findings and new knowledge emerge. Narrative inquiry is the most relevant type of qualitative research method for this study because of the opportunity to listen to stories shared in an open format. Thus, interview questions were more for guiding or probing, but did not drive the interview experience or storytelling methods.

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### **Process of Gathering Data**

Typically, in narrative inquiry research, one tends to have a small group of participants for data collection (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006). The reason for having fewer participants is to encourage the development of rich, dense stories (Andrews, 2021). Having a smaller group of participants also enables the researcher to be strategic and intentional about choosing participants.



After initial interviews are conducted, second and third interviews add to the richness and denseness of the interviewees' stories (Bruce et al., 2016). Data can be collected through storytelling, case studies, field notes, letter writing, focus groups, journal records, autobiographical writing, semi-structured interview transcripts, photos, metaphors, songs, spoken word, poetry, documents, artifacts, personal philosophies (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; Moen, 2006). It is important at this point to consider the role of the researcher in the data collection process, which is subjectively steeped in a co-creation such that the researcher becomes part of the research itself.

The population for this study included five women who are social entrepreneurs in their own communities who hold complex intersectional identity stories. All participants live and work in the Pacific Northwest of the United States. Interviewees were invited to participate based on their possessing three main criteria. The first requirement was that each interviewee had to be someone I was already in relationship with to keep me accountable to my community and honor the Indigenous practice of doing things in a good way. Following an Indigenous protocol of ethics, the merits of having an established relationship override any trade-offs of potential bias or social influence in the data. Furthermore, being in relationship to my interviewees also enabled me to hold myself accountable to interviewees and include my own subjectivities as part of the research.

The second requirement was that each interviewee had at least three intersecting identities that are culturally marginalized or minoritized through systemic oppression. For example, all interviewees self-identified cis women, a minoritized subject position based on gender. They also held two additional minoritized subject positions along race,

ethnicity, orientation, age, ability, etc. Secondary stratification reflected income, age, religious affiliation, education level, and racial self-identification. However, because this was an open-ended interview method, participants may or may not have referred to all their ascribed identity statuses during the interviews. Therefore, secondary stratification was a framework that remained fluid through the data gathering and analysis process.

The third requirement was that each interviewee had to be operating in their professional lives as full-time social entrepreneurs. Qualification for social entrepreneurship was based on the organization's mission or impact as creating social value or positive social impact on the community that the organization serves. A social entrepreneur could be a small business owner with a mission of doing business for good, a political leader who engages in human rights or environmental advocacy, or work within the nonprofit sector, or as a c-suite executive with a corporation that gives more than 10% of its profits to a cause that benefits communities and/or environments. The identity stratification of the sampling was designed to reflect gender (female) and social entrepreneurship identities (private, corporate, and nonprofit) primarily.

Methods incorporated the Indigenous ethic of relationality. As such, interview participants were women who I was in a relationship with before, during, and hopefully will continue to long after the process of gathering data. Adhering to an ethic of respect, methods included open-ended interviews that allowed room for participants to share what they felt safe to, disclosing according to their comfort levels, and doing so in their own words and on their own terms.

Consent, transparency, and participant inclusion in the research design process ensured that research is conducted respectfully. My responsibility has been to stay

accountable to my community as I endeavor to conduct this research in a good way. Reciprocity has continued through engagement of research themes that are relevant to participants and their communities, information sharing within my community, public dissemination of findings outside of my community, and including participants as consultants throughout the research process.

### **Stories**

Narrative inquiry research involves storytelling and story listening. Frank (2002) suggested that stories are the vehicle through which the self is formed because stories, “are attempts of a self to find identity in terms outside itself” (p. 115). Storytelling is an Indigenous research method that sustains communities, validates epistemologies, nurtures relationality, and expresses experiences (Iseke, 2013). Stories specifically from elders contextualize research with, “storytelling types (mythical, personal, and sacred), storytelling as pedagogical tools for learning about life, storytelling as witnessing and remembering, sharing stories as spirituality as sources of strength” (p. 559).

By privileging the voices of Indigenous philosophers, we begin to see how original thinkers highlighted interconnectivity and co-creation between all life, including women, plants, and animals. Implications are ethical in nature as well. Smith (2019) highlights the relationship between intellectual and/or spiritual journeys and story practices:

Through intellectual and spiritual journeys into story practices we are drawn deeper into the Indigenous way of being. Our bodies soak up, heal, and transform through the emotional resonance of the knowledge journey in Indigenous storywork. Through interrelational dimensions of storywork we transcend time

and space, connecting on deeper levels of understanding with each other, with all living beings, with the earth and the multiverse. (p. 12)

The entanglement of colonization is disrupted by doing things in a good way, a way that honors the ancestors that the four Indigenous principles of ethical research outline. The researchers know it was done in a good way based on collective feedback from the community.

As the researcher listens to participant stories, they must necessarily suspend the inclination to look for something in particular; and remain open to making new meaning through the listening process (Bruce et al., 2016). Narratives can give power to social movements and social change efforts. “Stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledge while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be contextualized from the truth” (Kovach, 2009, p. 94). Participant stories told become the data and are encapsulated and analyzed within the broader process of the interviewer’s narrative research (Andrews, 2021).

Movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo gained momentum through the power of individual and group storytelling. By sharing stories from marginalized voices, narratives make it possible to form bonds of belonging across similar lived experiences (D’Cruz et al., 2019). While it can be challenging to identify how factors such as race, ethnicity, gender, ability, and other positionalities are experienced, it is commonly accepted that intersectional identities and positionalities are influencers in narrative inquiry (Allaire, 2018; Evans-Winters, 2021). However, stories are where researchers go to look for answers to these difficult cultural and social identity questions (Fisher et al.,

2018). They do this by merging tools of inquiry with cultural knowledge and context within the data collection process.

### **Role of the Researcher**

The role of the researcher then, is to remain cautious about articulating transparently the power dynamics and potential imbalances between interviewer and interviewee (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). One way this can be done is with focused awareness of the researcher's own positionality and by engaging in a process of reflexivity that does not start or end with the research. Such reflexivity can include identifying where the researcher's position in power dynamics lies, and how their research may collude with structures of domination (Allaire, 2018). Reflexivity within the narrative inquiry research document can take the form of a positionality statement, which is a written acknowledgment of the researcher's identities, privileges, biases, and assumptions that ground their subjectivities in a context (Kovach, 2006).

The role of the researcher is also to focus on the interviewee's authentic experiences. Since shared meaning is a mutual construction, the researcher is often in relationship of actively building rapport with the participants they are interviewing (Moen, 2011). Having a relationship helps the researcher to better hear and understand the participants' moral impulses (Caine et al., 2013; Frank, 2002), and construct a mutual understanding of meaning. This relationship can result in collaboration to highlight what often can be a marginalized story. Building good relationships happens over time by being in the same space together and attending to what Caine et al (2013) refer to as the "places of liminality, the betwixts and between, which, we argue, require attention to context(s), relationship(s), and time to explore narratively" (p. 580). Moreover,

relationality is central to the role of the researcher and the participants they are in being in-relation-with.

There are several ways that the researcher can conduct good qualitative research. These include providing thick and rich descriptions, searching for and highlighting complexity, being strategic about choosing participants, and conducting interviews in person to observe body language (Allaire, 2018; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Moen, 2006). It can be helpful for the researcher to keep a journal of reflections to assist with the epoche and bracketing of the researcher's experience while engaged in the research process. Journaling on one's positionality, affinities, and privileges can help the researcher to make sense of their own position within privilege and power dynamics (Spector-Mersel, 2011).

### **Process for Narrative Analysis**

Data provides context, and in this case, the context is a noun or an object that can be analyzed. Williamson and Long (2005) suggest that qualitative data analysis is a creative process because it often requires the researcher to sit with seeming disorderliness, ambiguity, and a temporal orientation toward the process to allow for the incubation of ideas. If I am curious about what's out there to know, and I have a good model for how I plan to get from data to conclusions, then I need to use a process ontology to gather data which I hope will be useful, without knowing which data will become most useful in my final analysis. The interim of the process is where the creativity happens.

Narrative analysis is a process that researchers use to understand how research participants construct stories and narratives from their own personal experiences (Frank,

2002; Moen, 2006; Spector-Mersel, 2011). It is not about generalizing what participants did or said in their stories, but rather about how participants make sense and make meaning of their experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). The narrative analysis involves a process of breaking up the narrative transcript into blocks of stories to be compared with other narratives to highlight a core narrative.

A core narrative is a general narrative that is grounded in the research participants' stories. In the case of semi-structured interviews, the researcher created a verbatim transcript for the purposes of narrative analysis. Transcripts can be analyzed by breaking up the transcripts into stories, or they can be analyzed deductively by applying existing story structure frameworks, such as story circles, to the stories told in interviews (Spector-Mersel 2011). It is possible to start analysis inductively and proceed with abductive analysis once stories have been established.

For the purposes of this study, two interviews were conducted with each participant, including one main interview and one follow-up interview with the option of following up with a third interview if possible. The first interview was used to develop follow-up questions which were explored during the second interview. Once all interviews were completed, data analysis began. The data analysis process includes validation of findings with each participant in advance of publication. To do this, themes were presented to participants to check for accuracy and illicit feedback.

One approach to conducting data analysis incorporates Wendy Patterson's (2013) conceptualization of the six-part analysis of stories. The first step is to identify the abstract or core thesis of the story, including themes or core narratives. The second step is to describe the factors of orientation including time, place, situation, and characters

involved in the story. The third step in Patterson's procedure of analysis is to highlight the complexity of action through the sequence of events that make up the narrative plot. Step four requires naming the resolution that follows the outcome of the story. Step five is to determine what is the coda, or the story's ending. The final step is to undergo an evaluation of how the storyteller makes meaning as well as how meaning is defined and coded or described. Patterson's (2013) process of data analysis is only one way to help the researcher unpack and seek to understand the stories that come up in interviews.

For this inquiry, I used Tavory and Timmerman's (2014) process of abduction that starts with a broad coding structure and evolves into the *de novo* coding process, followed by purely intuitive coding that results in creative meaning making. I'm using abduction to break open my method to see something we have not seen before. As noted previously, anthropocentrism and cartesian ontologies are not moving us forward toward human and non-human flourishing. An Indigenous approach includes plants, animals, and the Earth herself in the context. Abduction allows for these new and yet old imaginings to revitalize, belong, and flourish.

Interpretations of the data may reveal contextualized relationships between the interview participant's identity and her sense of belonging and resilience. Data analysis processes may also reveal ways the participant makes sense of her own resilience considering her identity as a social entrepreneur and regarding her family, organization, and community. Implications of this interview are relevant to narratives of people in the diaspora as well as descendants of immigrants, and identity erasure and revitalization in general.



## Process of Coding

Coding began with a clean read of the interview transcript, without making any notes. This can be followed by scouring the entire interview transcript carefully to identify the most compelling initial themes that stand out to me. Tavory and Timmermans (2014) argued that data contains surprising contents that work wonderfully for abductive reasoning and analysis.

Phase one of coding involved a primary open coding of the transcript (Bazely, 2020). Because I like to work with my hands in the creative process of coding, I incorporated an analog coding method using colored pencils, colored pens, and sticky notes. I hand labeled page numbers and immediately identify any turning point stories that reveal themselves during the interview. Next, I scoured through each paragraph, assigning one of the following labels as paragraph functions: who, what, where, when, and why. These paragraph labels allowed me to begin the abductive analysis process that Tavory and Timmermans (2014) described as defamiliarization. “Defamiliarization allows us to mull over aspects we took for granted on the basis of our pre-existing ideas and proto-theories, and revisiting allows us to make the same observation in different theoretical ways as we go along.” (p. 60).

Upon identifying and labeling the initial transcript codes, I scoured for themes that stand out and wrote them on sticky notes using data directly quoted from the transcript. Then I coded the transcript itself, using these initial themes. My first round of coding provided new perspectives on the material in terms of major themes and relationships between them. As a result, new themes emerged.

Phase two of coding involved a secondary coding pattern that can explore relationality, causation, and reactions between themes. At this point in the abductive analysis process, I became more playful with the data. I arranged sticky notes in different patterns to look for new patterns. I created layouts with sticky notes, to express relationships, causations, and reactions between themes that arose. Themed relationship patterns were photographed for further abduction. I generated word clouds using direct quote data from the transcript document. The purpose of generating word clouds in abduction is to look for hidden clues that I may have missed in the first two phases of coding. Word clouds revealed new themes, affirm, or upend the themes that I had developed on my own, in the first two phases.

Phase three of coding required the development of analytic memos that pulled my categories and patterns into more holistic conclusions about what my interviewee said, meant, and believed. This was an intuitive process dedicated to what Tavory and Timmermans (2014) called creative meaning-making:

By focusing on creative meaning-making, we move beyond the false dichotomy between the context of discovery and the context of justification. Justification and discovery are part of the same research context. Thinking through semiotic chains and their consequences allows us to approach the questions of explanation, causality, and variation without falling into the problems that these attempts to often entail. (p. 121)

In the process of exploring for explanation and variation, I stuck each themed sticky note to its own sheet of paper. Then I collated quotes from the transcript according to that specific themed category. What resulted were lists of quotes organized by themed

category. Photos of themed category lists will be taken for further abduction. At this point, I began to move the coded theme category lists around and rearrange them on the table in different configurations to identify relationality, causation, and reactions between them.

Eventually, the result returned me to my first step of coding. One way this happened was by labeling each team category list with the initial comment functions: who, what, how, when, and why. These initial codes took on new meanings when they are reassigned one each, to the themed category lists.

Phase four of coding held space for purely intuitive coding processes or ideas to emerge. I started to play with combinations of quotes from each themed category list. I organized different sentences using a piece from each themed category list, or construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct single statements that include the who, what, how, when, and why themes. My intention was to create multiple versions of a single-sentence gestalt representing the overarching themes in the data transcript. What may eventually result from this iterative process could include, for example, poetry, by using combinations of quotes from the themed category lists to develop what Tavory and Timmermans call, “the speculative process of fitting unexpected or unusual findings into an interpretive framework” (Tavory & Timmermans, 2014, p. 123). Tavory and Timmermans (2014) argued the impact that art makes on interpretation and analysis:

What art does — through my minute description, through the use of metaphor, by taking an odd point of view, or simply through unnatural line breaks in poetry — is to force us to confront our everyday experience as unfamiliar and thus to gain a deeper appreciation for it . . . Art, then, makes familiar things strange and allows

us to re-evaluate our habitual, or what Shklovsky called “automatized,” non-appreciation of them. Art makes things the object of attention rather than of habituated action. (p. 56)

### **Process of Interpretation**

What I learned from pre-dissertation practice with interviews and the abductive analysis process is that I should trust my intuition. In practice sets, I created themed lists and using them to write a poem was the creative process that produced new angles of understanding the raw data. Poetry served as a distillation of the themes themselves into a very basic message that resonated with the rest of the interview transcript, including the portion that did not get coded. The implications of this new poetry were profound in that it took on a new meaning of its own. Each poem contained a story. Its story served as a response to the data’s calling: to find stories. I interpret this as a sort of *Lectio Divina* (Painter & Wynkoop, 2008) phenomenon, where I engaged in a dialogue with the transcript and allowed my analysis to become a personal response to the data itself. While this dissertation does not take data analysis into the poetry writing phase, that is an option for post-doctoral work.

### **Process of Validating Findings**

Internal validity threats include the fact that participants can communicate with each other, and this communication can influence how both groups score on the outcomes. That said, the nature of relationality embraces group communication as part of doing research in a good way. External validity threats are present because of the narrowed characteristics of participants, the researcher cannot generalize to individuals who do not have the characteristics of participants such as men and people who do

business purely for profit. Some of those perspectives and experiences in this study may generalize to others out there. But to *confidently* generalize the self-reported data to larger populations, a more robust methodology with a larger and more diverse sample may be beneficial. There could be a rich body of continuing research that is born from this work including additional interviews, expanding out to other regions, cultures, languages, identities, talking circles or focus groups, and Large-N surveys, to name a few. The researcher has restricted claims about groups to which the results cannot be generalized.

With narrative analysis, it is important to develop internal and external validation of the data (Caine et al., 2013). Even when we have similar experiences, we may remember them differently. Fact-checking with participant members often meant going back more than once, and often multiple times to check in with interviewees to make sure that memories did not conflict. Reconfirming with interviewees post-interview was a way to level power dynamics because they get to participate in the fact-checking process and confirm what they said in the interviews. Perception-checking with colleagues provided a peer review process that adds internal validity to narrative inquiry. Using multiple data sources and keeping the data closely connected to the stories added additional internal validity (Allaire, 2018; Fisher et al., 2018). Internal validity strategies are complementary to external validity strategies.

External validity strategies included paying attention to the temporal framing of stories, that is the beginning, middle, and end of the story (Andrews, 2021; D’Cruz, 2019). Time and place are bound together with the story. Finally, transcript data was corroborated with external sources for fact checking to add external validity to the research.

## **Outcomes**

Outcomes of narrative inquiry research often arise as a shared unity of meaning-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990; D’Cruz, 2019; Spector-Mersel, 2011). Narrative inquiry as a method focuses on how the story is constructed, whom it is constructed for, why or what purpose it is constructed for, as well as what the cultural, historical, and social discourses are that it draws upon (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

While some researchers try to understand personal and social interactions, others may focus on the temporal continuity of past, present, and future or the situational context of place (Andrews, 2021; D’Cruz, 2019). Moen suggested that the human perspective is not fixed because, “the social contexts individuals encounter are based on where they are at any particular point in time” (p. 57), thus resulting in a changing landscape of context as time passes by. With narrative inquiry, the researcher holds the voice of the story, while the interviewee holds the memory of the story. In this way, narrative inquiry is a collaborative process.

## **Importance of Consent**

Data findings and analysis become a way of characterizing lived experiences (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Therefore, it is critical to adhere to IRB standards and regulations since western research has a long and torrid history of murder and abuse in the name of research. Bruce et al (2016) suggested that approaches to, “enhance trust and understanding between ethics review boards and researchers could be considered” (p. 5). Conversations with interviewees that clearly define and lay out what exactly they are giving and consenting to is important to building trust with research participants.

## Limitations

There are limitations to using narrative inquiry as a research method. This method is not good for generalizing, developing theory, or revealing phenomena (Andrews, 2021; Moen, 2006). Stories are different from actual events because they contain the subjectivities of both the storyteller and the listener. The listener, who is also referred to in this paper as the researcher, may elect to practice inclusion, omission, silencing, or flattening of the stories they've heard when writing up their final document (Spector-Mersel, 2011). Memory is subjective, and stories must not be construed as "truth" but rather received as one person's experience during a particular moment in time and a particular place (Moen, 2006). For this reason, narratives change over time and can only represent the interviewees perspective in the moment that they are sharing the story.

I do not claim to hold or use an Indigenous methodology. I do, however, suspect that survivors of diaspora may take ways of being with them to new lands, even after they have migrated away from their homes, languages, and families. As a descendent of white, Indigenous, immigrants, I was raised with Indigenous ways of being, including a process-relational ontology and moral framework depicting how to do things 'in a good way'. This was taught to me by my family, without a connection to my ancestors' land, language, or communities. I am engaging an Indigenous ethical framework that aligns with my methodology of doing things 'in a good way', as well as an Indigenous research method that resonates with my narrative epistemology that the world is made up of, and from, stories.

I am not doing Indigenous research because I am not interviewing Indigenous people specifically. My research aims to turn inside-out the historical research paradigm

where Indigenous people are gazed upon by researchers. My inside-out approach aims to embrace an inward Indigenous perspective and then gaze outward into the western world of women and business, responding to it from that place. What results then, is an abductive data analysis process that calls out colonizing forces as experienced in the everyday lives of women who engage in business for good.

### **Hazards**

Narrative inquiry brings hazards that largely relate to the subjectivities of the researcher. Andrews (2021) asserts that the researcher ought to practice ethical sensitivity by keeping in mind the dynamics of power and the dangers of interpreting another's voice. Clearly identifying biases and assumptions ahead of the interviewing stage can help prevent the researcher from inadvertently reinforcing preconceived ideas (Caine et al., 2013). Stories are not facts in and of themselves, but rather perceptions of experience (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Therefore, the researcher must take care to choose interviewees who can speak to the perspective the research is calling for. As such, the researcher necessarily provides their epistemological stance and means of analysis transparently to the interviewee and the reading audience.

While narrative inquiry can be used to give rise to positive social change, there are some cases in which stories can get in the way of such social change, even when the storyteller or researcher intends to be an advocate for social justice (Kovach, 2009). Subjectivity and bias can be misconstrued, and the personal story can get blurred when considered out of the context of the relationship. The researcher can work to prevent some of this by using stories to confirm or deny truths, rather than trying to use them as a proxy for the truths themselves (Andrews, 2021).



## Decisions

Engaging narrative inquiry as a research method comes with several decisions that the researcher must tend to during their research process. Determining which stories are important and worth sharing is a decision that the researcher needs to carefully consider (Andrews, 2021). Caine et al (2013) shares that it can be helpful for the researcher to focus on listening for stories rather than listening to stories, during interviews because, “often our understanding as narrative inquirers does not come instantaneously, or quickly, or by engaging in clever analysis” (p. 581). Rather than identifying phenomenon within the stories, researchers determine how interviewees are tracking and making meaning of the phenomenon they are experiencing (Moen, 2006). In this way, stories can help researchers better understand their interviewees and assist with decision making in terms of what to unpack and publish as narrative.

Because narrative inquiry involves storytelling and story listening, this research method may allow the researcher to combine so-called western research methods with other Indigenous research methodologies (Allaire, 2018). These methodologies may include holistic epistemologies, storytelling, purpose, the experiential, tribal ethics as well as tribal ways of gaining knowledge and overall consideration of the colonial relationship (Kovach, 2009). Combining narrative inquiry with Indigenous research methodologies in the case of a study involving Indigenous research participants, may enable the researcher to stay true to the nature of the participants and the culture they represent (Allaire, 2018). If done in a good way, this approach can help break down cultural barriers and challenge stereotypes of Indigenous and marginalized communities (Kovach, 2009).

Many of the decisions that the researcher must make during the research process will affect the quality of the work produced. Some scholars suggest that there are certain indicators of quality narrative research, such as truthfulness, trustworthiness, critical reflexivity, accessibility, ethical sensitivity, co-construction of meaning, awareness of temporal fluidity, multi-layered stories, and contextualization of the research (Andrews, 2021). The researcher may choose to use metaphor or metonymy to explore symbolic meanings and semiotic substitutions between sign and symbol (Clandinin & Connelly, 1990). Or they may incorporate the first person to give voice to personal interpretations and stances in relation to the interview data. Clandinin and Connelly espouse the notion that narrative and life go together which is why “material written throughout the course of the inquiry often appears as major pieces of the final document” (p. 7).

### **Rationale for BIPOC and Female References**

This dissertation research includes references from predominantly Black, Brown, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC), and female scholars to privilege their voices in their own words and on their own terms. Therefore, literature reviewed from Indigenous scholars effectively grounds the argument for Indigenous ethics in leadership research. Furthermore, literature reviewed from female scholars, specifically in the field of leadership, effectively privileges the needs, priorities, and issues central to conducting ethical research in the area of women’s leadership studies.

By privileging the voices of women and BIPOC philosophers, we begin to see how original thinkers highlighted interconnectivity and co-creation between all life, including women, plants, and animals. The entanglement of colonization can become disrupted by doing things in a good way, a way that makes the researcher and research

participants' ancestors proud of the work conducted. Whyte (2017) asserts that, "our degree of success in exercising self-determination is irreversibly coupled with our political relations with states whose constituent people and institutions wield daunting financial, military, and police resources and regulatory and legal enforcement capabilities" (p. 208). Indigenous feminist ethics can include those aspects of life that western ethics leaves behind, namely women, children, minoritized communities, elders, animal people, plant people, and rock people.

### **Summary**

Chapter III discussed the literature around methodology, ethics, and methods for narrative inquiry, gathering stories, as well as processes for data gathering, data coding, and interpretation. Ethics made up a critical section of this chapter including an Indigenous framework for doing research in 'a good way', ethical considerations specific to this inquiry, the role of the researcher, the importance of consent, hazards, and how decisions are made. Chapter IV includes findings from the interviews and data. Chapter V offers a discussion of the journey and its implications.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

*Through intellectual and spiritual journeys into story practices we are drawn deeper into Indigenous ways of being. Our bodies soak up, heal, and transform through the emotional resonance of the knowledge journey in Indigenous storywork. Through the interrelational dimensions of storywork we transcend time and space, connecting on deeper levels of understanding with each other, with all living beings, with the earth and the multiverse.*

— Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Research*, (2019)

The stories of five intersectional women entrepreneurs in this chapter are those of resilience, determination, gratitude, revitalization, and love. These women live their lives beyond what the dominant normative cultural paradigm tells women to be by envisioning authenticity, reciprocity, and the ability to thrive in a culture that was not designed for them. While each story that was shared with me is not captured here in its entirety, I have mindfully selected the most relevant stories to illustrate how they are communicating their identities, belonging, and resilience and how their approaches to social entrepreneurship are fostering these things for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities.

It is critical that I honor tenets of Indigenous ethical research (Archibald, 2008; Atleo, 2006; Chilisa, 2012; Kovach, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008; Windchief & San Pedro, 2019) which were carefully addressed in earlier chapters to include relationality, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. As such, I have attempted to share stories of each

woman in a way that honors our relationship while respecting her privacy and professionalism, mapping each story's relevance to its cultural context, and highlight some of her words verbatim so that the reader may feel their essence. In this chapter, I tried to share the stories of each woman in a good way that highlights her strengths, leadership experience, expertise, and message that she wants to share with the broader community. All women gave me permission to use their names for this dissertation, and my aim was to share their stories with reverence by crediting them by name.

What follows are some of the lived experiences that each woman chose to share to illustrate their identity, belonging, and resilience. Each section begins with a paragraph to contextualize my relationship and friendship with each participant, research setting, food shared, cultural context, and casual conversation outside of the research. As stories were shared, laughter was common as well as tears, and I have indicated some of that within the stories themselves. My intention was to be an open vessel for receiving their stories, and I demonstrated my respect by being adaptable, flexible, and fluid with the relationships of each woman.

This chapter contains the results of Indigenous research methods and narrative inquiry woven together with Indigenous ethical principles of research to respond to the following four research questions posed in the first chapter of this dissertation:

- What are women social entrepreneurs' stories about their complex intersectional identities?
- What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around belonging and how their business creates a space of opportunity for belonging?

- How do women social entrepreneurs' narratives culturally contextualize doing business for good and what are the social change causes important to them now?
- What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around resilience and how their businesses create a space of opportunity for resilience?

Before and after each interview, prayers were offered, and guidance was asked for. Each interview was transcribed using digital recordings collected via Zoom. Each interview transcript was carefully and meticulously edited for errors, and in some cases, large parts of interviews had to be hand transcribed. Then the transcripts were prayed over, and offerings were made to land as, “knowledge is seen as belonging to the cosmos of which we are a part and where researchers are only the interpreters of this knowledge” (Wilson, 2008, p. 38). Only then were the transcripts reviewed and coded; and these last chapters written.

### **Participants**

For my study, to gather stories of resilience, I invited five intersectional women entrepreneurs who I had already known for at least a year. The participants were all willing to reveal their lives to me through their stories. Focusing on successful women leaders, I chose these five women to maintain the ability to write a thick and rich description of their stories. The participants ranged in age from 40 to 63. All of them are college educated, engaged in their communities, leaders in business, nonprofits, and politics, and held at least three subordinated identities in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic class, orientation, religion, and ability.

Every participant was incredibly candid in their storytelling, and I immediately felt the weight of responsibility to carry their stories in a good way, to make my ancestors

proud and their ancestors proud. Employing a narrative inquiry approach, my guiding questions were more like a trail map, allowing the participants to co-create by taking the lead in the dialogue. Because we were already in relationship, I had previously established trust and deep rapport with each participant based on mutual respect. I continued to communicate with participants throughout the analysis and writing process, and they invited to edit their own stories for a true collaborative body of work. It is not my intention to have these stories taken out of context, and so any mistakes are mine alone.

While not conventional to APA, I choose here to italicize direct quotes to highlight and amplify the voice of the storyteller and create a visual cartography for the reader to sense when the voice of the storyteller changes from one person to the next. As different threads are woven to form a tapestry, my storywork weaves multiple voices together into a singular conversation.

## **Findings**

I met individually with participants for two separate interviews, each lasting 90 minutes, for a total of three hours. Interviews happened over a six-week period, and I travelled to meet each participant, in person, at their home or office. The sounds, smells, and aesthetic of each participant's personal space provided a rich landscape as I began to listen to their life stories of personal and professional experience. I was incredibly moved by their stories, and there were many moments where I cried because I could relate to what they were sharing with me. Their stories were emotional, vulnerable, revealing and incredibly honest as I listened to them share their profound wisdom. The collective

embodied resilience of these five intersectional women leaders is amazing to me. The individual stories of each of the five participants are presented next.

### **Colleen Echohawk's Story**

*Seattle, Washington*

I have been inspired by Colleen Echohawk ever since I heard her candidate speech when she ran for Seattle mayor in 2021. In early 2022, we had breakfast together with a mutual friend and I mentioned I was working on my Ph.D. She invited me to reach out to her to get to know each other better. Ten months later and with a lot of back-and-forth communication, I flew 350 miles and rode on public transportation for two hours to have the privilege to interview Colleen. She was gracious enough to invite me into her home, where her husband Matt made a fire in the fireplace so that we could enjoy the warmth while we talked. It was there I also had the opportunity to meet her oldest child, True. Colleen's relaxed demeanor and friendly smile immediately put me at ease.

Colleen is 46 years old and identifies as Native American, cis-gendered female, straight, non-Christian, and able-bodied. She is a mother, wife, auntie, and an enrolled member of the Kithehaki Band of the Pawnee Nation and Upper Athabascan people of Mentasta Lake. Colleen serves as the CEO of Eighth Generation, an authentic Native art and design lifestyle brand headquartered at Pike Place Market in Seattle, Washington. She is a member of the Board of Trustees at Seattle Foundation, serves on the Seattle's Community Police Commission, and is the former executive director at Chief Seattle Club. She is a graduate of Antioch University Seattle and previous candidate for Seattle Mayor. In 2013 she co-founded Headwater People Consulting, dedicated to partnering



with organizations that are facing change to design processes that enable them to thrive. She lives in North Seattle with her husband and their two children.

Colleen grew up in Delta Junction, Alaska, 99 miles south of Fairbanks. When she was first brought home from the hospital, her family did not have running water. She was raised by her mother and her father. Her mom is, "Irish descent whose family settled in Alaska during the gold rush and called themselves pioneers." Her father arrived in Alaska to work on the trans-Alaska pipeline and never left. Colleen is an enrolled member of the Pawnee Nation of Oklahoma from her dad's side. Even though she was not raised with the Pawnee tribe her father was very concerned that the children would not feel connected and so he constantly communicated with them that they were Pawnee, they were Echo Hawk, and they could do anything. "That was his mantra for all of us, and he would say it often."

The Pawnee tribe was primarily from Nebraska and Kansas prior to the colonization of this country. Because of oppressive tribal relocation, "the Pawnee were removed from Nebraska and Kansas to Oklahoma and along the way they lost thousands and thousands of people until there was only 610 Pawnee people left in the early 1900's." Colleen came from a group of survivors who made it through genocide, and she feels very connected to them. She reminds her kids to, "think about our ancestors and think what they went through." She feels very blessed and recognizes her, "privilege and accompanied responsibility with living in this time and feels a responsibility to live up to her ancestors' dreams for future generations."

Colleen's father grew up with his dad, who was one of the last traditional Pawnee Chiefs and so her father got to witness a lot of traditional ceremonies. He felt very

fortunate to have had that experience. Although Colleen grew up away from her tribal homelands, her parents had become friends with another Native man named Fred John in their little town. Fred John was from a village two and a half hours away called Metasta Lake. “He literally adopted the family into their tribe.” Colleen is adopted into the upper Athabaskan tribe of Metasta Lake. While many Native people have been displaced and consequently can feel very disconnected, Colleen feels, “fortunate to be connected to a vibrant community, even though it was a little confusing sometimes due to my being an adopted member of the tribe.” Her children are connected there, and the tribe has been generous and welcoming to them and so she feels blessed to be part of their community.

Colleen went to Shoreline Community College where she connected with a Native instructor who mentored her and eventually her siblings. She feels very blessed to have such a strong sibling group and is the oldest of six in her family. She’s inspired by her sister Abigail Echo-Hawk, who is Chief Research Officer at Seattle Indian Health board and has spoken at the White House about appropriate responses to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as data sovereignty. Colleen is also inspired by her sister Lael Echo Hawk, an attorney who advocates for tribes in the federal government and runs her own law firm.

Colleen credits her husband as, “an incredible mentor and feels blessed to have a supportive partner to coach me and share a family.” Another mentor who was influenced her is one of her first friends in Seattle, Gail Morris, who now serves as the Director of Indian education at Seattle Public Schools. Other mentors include Darik Belgar, and Lummi elder Julie Johnson. With family and friends always surrounding her, Colleen feels, “lucky to have so much support and draws confidence to go be a badass.”

Colleen and her siblings remain connected to going back to their traditional homelands in Nebraska and Kansas. They aspire to attend the traditional corn plantings which the Pawnee tribe is doing to bring back the corn into Nebraska. Being connected to her traditional homelands is important for her, and a lot of Pawnee people are doing the same and meeting up together in Nebraska. She feels blessed to be in connection with her siblings because, “we are never alone, and we’ve all had successful careers that are primarily in the Native community.” They love hanging out together and supporting each other, often gathering around a shared meal to tell stories, drink wine and simply laugh.

Colleen leads as a Native person first. “As a cultural leader, I show up in every single place that I am at as a Native woman.” Whether she’s in a business headquarters, non-profit boardroom, or tribal space, however she is showing up is inherently Pawnee Athabaskan woman. She’s also connected to her feminine and feels that her ancestors have guided her since she was little. Although Colleen grew up in the church, she does not practice anymore, but her connection to her ancestors remains. “If I pray, I pray to my ancestors, and it feels very much like the relationship lives in my body.” In the Pawnee tradition it is believed that when you see eagles, they are literally your grandparents or great-grandparents watching over you and guiding you. “That is the reason why eagle feathers are so important because these are little signs that are meant to lead you on the path.”

Colleen is motivated by impact-driven missions. She worked at the Chief Seattle Club with a passion for ending homelessness for Native people. Her parents raised her to see the good in everyone and if her father found a hitchhiker, “he would regularly pick them up and have them live in our house.” Through these early childhood experiences

Colleen learned that all humans have incredible value and that they can be fun to talk with and great to be in relationship with. “Growing up with these strong values inspires me in the work that I get to do to help end homelessness and advocate for Native people who need housing.”

Currently serving as the CEO of Eighth Generation, Colleen is supporting Native artists, designers, and entrepreneurs. Her transition from working in nonprofits to end homelessness to working in business for Native artists is akin to moving from being on the defense to being on the offense. Colleen’s work now highlights the importance of Native people, the importance of Native art and culture and design. After years of experience in leadership roles at nonprofits Colleen is clear that, “nonprofits will not fix our large societal problems such as homelessness and poverty.” She watches how people with money are making decisions and wants to see the dynamic of power shift.

One of the ways she’s working toward that is building generational wealth for her family and for the people that she works with at Eighth Generation including the artists there and the Snoqualmie tribe who she works for. “Part of what makes this work personally satisfying is that Natives see themselves represented in Eighth Generation merchandise.” Growing up, Colleen remembers when her Uncle Larry Echo Hawk, who served as Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs under the Obama administration and started the Native American Rights fund, was running for governor of Idaho in 1984. “Campaign merchandise became treasured because it was the only household item we owned where we saw ourselves represented.” Now with Eighth Generation, she can be at the front of changing representation for Native people.

Now that she's 46 years old, she shares how things have slowed down a bit. Colleen is now in the "Auntie space," where she feels called to mentor all Native young people who would like her to. In her current role with Eighth Generation, "there's much more time there for mentorship than there was in my other roles. I had been too busy with too many emergent things going on and now I'm much more intentional about mentoring." She works to build prosperity and connections for young Natives in the business world. She's enjoying the work.

Colleen has always been drawn to leadership roles, as she was president of Leadership Council and did debate team in high school. As the oldest child in her family, she often had a high degree of responsibility in the household, and her parents were also very clear about telling her that she was built to be a leader. Her parents told her for example that she might be the next president of the United States someday, or that she would run a business or a non-profit.

Colleen feels very satisfied personally in the CEO and executive role where she can put her good leadership skills to work. She's quick to study and approaches new and challenging projects with a can-do attitude. "I feel very competent that I can learn how to do whatever is needed, and I acknowledge that comes with experience and time." She extends this wisdom to her young Native mentees by encouraging them to, "build that leadership muscle by telling them that they are future Fortune 500 leaders, CEOs, and business owners." Colleen says that her own leadership style reflects her belief in Native people.

There are thousands of Native people and non-Native people who believe in Colleen as evidenced by her recent run for Seattle mayor. "I am a major extrovert and so

running a campaign was an exciting project.” The campaign happened in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic quarantine, and so she feels like she owes it to herself to try running again at some point in the future. While she does not identify as being an ambitious person, “I do have the experience in housing and expertise in public safety and police work to address pertinent municipal matters.” Her resistance to running for mayor again comes mostly from her priority as a mother to her two children, as well as being a leader at Eighth Generation.

Colleen’s identity is strong, “and although I haven’t always felt this confident, I attribute my strong identity to much of the success that I’ve had in my various leadership roles.” Often Colleen finds herself the only Native woman at the leadership table, and she uses those situations as opportunities to model how to be strong and confident for other Native people, especially within spaces that were not meant for them. She uses her experience to mentor younger Native women, “letting them know that it’s normal to have those feelings of imposter syndrome, primarily because Native women leaders operate in a space that they weren’t supposed to be in.” She knows that white, male, and patriarchal leadership spaces were not designed for, by, or about Native women. Therefore, Colleen emphasizes the importance of self-care when navigating the long and sometimes lonely road of leadership.

Colleen finds belonging when sitting around the table with her siblings and her husband. “My husband and I have been together for almost 30 years and no one knows me more than him. I feel incredibly lucky that somehow when we were 18 and 19 years old, we somehow knew.” Colleen’s husband has been very supportive of her as a Native woman leader, often backing her up and following her leadership. She finds safety and

belonging sitting around the table with her siblings where they, “laugh, cry, disagree, laugh again, tell stories, and give each other advice.” She also feels belonging at the Chief Seattle Club, having worked there for so long and knowing so many of the folks and feeling love for each one of them. Colleen finds belonging with the urban Native community, and often attends pow wows, “just to enjoy all of the amazing people who I love and looks forward to connecting with.”

An aspiring author, Colleen is co-writing a book with her mentor and friend Ben Franz-Knight, who was the Executive Director of Pike Place Market in Seattle. “Ironically, Ben is a white man whose family built their wealth on my ancestral traditional lands, and they did it before the Pawnee actually left their traditional territories.” Perhaps it is this ironic history that brings them together in authentic and vulnerable ways. Or maybe it is a pioneering spirit that both share in their ancestral history. Whatever the reason, this marks one example of many where Colleen can find commonality and establish friendships with people who are different from her, a leadership skill that she wields with grace and care.

At the center of everything that Colleen does, both personally and professionally, is her value system that, “every single person as being important and worth fighting for.” Colleen remembers that her ancestors fought so hard for her to be able to be in the places that she is today. “Now I am fighting hard for future generations to have it easier than I did.” Raised as an Evangelical Christian, Colleen does not identify as being Christian anymore. She sees her younger years in the church as her parents attempt to create a safe space for their kids to be around loving and kind people. Colleen works to extend safety and stability for her children in non-religious ways.

While some younger minoritized leaders have been heard saying that they should not have to be resilient, Colleen recognizes that, “I’ve had my own experience of fighting for my community and having to build resilience from that place, which has been very helpful for me as a leader. While it is unfair that Native people must be more resilient than other people, it is just the way it is and for the continued growth of the community.” Colleen advocates that Native people embrace their resilience and be more supportive of each other.

Colleen is passionate about helping Native women and women of color to become savvy and involved as world leaders of business and finance. When speaking to a group recently she asked Native women what they would do if they had money like Jeff Bezos. “Everyone agreed that they wouldn’t be the richest people in the world because they would give it all away.” Colleen sees this as a powerful illustration of why we need Native women to be in those seats and around those leadership tables and making decisions for the future. “When Native people and other people of color are leading, it’s not just good for our communities, it’s good for everyone in them, and it’s good for the environment especially.”

Climate justice in particular, is also top of mind for Colleen, as she recognizes, “global impending doom if we do not have different people at the leadership table.” For this reason, she hopes that women coming up behind her are both bold and strong in what they believe and that they are supported by other Native women and other people in a strong support system and that they are also supporting themselves. She reminds those whom she mentors to, “believe in the power and strength of your ancestors who are guiding you forward and to feel their proudness and excitement about what this



generation of leaders gets to do in their lifetime.” This sense of ancestral pride is something that Colleen takes very seriously and thinks about all the time. As such, she tells her kids every chance she can that they come from loving and wise stewards of the land, and thus they have inherited the responsibility to continue in that stewardship.

Colleen’s connection to entrepreneurship stems from her leadership experience in nonprofits and business. “What I see as being valuable about entrepreneurship in Indian country is that the opportunities are endless for building generational wealth.” In her work as a nonprofit leader and as a trustee of a major community foundation, Colleen saw tremendous weakness in the non-profit model both in dealing with emergent needs and catching the upstream flow that’s coming down from “wicked problems”.

From the vantage point of her current philanthropic work, Colleen can see that the levers of power are still being held by those who have the dollars, and she sees the opportunities of building prosperity and wealth for Native people in the arena of entrepreneurship and business. She sees the opportunity for a tremendous amount of work and success in this arena. To this end, Colleen has become, “obsessed with the generational wealth gap and thinking about what it is going to take to move those levers of power so that my children and the other generations to come behind them will see wealth being brought into the future of Indian country.” She highlights the critical difference that wealth means something very different for Native folks.

For Colleen, it is not actually about having more dollars, as dollars can cause a lot of harm. “It’s that the same folks have been holding those dollars for too long in this country, and there must be a shift of power in order to do something different with those dollars that will help those in need.” In this way Colleen sees business and

entrepreneurship as an opportunity to remove the stigma of poverty in Indian country and, “take the system of capitalism and find ways to leverage it and indigenize it so that it gets back to the tribes and to the communities who need it the most”.

Colleen has a clear message for younger Native women who find themselves Going First in leadership roles:

*What I would like to tell younger Native women is: you're going to have those feelings because you are in a space that you weren't supposed to be in. Like the mainstream culture thought you weren't going to be here. So, you will have those feelings and you need to take care of yourself. Be like, okay, I feel this way right now but I'm not going to feel like this forever. It's okay that I'm feeling this now, so I'm going to take a second, and go do something else or get some support.*

Colleen and I shared a lot of laughter during the interview. I could hear resilience in Colleen's voice as she spoke candidly about her challenges working in predominantly white spaces. There's a vulnerability in her candor and a warmth in her voice that is soothing. I was struck by how she is continuously holding space for the past through her ancestors, and the future through future generations, simultaneously. She cares so deeply for Native people, and she's holding all of them in her heart with the work that she's doing. After our two-hour conversation and as I was leaving, I remember feeling incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity to be present with Colleen.

### **Kate McAlister's Story**

*Sandpoint, Idaho*

I first met Kate McAlister in 2016. I attended her Chamber of Commerce meetings by day and performed with her in a local vaudeville nonprofit fundraiser by

night. I enrolled in a program she developed and facilitates for the Chamber called Leadership Sandpoint. What I appreciate about Kate is her range of authentic ways of being. She can be analytical while sitting on the dais at Sandpoint City Council meetings, jovial while running the Chamber, and hilarious on stage at the Panida Theatre. I was grateful to be invited to her office at the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce for these interviews.

Kate McAlister is 63 years old and self-identifies as Irish, white, cis-gendered female, straight, non-Christian, and born poor. Kate is a repeat sexual abuse survivor. She serves as President of the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce, is an elected member of Sandpoint City Council, and founder of Sandpoint Leadership, where she teaches nonprofit governance based on a curriculum that she developed. She is President of at least one nonprofit and very active in the fundraising community. Kate has two daughters with her husband of 30 years, as well as several grandchildren.

Kate identifies as coming from strong stock. Her ethnicity as second-generation Irish American on both sides of her family plays a role in her personal and professional experiences. Her family, “originated in Scotland and then the youngest son came to Ireland in the 14th century to fight as a Gallowglass, a class of mercenary warriors.” Her family continued the tradition as Gallowglass warriors and mercenaries after moving to Ireland. “These were warriors who fought naked and painted their body blue and fought to the death.” Kate would often remind herself of her family history during the more challenging times in her life, remembering that she comes from warrior stock is a source of strength in challenging situations.

Growing up, Kate had to “overcome many challenges from an early age.” Her family were addicts and alcoholics and did not give her the protections that all children need and deserve. She is a survivor of sexual abuse that started at the age of four. “An uncle in the family would hang me by my wrists with a chain and abuse me repeatedly from the ages of four to twelve.” Kate was often called stupid by family members and when she did demonstrate her own sense of resiliency, she would often be knocked back down with derogatory comments and more abuse. Kate attributes her experience of abuse to her gender. In her experience, “girls were seen as less valuable than boys.”

Kate was 29 when a doctor helped her to acknowledge and work through her experience of abuse. When Kate confronted her mother about the abuse and did not receive any support or empathy. Kate walked away from her family “because the abuse was allowed to continue.” Eventually she found out that the uncle had abused 57 children in the family. With the help of a physician, “I was able to heal and share my story with others to help other abuse survivors heal from their experiences as well.” Kate has since been invited to speak at Lutheran Social Services, Whitworth University, the YWCA, and other large organizations to mentor abuse survivors and let them know that if she can get through it, then so can they. She has helped many abuse survivors as a speaker, mentor, and friend.

As Kate grew up, she felt the strain that the cycle of poverty often perpetuates on poor and working-class people, and desired to find another way. “I dreamed of a white collar; nine-to-five job with weekends off, so that she could lift herself out of the impoverished socioeconomic conditions that she was raised in. At one point, she was working three jobs when her car broke down. “I had nobody, and so I had to problem

solve by myself.” She was determined to avoid the welfare system that her family had relied on and found a way to manage. Eventually she lifted herself out of the cycle of poverty through her own resilience and natural leadership ability.

Kate had her first child at the age of 17, and “I’m glad I did because at the age of 24 I had to have a radical hysterectomy. I believe it was all the stress in my life that caused my health challenges.” She credits much of her resilience to her role as a mother and to the inspiration she gets from watching her children grow up. Kate has two daughters who are also very strong women. Kate raised them to value education and leadership. As they grew into adulthood, her daughters eventually recognized the challenges she endured as a single mother, including giving up meals to give what little food they had to the children. While she did her best to try to hide their financial hardship from the children. She raised intelligent daughters who eventually came to recognize Kate’s resilience as a mother and her determination to lift them out of poverty.

Kate spent years working in corporate America. “Many of my mentors have been men, as there were very few women leaders in the places where I worked.” Kate graduated from the School of Business at Boston College. “I never thought I would be a leader because I grew up in generational poverty.” As a child she heard, “you’re stupid” and “you think you’re better than us,” or “you’re never going to do anything.” Kate never thought leadership was a thing for someone with background. And yet, every time she was on a team or involved in a club, she ended up leading the whole thing.

One of her most difficult lessons came when she was working for a major nonprofit organization to help them fundraise when she found herself advocating for 121 of her colleagues and other employees around a major health insurance disagreement

with the employer. In this case, Kate naturally took on a leadership role that was outside the scope of her fundraising job description. She credits many of her leadership lessons to those initial years in corporate America.

Kate did not have the opportunities to fully understand her capacity for leadership early on, and she had to learn quickly what it meant for her and the people she encountered every day. “Then, on September 11, 2001, after the Twin Towers came down to the ground, I found myself catapulted into a leadership position with a national utility company that I was working for at the time.” Initially hired to conduct corporate social responsibility, Kate found herself stepping in to alleviate suffering of her colleagues. In this case, her boss was unsupportive of her new leadership role, however his supervisor noticed her leadership talent and had the foresight to ask her to stay on with the company. She worked there for 16 more years.

“Being a woman and coming up through corporate America was not easy.” Kate often found herself being the only woman in the executive c-suite. As a result of gender dynamics, “I experienced being passed up for upper mobility opportunities that were given to men of lesser experience and education.” For that reason, most of her mentors were necessarily men. “I share my leadership lessons with my mentees and enjoy working with young leaders of the millennial generation, because they typically are open to the idea that women can be leaders more than people who grew up in the boomer generation with me.” Because there were not many women mentors available in her sector, Kate is arguably among the first female leaders to lift themselves up into positions of power in corporate America.

Kate is the President and CEO of the Greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce. The chamber is a non-profit, membership-driven organization that serves approximately 400 businesses, community organizations, and individuals. Part of Kate's role as President and CEO includes serving chamber membership through business promotional opportunities as well as building strategic relationships in the business community. Kate is also responsible for managing budgets, overall operations as well as managing tourism efforts and grant writing processes. Kate hires and develops staff and is responsible for key programs of the chamber.

Kate has a wonderful sense of humor that she accredits to being, "both a leadership strength and challenge." She balances her strength of humor with her strength of intellect, often reciting the more serious issues of her professional life and then using her sense of humor to bring levity to the story. She also uses her sense of humor with her mentees at the greater Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce. "I enjoy hiring and being around young individuals because I love having great discussions around leadership with them."

Part of her role with the Sandpoint Chamber of Commerce involves developing the curriculum for and teaching the annual Leadership Sandpoint program. Kate developed the curriculum to include nine monthly day-long sessions in an immersion format so participants have a focused opportunity to hone their leadership skills. Her curriculum offers educational sessions and activities in a group setting. Kate's intention with the program is to nurture free thinking, ideas sharing and problem solving. Kate enjoys working with emerging existing leaders and challenging them to rise to the needs and potential of the community that exists in dynamic social and economic challenges.

Serving as the executive director of Angels Over Sandpoint, Kate produces an annual fundraiser that helps bring backpacks with school supplies to children in need. Her annual fundraiser called *Follies*, is a vaudeville show where Kate enjoys playing her alter ego: the Queen of Ireland. Her character is a dirty mouth, sarcastic person and she loves wearing big green sexy gowns and entertaining the audience for local non-profit fundraisers. To date, the *Follies* has raised thousands of dollars for the charitable cause of helping local families and children.

Kate was a single mother for a period and worked very hard to raise her two daughters without the help of a co-parent. “My journey as a leader was influenced by my experience as a single mother in that it helped me to understand what it is like having to learn how to play in a man’s world professionally while raising two children alone.” Kate worked hard during these times, often trying to please multiple constituents and their conflicting agendas or desired outcomes. Now that Kate identifies as growing into her crone stage of life, she embraces the opportunity to become an elder to her grown children as well as her grandchildren.

As Kate embraces her wisdom years, she admits that she loves being the matriarch of her family. Her grandchildren are mostly teenagers now and she loves hearing them say things like be impeccable with your word, the same things that she used to say to her daughters when they were young. At this stage in her life, she’s enjoying the continuation of the legacy that she started in her family. Her youngest daughter described her resilience once saying that she is just like the Dalai Lama on a pile of diapers. “The metaphor seems particularly fitting given how much adversity and proverbial crap I’ve had to deal with to get to where I am in life.” Now that she has brought herself so far,



people approach her and ask her all kinds of questions because they know she will usually have a wise answer to share with them.

Kate made it out of poverty, survived abuse, and overcame gender oppression in corporate America. Because of her lived experience, she never takes her privilege or responsibility for granted. “I recognize how difficult it is for young women leaders to balance the expectations of motherhood with the expectations of being a professional.” Some citizens of the city of Sandpoint refer to Kate as the matriarch of their small town. Perhaps this is due to her reputation for taking people in and mentoring them with encouragement and wise counsel. Her mentees know that they can talk to her about anything and that they will be met with non-judgment and understanding.

Currently, Kate enjoys an active life where she serves as a strong leader in her family, the organizations that she leads, in the business community of Sandpoint, and in the political sphere of Bonner County. “I find belonging in teaching leadership to young up-and-coming leaders.” She loves the theater and often performs in local plays. She sits on the board for Lake Pend Oreille Repertory Theater, where she gets to continue to mentor a wonderful group of actors, directors, musicians, and performers. Kate has found a way to find her authentic voice among the many leadership roles that she is responsible for in her community.

For the past 25 years, Kate has been a member and a leader in the local non-profit, Angels over Sandpoint. She enjoys being part of a working board because she gets to, “help people who fall through the cracks with my philanthropy initiatives.” She understands from her lived experience that, “people often don’t need a lot of help, but they still fall through the cracks,” and she feels a sense of personal satisfaction being able

to give back to children who had fallen through the cracks. “I know what it’s like to be made fun of as a child, and I have empathy for people who are made to feel less than because they don’t have what others do.” She takes her early life experience and consciously moves it forward, knowing that she can, through Angels over Sandpoint, give thousands of children dignity through their backpacks for school program. In her 25 years as a member, Kate has participated in helping thousands of children get what they need to be successful in school. Kate feels that Angel’s Over Sandpoint board of directors is an amazing group, and she loves being part of it, which is also why she has stayed with it for so many years.

In 2016, Kate was defeated by incumbent Heather Scott for the Idaho House of Representatives District 1A seat. Even though Kate ran a stronger campaign and had more fundraisers than the incumbent, she was harassed online for being a Democrat, received hate mail every day saying she should be raped, and death threats targeting her for being Irish. Kate has progressive ideas and believes in education and a woman’s right to choose, which only fueled her strength as a political candidate, and corresponded to the hateful rhetoric of the political opposition in Idaho.

Kate bounced back with more political strength in 2020 when she was elected as a member of the Sandpoint City Council. Through her role, she helped the city navigate the stress of the pandemic, including controversy over mask wearing, COVID vaccines, school closures, and businesses folding. Her leadership was so well regarded by her peers that in 2022 she was elected to serve as president of the Sandpoint City Council. She takes leadership inspiration from other women leaders around the world such as New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern and Iceland Prime Minister Katrín Jakobsdóttir.

Her political advocacy work includes healthcare, education, a woman's right to choose LGBTQIA+ rights and human rights in general. "I continue with the strong advocacy work for the underserved and the people who have no voice, because I understand their experience and feel passionate about making their lives better."

Now that Kate has a proven track record as a political leader, some have asked her if she would consider running for higher office. Several members of the community have asked her to consider running in the next election for the role of the Mayor of the City of Sandpoint. Kate admits that she loves Sandpoint, and she loves the people of Sandpoint. She holds pride that she's going to fight for her community until she passes on because the people who make up the tapestry of her community are incredible human beings. While Kate has some reservations about the possibility of stepping into higher office in such a politically polarized part of the United States, it is something that she has taken seriously and is considering. In her view, the main thing that would keep her from running is the meager \$14,000 per year salary that the city pays the mayor. Such a small salary means that mayors must be either independently wealthy or retired before they can run for office.

While the role of mayor is technically a part-time job, Kate is not the type of person to do anything part-time as she would put all her heart and determination into filling the role. "Another part of my hesitation to run for mayor is that the current mayor has been put through a lot given that Sandpoint is the county seat in a very polarized part of North Idaho." She recognizes that even if she does become independently wealthy before the next election, she will still have to deal with the hate speech and harassment of the extremist right that Idaho has a reputation for.

Kate sees herself as being the kind of leader who prefers to lead from the middle because she enjoys being part of a team. She sees how her whole life has led her to understand what leadership means and she incorporates that wisdom when she trains young leaders. “I plan to one day write a book called *Leadership Sucks*.” Her book will outline solutions to the challenges of leadership by acknowledging that its leaders must make very difficult decisions knowing fully that a lot of people are not going to like the outcome.

Now that Kate has been mentoring young leaders for decades, she has a message for women who are struggling with how to fit into leadership roles and still be authentic:

*You can do anything. No matter what life throws at you, you can get back up and you're going to find a new way, a different way. (crying) And you're going to keep going, and then you'll get knocked down, and you'll say to yourself, "That didn't work. I'll figure out another way." Don't let anybody stop you. There's no value in holding back. That's what I want to tell young women. When you feel like maybe you shouldn't be in that space, remind yourself that everybody still put their pants on one leg at a time. Everybody poops! You have brains, and you have heart, and you can rule the world. You have something valuable to say. Just keep going! Don't let people dissuade you. Don't let men tell you that you'll never do anything, or that you need to get married and have kids. You can do anything!*

My time with Kate was full of shared belly laughs and tears. Her stories are incredibly heartfelt, and her institutional knowledge of business is priceless. She comes across as creative and practical with a keen ability to problem solve. I have personally witnessed Kate achieving consistent success in building consensus and driving collaborative

relationships with nonprofits, boards of directors, government agencies, vendors, and business owners. I think of Kate fondly as the Matriarch of Sandpoint.

### **Shannon McGuire's Story**

*Boise, Idaho*

I met Shannon in 2018 when she came to North Idaho to do some facilitation work for the City of Sandpoint and Blue Cross Foundation. I immediately felt a kinship connection to her. She was visibly pregnant, and I was impressed with how she facilitated strategic development gracefully, among professionals, while carrying a third trimester pregnancy. After several emails and phone conversations, I was elated to fly to Boise to interview Shannon in her office at Spark! Strategic Solutions. Spark! is located inside the Kiln, a multi-story co-workspace complete with vaulted ceilings, big windows, boldly colored upholstery, yoga studio, coffee bar and an effervescence of young entrepreneurs.

Shannon McGuire is 40 years old and self-identifies as Black, female, spiritually inclined, able bodied, and straight. She is a first-generation college graduate and a thought leader in community wellbeing spaces. Shannon had a successful career in corporate America before turning to nonprofits, where she served as VP of Operations at United Way. Shannon is Founder and CEO (Chief Empowerment Officer) at Spark! Strategic Solutions, a team of compassionate ideators, strategists, and mobilizers who love building vibrant communities. In her work as a Social Impact Strategist, Coach, and Facilitator, Shannon helps government municipalities, nonprofits, NGOs, and corporations to help them see the whole system, ensure balanced representation, lead with convening power, and use data to drive action. She lives in Boise, Idaho with her husband and their four children.

Shannon was born and raised in South Central LA in California during the crack epidemic and riots. “As a child, I wasn’t interested in where I came from because I had to live in the now, and not worry about the future, not worry about the past.” Shannon grew up on a block that was usually controlled by a gang. She learned early on, “what colors to wear, what time to come into the house at night, and who to avoid on her block.” She sees herself as a veteran of community war and a descendent of a lineage of suffering overall.

Shannon still experienced a lot of joy as a child and carries fond memories of watching TV with her family and laughing together. As a natural leader, Shannon loved being the line leader at school and would often raise her hand first when she knew the answer to the teacher’s question. “I was a natural giver from the beginning, and the environment I grew up in did not nurture giving.” So, Shannon began to find her own adaptations to the environment she found herself in.

Shannon comes from a line of people who endured a lot of traumas and a lot of challenges, including her parents. Shannon holds African ancestry, and her ancestors were, “brought to the United States against their will by being tricked, coerced, beaten, and robbed. I still feel the generational trauma of families who were forcibly separated and sold.” From that historical context, the privilege of knowing her ancestors farther back than when they were forced to come to the United States has been lost, as very little documentation exists. Shannon does not claim or dwell in victimhood, however. “I choose not to dwell in the last 400 years, or even the last 1,000 years.” She feels the heartache of her ancestors who had to start over in a culture that was not their own, and she transforms it into resilience that empowers her.

Shannon has since reframed the story of suffering into a story of the conquerors' journey. Initially as a child, she wanted to be a lawyer. Then she dreamed about becoming a history teacher, but finally accepted that she was born to be a leader. "Throughout my childhood, I was always willing to stand up, and always willing to hold the lantern and walk forward into the darkness, not worried about if people were following." This has informed her life path of being guided by higher spiritual laws and values and standing in her integrity.

Shannon now sees herself as coming from a lineage of conquerors, "people that have been through a lot and not only suffered but are willing to keep getting up and moving forward." In defining identity for herself, Shannon says that social norms around race and gender do not matter to her as much, "because I descend from a lineage of bad ass conquerors. I consciously work to heal a history of family separation with a mission toward family focus and nurturing." The family unit has become so important to Shannon that she sees herself as a bridge builder and bringing back the old ancestral traditions of keeping family together.

Shannon didn't grow up with her grandparents; that's still something that she misses to this day. She was raised by both her mother and her father, and she has a lot of memories of sharing laughter together. Shannon credits her mother's unwavering acceptance as the beginning of her journey in authenticity. Some of her favorite childhood moments include, "being together as a family with both of my parents and my siblings." Even though they endured tough times and traumas in the family, Shannon always felt a sense of pride from her parents. Pride for being their daughter and pride in all that she has accomplished.

Holding on to a strong sense of faith has been at the core of Shannon's resilience from the beginning. "I was baptized alongside my older sister as a young child and so I learned to listen to and trust my intuition from a very early age." Walking with a strong relationship to her God, as well as being a fan of linguistics and etymology, Shannon has empowered herself to rename God according to her own unique experience: Inner-G, "meaning that God is inside each person because they are powered by that God energy."

Shannon experiences her intuition as a very quiet and serenity filled voice that suits her and lets her know what's right within her body and helps her reconnect with her spirit. Shannon's spiritual faith has helped her to, "keep a clean emotional bucket so that I can find wisdom that is bigger than me." She credits her strong ancestors for all the wisdom that she is able to have access to through her intuition. She draws on her ancestry for strength, protection, nurturing, and guiding.

At nine years old, Shannon lost her little brother to a tragic accident. The family had recently celebrated the fraternal twins' birthday when her brother was hit and killed by a car right in front of her. Shannon was blamed for her brother's death. Her brother was buried on her dad's 36th birthday and a week later the LA riots broke out. "I carried guilt and shame for years until I figured out how to liberate myself from the fear, uncertainty, chaos, and division that surrounded me." Her brother's death was only one of six or seven of the adverse childhood experiences (ACES) Shannon endured. "Looking back, I recognize how much joy I had in my heart before my brother's death, and how much I have worked to restore that joy since his passing." Now Shannon guards her inner joy protectively and uses her adverse childhood experiences to mentor others who have been through trauma and help them find their joy as well.



After her brother's death, Shannon was sent to a different school where she was identified as being gifted with highly creative abilities and leadership capacity. She jokes that, "being gifted did not necessarily make me smart, (laughs) because I still ended up pregnant at 17." But motherhood sparked something in Shannon that caused her to make significant changes for the sake of her baby daughter. Shannon went from, "being a high school dropout and pregnant on welfare to putting myself through college and attaining a top corporate position within five or six years." Motherhood has a lasting positive impact on Shannon that still influences her leadership. She bought a car, bought a house, had two more children, and was living the American dream according to what she was told. Corporate culture was miserable for Shannon, and hard on her family, so eventually she walked away from the toxic environment to move toward more personally satisfying work.

Shannon sensed that she was being, "guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit and learned to trust it." At the age of 25, Shannon and her husband decided to move from California to Boise, Idaho. She remembers, "leaving the noise and bustle of the city behind and settling into the quiet of her new life in Idaho." While her career began in corporate America, she soon moved to nonprofit work so that she could be more engaged in the community. She sees her work as being in service to the greater good, and that is part of her professional identity. She also connects her professional roles as a sacred equivalent to that as a mom because her clients come to her, and they share their dreams with her knowing that she will be excited to help them achieve it. "I didn't come into the space of community well-being because I knew it existed. I was divinely directed into it."

For Shannon, the process of sharing hopes, dreams, fears, and joy is “super sacred.” She can feel her connection to humanity. “It’s a feeling that sometimes comes over me and I feel it in my body, (closes eyes) like a warrior pose with shoulders back and very alert, I can feel a melting of her heart.” From this place she feels connected to the collective good and can sense her intuition and how it is differentiated from bias. She finds belonging in her spirit and, “the power that comes from having the ability to make decisions for myself and sometimes others.” Her belonging is also sourced from how she presents herself to the world versus what the world assumes about her based on her identities. She has a strong sense of who she is, understands where she’s from, and draws from it as a source of strength. “I do not belong in spaces where there’s malicious intent, ridicule, and overall meanness.” She does not dwell in spaces where people are “stuck in victimhood. I consciously avoid victimhood dwellers that are not wanting to make life better for themselves.”

Shannon also finds belonging with her family and the rules that she carries as the matriarch, including tending to her elderly father and his final days. She finds belonging in her business and having a team to mentor and reminding them that all the power they need is already inside of them. Shannon also finds belonging in her “mother heart” and carrying that forward unapologetically. “I belong to this earth, and I belong to this moment. I don’t attach myself too much to biological identity because I’ve always felt bigger than my biology.”

Shannon also feels belonging among leaders, and at the leadership table. She also feels belonging with folks that are suffering, and hopeless, “who can’t see the path forward or understand how to make their suffering better.” She feels belonging among

people who struggle with eating disorders and uses her experience of fierce self-acceptance to mentor others toward finding their inner power. She also has a sense of belonging and connection to the arts, she sees something beautiful about self-expression and people who are expressing themselves without any desire to be fully understood. Above all else, Shannon belongs in places where there is laughter. “Laughter is the purest most authentic expression of myself.” Shannon can walk into any room and feel good about being who she is, and it took her a long time to get there.

Shannon and her husband of 25 years have been together since they were 15 years old. Shannon is a mother of four children aged four, ten, nineteen, and twenty-two. Before anything else, she identifies as being a mother and that is central to her identity. “I identify strongly with my mom heart and have pushed for more community engagement that advocates for mothers through her new business, SupreME Moms.” Much of her motivation and resilience grows from the tremendous love she felt for her children. Where she endured people and events that held her back and held her down, she learned how to, “let go of what I knew and accept fierce self-responsibility and the power to make decisions for myself and my family.” Where the systemic constraints of racism, sexism and classism repeatedly pushed her down, Shannon developed the resilience and depth of character to work harder and wiser, which allowed her to break oppressive cycles for her descendants.

Becoming a mother for the fourth time changed something in Shannon and she refused to put her identity as mother on the back burner. She would go into meetings with leaders and facilitate their strategic planning with a baby strapped to her chest. She remembers people, “side eyeing me and nervous at first, and then impressed with the

caliber of my work that I could accomplish with my child in tow.” She credits the resilience of her ancestors, who have been working and raising children together for thousands of years. She loves being a mother and has since put motherhood front and center in her identity.

When Shannon founded her company, Spark! Strategic Solutions, in 2014, she developed a framework that includes a human-centered system such that all her social impact strategy is driven with humans at the center. With her work Shannon is interested in learning about the stories of her clients, “hearing about their belief systems, and nurturing the communities around them.” Shannon has processes to get to know her clients in an authentic way, and not the identities and labels that they carry. She entered social entrepreneurship to, “create a new system and a new way to give back by helping leaders to remember that all humans matter.” Shannon has learned through adversity, “how to be strong but not immovable.” How to be energizing but not exhausting and coming from the space of empowering and not merely being inspirational. “It has been a wild ride for me.”

In celebration of her 40th birthday, Shannon wrote her first book titled, *To (M)OTHERS from the HOOD*. The book is one-third memoir, one-third insight, one-third solutions oriented, and 100% truth on how to conquer fear uncertainty chaos and division in life’s most difficult hood: victimhood. Her book offers personal stories and resilience strategies that Shannon has discovered along her journey. She wrote the book for herself and for her family, offering her own conquerors journey, “as a healing balm to anyone who has gone through trauma.” Her intention was to write something that could connect with people’s feelings and help them to conquer their own victimhood. “While I didn’t

know that I would become a sort of poster child for trauma and mental well-being, that is what my book is about.” Shannon hopes that her book will give others permission that they need to live their life and feel good about being themselves.

What interests Shannon now is creating new traditions with her family and focusing on the good things that she wants to carry forward and the positive stories of resilience that she can tell. She is fascinated by trauma and how that passes down, but she’s more fascinated about resilience and joy and how she can share more of that with the world. She credits her abilities of finding joy amid chaos to the strength of her inner flame that, “resists darkness and reminds me that I am a child of God.” This flame is like a pilot light that brings her happiness and inner warmth which she shares with her family and community. She’s on a quest to give her children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren a head start so that they can do things that she could never imagine.

Shannon did not grow up with many mentors and had to teach herself the leadership and resilience strategies that she now shares with her family, coaching clients, and community. “Now I find myself in a liminal space between motherhood and menopause, where I have become a mentor to others who are coming up behind me.” The work of mentorship is “heart work” that she feels is “part of being a matriarch and being a living example of how to take up the agency to claim who you are.” As a natural leader, she goes first and leads with her willingness to hold the lantern and walk into yet another unknown territory. “Walk by faith, and not by sight” is part of Shannon’s ethos and she adds, “And walk with heart.” She sees her life as a master class in learning compassion, forgiveness, and kindness. Starting with herself first. Shannon takes the power of Going First as being the light for others while carrying compassion, forgiveness, and kindness.

Shannon is publicly regarded as “a leader of leaders,” because her work helps her leadership clients to make big decisions that impact many people. Some of her clients make decisions that impact almost every person in the state of Idaho. Her work, “helps leaders get out of their own victimhood of fear, anger, disgust, and the joy derived from others misery known as schadenfreude.” Despite her tremendous professional success, Shannon thinks of herself as simply doing the best that she can. “I’ve always been interested in human behavior and why people do what they do; and sharing what I’ve learned in a way that helps people understand it and find what works for them.” Every moment she feels gratitude for her breath and for the power of having a life of free will. Shannon’s is a story of the conquerors journey, and she answered the call.

Shannon ultimately sees herself as an “advocate for power, goodness, and joy.” She reminds those around her that all the power one ever needs is already inside of them. She uses her adverse childhood experiences as a source of strength and wisdom when she mentors her clients toward fierce self-acceptance. She gets her power from acknowledging her source, where she comes from, and her ancestral lineage of warriors that have “laid bare the path” for her to be on right now. Her work intends to honor her ancestors that came before her and to build a legacy for future generations. In this way Shannon is a bridge builder between generations, between cultures and communities, and between marginalized groups who’ve endured trauma and intentional groups who are trying to be part of the change they wish to see in the world.

Shannon has a message to share with young leaders of color who are rising as entrepreneurs, and starting their own businesses:

*You got this! And it's going to be hard. Many days you will want to give up. You'll keep pushing and hopefully you'll look back when you're 40 and go, yeah it was worth it. You can always have a different finish. The starting line is never the ending line. Never. All the power you ever need is already inside you. It's like no pressure, no diamonds. Without these hard moments you wouldn't get to the beauty of resilience. Without the pressure, your power would lay dormant inside you. It's hard and it's probably going to get much harder. But the feelings you are feeling in these dark ass hours are going to bring so much light. It's going to be beautiful. And these stories that you can tell, and share are going to help others because they are going through it too. Also, stop chasing material stuff. Don't enslave yourself! Women are told to work hard in places that don't feel good so we can buy this shit to mask and pretend to feel good. No. You define your own world terms. You are worth it. You are here for a reason.*

Shannon has a message to share with young women leaders about negative self-talk. As a person who has struggled with depression due to situational factors in her life, Shannon has a unique ability to find the good in the darkness:

*My resilience was born out of dark times. Depression is like drowning in front of a bunch of people that keep saying, "Just swim! Just swim!" I can't. I'm tired. I need help. People didn't recognize it around me, so I had to learn a lot of self-talk. My resilience is the ability to look back at those stories and see the gold in them. To honor those days, recognize them, accept them. But to never give up. You could say as a woman, or as a woman of color, I have to run harder, run faster, run better, longer, and stronger. The moment I give up, the starting line*

*gets moved way the hell back. No room to fail. When you fail, fail fast and get up quick. Then one day you wake up and you have become a mother. And you have stretch marks! We move from maiden to mother to crone phases, and we can't go back. We want to but we can't'. So there becomes this fighting and this drain that happens within us and that's going to zap your resilience. The identity is no longer what it was and there's not an acceptance of what is. How many of us really build a connection to those phases in our lives. Take up your agency and define your identity for yourself.*

When Shannon and I sat down for our first interview, I had not seen her book, *To MOTHERS from the HOOD*. After our interview, I felt honored that she sent me home with a pre-release copy and asked me to write her a public review for it. I devoured the entire book before our second interview. It spoke to me in personal ways as I could relate to the feelings she described having as a child and young woman. She has a resilient way of transforming her traumatic lived experiences and stories of victimhood into sources of power and joy, which I imagine has got to take a tremendous amount of energy, power, and intention. What did not come through in the words of her narrative was her calm demeanor that feels almost spiritual, like prayerfully loving kindness.

### **Joelle Bogenholm's Story**

*Camano Island, Washington*

I met Joelle in 2020 when we were both asked to join the board of the Pacific Sámi Searvi. For me, it was an instant connection, as if we were cousins. We have spent hours talking, emailing, and spending time together. I was thrilled to drive 400 miles in six and a half hours to interview her. For me, it was an excuse to have the opportunity to



spend more time with her. I was fortunate that Joelle offered to host me at her home for the interview. She made me a wonderful dinner and we built a fire together under the stars and talked for hours. We watched the sunrise and drank coffee together. We talked about family, ancestors, and the future. Our official interview happened the next morning on her back porch. The birds were chirping, and an old grandmother Western Red Cedar tree stood tall next to us as we talked.

Joelle Bogenholm is 56 years old and self-identifies as Indigenous Sámi, white presenting, lesbian, differently abled, Buddhist-animist, and cis-gendered female. She is a mother, healer, daughter, sister, partner, aunt, cousin, and grandmother. Joelle holds three master's degrees and was a Post-Graduate Fellow and Program Coach in leadership and organizational development at Seattle University's OSR Master's program. She has served in leadership roles with large organizations including the Boeing Company and the Boys and Girls Clubs of King County. Since 2018, Joelle has served as Chief Human Resources Officer at Landesa, an international NGO which works to secure land rights for indigenous communities and rural persons living in poverty. The impact is at the intersection of poverty alleviation, gender equity, food security, and climate change. Joelle is a Gestalt trained organizational development consultant, cultural strategist, Principal & Certified Executive Coach with her company, Forysta Consulting LLC. She lives on Camano Island, Washington with her adopted father and their three dogs.

Joelle begins our interview acknowledging that we are here on earth for a finite period, and we are informed and influenced by those that came before us. Therefore, she gives thanks first and foremost to her ancestors. She has been inspired along the way by her parents and teachers, including Fourfold Way author, Dr. Angeles Arrien, Gestalt

Institute President Dr. John D. Carter, Dr. Josephine Wilson, Dr. Catherine McHugh, Dr. Mary Ann Rainey, Dr. Veronica Carter, and Dr. Marcella Benson Quaziena. These people have inspired her in the work that she does as a healer, teacher, warrior, leader, executive, and visionary. Joelle's role as Chief HR Officer is not only to oversee HR but, "really to build the leadership development capabilities so that there is a generative culture where people are thriving, and they can work in a way that achieves the mission of the organization." The organizational focus on climate change, gender equity and poverty alleviation through land rights has impacted over 500 million people in the last 40 years.

Joelle carries many culturally subordinated identities, including being lesbian, being adopted, being Indigenous and recently disabled. All of which have built her grit, determination, and resiliency, "because of the fact that my hidden, and not so hidden identities have allowed me to be privy to what people who have dominant identities might hear and that's given me the opportunity to face it and deal with it directly." Joelle came out as lesbian when she was twenty-two but knew in her heart since she was five years old. "Being lesbian was an invisible identity that was completely rejected by my family." Although she knew it at five years old, she did not have any role models for that aspect of herself and it was completely unacceptable in the culture she grew up in. She would hear people using words like "butch" and "dyke" and quickly realized that "lesbian was not a safe thing to be." She liked having long hair and wearing dresses and was an earthy type, so the complexities of her multiple identities began to impact her at a very early age.

When Joelle hit puberty, she began hating herself. “I started thinking that I was an abomination. That I was wrong. That she did not fit. And that I was the only one.” She sees her teenage years as “being very dark” and the only reason she made it through was her love of learning. She took lots of classes and excelled in academics. She also found solace through music, “by working at a local record store.” Her parents eventually found a counselor for her which she credits as being her “saving grace” during her teenage years. “When I was 22, I felt strong enough to come out to my parents and be more vocal about my identities.” This led to a move to Los Angeles where she was able to find a safe place to be and other people like her to be friends with. When she was finally accepted for her certain identities such as sexual orientation she felt as if it was a “coming home” to herself. She no longer felt like an abomination, and she found a great community to be part of. “I stopped judging myself and stopped trying to destroy myself.” Joelle was able to heal from the dark times of her teenage years and use her lived experience with “multiple suicide attempts” to mentor LGBTQ+ youth with self-destructive tendencies to help them find their own healing as well.

Joelle grew up in various Native American communities, “which felt more like a fit with who I am as opposed to other modern kinds of white society.” As a child she was very shy and felt more comfortable being by herself, “especially in the woods or with animals.” She did not need a lot of people around, which made her stand out from her peers as being different. She credits those Native American influences for who she has become an adult.

When Joelle entered school age, she lost herself in reading and research. She had an enormous love for the natural world and the science behind it and so she “excelled in

academics.” She was put in a gifted program when she was in elementary school, and “even though I didn’t quite feel like I fit in with the other students, I enjoyed being able to study and thrive in my learning.” She was also drawn to music and loved listening to music and singing. “I learned to play several instruments early on. I was happiest around music, animals, and when in school.” She did not like feeling weird in comparison to her peers, and so she did not really need to be around others unless it really felt like a good fit for her. As a result, she has found the most belonging around animals, music, schoolwork, and in the forest.

Joelle’s faith is very important to her. “I have a combination of animist and Buddhist philosophies of spirituality. Part of my spiritual practice has been influenced by Native American traditions and part of them are Sámi traditions.” There’s a big indigeneity component to her cultural practice as well as a strong Buddhist practice that she has had for about 30 years. “Many of my teachers have been Buddhist practitioners including Thich Nhat Hanh, the Dalai Lama, and Pema Chodron.” She has had several Native teachers as well and that is a big part of how she sees herself. Although she has studied comparative religions, Joelle sees herself as, “being a part of the universe and that it is all alive because we are intricately connected and so we all must take care of it together.” She has technically become disabled now that she walks with a limp and sometimes carries a cane, although she does not consider herself disabled and doesn’t even like the word. “I see myself as just differently abled as the natural progression of my body ages.” She sees the gifts that come with this natural progression of age.

Joelle has an interesting story around the circumstances of being adopted. Joelle’s biological mother was engaged to her father in college, and all was fine until her mother

got pregnant. “Then both grandparents on my non-Sámi side, on the colonial side, rejected my mother as being ‘the wrong kind of Swede.’” Joelle has a Swedish heritage but, in this case, the ‘wrong kind of Swede’ points to her Sámi identity. This identity often comes with stereotypes of physical characteristics such as, “you know, smaller and darker Northern people.”

While it was the Swedish colonial side of her family that had incited her originally being given up for adoption, it was the Sámi side of her family that took her back years later. In that way, “I’m not Sámi by culture per se, as in someone who has been living inside the culture would be, but rather am a descendant of Sámi ancestry, and it speaks to me from that place.” As she got to know her biological family, she began to hear little hints that spoke to assimilation and what was expected when her great-grandparents came to the United States. “There were things said and not said or brushed off as things that ought not to be talked about but were just normal for the family.”

When Joelle came out to her adopted parents, they rejected her as being unacceptable and so she went searching for her biological parents. And that’s where the journey began in reclaiming her identity. Joelle has always been aware that she looks nothing like her adopted parents, and would often be called names like, “wild Indian.” While Joelle did not ever feel like she truly fit in with her adopted parents, she was able to find a deeper sense of belonging when she found her biological Sámi family. “I’m still in my journey of discovering my ancestral heritage, but I know that my ancestors came from middle Sweden and Northern Sweden, and I’ve traveled to my ancestral homelands on more than one occasion.” There are some cultural practices that are distinctly Sámi, such as joiking (like singing but with a different spiritual meaning), which Joelle has

been doing her whole life without ever having a teacher to show her how to do it. All of these are small clues to her Sámi heritage that she continues to research and learn more about.

Joelle has been a leadership development coach, healer, medicine person, all within the organizational context and mostly as the head of human resources. Joelle did not necessarily decide to go into HR, as it was actually decided for her when she was running an Easter Seals program. Her role wasn't earning a living wage and she got an opportunity through an award that she received from a corporation to help them solve a staffing problem. That led to opportunities for advancement in HR and additional freelance work for the Department of Rehabilitation. Joelle has been in HR for almost 30 years now. Along with her executive leadership, she also does consulting around leadership development by “putting healthy systems into place for her clients.”

Through her work, Joelle's had the privilege of traveling to all 50 states and has been to many countries within Asia, Africa, and Europe. The place that has influenced Joelle the most would be the Arctic including her ancestral homelands of Sápmi, which lies in the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula of Russia. Joelle enjoys meeting other people who, “have strong relationships with the land and honoring the fact that everything around us is alive.” She sees that we are an intricate part of the land around us and that is a source of grounding for her. Joelle gives credit to every place that she's traveled to, “because the lands have left an impression” on her and helped her to connect to other people and parts of the planet.

There was a time where Joelle briefly dipped her toe in corporate America as an Organization Effectiveness Consultant. “I quickly realized that it was not a healthy

system, as I did not want to be part of a culture that incentivizes chasing more money for more opulent lifestyles.” One of the most difficult challenges that Joelle has encountered as a professional in leadership spaces has to do with her race. She is often seen as not being white enough when in spaces dominated by white culture. “As a result, I tend to create relationships with BIPOC people easier than with people who are white. Oftentimes it is white men who have been dismissive toward me and not taken my leadership seriously.” When she was younger, it would often be white male peers who would make passes at her, and then when she did not reciprocate, they would turn on her to attack her leadership position.

Because Joelle’s ideas would often challenge the ideas of white men and white women, she has worked her entire life to help advocate for leadership development among leaders of color. “I also continue to advocate for collaboration over competition among women in the workplace.” She knows from firsthand experience, “what it’s like when females compete to knock each other down” and she continues to mentor women who navigate this very real double-edged sword. “I aim to change that in every culture that I touch.” Joelle quickly realized that she would rather be working in a smaller system, usually a nonprofit or NGO, knowing that she can touch the lives of the people that she works with. She is passionate about “bringing light into the lives” of those around her and leaving them feeling seen and heard.

Joelle is a mother of two children. She has a 12-year-old stepdaughter and a 14-year-old stepson, but they are like her daughter and son. Although she is no longer with their other parent, “the children are a big part of my life and I feel that it is my role to help them prepare themselves for adulthood.” Not necessarily modern adulthood but,

“rather those rights of passage that are often not considered such as fishing, preparing the catch, and cooking the catch to feed one’s family.” Joelle wants to make sure that the next generation knows who they are and that she helps them to be prepared for their next phase in life. She carries the responsibility of, “taking care of the next seven generations precisely by taking care of her children and parents now. “By listening to them deeply and hearing their stories and helping them reframe those things that do not serve them,” Joelle is healing both her ancestors and her descendants.

As Joelle enters her later years, she begins to consider herself an Elder because she’s getting close to retirement and is taking care of elderly parents. “I see my mother’s transition as a very sacred time where I’ve been very intentional about creating honorable closure for my mother so that she can pass in peace.” During the time of this writing, Joelle’s mother passed away under the care and guidance of Joelle.

Joelle finds belonging first and foremost in her relationship to the land. “I see myself as a co-steward of everything that’s alive, and I love being in communities that are associated with education, music, indigeneity, and advocacy.” More recently, Joelle met a group of people through the Pacific Sámi Searvi, a Seattle-based nonprofit dedicated to preservation and celebration of indigenous Sámi heritage as well as Indigenous cultures on Turtle Island. While she has gone to pow wows and potlatches throughout her life, and feels an incredible sense of belonging there, she has not spent a “tremendous amount of time being invited in or just hanging out” with a particular tribe. In this way the Pacific Sámi Searvi and its board of directors provide a sense of belonging for her and she continues to feel welcomed there. In 2023 Joelle was elected by



her peers as Vice President of the Pacific Sámi Searvi, which is a natural extension of the leadership development work she has been doing for the last 30 years.

While Joelle did not have an innate sense of belonging with her family growing up and has spent most of her life on the margins, she has “transformed this acute awareness and sense of belonging into a passion for inclusivity and diversity within organizations.” She starts by recognizing that everyone has gifts, and she focuses on those gifts when she’s doing leadership coaching and leadership development. “My sweet spot is in coaching younger women. Although I coach both men and women, I’m able to use my lived experience as a woman to create a strong coaching practice that helps women focus on who they are and how their lived story has created resiliency and strength for themselves and those around them.” Joelle has also healed and transformed the subordinated identities that she carries into more of an “understanding about human suffering” and things like imposter syndrome and shame so that she can relate better to people and help them to see their way through.

When Joelle thinks of her ancestors, she thinks “thousands of years back and how they lived their lives historically.” She thinks of her modern ancestors like her parents and grandparents that provided a relatively safe environment for her to grow up in. Joelle navigates the complexities of not completely assimilating to the modern day but, “being able to live in an operate among modern day cultures and technologies.” Joelle learned a lot from her grandmothers and grandfathers, but it was her grandmothers that really stand out to her. “My grandmother’s spent a lot of quality time with me as a child and I remember little things I heard them say like ‘I never do without, I make do.’” These kinds of sayings continue to inspire who Joelle has become and is becoming.

What Joelle cares about the most is creating communities and organizations where people can thrive. While she has worked in senior Human Resources roles for many different organizations, and as an executive coach and organizational development professional, she doesn't brand herself as an executive. Rather, she sees herself as "being a human being first, and on a journey to help other human beings thrive in communities and organizations." In her work as a coach, Joelle does "everything from soup to nuts, whether she's working on developing strategy alongside executives, or executing it all and then coaching individuals to be better leaders." Development takes about 40% of her professional time.

Her current work in leadership development is effectively bringing next generation leaders up from within the land rights world and making sure that they get the leadership skills that they need to take their work to the next level, "so that they can begin to solve wicked problems in the world". In addition, she's very interested in "securing the land for either community land rights or for Indigenous peoples living in poverty" so that they can rise above their circumstance. Joelle sees that first and foremost, "people are what matters, because nobody's going to care about money in the end." They are going to remember how you made them feel and what kind of a hand you held out to them, how you helped them get a leg up. For Joelle, that is what life is all about.

Joelle has a message for young women leaders that counterbalances American cultural norms of consumerism, quiet corporate quitting, and career burnout:

*It's hard when you're young to think that life is short. But if the next generations would live below their means and not have to have the fancy coffees and the fancy cars, and build up an emergency fund, then they won't have to make a choice*

*between their soul and a career. That would change everything. That would change this consumeristic modern society. It's just creating a nightmare for our kids and our planet. We are taught to lead first with what we do for a living. But who am I? What are my values? What brings me joy in life? What doesn't bring my joy? Take care of your body. Don't do the things you hate. Take care of your mind and emotions. Don't compromise who you are. Do the best you can and know that life is finite. Attend to your own resiliency.*

Joelle has a message to share with young women leaders who are finding their way to their own healing and walking in positions of leadership:

*I want to make sure that the next generation knows who they are and are prepared for that next phase in life. That points me back to, what is enough? In modern culture, there is too much accumulation instead of being satisfied with where we're at. Many people haven't had to fight because our culture has made it too easy, but it's that grit and determination, that pain and suffering that was built into our ancestors. Your struggle is a rite of passage. Control is an illusion.*

What struck me most about visiting Joelle were the artifacts she carries from her travels around the world. At the entrance to her home, there are two reindeer skins on the wall and handicrafts including a hand-woven wool reindeer figurine, a drum made by Sami drum maker Anders Sunna, a hand carved woman's knife and a man's knife, and there's a sea otter made from whale bone. Further inside, artifacts from the mouths of alligators and whales and in addition to the baskets, painting, dolls, and other artifacts from countries all over Africa, Southeast Asia as well as Inuit territories. Her life experience with world travel clearly means so much more to her than merely collecting

souvenirs while on vacation. It demonstrates her statement about feeling personally connected to each place that she's been to. For me, it was incredibly inspiring, as my home is also a collection of meaningful artifacts from my migrations to other lands.

### **Ilana Rubel's Story**

#### *Boise, Idaho*

I first met Ilana Rubel in 2021, and I knew I liked her right away. I'll never forget our first breakfast together. She was sipping hot chocolate with whip cream on a Monday, and I thought, "this is my kind of lady." Since then, we've spent several meals and glasses of wine talking about our families, personal aspirations, fears, hopes, and dreams. I felt honored to be invited to interview her at her office inside the Idaho State Capitol building in Boise. She has a stately office off the main entrance with marble floors, and a plaque on the door that says, "Democratic Leader of the House of Representatives."

Ilana is 50 years old and self-identifies as Jewish, white, dual citizen, born poor, able bodied, Democrat, and cis-gendered woman. Ilana currently serves as House Minority Leader for the Democratic Party in the Idaho State Legislature. Ilana is a graduate of Georgetown University and Harvard Law School and serves as the Vice Chairman for Idaho Businesses for the Outdoors. She has a thriving career as an attorney and serves as Senior Counsel for Fenwick & West LLP. Ilana and her husband have four children together and they live in Boise, Idaho.

Ilana came from a "family of upstanders", including incredibly strong women. Her grandfather's family was killed in the Holocaust, and it "caused a generational passion for speaking up when dangerous things are happening to innocent people." While Ilana's grandfather was sick and died younger, her grandmother was a community leader

well into her 90's. "She went to the University of Chicago in the 1940s, studying the hard Sciences and was incredibly civically engaged. Ilana's grandmother was the director of Planned Parenthood, the director of The League of Women voters, and "a very tough cookie who elbowed her way into the public arena. She emanated the energy that people better not dare to tell her that she did not belong in leadership spaces." Ilana's grandmother had a very forceful personality and she let anyone who stood in her way know that they had better move. No one told her, "Lady, sit down."

Ilana's grandmother was brilliantly intelligent, and she taught Ilana from a very young age that women belong in the corridors of power. Ilana grew up knowing that she should never shy away from leadership. Her grandmother was there for her throughout her life and continues to be a point of inspiration for model behavior. Ilana's grandmother expected that she would go on to do great things including higher education. "I attribute my ambition to learning from my grandmother." In fact, she would have felt like she was letting her grandmother down if she were not ambitious, because her grandmother had modeled it so effectively for her.

Ilana's parents met at the University of Michigan. "My mother got pregnant before their wedding and so she did not have health insurance because of the fact that she was not yet married." To be able to have her baby and have her health insurance covered, Ilana's mother had to throw her belongings in a car and drive up to Canada. Ilana's mother "lived out of her car for a while so that we could get free health care during the pregnancy and the birth" of her child. She had a distant relative who was in Toronto and "she was in dire straits" so she showed up at their doorstep with one year old Ilana in tow and desperately asked for help.

Ilana ended up living with the family for years and because of this earned her dual citizenship. She completed high school in Toronto and credits her mother for “working hard to lift them out of poverty.” Ilana’s mother pulled herself up and worked through the most incredible adversity. “She was profoundly committed to me and my success. She would do anything for me and was always trying to find ways to get me into the best schools, to get me private tutors, and to make sure that I was at the top of my class.” Ilana’s mother made her read a book a day so that she would have the best vocabulary and encouraged her to be the best in her high school.

Ilana’s mother passed away in 2022. “She was desperately broke when she passed and was living alone in an apartment. She had no cars.” But Ilana never saw her mother look depressed because she would never let anything get her down. “She would do whatever she thought was necessary in order to get through tough times and remained amazingly upbeat about it.” Ilana looks up to her mother. “It would seem she didn’t have a depressed bone in her body.” Ilana misses having her mother around as her cheerleader and her unconditional support. Her mother’s loss has been a very hard thing for her to bounce back from and she wears a necklace containing her mother’s ashes everywhere she goes. Because Ilana was raised by a single mother in poverty, her identity aligns more with “the struggling single mom world” than with her more recent rise into the affluence of wealth associated with being an attorney.

Ilana has had some very inspirational women in her life and throughout her school years. She cites Elizabeth Warren, Bill Clinton, and Sheryl Sandberg as leaders who inspire her. “Elizabeth Warren, who was one of my professors at Harvard Law school, was one of her greatest inspirations.” Although Elizabeth Warren was not political at the

time that Ilana studied with her, “she was an incredible professor, and she really did model compassion in the public arena.” Elizabeth Warren taught Ilana how to dig into law and analyze the incredible societal and socioeconomic impact that laws have.

Ilana had no idea that Elizabeth Warren was a Republican at the time, and she had no idea that Elizabeth was ever going to go into the national political arena. “But her classes were very much oriented around digging into the language of laws and understanding the letter of the law versus the impact of the law, and particularly how the laws were going to have an impact on low-income people and people in vulnerable communities.” Studying under Elizabeth Warren really helped to plan to seed for Ilana and fueled her career in law after she graduated from Harvard Law school.

For Ilana, being Jewish is a big part of her identity. She recognizes that being Jewish in Idaho means that she is “part of a small minority” and has lived experience with being the target of hate speech and hate actions. She also identifies with “people who have been targets of hate crime,” including racially oppressed minorities. While she is white presenting, she feels that she personally deals with analogous challenges to those who are victims of bigotry and so she holds an affinity with any group that’s targeted due to race and ethnicity in America.

Ilana remembers “being personally targeted for religion as early as high school.” Her family did not have a car and so they took the bus everywhere. One night Ilana was riding the bus to her high school prom when she was accosted by a group of white teenagers. “They were somewhat older kids and they started to make fun of me for being the Jewish girl all dressed up for prom and started to threaten me.” They threatened to dump their drinks on her dress and joked about how funny it would be if they had

destroyed her dress on the way to prom. “Their ethnic slurs were clearly about her being Jewish” as they asked her questions like “who do you think you are getting all dressed up and riding around town?!”

Ilana remembers being terrified while sitting at the back of the bus. She kept hoping the bus driver would hear and intervene, or that somebody would hear an intervene, but nobody did. “I was terrified, and I remember being very frightened and upset that nobody intervened.” Because of this experience and others Ilana has a very personal experience with being a victim of ethnic hate speech. Even though it happened thirty years ago she still remembers it “very vividly.”

This early memory is a major contributor to Ilana’s compassion for people going through similar oppressions and people who are victimized because of their identities or visible characteristics and even sometimes non-visible characteristics. What stood out to Ilana about that event was that “nobody intervened,” and so it made her always want to be the one who intervenes. Ilana holds a personal value around speaking up for minorities and racially oppressed groups. Whether a person is Jewish or black, or Asian or Hispanic, or gay or trans, Ilana finds it “equally unforgivable for the people who just sit and watch those who perpetrate.” This is part of what drives Ilana’s desire to be in public office. In this way, several of Ilana’s identities influence the work that she does. She is “committed to intervening” when she sees bullying and oppression happening. This affinity for minorities drove her earliest interest in politics as she has a vision for a government that protects people and protects against the tyranny of the majority. Ilana feels equally compelled to “stand up for anybody who doesn’t necessarily overlap” with her identities including members of the LGBTQIA+ community.



Ilana is a mother of four children. As a leader, she's always wrestled with the idea of being the conservative Christian right vision of a 'good traditional mom'. She carries guilt that she almost never cooks, the house can sometimes be a mess, and she misses a lot of her children's activities such as PTA meetings and sports practices. "But the family has adapted and found new ways to spend time together." Ilana does make it a priority to attend her children's big games, they have adapted to eating take out often, and she makes a big effort to ensure that the family takes great trips a couple of times a year. She enjoys taking her family on travel adventures and hopes that the trade-offs of being a leader in her community will make it worth it for her family in the end.

Ilana's children get the benefit of watching their mother help run the state of Idaho. She wants to send her children the message that "it's something that they can do," just as her grandmother was a role model of leadership for her when she was young. At the time of this writing, Ilana's children are ages 22, 20, 17, and 13. Ilana goes to as many of their events as she can, and like many professional mothers, she finds that juggling multiple priorities can be exhausting and sees herself as the "tireddest person on the planet."

While her family was initially flabbergasted when she told them that she had political aspirations, they soon became excited. Her children take pride in their mother's leadership role. "They like taking their friends to the state capitol building and showing them that their mom has a nice office and that their mom is the leader in the pictures where all of the leaders' photos are hung." Her children have pride in seeing their mom in this role as she leads by example that they too are meant to have a place in the corridors of power.

Ilana's legal career is full of success stories. One of her early jobs was as an attorney litigator with a major law firm in Chicago. "The job was a grind beyond belief." Ilana worked 90 hours a week. "I remember watching the sunrise from my office, it was common to pull three or four all-nighters per week in my office and remembers the stress being through the roof." She was constantly having to cancel vacations, cancel birthdays, and cancel important things to meet the demands of the job.

Later she transitioned to a major Silicon Valley law firm where she was one of the very few women in the office. "The partnership was overwhelmingly male and while they wanted to be as progressive as possible, they struggled to get more women into leadership." While the transition led to a gentler work schedule, gender norms still played a role in her stress levels. In one case, Ilana was asked to litigate for a 400-million-dollar trade secret case that was going to trial in Detroit. Ilana had been working on the case for three years and the trial team was going to be very limited. "I wanted to be on the trial team and see the case through to the finish."

Ilana became pregnant heading into the trial and was afraid of letting the supervising partners know that she was pregnant because she was afraid that she was not going to be included on the trial team. "I had to hide my pregnancy because I was so worried." She would hunch over and try to hide the pregnancy bump for the first six months of her pregnancy, until she had locked down her spot on the trial team. "I was able to get an OB/GYN in Detroit in case I went into labor in the middle of the trial." But she remained concerned that assumptions were going to be made about her ability to be part of the trial team.

This was just one of the very tangible ways in which Ilana's gender came into play and influenced how she had to play her cards as a woman in the workplace. "Even though I worked at what I felt was an incredibly enlightened and super progressive firm, I still wonder where there might have been some differential treatment or whether my spot would have been given away had I disclosed her pregnancy earlier in the trial." The case settled finally when she was in her third trimester, and Ilana got back to Boise a week before going into labor. This is merely one example of the challenges and uncertainty that Ilana has experienced being a woman and juggling a prominent leadership position within her law firm.

Serving in the role of the House Minority Leader in the Idaho State Legislature has come with its own set of challenges. The Democratic Party carries 12% of the House Seats which makes them a small minority. "I'm subject to political sliming on social media, verbal attacks on the house floor, and death threats from angry constituents." As a Jewish woman in politics, Ilana has endured consistent and ongoing experience of discrimination because of both her gender and her religious affiliation. A staggering majority of Idaho state legislators are straight, white men, and Ilana is one of the few women political leaders comprising this male-dominated legislative body. Additionally, there is a general presumption that the political leadership in Idaho is or ought to be Christian, straight, and white.

Through these challenges, Ilana has learned to stand up and speak for herself, and her constituents, in an authentic way. She recognizes that even when she gives "basically the exact same tenor of speech as a man would," she does receive differential treatment because she is a woman in leadership. "There's a different framework that can be applied

to women who stand up and do the exact same things that men do.” Being the leader of the democratic party in a state with a Republican majority also comes with navigating “constant frustrations of never getting done what seems so obvious and seems so right” according to the priorities of her political affiliation. In a state that is notorious for being politically polarized, Ilana has the difficult job of examining the facts and negotiating with politicians who hold “a different set of facts that have been fueled by biased media outlets” and carrying the agenda of trying to achieve consensus.

Ilana finds it ironic that when she was a practicing lawyer, when she was right and felt like she had all the facts and the law was on her side, she would pretty much always win. “However, in politics, even when I feel completely and indisputably right, my party may still lose because they are in the minority.” For Ilana, this is an excruciating challenge that all people who have been positioned in the minority have to navigate on an ongoing basis, whether due to personal identity or political affiliation.

Ilana finds belonging with her friends, synagogue, family, and with people who have a similar worldview that she does, and “who agree that we’re seeing some political insanity happening across the United States.” She worries that if her political party cannot gain some more traction within the state legislature that there will be a very concrete and disastrous fallout. “I have a son who is gay and thinking that he can’t live in Idaho anymore and is considering moving out of state and never coming back.” She has several friends with transgender kids who are going to have to leave their homes that they’ve built for their whole lives because of the things that the legislature has done to oppress transgendered people. Ilana has people in her own life who are “basically going to be forced to be refugees from their state” because of the ways that newer legislation

invariably oppresses them. Ilana wants to champion those people and try to do everything she can so that they do not get driven from their homes.

While Ilana is the first woman in her family to be elected to public office, she has several other powerful family members who have held leadership roles. Her aunt ran the AIDS clinic for the Southeastern United States during the 90's. She has an aunt who was included in the Virginia Hall of Fame and is "a big hot shot in her own right in the medical field." Ilana has another aunt who was a professor and was voted top professor at the University of Toronto and Canada. Ilana gives credit to the "badass women" in her family who have "done amazing things" and she continues to draw inspiration from their role modeling and mentorship.

"My father completely checked out" and so Ilana doesn't really know him at all. She also had an uncle who she grew up with for years in Toronto who is an incredible supporter of hers. She remembers her grandfather being incredibly loving to her. "He was always my biggest cheerleader and wanted me to go on to greatness." Family role models have encouraged Ilana to rise to the leadership that she currently holds.

Ilana credits much of her success to the ongoing support from her husband. She feels that she could never have become such a successful leader without him. "He makes most of the money so that I can do my political service." He introduces her at House parties and fundraisers, he handles all her road signs, he listens to her stories, and gives her advice. She runs her draft speeches and articles by him, and he gives her great feedback. Ilana is grateful to have so much support and love from her husband. The men in Ilana's life have been, with a few exceptions, as supportive and wonderful as the women in her life.

Ilana has endured significant life challenges, and yet she has consistently bounced back with incredible resilience. She has found a way to embrace her vulnerability which allows her to be a more powerful leader among her constituents. She believes that it takes bravery to be vulnerable, and those who can be vulnerable are the bravest among us.

Ilana shares her message for young women leaders coming up in politics and law:

*In hard times, remind yourself that this too will pass. We could always be in a position that is absolutely as low as it seems possible, and there's a real temptation to just dwell in that and think about the end of the world. Remind yourself that there will be a time, a month from now, or a year from now, where this will just be a bad memory. There will be growth. You will be a better person because of it. When you look back at your hardest moments, you'll be looking from a better place. Always take a deep breath and make sure you don't lash out and exacerbate the problem and turn it into a much bigger problem, right, through your reactions to it. Fasten to those hopes. Keep reassuring yourself that hope is not futile, you know your work is getting somewhere. Don't get too absorbed in the darkness of any particular downturn. Practice hope and optimism along with doing that mental discipline to really focus on the successes. Try to build a system in your mind so that successes take on more mental real estate than your failures. I'm not optimistic. I certainly have my moments of total despair. Then I go out to the movies, sit with my cats, I got myself a massage chair, do jigsaw puzzles, do sudokus. Sometimes I have to turn it all off and completely check out. I think everybody needs to get out and take more walks in nature. I think nature helps even in the darkest times. Do what you have to do to*

*fasten on to your successes, and then keep going. Resilient leaders practice optimism, they can be restrained when necessary, and they don't overreact and make down times worse. Diversify your life with a little bit of culture, friends, family, physical fitness, and your profession. So, if your work is just one thing, then when one thing takes a dive, you know you've diversified so you can stay balanced. When everything goes to crap in your professional life, you still have a wonderful family to fall back on and great friends you can go to the movies with and take your mind off of work. When you're having a bad time with your spouse, at least you have some professional satisfaction to fall back on. It's important to have a multifaceted life.*

Ilana shares how she approaches decision making when it is tough to know what the right thing to do is, and it is impossible to please everyone in your constituency:

*It's never clear what the right path is. You just have to pick one and hope you've picked the right one and try not to spend the rest of your life second guessing things. The best course is to not waste too much of your life dwelling on unanswerable questions. There is almost always more than one defensible path that you could take, and you just pick one and try not to do too much second guessing. Then you go out for drinks with your friends.*

Sitting with Ilana in her third-floor office at the Idaho State Capitol felt like a highlight of my career. During the interview she broke down into tears a few times, causing me to cry as well. After the interview we went for lunch and talked for another hour or two about her childhood, family, and hopes for the future. That night I attended Ilana's 50<sup>th</sup> birthday party at a cocktail bar in downtown Boise. I met her book club best friends, who are all

leaders in their own communities. My heart was full of gratitude to have been trusted with the opportunity to interview Ilana for this project, and it filled me with a strong need to represent each study participant in a good way to highlight all their accomplishments alongside their resiliencies.

### **Conclusion**

The narratives of the five participants in this study illustrate a compelling, heart wrenching, and at once inspiring portrait of what resilience looks and feels like for these intersectional women leaders in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Their stories were all very different, but there were many similarities in the way they felt during their childhood and what compelled them to bounce back from adversity and rise into positions of leadership within their communities. These stories paint an inspiring portrait for younger leaders to learn from.

All the participants shared how they see themselves in terms of their identity, how they find belonging, and what resilience strategies they employ to navigate and learn from challenge. Each participant shared stories of what it was like to be the only minority in straight, white, male dominated spaces. Within each story, each participant painted a picture of how they continued to lift themselves up into greater positions of leadership within the nonprofits they run, the businesses they manage, and the political spaces they frequent.

All five participants are women of indomitable spirits, harnessing Radical Self-Agency, leveraging mentorship, and living in relationship with their ancestors and unique spiritual understandings. They shared their stories with an openness and authenticity that



is often left out of the research in this area. I feel as though I have been given five lifetimes worth of wisdom to hold. It is a precious gift that I do not take for granted. Through the relationality, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity that was shared during this study, each woman leader was able to communicate meaningful stories from her life as well as her connection to purpose, ancestors, mentors, blessings, and prayers. In all the cases, I had the privilege of spending social time, meals out, birthday celebrations, overnights, and extended mentorship opportunities with the participants.

As we became coauthors of their stories together, we shared laughter, tears, and intuitive insight. I looked forward to, prepared mindfully for, reflected deeply on, and will carry forward the conversations that we shared together during our interviews. This study captures a small snapshot of a relationship that I cherish with each of these incredible leaders. They will continue to inspire me and influence who I am becoming.

A detailed discussion of the findings in Chapter IV is presented in Chapter V. Included in Chapter V are themes from the data that resulted from analysis of each participant's communication of how they experienced their intersecting identities, sense of belonging, resilience strategies, and leadership frameworks. In addition, personal reflections as the co-creator of this study are shared, conclusions are drawn from the data, limitations of the study are addressed, contributions of the study are offered, and implications for future research are illuminated.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

*Stories remind us of who we are and of our belonging. Stories hold within them knowledges while simultaneously signifying relationships. In oral tradition, stories can never be decontextualized from the teller. They are active agents within a relational world, pivotal in gaining insight into the phenomenon.*

— Margaret Kovach, *Indigenous Methodologies* (2012)

Narrative methodology weaves together the ways in which sociality, temporality, and place intersect in the stories of participants (Gavidia & Adu, 2022). Narrative inquiry as a methodology has an umbilical origin and what cannot be overlooked is the ancestry embodied in the research because, “in practice, Indigenous research methodologies give greater salience to premodern sensitivities (i.e., praying, singing, dancing, beading, weaving, and other culture-centered faculties) that have been layered over with the denatured practices and approaches” (Davidson et al., 2018, p. 15).

According to Tachine (2018), stories offer a “space to learn from and unite with others, listening to or reading a story privilege us to be connected to or belong to that story world” (p.65). In the homes and offices of five intersectional women leaders, I was given the honor and privilege of entering their lives through their stories. All five women walk with multiple subordinated identities, all have found success as mothers, partners, professionals, and leaders in their communities, businesses, nonprofits, and political spheres of influence. Their embodiment of resilience stands as a beacon of light for other leaders to learn from and become inspired by.

The purpose of this study was to gather stories from women social entrepreneurs as they talk about their complex identities and how their approaches to social entrepreneurship nurture belonging and resilience. My intention with this research was to provide a foundation and framework to further support resilience building among intersectional women within leadership spaces. This study also helped me further align my lived experience and research praxis with aspects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous methodologies.

The biographical narrative that each participant was willing to share offers the readers a frank and unpretentious glimpse into their bold risks, major successes, painful setbacks, and hopeful visions for the future of our world. By using the narrative method, each participant was able to share her own stories in her own words, offering the turning point moments and critical pathways to paint a vivid cultural portrait of their lived experience. The interviews included explosive laughter, quiet tears, and introspective silences. Each one of their stories was full of purpose, grit, and valor. Their stories speak resilience into the being of the reader.

Being present with Colleen Echohawk, Kate McAlister, Shannon McGuire, and Joelle Bogenholm, and Ilana Rubel as they shared their stories affirmed the research I had conducted on identity, belonging, and resilience. All five women embodied resilience differently. As outlined in Chapter II, resilience is collectively defined as the capacity of individuals, communities, and organizations and their holding environments to contain disequilibrium over time (Arendt, 2013; Azmat et al., 2015; Heifetz et al., 2009). It is a person or community's ability to bounce back after challenge (Berkes & Ross, 2013; Sharrieb et al., 2010).

In this chapter, I discuss the participants' narratives in the context of their intersecting identities, individual sense of belonging, resilience narratives, and leadership viewpoints. All five participants used social entrepreneurship in different ways to empower themselves and gain the ability to make their own identity rules, create their own container of how belonging, develop resilience, and be of service to the needs of their respective communities in the way they see fit using all resources at hand. In response to my research questions, I was able to confirm how participants were talking about their identities, belonging, resilience and leadership as intersectional social entrepreneurs in the Pacific Northwest.

### **Discussion of Findings**

What follows is a discussion of findings organized by four themes that emerged from the narratives: 1) Going First, 2) Radical Self-Agency, 3) Re-membering, and 4) Ancestral Connections. Each participant is highlighted with her stories as they relate to each of the themes. All participants had unique and valuable perspectives that contributed to the emergence of the four themes.

#### **Going First**

The term *Going First* emerged out of the participants response to questions around leadership and social change. Social entrepreneurship is a core strategy these women leaders use to demonstrate resilience, leadership and affect social change. All five women are conducting business for good in that they are advocating for their families and communities through their work. What was so beautiful is that each participant, without being prompted, offered a metaphor to describe their lived experiences of being the first to go into leadership roles within their respective families and communities. This section

discusses the five metaphors participants used to describe what it is like to be the one who goes first: the Metaphor of the Grass Dancer, Metaphor of the Train Trestle, Metaphor of the Way Finder, Metaphor of the Healer, and Metaphor of the Public Defender.

***Colleen Echohawk: Metaphor of the Grass Dancer***

Colleen uses the metaphor of the Pawnee grass dancer when she thinks about her role as a leader in business, nonprofits, and politics. She explains that there are a lot of hard decisions individual leaders must make, and she gets to be much more intentional about it through this metaphor. She said:

*I resonate with the idea of the grass dancer. The one going ahead. The one who's preparing the way for people behind them. And we take that as a serious role in my family. And also, in the larger community. We understand ourselves to be kind of a prototype of grass dancers. You know, in the plains when the tribe was moving to go after the buffalo or to go back to the village, or whatever it might be, they would send out the young men who would go out and flatten down the grass for the tribe to come behind them. The elders and the young. That was their role in the tribe. That is a beautiful metaphor to me. It kind of takes it out of the colonial space. Even now in the pow-wow traditions, you see that the grass dancers go out. So, I definitely resonate with that.*

In one example, Colleen was called in by the mayor's office to help with a situation at the city involving multiple constituents including police unions, business leaders, and politicians. Looking through the lens of the grass dancer metaphor, we can see in the

following example that Colleen's cultural leadership sits at the center of her leadership practice:

*I was trying to think, what is the best way to do it? So, well I only know how to do what I know how to do, right? So, we brought in some singers. We brought in the drum. And kind of, just like, our cultural ways of, like, approaching how to be together. It was very successful. We had really good outcomes. And we were also able to, you know, call people in. And help people feel connected to the mission of what we were doing. We knew there wasn't going to be agreement. But could we do the best that we could for the people that we love in this city.*

For Colleen, the risk of Going First is not too much because she has a good support system with her family, ancestors, teachers, mentors, and tribe backing her up. Another cultural connection to the metaphor of the grass dancer is illustrated in Colleen's work with the Chief Seattle Club, a nonprofit dedicated to helping Native people find stable housing. She asks this valuable question:

*How did we get to the spot where Native people are the most likely to be homeless? What kind of effed up world are we in? Who is going to fight for them? Who is going to push so hard to see how valuable they are, right?! When I first started at the Chief Seattle Club, I had been a board member and then I became, you know, the Executive Director, and I was like in the day-to-day interactions. As I said, growing up with homeless people living in our house, I knew their value and how important people are. I believe that the reason that that happened has everything to do with cultural connection. I saw that our people are not so connected to the white mainstream. So, I just got really focused on it. We started*

*expanding our programs, and we ended up building housing. That was imperative for us to build housing and so that was the connection.*

Colleen feels so very fortunate to have a wealth of support that she can rely on. Part of the challenge of Going First means that Colleen has had to redefine her roles as an executive within Native spaces. Executive leaders must make hard decisions and sometimes fire people. They must work with budgets and cut back on things, which is difficult when leaders are in relationship with their employees and care deeply for them and their future:

*I struggle with this. You have to have a boundary with your team and your staff. My thing is I just want to be best friends with everybody. I've tried. I can't do that because I just have too many people in my life. But you also can't do that because you have your team, and you have to have boundaries. You have to protect them. As a leader, you are responsible to protect the people around you. I have found that I can't be the same way with my family as I am with my team. And that's ok. That's just part of leadership. I really like people and I'm a major extrovert, so it's hard for me. I just generally believe in people.*

Part of Colleen's way of Going First means mentoring young leaders coming up behind her. She does this by encouraging them to indigenize the business and political spaces around them. She helps them to envision and act on ways they can make these spaces work for them as Indigenous people:

*I'm not the only one. There's going to be, like, more people behind me. Leadership is a skill that you have to learn. I feel very competent now, and I think that comes with experience. Of course, I don't know everything about building*

*housing, but I knew how to resource myself. So that is kind of my key role, that I'd like to be in the executive role, and I do the best there. I want my leadership to reflect kindness and reflect my belief in people.*

Running for Seattle Mayor was another example of the metaphor of the grass dancer, Going First and clearing the way for others to follow. While Colleen did not have political ambitions, she happened to have the right kind of experience and expertise to make her a credible candidate. She feels that she just happened to have the right skills at the time and run a candidate's race. She described her experience:

*I was recently at a big event for, like, the opening of one of the buildings we worked on. I felt so good. It was just like, you know, there were so many people there who are just such precious humans, and they know I love them. And it means something special to them because they see me out there in the community. When I decided to run for office, they were so thrilled. They were so excited! They felt represented. We had done 'get out the vote's before. But when I was running, people were like, I gotta do it! Get me my ballot! We had to help them understand how to do this. People who had never voted before, voted because they knew me. So many amazing people.*

Part of the reason Colleen embodies the metaphor of the grass dancer is because she is leading in predominantly white spaces where she is often tokenized and misunderstood because she is the only one:

*It's just tough for Native women. I gave a keynote talk to this really amazing group called Native Women Lead, and it was at their Native Women Business Leaders conference. I was just reminding people that the mainstream mentality in*



*this country is like, that we weren't going to be here. Right, so like the vanishing race kind of theory. So, I have to be very strong and also give myself breaks. I feel like the Native female experience is so unique because we weren't supposed to be here. And I think that the system is still trying to wrap their minds around what that means.*

Another challenge with Going First is that it is impossible to fail without being seen as a discredit to your tribe, or to your gender. The pressure is high to get it right the first time and that makes taking bold risks very high stakes. Colleen navigates this with experience and a sense of humor:

*The system is not meant for us to be in business. It's scary to make business mistakes. Even, like, I could say something at a board meeting or around the table and I worry: Am I going to sound stupid? And if I ask a question, I just have to be ok with that. I remember when I realized that. Man! I was in a meeting and a white guy asked a stupid question! And nobody cared! (laughs). One day I realized. I used to make sure that my comments were the coolest. And well put together. But his questions were dumb! He stumbled all over it, and like, nobody cared. I am getting to that point in life where it's hard and it can be risky to make mistakes. But you gotta get over it and just be willing to make those mistakes. Take those big risks. And be cool with it. Also, I think, trusting your instincts, and your gut. And having people you can bounce [your ideas] off of, too. There are people willing to relinquish power, and say like, I am going to give you support as a Native woman because the world needs that kind of leadership and finding those kinds of people. I'm so lucky to have those kinds of people in my life. And*

*it's just wonderful. I hope that women behind me, are going to support each other like crazy.*

***Kate McAlister: Metaphor of the Train Trestle***

Kate described Going First using the metaphor of the train trestle to illustrate what it is like to be a bridge between a generation that did not have women leaders, and a generation where more and more women are rising into positions of leadership:

*One of my favorite things in the world are train trestles. The old wooden trestles. I love them, there just so fascinating to me. One day I was driving with my grandson, showing him all those old train trestles and he said, "Well that makes perfect sense Nana, because they connect two sides, and they still support so people can move from one side to the other." I realized that he was talking about me. Someday I'm going to start a foundation and our logo will be the train trestle. My vision for the future is that we can get that into the next generation, to be good, and be strong, and talk to one another because that's what we're missing. We need to stay connected. Let's figure out how to bring different people together. Let's figure out how we can connect people on both sides and still support them across that giant crevasse. My vision is to be able to help people reconnect again so they can better understand each other. We need each other.*

One of the ways that Kate goes first has to do with a book that she is writing. She feels that her whole life has led her to understand what leadership means, and now she trains young people with what she has learned:

*I believe that leaders are made up of integrity, intelligence, and inspiration. Integrity doesn't care how much money you have, you do the right thing for the*

*right reasons. Intelligence doesn't mean you have to know everything; it means teaching yourself and having the emotional intelligence to lead with inspiration. It's in the small things, not those false narratives of old white men. I don't give a crap if you're a CEO, you can be the worst human in the world and still be a CEO. There are CEOs that are building rocket ships that look like phallic symbols when they could be ending poverty. Money and power are not the end goal. Leadership takes empathy and compassion. Leadership means giving a shit about humanity. I may be short, but I'm loud. Better leadership means connecting to one another and getting it that we need each other.*

Kate speaks to shame and how she moves past shame and fear of the unknown to continue Going First. She discusses the importance of getting rid of shame because it is a killer. You simply keep moving forward:

*I tell my children that they saved my life because I would look at them, and I would think, "I can't be like my family was. I have to be better than that. I want my children to respect me." That means standing in your power. Don't puff up. Don't shrink. Stand in your power and let people know that you're not going away. You are going to have a voice in this. You go out there and you say your ideas and you stand up for what you believe in.*

Kate has learned through years in corporate America that Going First means you have to think about how your actions influence the people around you:

*When I hear women are too emotional, I'm like that's bullshit. Men are not emotional enough and they should work on that. If they respect you, people will follow you anywhere, and you have got to be careful with that. You have to honor*

*that though when you're given this gift of leadership. You have to honor that and understand what that means, because people will do what you want them to. It's really overwhelming at times. Recognize that you have the acumen, the mental skills, the gift of influencing people. Whether you like it or not, it's part of being in a leadership role.*

Kate highlights the barriers that she has faced as a woman Going First in corporate America. It was not acceptable for women to stand up for themselves. If you did, there were repercussions for standing up. Kate describes her experience through the lens of being a single mother:

*Especially as a single mom. I felt like, Oh God, I can't lose my job! I can't lose my job. I've got to keep my job. I wish I could be younger but also have all the knowledge I have now. I would rule the damn world. Because you don't really understand it when you're in it. Now my daughter asks me, "Why did you put up with all that shit?" It's because you had to. A lot of women that I've spoken to still struggle with being in business, even in nonprofits, and leadership in general. It's mostly white men that try to mess everything up. We can't let that happen anymore. Authenticity is still something we are striving for because it can be difficult to hold. It takes a tremendous amount of self-reflection and really understanding and believing that what I have to say has value. My experiences are just as important as everybody else's.*

***Shannon McGuire: Metaphor of the Way Finder***

Shannon uses the metaphor of the way finder to illustrate her lived experience of Going First as a leader. As a child, Shannon loved being the line leader. She tells her

story of being a leader from an early age, and compares to being the one who's willing to venture out into dark with the lantern, to be the scout and communicate with others what is found:

*As a child, I loved being the line leader. I'll go first! I'll raise my hand first! I'll read out loud! I'll do it! It wasn't to be seen. It was to give. I've always been a giver and the environment I grew up in did not nurture being a giver. It nurtured the exact opposite. I had a hard time blending into those environments because I wasn't supposed to show my joy. Joy would be snuffed out, and it would have been eaten by the predators, and the scavengers would take what was left. But I was always willing to stand up. I'm learning that leaders go first. Maybe not all the time, but to lead out. I think of Christianity a little differently. The story of Adam and Eve is about the first man and woman, and the woman is just a rib. You're just a rib. I grew up in that type of environment. But that rib was bold enough to go first! She ate that apple and she paid for it, but she's the one who went first. Within the religion space we are missing the female voice and we've been missing it all along. Women have been leaders from day one. I always see the image of the hermit with the lantern and the willingness to walk through the dark. I'm drawn back by my early days of Christianity, walk by faith not by sight. That lantern is really the heart. So, I add on to the phrase. Walk by faith, not by sight, and with heart. I was always willing to hold the lantern and walk. Not always worried if people were following. I didn't look back. I've just lived my life guided by higher spiritual laws and values. Sometimes leaders need to go first. Are you willing to walk out, to venture ahead, and to communicate back? Are you*

*willing to share what you see and what you feel? The power of going first, and being that light carrying heart with compassion, forgiveness, and kindness, and being willing to communicate and share. It's really that simple.*

Shannon's experience speaks to being a Black woman in leadership spaces, where she is often the only Black woman. There are many times when she is the only Black woman in the room. But she only sees it when she looks for it. The reason she does not look for it because she knows how the appearance of race comes with assumptions and stereotypes:

*We are constantly fed those messages through our music, our movies, and we have played that role for too long. I won't play that role anymore. I define who I am. I flip the negative into positive. I don't watch out for discomfort anymore. I look for the comfort of feeling good in my own skin. That is how I walk into any room at any time, with anyone. I have learned to be strong, but not immovable. I have to be energizing, not exhausting. And I come from this place of empowering and not just being inspirational. Not coddling. My purpose is to be a beacon of light. I didn't know I was supposed to be a poster child for trauma and mental well-being. But that's part of my resilience. It's like, girl, you came from living in a motel with your parents as a high school dropout. You've done this! So being in leadership spaces, like, the experience may be new, but the feeling is the same and that is what I draw my resilience on. The event may be different, but the fear is still there. I can draw on that and be like, oh my gosh, I've been through this before. I know what it's like to be really scared, so now I can push through that. I overcame it and it was my conquerors journey. I hope that my example gives people permission they need to live their life and feel good about being*

*themselves. Now I help leaders see things differently. I'm not a political person. That stuff is like bloods and crips to me. So, I advocate for individual power within a shared human experience. Unity always makes its way in.*

Shannon goes first in her family and in her community for becoming a business owner. Now she coaches leaders to claim their own fears, name the uncertainty, describe it, and overcome it. She described how one of the hardest things is starting a business:

*When I started Spark! I was more self-employed. I started it all by myself. I was a freelancer. There's such resilience required to navigate such an unknown space. I was tested out the gate. I kept pushing forward. Kept moving forward. Being in business for yourself, not by yourself, is hard. They say it's lonely at the top. I don't think it's lonely at the top. I think it's quiet. Not many people want to climb that quiet summit. Now I do things on my terms. I feel good connecting with others now. I can make better decisions when I'm the boss. I can express myself and show up being me. It's such a freedom! I lead through values. I don't want to be angry and try to burn down and tear down the system. I don't want to spend generations doing that. I want to get the fuck out of the system and build my own with others. I want to create something that doesn't really exist. I'm all about it and that raw fierce place. The beauty of being in a space of entrepreneurship is you get to create a new system, and also a new way to give back. Now I am helping leaders remember that all humans matter.*

***Joelle Bogenholm: Metaphor of the Healer***

Joelle uses the metaphor of the healer to describe her lived experience of Going First, both in terms of being unique in her family and in terms of her approach to

leadership. Joelle identifies as a teacher, healer, and medicine person within an organizational context. She talks about how she goes first in this role:

*We all carry scars from previous generations, and we all carry hurt and pain from our journey in life. It's our responsibility to heal ourselves. To set ourselves free from the pain of past generations. If we can do that then we can walk in right relationship with others in the world, and our stories don't harm them. I am here to help leaders learn how to heal, so that they can be good leaders. A good leader is always the one who shows the way and helps people find the right answers within themselves. The teacher, healer, visionary archetype manifests through someone who has done their healing work. It's really important to make sure you've done your healing work and that you have clean boundaries. What we are then able to do, is to bring our gifts of spirit into the world in service of the next seven generations.*

Joelle described what Going First looks like in her leadership development practice and in her work as an HR executive. Healing remains a theme in all she does, whether its healing oneself, or healing cultural injustice, or healing the land:

*I really try to identify BIPOC women in particular and see if I can open doors. Sometimes it's just like making sure that they get a voice at the table or that they get recognition for the work that they've done. Because I feel that BIPOC women have to work four times as hard. And so, if we have white privilege, and we're aware of our privilege, it's our responsibility to create access and to elevate other women, BIPOC women, in spaces that they may not get a chance otherwise. And all that puts me on the other side to, you know, white persons in power. So, I do it*



*anyway. I go first in those white spaces and hopefully make it easier for BIPOC women coming up behind me.*

Joelle described what Going First as a nontraditional leadership executive looks like for her. When she is doing executive coaching, she is either teaching skills or reflecting back to her clients. Usually, her clients are looking for something and she tries to help them be clear about what it is they are looking for, and then she helps them reflect on how they can get it. She does this in her own unique way:

*I look for gaps, blind spots, and help them with tools that might take them farther on their journey. People's greatness is within them. Unfortunately, society creates conditions where we tell ourselves that stories are no longer useful. But if we can discard that notion and create a new story then we're going to bloom, thrive, and stay resilient. Part of that is staying reflective. Reflective leaders take time to meditate, read, work on themselves, and tend to stay more resilient than those who just go, go, go, produce, produce, produce. When I'm trying to develop leaders, one of my strategies is to bring them up from within and make sure that they get the leadership skills that they need to take this work to the next level so that we can really solve wicked problems in the world.*

Joelle speaks to being a nontraditional HR executive and her passion for Indigenous issues. She is very interested in how to secure the land for either community land rights for Indigenous people or individual land rights for people living in poverty so they can rise above their circumstance. She shares her leadership philosophy:

*My philosophy is to find that spark, find what really motivates them and breathe life into those embers. I think if we spent more time with employees, breathing life*

*into the embers to spark the fire, rather than telling them that they're not doing well, that would go a long way toward everyone's resilience on the planet.*

*Nobody is going to care about the bottom line in the end. People are what matters. They are going to remember how you made them feel. How you helped them get a leg up. I think that's what life is about and that's what we need to focus on.*

Joelle says that as leaders, we must heal ourselves first. She described how, as babies, we are born perfect. We are resilient and then things happen to us, but how we respond, how we are taught, how we learn, how we teach ourselves if we did not get it from growing up, and how we get back up: that is where we begin. She shares her process of healing:

*To realize, ok here's the scar. I'm going to put that in my toolbox because I fought through it. I faced my fear, I accepted my anger, and I'm still here. You don't hear about good healers who have not been wounded. Good healers are wounded healers that have healed themselves first, and they walk in a way that heals those around them. They have good boundaries. They light fires in other people. They listen and they encourage. That's a healer: someone who's done that work. I have so much more compassion and empathy because I've been through that pain.*

*When I see other people going through pain, I can hopefully be of more service. I hope that just makes me real where I engage.*

***Ilana Rubel: Metaphor of the Public Defender***

Ilana uses the metaphor of the public defender when talking about what it means to go first for her, and in her family. Ilana is the first woman in her lineage to be elected

to public office. Although she fell into political leadership, she takes her role of standing up as a defender and hero very seriously. She shares her rise to leadership:

*I'm glad we're stepping in to be the defenders and the heroes when nobody else will. When we stand up, we do the hard thing and when we do, we show that we stand with unpopular people in difficult situations. I try to live up to that principle. But I didn't aspire to politics per se. I just got an email one day saying that one of the Democratic legislators from my district had moved away halfway through his term, and they needed to appoint somebody to fill his place. I never thought I'd run for public office, but this one seemed simple. You could apply on a website and then get interviewed. But even then, I almost didn't do it because I thought, nobody knows who I am. I am not connected. Then I thought, you know, this is what women always do. They never go for these opportunities because they always assume there's somebody more prepared. But we are prepared with better, or at least as much experience as they are! So, women never throw their name in the hat. Whereas men eagerly apply for things that they may or may not be at all qualified for. So, I thought, I'll throw my name in the hat. I filled out the application and didn't tell anybody I was doing it because I didn't think there was any possibility I would get chosen, and then I was chosen. The whole thing went by so fast. Within the course of a week, I found myself sworn in on the floor of the State House.*

Ilana came from a family of incredibly strong women who were civically engaged. Her grandmother was decades ahead of her time:

*She really emanated, you know, people better not dare tell her she didn't belong there. She had a forceful personality, and they better get out of her way if they tried to, you know, tell her lady sit down. She was brilliantly intelligent, and she showed me from toddler age onward that women belong in the corridors of power. Throughout my life she was there.*

Ilana has since learned that being a woman in leadership has its ups and downs. She discusses what she learned about it, and the value she brings to politics. In both instances where she ran for office, it felt there was nobody else to do it, so she was willing to go first and simply do it:

*I cared more. I was more engaged in the job than many other people in my caucus. Nobody else had any interest in stepping into a leadership role. So, it was kind of like, well, if I don't go for this then we may not have a leader. I'm probably in a better position to do it than anybody else. So, I guess I better do it! My family was quite flabbergasted when I told them the night before that I was going to be sworn in the next day to the legislature. Then, I think they were kind of excited. I want to be there with as many people as possible and stop all this nonsense. I may have the essentials I need to live my life, but my goodness, we might actually lose our country. We might lose our democracy. We might lose our most core rights. I might lose, you know. I might have to sell my house and pack up and move and lose all my friends that I spent twenty years building relationships and go move to a new place and start completely from scratch because of political things that are happening in this building. I certainly have higher political concerns now than I ever have before. Our 250-year-old experiment in*

*democracy could collapse in our lifetime. So, it feels bigger than just, you know, what are my needs. So that brings a different flavor of pressure, pressure to speak up when others won't.*

Ilana shares what it is like to be in the 17% minority of democrats in the Idaho legislature, where representing her constituents can be very difficult because politics are so polarized. As a democrat in conservative Idaho, she sometimes feels she is shouting into a void. She keeps trying and she keeps getting smacked down:

*One of my resilience strategies is just that I get very fixated and fastened on the good things that happen. When we do get a win, I keep reminding myself that wouldn't have happened had we not had some losses. So, I may get ten losses for every win. That win is a big deal, so I'm going to fasten to that. Try to see where I can get another win. See where I can mitigate the losses, and sometimes I try to remember that in the big picture, what looks like a loss at the beginning was actually saving me. I may prepare so hard, and give this fiery floor speech, and they completely ignore me. But, you know, we got our message out there in the world. We activated people. We did move the needle in some ways. We planted some seeds out there.*

Ilana talks about what Going First looks like in her role as the House Minority Leader for the Idaho State Legislature. She must be mindful because her caucus members elected her to be their leader. She must be careful that she doesn't say things that will throw them under the bus because she has a lot of caucus members who are not from blue districts and who are hanging on by the skin of their teeth:

*I have to be careful not to say or do things that would backfire against my other members. Then I have a separate role as the leader of District 18. In some ways I am the voice of the democrats, and so I do have to be careful, because it's not just my own reelection that I'm throwing into peril. I might be messing with somebody else's too. With my words, they may end up catching flack, from my potentially saying something off. So, I do have to be really careful that I'm expressing it in a way that is not going to boomerang back in bad ways. They've chosen me, so I can't say everything that I think.*

### **Radical Self-Agency**

Radical self-agency is a theme that emerged from participant responses to interview questions about identity. All participants have found resilient ways to navigate multiple subordinated identities. Haugh and Talwar (2014) highlight the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social change when innovative business processes that facilitate women's economic activity, and at the same time comply with cultural norms that normally constrain women's role agency, clearly contribute a to change in the social order itself. Radical self-agency embraces Haugh and Talwar's (2014) frame of emancipatory entrepreneurship as, "processes that (1) empower women and (2) contribute to changing the social order in which women are embedded" (p. 643). All five participants shared stories about how they employ Radical Self-Agency to redefine and reimagine their identities for themselves and then facilitate social change to help others do the same. In this way, Radical Self-Agency is part of the empowerment process that allows women to see themselves as emancipatory entrepreneurs working for social change.

This section shares participant stories relevant to Radical Self-Agency including envisioning new systemic structures, cultivating authenticity, transforming victimhood into joy, the significance of self-authorship, and standing up for the voiceless.

***Colleen Echohawk: Envisioning New Systemic Structures***

For Colleen, Radical Self-Agency means re-envisioning new systemic structures:

*Who are the people who are shifting the dollars and influencing the election because they have the money? You know, it's a terrible system. We all know it is. How do we influence the system? We can't do it from the outside, saying it's a bad system right? The resilience has to be in creating new tables and new ways of doing that business. I say this all the time. I'm not the one who came up with it but, like, we're not asking for that seat at the table. We're tearing down the table and building a sweat lodge in that spot. Right? The table itself is flawed, to say the least. We can't tear that table down and rebuild it if we're just outside the building, you know, protesting. We need to be at the head of that table, saying, you know, that this table sucks. I'm going to tear it down. Let's build a sweat lodge. Lets' change the way that we want them. Because it's not only beneficial to the Native community. When Native people and other people of color are leading, it's not just good for our communities. It's good for everyone. And it's good for the environment. I absolutely resonate with that and feel that it is my responsibility to model courage to my kids, and to the generations behind me, to the people that I get to work with. To show them that, yes, you can. You can and you should do new things even when you're afraid. That fear is a part of it. It's just a part of doing life. You can do great things and still be afraid.*

Another part of Radical Self-Agency is turning it inward to give oneself permission for self-authorship. In whatever intersection Colleen is at, whether it is as a business leader, or a nonprofit leader, or as a Native woman, it is still inherently as a Pawnee Athabaskan woman:

*And fem, I am very much connected to the feminine. I look very Native, even though I have a white mom. I look just like my dad and like my aunties. I look just like his sisters. It's just been the way that I've decided, and the way that my ancestors have pushed me. I think that I'm very blessed to have the opportunity, and my identity is strong. But it is strong because I have had a lot of support and years of experience. It hasn't always felt this good. Now that I'm 46 and have had a lot of success, that helps. I've been really successful at things and people are like, oh shit! She actually knows what she's talking about! And that helps!*

Colleen emphasizes the importance of authenticity, especially when it comes to identity. She is now at that 'Auntie stage' in life where she has learned to be her authentic self, and she described why the world needs more authenticity from Native people:

*I am beyond proud to be a tribal member of the Pawnee nation. I say it every chance I get. My identity is so connected to that. Even though I didn't live on our homelands, it's been ingrained in me since I was a child. I try hard to be authentic. I value my own authenticity and I've worked hard on that. I care about this planet we live on. I care about people. And they need to see people just being their authentic self. I love people.*

Colleen uses Radical Self-Agency to clearly define her identity for herself, and then turn it outward so that the public also receives her in the way she is intending to be



understood, as a Native woman. She shares about the importance and the value of wearing Native jewelry. Specifically, Native earrings:

*As Native women, we have been successful, you know, in the nonprofit world. We are there in research. We all have this like collection of Native earrings. And it's not just because we like them. It's also like taking our place and our space, and saying, "This is who I am." This is who you're getting. Right? Like you're not getting another white male or white person. Of course, we are not going to look like how you've always done it! We shouldn't have to You're getting a Native person with these kinds of values and ways of being in the world. And it's like a declaration of indigeneity. It's intentional. And also, you have to live up to that, right? When I walk into the room and I'm wearing these big ass Native earrings, and beautiful. I am living up to that. To those values that my ancestors fought for.*

In addition to openly communicating identity, Colleen has learned how to pull out of unhealthy relationships that do not support her Radical Self-Agency:

*When people break our trust, then don't trust them. It was five or six years ago, I realized, I have some people in my life who gave me nothing. They take and take and take. Why am I allowing that to happen? So, I made some choices about some friendships, and I pulled back from some of them. I was nice about it. I didn't say like, "I'm not going to be your friend anymore." But I slowly quit answering calls and making plans with people. It was so helpful for me to take this drag off of me. People were kind of holding me down and not being supportive. We need allies and peers; we don't need naysayers. I hope the women coming up behind me are bold! And strong! In what they believe in, and that they supported by other Native*

*women, other women. And that they are also supporting themselves. Believing in their own brilliance and staying committed to supporting their own brilliance with self-care. Whatever is going to feed them. If it takes you years to know what that is, then take your time. Because you're not going to be able to do the work of resilience, and the hard stuff that is ahead of us, without knowing what feeds you. And then it's going to suck and be hard for everyone. You just do it. It's in you. Don't feel like you have to do something special to be resilient. As a Native person, you, we, are resilient.*

Colleen takes the view of responsibility for local Native people, even though she did not grow up on her tribal homelands. She has a clear strategy about what support looks like for local Natives. When she walks into spaces like the Chamber of Commerce, she is the only Native person there. Therefore, she knows how her contribution is important:

*I'm the only one around the table that is going to identify with the needs of the tribal community, and the one at the table that is going to make people think twice about how they are contributing to colonization. Reflect on what is their relationship to local tribes. I was on a call with the Gates Foundation and Snoqualmie Tribe, and I was really able to model to this Native person who was working for the foundation, because I've done it for so many years. Listen. This is our responsibility as urban Native people who are not from this region. This is not our land. Our responsibility is to build relationship with the tribes, and then to back them up in every way possible that we can.*

***Kate McAlister: Cultivating Authenticity***

Kate also uses Radical Self-Agency and turns it inward to cultivate authenticity. She tells a story of a time where she had to work to make men see that she was intelligent and a leader. Kate has suffered from imposter syndrome. She shares how she makes sense of her authenticity, and how she communicates that to others:

*Authenticity for me, is actually a feeling. It's a knowing in my core that what I have to say is important and I'm going to speak up because I have been given that authority by the title of my position. It says I'm CEO, so I better act like one, goddammit. I remember when a VP asked me to make a presentation on corporate social responsibility. I was setting up everything and this guy came in from another company because we were hosting several companies. I was laughing about something and joking around. And he said, "Obviously you don't know the seriousness of this. Otherwise, you wouldn't be joking around. We're, you know, we're thinking about putting money into this. This is no joke." And I said to him, "Please do not misconstrue my effervescent jocularity for lack of intellect. Because I will verbally eviscerate you where you stand." And he goes, "Well who's in charge of this?" And I said, "I am. Thank you for coming." Later my VP came and said, "Oh my God, I thought you were going to tell that guy to fuck off!" And I said, "Well, I almost did." But I did. I did use my big girl words, right? So, there's times that you will be dismissed. It's like, don't dismiss me. Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean I'm any less of a leader.*

Kate speaks to Radical Self-Agency in terms of the way that women feel as leaders, and the stereotypes that women must get over to define their identities for themselves. It was difficult for women of her day to feel like ‘real’ leaders.

*Either they had to kowtow or become a ball-busting bitch who they got rid of right away, because who wants that right? You weren't really allowed to be yourself. You had to be one of the boys. I guess I was ok at that. I learned to work with men. But it was just difficult to go your entire career and feel like nobody's really taking you seriously. The male was dominant and what he said goes. You're a woman, good for you, go pat your head and go home and bake a cake. The hardest part was coming up with ideas, and then having a man take them, and move ahead or get a bonus because of it. It's so disgusting that it happens all the time, right, for 50 % of all humans in the universe. I got tired of people taking my ideas and getting credit for them. I don't put up with that shit anymore. I love, today, seeing so many women in power. It's about time. It's our turn as women to stand up and say, "Hey either we can all play in the sandbox together, or else we are going to take over." And I think we should take over.*

Kate discusses the importance of finding a way to be authentic in the workplace. In the beginning, she felt that she needed to be everything to everybody. When she had to be a nurturing mother, she acted like a nurturing mother. When she had to be a non-emotional executive, she would show no emotion. None of her identities were integrated. She shares how all of this changed:

*I needed to be a people pleaser. People need to like you or else you're never going to get anywhere in the world, especially if you are a woman. I had to make*

*sure that I was nice to everybody. And then one day I realized it doesn't matter if I'm nice to everybody. I have to be who I am. Now, even in politics, I don't care if people love me or hate me. I want them to respect me. I want them to respect the decisions I made because I really do advocate for all my constituents. So, there will be moments when you have to step back and remind yourself that you are a good person to your core. You believe in people. This is who you are and that is their problem. That is their issue. So, authenticity is a daily struggle. I don't want to just try to blend in anymore. These are my truths. It's my turn now. Becoming your most authentic self is the hardest work you'll ever do as a woman, because it forces you inward to really look at yourself.*

***Shannon McGuire: Transforming Victimhood into Joy***

Shannon talks about victimhood, as being one of life's most difficult hoods to navigate. Her experience of chronic stress eventually ended up in a visit to the ER. This experience sparked Radical Self-Agency in the way Shannon took responsibility for her stress, and then changed her situation by transforming her victimhood into joy:

*The corporate hustle and grind mean there's always a problem and there's always more to do. No one was ever good enough. I would be at the office late, and my kids were there, and I started thinking, damn, what are they seeing? I'm not even building this for me! But I was in this top corporate position and working on this memo when my chest starts hurting. I felt like I was having a heart attack, but I kept on working to finish the memo. I remember how hard it was to put the work down to take myself to the hospital. I was in the ER, and my boobs are out, and this technician is trying to ultrasound my heart. I'm just lying*

*there and thinking, why am I so stressed? In my culture there is this disassociation from stress. What stress? I don't stress. There's no stress. Oh my gosh, yes, there is! There is stress everywhere! Chronic stress in the workplace. Even at home, there's the mom guilt associated with being a working mother. But I'm out there creating a better world for my kids. Then there's the social stress. Man, I gotta work to eat and survive but I don't want to admit that because I don't want to make it seem like I need to eat and survive. Ok, no. We all need to eat to survive. So, I just started thinking about the freedom that I have. I walked away from corporate because the culture was miserable. I walked away because I'm not a complainer. I should have been done with the toxic culture sooner. I have learned how to avoid as much as I can the victimhood dwellers that are not wanting to make life better for themselves. Instead of blaming, I have to stop and really think about what is my choice. Yes, people and society apply pressure. Yes, there's probably some social gains and losses, but ultimately, it's my decision.*

Shannon shares the process of how she goes about taking up Radical Self-Agency when it comes to difficult emotions like fear, anger, sadness, and schadenfreude:

*You're living in a world that is pretty screwed up with systems that weren't designed for you if you're a woman, or person of color, or you're LGBTQIA+. I had to learn to harness intuition and to trust it... you need that when you're literally running from gunshots. I re-defined J.O.Y. as Just Observe You. Because no one owes you shit. There's going to be a lot of moments in life where you need to just observe you. That's how joy became a big part of my identity. When I recognize that I don't feel good, that's the moment to do some self-coaching. I*

*celebrate when shit goes wrong. I see it. I know victimhood. I check in: how are you? I might be angry. Oh shit, okay, you're probably hurt. Okay, and I have to tiptoe with this one but, what didn't go your way? This takes radical fucking accountability. I find the truth and sometimes it just comes down to things didn't go my way. I observe myself and bring back the joy. I can't change it, so I just observe it. It's okay to feel angry, so what's next? I need some space. Claim the emotion, just observe you, and take care of your needs to flip it back into joy. When I feel good about being me then the right people will vibrate with that. Don't stay in that victimhood, why the fuck would you use your energy to do that! Leaders go first so you have to learn to become your own coach. Coaching first and foremost is getting to a place to accept me. That is the secret sauce. So be your own coach, bring it back to you, accept you and love you unconditionally, and people will say yeah, I want to join that. What can you create more of for people so they can resonate with your vibration? Maybe you're leading the wrong organization or maybe you're in the wrong room. Go where you're celebrated, not tolerated.*

Shannon uses Radical Self-Agency to make decisions for herself and sometimes others. She sees her identity as the gift of being alive. She described the power of self-agency that lies in how she presents to the world versus how the world receives her:

*I used to be this misguided people pleaser. I tried to just blend in enough to not rock the boat. It was really uncomfortable. I've examined my scars and now I know who I am. I think about where I'm from and I always belong wherever I am because I come from an ancestry and a lineage that has been here. It's hard to be*

*a somebody when your environment is so crappy. And we are still here. I am here, and therefore I belong. All the power you need is already inside you. I belong in my mother heart. I belong here, right now, and I carry that forward unapologetically. I don't attach myself to biological identity. I have always felt bigger than this body. It's been hard feeling bigger than my body. I belong here because I'm a mom! And mothers have an important role that belongs at the center of humanity. Sitting at the leadership table, people will see me as a Black woman. I sit at that table, and I look at myself as so complex and so much more than that. I'm a mom. I'm a child of energy. I'm a human at this table. And so, I belong. If I strip myself of every word, every label that's been applied to me, that I've applied to myself, then what's left? That's where I found that I come from this source, a loving source. Now I can walk into any room, any room, and I feel good about being who I am, and it took me a long time to get there.*

Shannon is entering the matriarch phase of her life, and she feels as if her mother and her are on the learning journey of matriarchy together. First, she is going through the passing of a parent. Her dad, who's been the man of the family, is now in his final stages of life.

This is a new place for Shannon, and for her family:

*We are at a new place of claiming who we are, my mother and I. My mom didn't have a guide to tell her about how to be a matriarch. So, we have this ability to craft, what is our role, and how do we spread that wisdom. Which was another reason that I wrote a book. What does it mean to lead a family? Leading a family is a leadership role. It's about that fierce acceptance of self and building on the strengths you were given. We're all connected. We all flush the toilet everyday, or*



*at least we should be. And hopefully putting the toilet seat fully down. (laughs)*  
*Your hardships in that story you were born from created such a unique set of*  
*strengths in you that will never be replicated.*

***Joelle Bogenholm: Practicing Self-Authorship***

Joelle speaks to Radical Self-Agency in terms of practicing self-authorship to take ownership of and pride in our culturally subordinated identities. While some identities she carries are hidden in the sense that they are invisible such as being Indigenous Sámi, lesbian, and adopted, others are visibly dominant such as being white presenting and cis-gendered female. Joelle described what practicing self-authorship means to her:

*I always knew I was different. I carry the invisible identity of being lesbian and that was completely rejected by my family. I knew it at age 5 but I didn't have role models. It was totally not acceptable to be gay where I grew up. I wasn't safe. When I finally accepted my orientation, it was like coming home to myself, and I no longer felt like an abomination. Kids are still suffering at the hands of their parents and religious fanaticism, when they really just need to be loved. If I could say anything to those kids, I would say just hang in there. You will find your tribe. My safe spot is and has always been with Indigenous communities but carrying white privilege has allowed me to see the darker side of human reality. I consider myself BIPOC because I am Indigenous. When I show up in BIPOC groups there's curiosity, and then there's acceptance. I am a part of this universe, it's all alive, and we're intricately intertwined with it and so we have to take care of it.*

Joelle described what it is like to be in spaces with people who carry only dominant identities such as white, cis-gendered male, straight, and Christian where they often assume that she identifies with them, and yet, she feels alienated:

*One of the most difficult things has been this. Honestly, in the space of white people, it has been really really hard. Because, one: I'm not quite white enough. And two: men, over time a lot of white men have been dismissive to me. When I was younger, I had blonde hair and blue eyes, and I don't know if I was taken seriously. Peers would often make passes at me and when I didn't reciprocate, they turned on me. My ideas challenge the ideas of white men. The other disappointing thing I've seen is among white women, and I have worked my entire life to change this. White women tend to see other white women as competition. There's always been a female that wants to knock me down. I've never wanted to be competition. The power is in collaborating and building up the next generations. But that's not how white dominant culture sees it. So, I've always believed in trying to bring up and support other women and tried to hold my own with men too. Some welcome my advice and some don't. For some white men, if you are a woman who stands up, you're a bitch. If you're a woman who speaks her mind, you know, you get labeled. And if you show compassion, you're weak. So, it's a real double-edged sword for people like me. I aim to change that in every culture I touch. I think white people are running scared now. There's an underlying fear. They don't want to be politically incorrect, but the unconscious bias is still there. So, what I find is that I create relationships easier with BIPOC people, than I do with people who are white. People who are white might say*

*something off and be like, “Don’t you agree?” It’s like, white solidarity is like this passive aggressive thing. I’m actually like, no, this is what I think. I have to do it in ways that both calls out and invites in. I have to be willing to stand up with my BIPOC friends and speak my truth. Be who I am. Walk in forgiveness, walk in love, but also not tolerate when I see racism or isms in general.*

Joelle discusses a path for using the practice of self-authorship as a resiliency strategy. How she looks at resilience is twofold: How you keep yourself healthy (mind, body, spirit), and then how you get yourself back up again when you’ve been knocked down. Everyone gets knocked down. It depends on the length of time it takes you to get back up, and how you do that:

*Resilience is the key skill of our time. It means both taking care of ourselves and picking ourselves up when we get knocked down. How do you pick yourself up and dust yourself off? How do you learn from it? How do you integrate it into your stories in a way that does not evoke shame in us but evokes power and choice. I just can’t underscore this enough in everything.*

Joelle defines success as living an authentic life and being happy. Having enough does not mean modern world opulence; it means following your heart:

*If you are your authentic self then the universe conspires with you, and for you, to create abundance. That doesn’t necessarily mean material abundance. When you can just be, there’s a gift of presence to yourself and to those around you. And that’s important.*

***Ilana Rubel: Speaking Up for the Voiceless***

For Ilana, Radical Self-Agency means standing up for what's right, even when others will not. She tells a story of one of the times that she felt humiliated because no one stood up for her. Her family did not have a car, and so they took public transportation everywhere. When it came to her high school prom night, Ilana rode the bus to the school in her prom dress:

*I was taking public transportation to prom, and there were some older teenagers who started saying, "Look at that Jewish girl. Who does she think she is? Getting all dressed up and riding around town!" It was terrifying. I was at the back of the bus. I kept hoping the bus driver would hear and intervene, or that somebody would hear and intervene, and nobody did. I was terrified. It was very frightening and upsetting, having nobody intervene. And just that feeling of (crying) victimhood. Sorry, it was so long ago. That was thirty years ago but I still remember it vividly. I know what it's like for people going through that, and people who are victimized because of their visible characteristics, and sometimes nonvisible characteristics. I remember being so upset that nobody intervened, and so it made me always want to be the one that intervenes. I don't ever want to be somebody who just sits there watching that happen to someone else. And so, you know, whether a person is Jewish, Black, Asian, Hispanic, gay, or trans or whatever . . . I find it equally unforgivable for those people who sit and watch, as for those who perpetrate.*

Ilana described how her identity influences the reasons why she went into public office. She described how her experience of being bullied for being Jewish is part of what drives

her desire to be in public office. She described her Radical Self-Agency along with her elected position as having a little bit more ability to intervene when you see that bullying and that oppression happening.

*You know, we need a government that really protects people. Protects against the tyranny of the majority. And to protect everybody's rights, so, having been in one of those minorities, like, that helps color things. I feel equally compelled to stand up for anybody who I don't necessarily overlap with, because I get deeply upset when I see those attacks.*

Ilana's challenges include conflicting identity roles between being a mother, wife, friend, professional and political leader. She shares how she finds her way in claiming self-authorship to fit who she wants to be instead of what society tells women they should be:

*I've always wrestled with personal and professional balance. My family, you know, I don't think they really fully understand what all goes on in here (the state capitol). This leadership role has made me less of a traditional mom. I mean, I almost never cook. Our house is a mess. I miss a lot of things. It's exhausting. I'm the tireddest person on the planet! I was trying to be in all this stuff, but I miss a lot of things that, would be nice for a more traditional mom to be present for. I hope that there is some countering merit that they get to see from their mom helping to run the state. That it sends them a message: this is something you can do. This is not something that only magic people you've never heard of can do. This is something that someone who wakes you up and drives you to school every morning can do. I hope it's made it more attainable and that they grow up*

*dreaming big! I think there's tradeoffs, but they also got some role modeling that other kids don't get. I mean, they see that you can run the world.*

In another example of Radical Self-Agency, Ilana tells a story about worrying that she was going to lose her job because she was pregnant. She shares how she navigated through that tough situation:

*There were some very tangible ways in which my gender came into play in terms of how I had to play my cards. I had a very big case, the biggest case I've ever worked on, that was going to trial as a 400-million-dollar trade secret case. I had been working on this case for three years and the trial team was going to be very limited. I very much wanted to be on that trial team and see this case through to the finish. I became pregnant heading into it. I was so afraid of letting the supervising partners know that I was pregnant because I was afraid, I wasn't going to be included on the trial team. So, I was hiding it. I was wearing big, baggy things. I was hunched over to try to hide the bump. Until I locked in my spot on the trial team, I hid my pregnancy. So, I was like six months pregnant and not telling everybody, and still trying to conceal it. Then I had to get an OB/GYN in the city the trial was in case I should go into labor in the middle of the trial. I was concerned about what people would assume of me. So, I did feel that there were some very tangible ways in which my gender came into play. It was challenging, certainly. Juggling everything. There's an awful lot of hangovers from centuries and centuries of patriarchy and lack of equal rights.*

## **Re-Membering**

In Chapter II, I wrote about bricolage as a way that women are using entrepreneurship to make something from nothing to survive and thrive. While there may be merit to that scholarship, the findings in this study suggest that women social entrepreneurs are doing more than bricolage. They are engaging in a process of Re-membering. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012) described Re-membering in terms of connecting bodies with place and experience, and importantly, people's responses to the pain they have endured:

This form of remembering is painful because it involves remembering not just what colonization was about but what being dehumanized meant for our own cultural practices. Both healing and transformation, after what is referred to as historical trauma, become crucial strategies in any approach that asks a community member to remember what they may have decided unconsciously or consciously to forget. (p. 147).

Re-membering invokes the image of putting missing pieces back together to create a wholistic oneness. Re-membering has a healing quality that empowers the individual to recover what was lost. Re-membering is a theme that emerged from all participants responses to interview questions around belonging. This section shares participant stories relevant to Re-membering, in their own words. Participants describe Re-membering to dream big, Re-membering through mentorship, Re-membering how much is enough, Re-membering who you are, Re-membering your purpose.

***Colleen Echohawk: Re-Membering to Dream Big***

Colleen tells her mentees to remember what they are capable of by dreaming big and visioning where they want to be in the next ten years. Then she helps them get there. She hopes to see her staff eventually leading much bigger things than she is. Colleen tells her mentees that they ought to be either a fortune 500 leader, or a major CEO. She works to build that leadership muscle in young Native people:

*I believe that what is important for the future is for the country, and for the world, is for Native women and people from other identities and other cultures to lead from those spaces and change the dynamics of 'this is the way it's always been done'. You can see it in everything from architecture, to business, to you know, transportation in this country for the past 500 years. It has been dominated by white male thought and I think it has come to a reconnecting point where we have to change. The world wants a change. Our planet is not going to exist without a major change. As I get older, I get to share these stories so that young women who are following behind me can also build that storytelling muscle. In the general Indigenous community, it's just important.*

Colleen also uses her mentorship to show other young Natives the idea that belonging is remembering. She understands that her ancestors are active, and that for Indigenous people, it is about settling into a space of remembering of them:

*In many ways, belonging is about remembering. Remembering who you are. And remembering that your ancestors fought like hell to get here. So, it's just a matter of just like, Hey! I'm going to remember. I'm not going to let all the bullshit around me, tell me that I don't belong here. There is so much renaissance of*



*culture. Young people think, "I shouldn't have to be resilient." I get that. I understand that. But also, I've had my own experience of fighting for my community and having the experience of resilience. I thought it was very helpful because I kind of built it. I know it's unfair. It's unfair we have to be more resilient than other people. It sucks. But it's just the way it is. I think, for the continued growth of the community we need to support each other. We have to be intentional and focus on being model clients to each other. My whole career has been about being resilient, and just like honestly, sometimes just gritting my teeth and just sucking it up and just going forward.*

Colleen views Re-Membering as a birthright. She connects the displacement of Indigenous people to their tendency to question whether they are enough or feel the need to prove their legitimacy as a Native person.

*I think a lot of people, because we have been displaced, can feel very disconnected. I was fortunate, even though it was a little confusing sometimes. I was fortunate to be connected to a really vibrant community. I continue to try to remind people of that, in all the work that I get to do. And I think I'm kind of driven to support our country to reckon with the importance of Native people. And the importance of Native art, culture, and design. I try to remind people that even the most successful person in this world, unless they are a narcissist, they will have moments of feeling: am I enough? Am I right in this moment? And that's important to remember because you won't always feel belonging.*

Colleen believes that innovation and entrepreneurship are the path toward shared economic and political power. She raises the question, “What is enough?” when it comes to material wealth. She encourages innovation and entrepreneurship in her own family:

*I want to encourage my kids to think about making money, and to be okay with that. I resonate with the idea of shared prosperity. But what does one do with all those dollars? I think we have to change our mentality in this country. To say, what is enough? Wealth is not a value I will ever aspire to. For me, wealth means if I have a relative who needs support through a medical situation or through an educational situation, that I can just give them those dollars and walk away without expectation of them ever returning it. Or, you know, create a beautiful meal in my home for family and friends. So, I think we are beginning to shift the paradigm in this country that wealth is family. Wealth is having the opportunity to give it away. We don't know how to think about shared prosperity in this country. Until Black and Native people are the ones who have the dollars, we're not going to be able to see it. I envision free education for all Native people, at every publicly funded institution, and I believe in land back. I think that's one of the things we are going to have to grapple with in this country. But I believe in order for us to have the opportunities for food sovereignty, the opportunities for the right of the Indigenous ways of education, and leadership, that you also connect it to the land.*

***Kate McAlister: Re-Membering Through Mentorship***

Kate speaks to remembering in terms of finding mentors who can remind you of your greatness. She described how difficult it was growing up in the baby boomer

generation because all her mentors were men. There were never women to go to for mentorship because there were no women in leadership in corporate America at the time. But there were men who saw something in Kate that she never recognized or did not want to recognize. They helped her remember that she was a leader:

*I really didn't have women mentors because we were not told to look up to women. There were women I admired. I was very excited to meet Mary Robinson, the first female President of Ireland. I met Hillary Clinton and Coretta Scott King. I thought these women were amazing. I still learned a lot from men. Like, don't cry in front of crowds, you know, be strong. Stand up! And the first time you do it, your heart's in your throat, and you think you're going to throw up. But all the times my mentors forced me to be in front of people, they'd say, "Get out there and talk. You get out there. You know this subject matter, and you can do this. You have authority. Speak with authority." Sometimes it didn't matter if I spoke with authority and had a great education. Because a man would always beat you out for the position. Always. It was disheartening. But now I have two daughters who are very strong women, and they already understand those things that I had to learn the hard way.*

Kate described how important it is that when life gives you a gift, you must honor it, no matter what. In this story, she described the moment when she first became someone's mentor, and what that opportunity meant for her:

*One of the best times ever was when this young man came to me right out of college, and he worked for me. We would have great discussions. He came to me one day and he said, "Boss, I'm just so weird" and he really meant it too. It was*

*so sad. And I said, "Pal, we're all weird. We're all weird. We're gonna be okay." We continued to talk throughout the time he was with me, about three years. Then one day he said, "Thanks for being my mentor." I said, "What? You think of me as your mentor?" I mean, it never entered my mind. He's like, "Well, isn't that what you are? Of course, that's what you are." I said, "Oh. [Crying] You have no idea what this means to me. In my day a young man would never, ever have come to a woman for mentoring." Then he said the greatest thing ever. He looked at me and he said, "Well that's stupid." [Laughs] So that's one thing I appreciate about the millennial generation.*

***Shannon McGuire: Re-Membering How Much Is Enough***

Shannon tried working in non-profits for a time but found a similar mentality of victimhood that she had experienced in corporate America. For Shannon, remembering how much is enough means not allowing money to make all your decisions for you. It also means defining what 'enough' money is for yourself:

*Money is a tricky little sucker. Money and numbers bring a false assumption of control. The head scratcher became when I entered the nonprofit space. How similar it was in some ways! In some ways it was even more toxic because you have all these do gooders, or these people with heart that were often breeding more victims, more victims. Justifying it, and taking less because they felt like, of course, it's a nonprofit, and so I'm not supposed to make enough. So, I walked away from it all. It's not so much walking away from something, as it is going toward something. I wanted a big change, and it was the best thing I did for my marriage. It was the best thing I did for my kids. It was the best thing I did for me.*

Shannon uses a human centered framework in her leadership consulting practice that fosters her clients' personal sense of being enough in a way that creates more belonging for people:

*I'm calling in community. It's been a wild rollercoaster. Some days it pisses me off because of the lack of collaboration and desire. Clicks are real, especially in philanthropy. Where the money goes and who gets it. Other days it can be rewarding to be flipping the paradigm in leaders' heads about how to see the world, and people, and communities. At Spark, we have a framework called the Human Centered System. No matter what the policy, no matter the structure, everything is driven by humans. What is at the heart and mind of that human? What is that human's story? It sits at the front and center, nurturing and guiding community.*

Shannon speaks about how she mentors her clients, and the importance of consenting to the process of sharing hopes, dreams, fears, and joys. She sees her work as being sacred:

*When I'm invited to connect and listen, that's sacred, because the heart and mind are sacred. When folks are sharing from that space, its automatically sacred. If you consent to hearing my ideas, and I'm consenting to really listening, that's super sacred. There's a feeling sometimes that comes over me. I feel it in my body. Like I'm in a warrior pose. Shoulders back. Melting in my heart. I am feeling a connection to humanity. From there I can discern what is best for the collective good.*

Shannon relays that it is important to understand the difference between your bias and your intuition. Shannon relies on her intuition all the time, both at work and at home:

*I have to draw on that intuition. There's a lot of talk about bias. We have bias, but I don't think we've explored it enough. Intuition is sometimes mislabeled as bias. There are times where I feel something, and I can't explain it. I have gotten better at it. Like if I feel that I need to not hire a person, or what direction not to go in. I've learned to trust that. It could be appearing as bias as well. I see past my bias. I have to feel it in order to move past it. I feel past it. And nine times out of ten, my intuition is correct.*

***Joelle Bogenholm: Re-Membering Who You Are***

Joelle talks about the phenomenon of remembering from her lived experience as a Sámi American woman:

*First of all, there's what's in the bones. There's the knowing that you can't deny. You know that you've experienced certain things before. That you remember, like, the ancestral ways. And that's really hard to explain. I'm not Sámi by culture per se, but it's my ancestry and it speaks to me. As far as Sámi stuff goes, like joiking [Sámi cultural practice that sounds like singing], these things I have been doing my whole life, in private, and no one taught me how. It just made sense and it all fits. Those things I have learned seem more like remembering than you know. Like, learning is remembering. Remember who you are. Remember where you came from. I'm still on the journey to discovering. I know it's very important.*

Joelle speaks to her relationship to the land and animals as part of what she is remembering from her ancestors. Joelle has travelled all over the world and she has loved every place she has been to. But when she travelled to her ancestral homelands of Sápmi, she felt as if she was home:

*When I went searching for my ancestral homelands, I knew. I knew it. I absolutely knew it. When it comes to animals, wild animals, domestic animals, like, I've done dog rescue for thirty years. There's always a herd at my house. I helped out at my godparents' ranch growing up. I was around horses and chickens. I just feel a complete sense of acceptance with animals. Just very comfortable, I talk to them. They talk to me. We have an understanding. I've gone to help sea turtles, helped in dolphin sanctuaries in the tropics, and I've volunteered in a rhino sanctuary in Africa. We helped rehab and release. I've done humane society and dog stuff all over the world. I've never actually gone somewhere where a dog hasn't just come up and asked for help. When that happens, I reach back and talk to my rescue folks, and we try to save it. I've got all these animal stories. For me, there are just as many animal stories as there are human stories.*

***Ilana Rubel: Re-Membering Your Purpose***

Ilana tells a story about when she was made to feel that she did not belong while working in the legislature. She was working alongside one of her female colleagues to get Medicaid expansion. The opposition was smacking the bill down again and again and refusing to vote on it. She shares how she got through that moment by, Re-Membering her purpose, and standing up for herself and those around her:

*My colleague got up and was very emotional and said, "You know, I have been all but spat on, since I started working on this. Members won't talk to me. People are sliming me on social media. I'm being attacked in the most vicious ways." And she started to get choked up. She's like, "I'm just trying to stand up for my constituents who need this healthcare, and I can't believe how I'm getting treated*

*like garbage.” The speaker interrupted her and was like, “Good lady, why don’t you sit down and gather yourself.” I was so upset. Seeing her get shut down, and I thought there were some gender undertones there. So, I stood up because she was one of my very courageous friends, and we had been working together on all of this, and it was very upsetting to hear how she was getting abused for really being courageous and doing her job. It pained me to see that she was being punished and brought to tears on the House floor, and then told to sit down for sharing her story. So, I got up. I said, “I am so disgusted by what I’m hearing is happening to my friend, the good lady here. She is the one with courage. She is the one with integrity. This is totally unacceptable that she is getting . . .” and I started getting choked up. I was talking about what they were doing to her, and the Speaker said to me, “Good lady, why don’t you sit down and gather yourself.” So, he tried to do that kind of man-splainy, like, sit down little lady, you’re getting emotional. And I was very glad that I didn’t sit down. When the speaker said that to my friend, she sat down and just cried quietly in her seat. He tried to do the very same thing to me, with the like, why don’t you sit down and gather yourself bit. And I was like, “Mr. Speaker, I am gathered. I have something to say here. If I sound emotional, it’s because I think this situation calls for emotion! But I don’t think that that means it’s appropriate to stop talking!” I was very proud of myself. You never know what you’re going to do in those on-the-spot situations. But I finished my speech and was un-ashamed about it. I was very glad that I owned that moment. I will happily cry on the floor. I’m proud of it and screw you for telling me to not be. You’re the ones that should be ashamed for not being*



*emotional enough in moments like these. So, I did feel like there were definitely some gender undertones in that moment. You do find that, you know, when I give basically the exact same speech as a man would and some of the men will still be up in arms that there is emotion. I do find differential treatment that looks like, you know, a man is passionate when he gives speech, but when a woman gives the exact same speech in the exact same tenor it's like, oh they're hysterical. A different framework is applied to women who stand up and say the exact same things that men do. I feel no shame in getting emotional. There's no reason we should go crawling in a hole when we cry. It takes bravery to be vulnerable. And those who can be vulnerable are the bravest among us.*

Ilana shares another story where she felt alienated for being Jewish while in political office. She can feel the collective presumption that everybody should be Christian. She has found it profoundly alienating:

*We are not living in the same universe on so many things. They do a Christian prayer every morning they open it up. With, you know, "We pray to our Lord Jesus Christ" this and that. Doesn't it even cross their minds that there might be people in here who are not Christian? I am constantly being hit with messages that I don't belong in the State house. We are different from you. You are not part of our little club. In one example, you can see over there, that they voted two years ago to put giant gold letters "In God We Trust" on the wall of the House. They brought a bill forward to put that on the wall. I was thinking, okay the smart thing to do right now is just shut up. There is nothing politically smart about standing up and saying we shouldn't put "In God We Trust" on the wall. But I*

*was thinking, you know what? I disagree with this and I'm just gonna vent and let them hear it. I stood up and I said, "You know, we are here to represent everybody, regardless of what religion they are, and even if they have no religion. We need to represent Jews and Muslims and Hindus and Mormon and Catholics, and atheists. It's not acceptable for these people, whose tax dollars we're collecting, and we're supposed to be representing, to hear from us that they have no place in this building. This is their House too. They should not have to walk into their chamber, where their laws are being made, and see giant gold letters on the wall. It says you don't belong here! We don't like you! We disagree with your viewpoint as your government! We're against you" So I gave this speech in defense of atheists. And of course, they did it anyway. They voted to do it. It's there now. That was just a moment for my own mental health where I just needed to be authentic. Because I would never forgive myself if I had just sat there silently. I will probably get yelled at for being some god hating monster or something. But it was satisfying to vent and be authentic. There is some satisfaction there. I think it's a little soul crushing every time you don't do that. So, I do it.*

### **Ancestral Connections**

Ancestral connections is a theme that emerged from participant responses to interview questions about resilience. All participants spoke of drawing strength from their ancestors, although they each approached it in their own unique ways. The theme of Ancestral Connections supports Southwick et al. (2017) in their assertion that the capacity to adapt and flourish in trying times is both an internal characteristic or trait as

well as cultural or learned through nurturing. This theme supports existing scholarly efforts to bridge individual with collective resiliency processes (Kirmayer, et. al., 2009; Richardson, 2002), and provides an opportunity to reimagine connections between the nature of genetic ancestry, and the nurture of cultural upbringing.

Thematic application of Ancestral Connections addresses the social and cultural dimensions of resilience important for Indigenous communities and women in accounting for historical and systemic trauma (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008), allowing space for notions of resilience to embrace the interconnectedness of people with each other and their environment. There was a theme that I could personally connect with in my own search for resilience as an individual, a mother, a partner, a professional, and a community member. I always feel my ancestors love and support, and that gives me strength.

This section shares participant stories relevant to their connections with their ancestors in terms of feeling responsible to live well, being the matriarch and asking for ancestral guidance, amplifying motherhood with intuition and energy, becoming an elder, and embracing multi-generational legacies.

***Colleen Echohawk: Feeling Responsible to Live Well***

Colleen feels very blessed and recognizes how privileged she is to be living in this time, rather than what her ancestors went through. Thus, she feels a responsibility to live up to the role modeling of her ancestors, and live a good life:

*I have this connection to my ancestors. Like if I pray, I'm praying to my ancestors. And I feel very much, like it's in my body, like in a nudging or in signs that are leading me. In the Pawnee tradition we believe that when you see eagles.*

*The reason why eagle feathers are so important is that it's literally your grandparents, and your great grandparents, they are watching over you. Not every time but many times I will get guidance from eagles. I try to think about what they went through and remind myself that, to rely on their strength, and to remember that I stand on their shoulders. If they powered ahead for me, they endured and suffered so that I can be here, so my kiddos can be here. I try not to give into the human desire to complain and feel sorry for myself. I believe there is power and strength in my ancestors, who are pushing me forward. I feel their proudness and their excitement about where I want to get to. I think about it every day and it supports me.*

When Colleen was invited to take on the role of executive director at Eighth Generation, her kids said, "Mom, you have to do it! It's the coolest job ever!" Another way Colleen feels her ancestors speaking to her is through her children. When she hears her ancestors speaking to her, she takes that seriously:

*This is my identity. I carry strength and resilience from those ancestors that make sure I was able to be here. I remind my kids to think about them. To think about what they went through. I tell my kids, you're not alone. You're not alone because your ancestors are all around you. Your family is around you. Go be a badass! There's that t-shirt that says, "I am the wildest dreams of my ancestors." I do think that they would have been blown away, after everything they went through, to see their grandchild have everything I have. There's a whole legacy piece, and part of what I am really conscious of is that they want me to live a good life, and to give back, and to support other Native Communities. But also, to live well and*

*have good things going on. It gets easier. And you get used to it. And you build your capacity. It's very important to be listening for those moments for when you can really turbo blast ahead to the next thing!*

In addition to gathering support from ancestors, Colleen also advocates for building strong social support systems:

*Gather your support system. Know that, yes, we have our ancestors who are all around us. But also, to have that physical support system. I don't think that I would be here if it wasn't for that. Believe in yourself and don't be afraid to make mistakes. I've made a lot of mistakes. I've screwed up big time. You are going to make it safe if you can make it a place of growth. So, to be able to have somebody to ask, "is this a good idea?" Make those connections, it's not just networking. Make friends with people.*

***Kate McAlister: Being a Matriarch and Asking for Ancestral Guidance***

Kate shares how she listens to her ancestors for guidance. She asks the universe for signs on how to move in her career, and for guidance in her decisions and actions. She feels that it is a blessing:

*I relied on my ancestors to get through everything. I mean my people endured the potato famine. I come from strong stock. I came from extreme poverty and a horrific family, but I don't have to live in that. It certainly has not defined me. The Irish believe that everything is about the story. We learn through story. There was a storyteller that used to go around the village. He was called the Shawnicky. He would be welcomed into every home, and he would gather all the people together. He would tell them stories of the ancient people and that's how they kept the oral*

*history. With the Shawnicky, there was a lot of storytelling. Now it's different. We need to stop looking for answers outside of ourselves when it comes to ourselves. Quite honestly, there was something inside of me that always said, you're better than this. You're not like them. You can do this. You know it's up to you. I had nobody, so I had to make sure I could get through these things. I guess I never recognized myself as being resilient. It was just that I had no choice, right? I could either lay down and die, or I could go into the welfare system like my shit-ass family did. Or I could be someone better. I could listen to that little voice inside of me saying that I was different, that I was meant for different things.*

Kate described her connection to her ancestors as giving her strength and resilience:

*There are times, honestly now that I'm in my sixties, where I look back and, you know, during my meditations and times that I'm just pondering life. I call them horrible, wonderful experiences. They are horrible in that they happened, but wonderful because I learned so much. I'm very thankful for my shitty life. I'm very thankful for it, because if I hadn't come from where I came from, I don't think I'd be the person I am today. And so, to honor where we came from. Even in ancestry. I'm a second generation American on both sides of my family. My family is from Ireland. We were Gallowglass Warriors who fought naked and painted their bodies blue. They didn't quit until you were dead, or they were dead. When I understood that and really researched it, that's what I would tell myself. As a single mom with kids, I would tell myself, I'm a warrior. I come from warrior stock. I can get through this. I think we can't forget where we came from.*

Kate talks about being the matriarch in her family, as a way of taking her place in the lineage of her ancestors. She says:

*I love being the matriarch. I love it! I love that my grandchildren are mostly teenagers, and I hear them say things like, "Be impeccable with your word" and I'm like, Huh! I said those things to them. So that's awesome. Right, The continuation! I look at them and I think, oh my god you are going to rule the world. You know, raising kids as a single mother was tough in the moment. And then you find out later when they say, "Mom, we know you didn't eat. We know you gave us all the food." You can't hide things from your kids because they are watching you. I love being the matriarch now because it means they look to me for comfort. It means being able to look at everybody when we're all together, like on holidays, and know that I made it. I made it out. They will not have to experience those things I experienced. I never take that for granted. I made it out, and that is difficult.*

Kate discusses what it feels like to be in the matriarch phase of life while also holding political office. Sometimes she feels like the matriarch of town because she takes in all these people and encourages them. She tells them they can talk to her about anything, and they know she will not be judgmental with them:

*We're all deliciously human. We all have stuff that we go through, so who am I to judge? I cannot judge people about where they come from, or what they've done, or what they've been through, because you know, I remember. Good leaders are people who can stand up in front and have rocks thrown at you. My retirement plan is to sit on my front porch and drink whiskey and throw rocks at people, and*

*while I'm doing that, I want to be able to rest assured that this town is running just fine and that I've had some small part in making it better. A small part in helping women become leaders. It's time for women to rule the world! End the sexism. If you're hung up on sex, go see a therapist.*

***Shannon McGuire: Amplifying Motherhood with Intuition and Energy***

Shannon thinks about being divinely guided by her ancestors, through the voice of the Holy Spirit. Her earliest spiritual experiences were always through intuition. For Shannon, God is the energy inside of her. She described it as a calling, and as a knowing:

*In my culture, we are guided by the voice of the Holy Spirit. That's what I was taught, and then I learned to distinguish that voice from the others in my head that are not mine. It was faint, subtle at first. The word God is like the word Mom. Both are loaded words. I had to redefine God for myself. What I landed on is energy. I call it INNER-G. I am energy and so there's this inner God. God is God, Goddess, Gingus, Gratitude, whatever. I draw on that energy. There's so much fear, anger, disgust, and schadenfreude in the world. There's not as much joy that we celebrate. So, I celebrate God as being the joy within. It creates balance, mental well-being, and joy. I've learned to trust that very quiet, serenity-filled voice. My intuition soothes me and brings me peace. It's the feeling of what's right within my body, mind, and spirit. To that, I learned quickly to have a clean mental and emotional bucket so that I can attach to that wisdom. It is ancestral. My power comes from my source. Whether that's my lineage or just the warriors who have come before me. The conquerors that have laid bare the path for me to*



*be on right now. I must honor them. I believe we tap into all that wisdom and knowledge, and we call it forth. So, I draw on the ancestral.*

Shannon has specific ways in which she draws resilience from her ancestors, through their history, and brings back to the importance of family. She thinks about the evolution of the mother role first and foremost.

*The mother is incubating, laboring, birthing, and then navigating, protecting, nurturing, and guiding. Then I start to apply those ancestral labels. If I am from African ancestry, I look at how they lived in family. We must go back to family. But my ancestors were bought, sold, stolen, and traded. My ancestors were likely brought over here against their will. Tricked, coerced, beaten, robbed, all of it. Those families were separated. First thing they did was separate them, take them apart. So, we lost our historical context in so many ways. Then laws were passed, and slaves were free, and we had to start over in a culture that wasn't our own. I can feel their heartache, but I don't stay there. While we were erased historically in some ways, I've learned to draw on the current of language, tradition, and stories that we still carry forward. I can feel their resilience and joy that they passed down to me. The family unit was always important, and that's ancestral. It was how we kept it together. I don't get caught up in the last 400 years, or the last 1000 years. I look at it in terms of how far we have come in my lineage. I'm on a quest to give my kids and grandkids and great grandkids a head start. I think about my ancestors, and I think about what they sacrificed willingly and unwillingly. It's a miracle that I'm here. I celebrate that because, as bad as things are, I am here, and I have the ability to do things they could never imagine.*

Shannon is preparing for the next phase of her career, and it is guided by her ancestral intuition and her inner mom heart:

*I draw from my ancestors. I think about my grandmother and my great-grandmother. I think we're only five generations from slavery, and that's not a lot. Resilience is tapping into those stories of my lineage. I'm living my dreams; they didn't get a chance. I better make it count. It feels like a call to be bigger. There's more that is required to share the visions that I see and continue to work toward. I feel called to help support and be a leader of moms. And harnessing some of that energy to direct at some of the challenges we face. Challenges that I will not see an end to in my lifetime, but I'm definitely here to move it forward. Most of my resilience, I think, is that tightrope between go forward or just say fuck it and give up. Can you find joy in the middle of all this chaos? It's almost like a little flame that resists the darkness. The inner flame for me, is God. I feel God. The flame grows inner warmth and happiness, like a pilot, regardless of circumstance. But that joy to me is the ability to know that I always have power. I can always make decisions for myself and sometimes others. No one can take that away from me — no one — because God gave that to me. Every moment I have breath, I have gratitude.*

Shannon goes back to her ancestors when she feels fear, anger, disgust, schadenfreude.

She experiences her resilience as an extension of the resilience that her ancestors demonstrated and wanted her to remember and draw from:

*I go back to my ancestors. We live in a different time and the events are different now, but it's still the same feelings. You know, that fear, anger, disgust,*

*schadenfreude, we've done this for a very long time. We're still here. Still here! There's a lot of showing up and that gives me so much hope, and actually recharges me in a way. A hundred years ago there was the Spanish flu and now we have the COVID-19 pandemic. More importantly than the event is the feelings that we have during them. How we navigate and push through. I'm bringing back to lead full circle with the mom heart. We need more incubation and nurturing and depth of feeling. Not to say you have to be a mother! It's the caregiver in each of us that brings the compassion, forgiveness, and kindness. We've been doing this for thousands of years.*

***Joelle Bogenholm: On Becoming an Elder***

Joelle sees her career and life path as being guided by her ancestors' legacy. She has learned how to trust them to guide her to the next thing. She's never actually looked for a job. Jobs have found her through this divine guidance and trust. She says the key is walking in integrity and building strong relationships:

*When I think of ancestors, I think thousands of years back and how they lived their lives. If you listen and you trust, you will be guided. You walk with integrity and your work will come to you. Just be who you are, do what you do, and the work comes. I can't say I chose my work. It chose me. I'm a very nontraditional HR executive. If I go into a system that wants tradition and rejects who I am, I leave that system and trust that the next system will find me. Everything around us is alive and we are an intricate part of that. When I am on the land, listening to my ancestors as they dance in the sky above me, and I become just like the landscape. When it gets silent, I get guidance that helps make things clearer.*

*Many have come before me and now, it's my turn. In this finite period of time, I want to make a difference, and leave the world a better place than when I found it.*

Joelle discusses what it is like to become an elder. She shares how she transfers what she learned from her mentors to her mentees in the process of mentorship and leadership coaching. As an elder, she advocates for the resiliency of younger leaders and change agents. She advocates for social change by breathing life into the change agents themselves:

*As I reach the age where I am becoming an elder, there's a lot of wisdom that I have been able to glean from my mentors, from people who built me up. I want to make sure that organizations can be their best selves, both individually and with each other. That's how I create change. By passing it down to the next generation. One of the biggest things I try to help people see is: you are enough! We have this scarcity of the soul in American culture. We're taught that we're not good enough, or we're not smart enough, or we aren't productive enough, or we don't give enough. I would love to give the gift of, "you are enough." Especially for young people because they are coming from a space where they can still learn and still grow but they're not judging themselves yet. They're not getting stuck in those shame cycles. When things aren't quite right, use the opportunity to learn how you can improve, grow, learn . . . not coming from a place of not being enough. Rather, coming from a place of, "I am enough, and I want to learn more." I am okay as I am and I'm still choosing to grow. So more of a both/and mentality, rather than an either/ or mentality. Gratitude is super important. Come*

*from a humble place of gratitude and enoughness, rather than a scarcity mentality of not enoughness. Share gratitude and give appreciation for anyone who has helped you. It's key to the universe.*

Joelle believes that it is important for young women to reach out to leaders who have gone first, and listen to them, as well as share their own story. She discusses how it is important for women who have gone first to invest in younger women leaders and for younger women to understand the context of what the women who have gone first have had to put up with:

*In my lifetime, I could have been fired for being gay. So, we fought for those rights to not be fired for your orientation. Not long ago, people could outright discriminate in the workplace, and now we've put some things in place. Not to say that there aren't still challenges, but the world is more open to taking a look at isms. We have come a long way, and we have a long way to go still.*

***Ilana Rubel: Embracing Multigenerational Legacies***

Ilana draws inspiration from the women in her family that went before her in civically engaged leadership roles. Ilana described how your origins of where you come from are so impactful on how you live your life and the choices you make:

*I come from a family of upstanders. I'm Jewish so my grandfather's family was killed in the holocaust. I became very acutely aware at a young age the dangers of bystanders, you know, the danger of people who see bad things happen and don't intervene. As Jewish people, we are acutely aware that the Holocaust didn't happen particularly because of Hitler. It happened because so many people went along with Hitler. You know, Hitler couldn't have done anything alone. So, it*

*really drilled into me the critical importance of being the person who stands up. There are amazing, amazing women in my family who have definitely blazed a path of, you know, standing up. I've had amazing support from the men in my family too. But the women were always out front and just being the leaders. I mean, my grandmother. Her husband died, and she became the precinct captain and registering voters every day until she was basically ninety years old. So, I give a lot of credit to the women in my life who really drilled into me that the world falls apart if somebody doesn't stand up. Most people won't stand up. You certainly can't count on other people standing up, so you better be doing it yourself. I do think of it more as the women in my family who have been the ones who stood up. The women really got particularly engaged and particularly worked up, and particularly compelled to step in, in a civic manner.*

Ilana speaks about losing her mother, and how she draws inspiration from her mother's memory. Her mother passed away last year:

*It was quite shocking (crying). That was hard. One of the most demoralizing things is not having my mom anymore. Just having that cheerleader, that completely unqualified and unconditional total support for everything. Losing that was really difficult. It was the biggest blow, worse than anything that's happened. I've lost bills and lost seats in the legislature. Not having a person who's hanging onto your every word. I didn't realize what an incredible boost, having that kind of cheerleader. I'm not much in believing about an afterlife. But I do wear a necklace with her ashes in it. I wear that everywhere. It has her fingerprints on the back. I just touch it sometimes. So, there's that other motivation I've tapped*

*into about wanting to make people that love you proud. You wish those who got you where you are could be there to see it.*

Ilana talks about how her ancestors role modeled authenticity for her. She says:

*I should keep this clean, because you have to turn this in, but I'm just going to go off color for a minute. As I do this job for longer and longer, I have fewer fucks to give with everybody. I'm probably getting more authentic than is prudent. I'm really at the point where the only reward I really have from this job (in political office) is that I get to speak my mind and represent my constituents. The job doesn't pay. I don't necessarily get done what I want to get done, or as often as I would like. But at least I have the catharsis of knowing that I could say my piece and they have to sit in their chairs and listen for ten to fifteen minutes while I say it. That's a little bit of a luxury that I grant myself, is that I'm going to say it even if it may not always be wise. Even on politically unpopular things. I will do things that might even be politically stupid, just to at least have a moment of catharsis of being heard. My only happy place is when I'm being authentic, so I better just let myself have that authentic time or I'm really going to lose my mind.*

## **Discussion**

The purpose of this study was to gather stories of intersectional women social entrepreneurs as they talked about their complex identities and how they are finding belonging and resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. A narrative inquiry approach was used to interview five women leaders in the Pacific Northwest. Their individual stories were woven together to create a tapestry of rich and candid emotions, hardships, triumphs, and wisdom gained along the way.

Findings add new insight to assertions from Di Domenico et al. (2010) that women social entrepreneurs are resisting the constraints of their situational limitations and engaging bricolage by improvising new ways to create value. Each participant spoke about utilizing whatever resources are around her to create new and innovative combinations which can be applied to new problems and opportunities. Taking it one step further, each participant spoke to Re-Membering as a practice of envisioning a future that is inspired by context from the past.

This dissertation has aimed to move, “out of the cage of universalized western gender theory and employs postcolonial and Indigenous perspectives to reveal local standpoints that express girls’ and women’s agency and resistance to oppression” (Chilisa, 2012, p. 295). As it relates to populations of intersectional women social entrepreneurs, the findings of this study support the literature reviewed in Chapter II around resilience (Buzzanell, 2010; Kirmayer et al., 2011; Sonn & Fisher, 1998; Thomas et al., 2016; Wexler, 2014), particularly as in terms of resilience ontologies (Crotty, 1998) related to identity and belonging (Alizadeh et al., 2018; Slavich et al., 2022), culturally specific metaphors leadership identity (Sinclair, 2011), culturally situated resiliency strategies (Brodsky et al., 2011; Faxon et al., 2015; Lenette et al., 2013), and the lived experiences of resilient women (Ersing & Caruson, 2017; Tian & Bush, 2020; Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020). Research questions were designed to highlight the lived experiences of intersectional women. Findings produced a rich and highly contextual set of insights for scholars in the field of women’s leadership.

My first research question asked: What are women social entrepreneurs’ stories about their complex intersectional identities? In the stories of the five women leaders



who I interviewed for this study, the report of findings clearly indicates that intersectional women leaders are employing Radical Self-Agency to define, redefine, make sense of, and communicate their identities that does not necessarily follow the dominant normative cultural reference point.

These results support Parkinson and Howarth's (2008) findings that the way people do social enterprise involves re-writing the discourse to articulate their own realities. In this way, Radical Self-Agency is a political act. Therefore it is a way to negate or avoid assimilation. The overarching theme of Radical Self-Agency was woven into the stories of all five women. Emergent sub-themes included envisioning new systemic structures, cultivating authenticity, transforming victimhood into joy, the significance of self-authorship, and standing up for the voiceless.

My second research question for this study was: What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around belonging and how their business creates a space of opportunity for belonging? All five women shared their strategies to move from the feeling of not belonging, to rewriting the discourse of who belongs to include themselves and helping others find belonging as an act of social change.

These findings support the literature reviewed in Chapter II regarding the relationship between social entrepreneurship and social change (Madhooshi & Samimi, 2015; Perinni & Vurro, 2006; Steyaert & Hjorth, 2006). Social entrepreneurship, itself, was a principal method used by each participant for responding to adversity. It is a useful method because it allows the bricoleur the ability to re-create, manifest and reform self-agency, identity, relationship, and service in a manner they choose. The overarching theme of Re-Membering (Smith, 2012) as an act of healing captured the lived

experiences of all five women. Participants describe Re-membering in terms of remembering to dream big, remembering through mentorship, remembering what is enough, remembering who you are, remembering your purpose.

The third research question for this study was: How do women social entrepreneurs' narratives culturally contextualize doing business for good and what are the social change causes important to them now? All five women agree that it is important to be aware of your privilege and the responsibilities that come with it. All five women are using their privilege to leverage the associated responsibility of leadership for social change. Findings from this research data can be applied to topics from the literature reviewed in Chapter II, including identity communications and their articulatory modes (Weick et al., 2005), intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989; Davies & Harre, 1990), and power and influence dynamics (French & Raven, 1959).

The overarching theme that emerged from the third research question was the experience of Going First in leadership. Participants chose to use the following metaphors to describe the embodied experience of what it is like to be the one who goes first: the Metaphor of the Grass Dancer, Metaphor of the Train Trestle, Metaphor of the Way Finder, Metaphor of the Healer, and Metaphor of the Public Defender. All five women articulated that the world gets in trouble when privileged people are controlling all the policy, making all the decisions in our society that everyone else must abide by. Especially when those people are blind to their own privilege. These women are thinking about the privileges they have and are aware of those who do not have them. They are all working to create new systems of equal opportunity.

The fourth and final research question was: What are women social entrepreneurs' stories around resilience and how their businesses create a space of opportunity for resilience? All five women shared their experience of resilience as being connected to their ancestors. The overarching theme that emerged was: Ancestral Connections. Each woman described her unique experiences in different ways. Sub-themes reflect participant stories relevant to their connection to ancestors in terms of feeling responsible to live well, being the matriarch and asking for guidance, amplifying motherhood with intuition and energy, becoming an elder, and embracing multi-generational ancestral legacy.

These findings align with findings from other scholars discussed in Chapter II, including on topics of post-colonial and Indigenous feminism (Chilisa, 2012, Kovach, 2009, Warren, 1996) as well as social and cultural dimensions of resilience (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008). Findings also align with my personal lived experience with drawing strength from my connections to ancestors as a way of developing resilience. This alignment between myself and all of my participants was perhaps the most surprising of the findings for me personally. It also reaffirms the importance of the stories that one is told growing up about themselves, who they are, and where they come from.

Intersectional women leaders in this study use entrepreneurship as a space to foster a positive identity, sense of belonging, and strategic resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. Findings support Coutu's (2002) assertion that many intersectional women may be sick of being called resilient or burdened by the pressure of having to be resilient by necessity, and yet continue to face reality with a staunchness that allows them to make meaning of hardship and improvise new solutions.

The intersectional women social entrepreneurs in this study all came across as resilient, brave, and yet humble path cutters who did not place first priority on the profit of the bottom line. Stories of Going First into leadership spaces, leveraging Radical Self-Agency, Re-membering the parts of themselves that have been systematically oppressed and transforming them through empowered healing practices, drawing resilience from their ancestors, and trying to make it easier for the next generation were common.

### **Conclusion**

There was an incredible amount wisdom contained within the stories that each woman chose to share for this study. I will include my personal favorite quotes from participants' stories here:

- *Resilience is already in us; we must flex it like a muscle.*
- *Resilience is also developed with practice.*
- *Victimhood is like a drug. Use self-talk to counteract victimhood and surround yourself with a strong support system.*
- *A leader does not have to be good at everything, they must surround themselves with people who are good at what they are not.*
- *Channel your imposter syndrome into a beginner's mind, and then use it to get curious about what you can learn from the leaders around you.*
- *Heal yourself first. Work on yourself and look at the ugly side, then practice acceptance so you can move forward.*
- *Don't wait until it's too late to birth your big dream.*
- *Speak up when no one else will.*
- *Don't use excuses to hold yourself back, the world needs you.*

- *Own your acumen, and move forward, and figure it out.*

Findings from this study reveal new and innovative ways to support intersectional women social entrepreneurs in developing resilience. This includes the importance of supporting work-life integration so that intersectional women can deepen coherence between the many roles they carry, both personally and professionally. Women also need support mobilizing with other women to prioritize collaboration over competition with the goal of advancing gender equity together. Critical to decolonizing power imbalances are this study's findings that nurture belonging by creating brave spaces for conversations to occur, and specifically how women leaders are taking responsibility for being understood. Finally, support specific to intersectional and historically marginalized women requires having their voices and their stories heard and accounted for in the normative discourse of leadership studies. This study has contributed exactly that and included fresh perspectives from contemporary intersectional women leaders who are thriving in a post-pandemic era.

### **Challenges**

Challenges included physical distance between me and participants. Data collection for this study required me to take three flights, four Ubers, five public buses, and drive thirteen hours in a car to conduct all the interviews. The miles were mine to travel, as I met each participant where they lived or worked out of respect for them and the relationship. Another challenge was transcription, as several hours of interview recordings were not transcribed by Zoom due to conditions of interviewing outside, barking dogs, trucks driving by, people talking in the next room, etc. I spent approximately 60 hours on transcription alone, listening to interview recordings over and

over in 10 second sound bites to make sure the transcripts accurately reflected our conversations. What resulted was fifteen hours of clean interview transcripts from which I was able to analyze the data.

### **Limitations**

I have some level of relationship to all the intersectional women leaders in this study. To honor the relationship with each participant, the sample size was limited to five intersectional women social entrepreneurs in the Pacific Northwest. While all the women agreed that the definition of the term ‘social entrepreneur’ did apply to them, none of them had self-identified as social entrepreneurs before the study. Two women self-identify as entrepreneurs specifically, while three women identify as leaders in either business, nonprofits, or politics. This study was limited to Idaho and Washington States since that is where I am embedded in communities of business, nonprofits, politics, and leadership practice. It is possible that this study could have implications for other intersectional women in leadership roles, even though they were not included in this study.

### **Implications**

Cultural oppression results in adverse identity outcomes, including internalized oppression, cultural erasure, and identity dysfunction (David, 2013). This research aims to meet the need for scholars to articulate recovery outcomes such as revitalization, reconstruction, and reinvention, as well as generally positive adaptive outcomes such as resilience, consciousness, and well-being (Sonn & Fisher, 1998).

The stories presented in this study reveal how intersectional women are overcoming oppression by weaving their experience of resilience through their

communicative processes (Buzzanell, 2010). Understanding how these women talk about their identity experiences is helpful, specifically in identifying sustainable and practical opportunities for interventions that foster resilience (Houston & Buzzanell, 2018). The findings from this research contribute new knowledge toward communication strategies and restorative pathways for intersectional women in leadership roles.

Women are central to strategies intended to grow individual, family, and community resiliency (Ersing & Caruson, 2017; Tian & Bush, 2020; Wakefield & Zimmerman, 2020). The implications of this research also seek to help intersectional women social entrepreneurs to develop increasing resilience as they enter spaces and become leaders in spaces where women had previously not led. Such implications support current theories that social belonging is an experience that can come from social networks like family, friends, businesses, ceremonies, sports, etc. Implications also affirm the connection made by Slavich et al. (2022) between social belonging and the outcome of increased resilience during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This research indicates that women social entrepreneurs need support systems that span far beyond leadership titles and the decision-making authority. They need financial support to manifest their entrepreneurial ideas. They need leadership development opportunities such as executive coaching. They need to be part of sponsorship networks organized by senior women leaders. They need strategic guidance over time to help them increase their personal and professional choices through long term planning. They need engaged families and communities to back them up. Finally, they need on-going support from family, friends, colleagues, and mentors.

These findings contribute significant new knowledge to the growing research on women's leadership, identity, resilience, and social entrepreneurship studies.

Furthermore, findings fuel larger societal implications and highlight the need for future research as it relates to resilient women leaders in economics, politics, education, medicine, and law. With resilient women in leadership, the sky is the limit.

This research explores how women leaders with intersecting identities are talking about resilience. Every single participant shared her stories of overcoming sexism in the workplace. Many participants shared stories overcoming racism, while others shared stories of overcoming xenophobia, homophobia, death threats, and sexual abuse. This dissertation has demonstrated how resilient intersectional women must be to rise into leadership positions, start businesses, or become entrepreneurs. This research has a personal significance for me, as I must understand what it means to be an intersectional woman leader in my own entrepreneurship and leadership roles.

This dissertation has been a work of heart, adding to the literature on identity, belonging, resilience and social entrepreneurship, women's leadership, and the use of Indigenous research methods and ethics. This study provides additional representation through an intersectionality lens that may provide clarity on frameworks that support intersectional women in leadership in a post-COVID era. The stories contained here provide synergy and inspiration for future generations of women leaders. The participants in this study live the four Indigenous ethical principles of relationality, respect, responsibility, and reciprocity as they do business for good while mindfully creating positive identity, sense of belonging, and strategic resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities.



### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This dissertation is intended to provide a strengths-based approach that amplifies the positive aspects of each participant and discover ways in which intersectional women are engaging entrepreneurship to create a positive identity, sense of belonging, and strategic resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. This study also revealed challenges that would be well deserving of the attention of future research.

### **Closing Reflections**

This has been a journey in finding my own identity, belonging, and resilience. What I have learned is that I am a daughter of the land, and she loves me back. Even though I did not grow up on my ancestral homelands, I can still hear my ancestors and they help me to listen to the land here as well. I am so grateful to have a deep relationship to the land. There are many forces at play outside of our conscious awareness, and the land reminds me to be humble because I am only one part of a much greater whole. I breathe the same air my ancestors breathed. I drink the same water my ancestors drank. I stand under the same sun and sleep under the same moon my ancestors did.

As I drink the water that has washed through the soils and rocks of my ancestral homelands, I absorb and internalize the information placed there mindfully by my ancestors. As I breathe the air that has swept through the forests and the very lungs that belonged to my ancestors, I breathe in the prayers that they spoke out loud, sang and drummed to. I hear the dreams that they put into the land. I carry in me the stories and the knowledge of 1,000 generations, and it teaches me how to live so that I can make my ancestors proud. I am being guided in tangible ways that I can feel. Someday I will return

to my ancestral homelands and connect with that place, completing my own circle of Remembering, coming home to the land that has been calling me back.

As an entrepreneur, these women's stories and lived experiences provide immediate and long-awaited mentorship for me. It is my hope that these stories will be used as case studies by others teaching resilience, entrepreneurship, leadership, political science, law, sociology, and women's studies. This research will be used by me in my role as Strategic Communications Consultant with Greenland Consulting, LLC as a public speaker, executive leadership coach, team builder, and adviser. I will cite this research to illustrate how women are communicating their complex identities as leaders in a book, workbook, and e-book created for, by, and about women leaders.

I aspire to one day use this research to start a foundation that offers micro-finance loans to women-owned start-ups that do business for good in their communities. My foundation will prioritize BIPOC women and single mothers to create a greater impact in those communities. Foundation services will offer wholistic support for women leaders including financial resources, executive leadership coaching, sponsorship from successful women leaders in the field, think tanks for ongoing mentorship, as well as physical, emotional, and mental wellness support to promote personal and professional harmony.

The stories of intersectional women social entrepreneurs contained within this dissertation illustrate how they can use the tool of entrepreneurship to foster identity, belonging, and resilience for themselves, their families, organizations, and communities. Their stories of resilience provide inspiration, wisdom, and hope for others. It has been my intention to create a work of resonance, light, and love for intersectional women.

Ollu giitu (Sámi) – lemlmx (Salish) – thank you (English)

Fárrui váibmu (Sámi) – with heart (English)

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## APPENDIX A

### Interview Guide

Possible guiding prompts for an open interview could include:

#### **Communication of Identity: Overarching question - How are identities communicated?**

1. How are your favorite relatives, elders, and mentors? Tell me the story of how you met them, and your favorite moments/times with them.
2. Describe how you see yourself in terms of your intersecting identities.
3. Please tell me a story of how you were able to see your identity and how it has changed over the years.
4. Tell me a story about your biggest challenge for you regarding your identity?
5. Describe how your various identities influence the work you do.
6. Tell me the story of the moment when you decided to go into your line of work.
7. How has this work contributed to your success in life? Please tell me a story about this.

#### **Communication of Belonging: Overarching question - How is belonging communicated?**

1. Describe where you feel the most belonging in your life.
2. Tell me a story about the communities or groups you belong to. How have they impacted you?
3. Describe the places or spaces you feel like you can be most authentically yourself.
4. Tell me a story about some of your greatest challenges as a professional woman.

#### **Communication of Resilience: Overarching question - How is resilience being communicated?**

1. Tell me how you understand resilience. Please tell me a story where you have felt resilient. And a story where you have not felt very resilient.
2. Describe the relationship between your resilience and what you do for a living.
3. Tell me a story about when you developed the most resilience in your life.
4. Describe how your life has changed since you gained that new resilience.
5. Tell me a story about how you call upon your resilience in your work and life.

#### **Social Change: Overarching question - How is social change communicated in work?**

1. Describe how your identities influence the kind of work you've chosen to do.
2. Give me some examples of how you advocate for social change. Please tell me your favorite social change story?
3. What are your resilience strategies?
  - a. Please tell me a story about when you used them successfully,
    - i. Tell me a story about when you struggled.
4. Tell me a story about your vision for the future, and how you see your role in it.

#### **Closing questions**

Is there anything else you would like to say about any of the things we have talked about today?