# MITÁKUYE OYÁS'IŊ AND A LAKOTA LEADERSHIP PARADIGM:

# A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF LAKOTA WOMEN ARTISTS LEADING COMMUNITY

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COMMITTEE APPROVAL AND RECOMMENDATION

Having read the dissertation proposal entitled *Mitákuye Oyás'in and a Lakota Leadership Paradigm: A Qualitative Study of Lakota Women Artists Leading Community*, authored by doctoral candidate, Mary V. Bordeaux (Sicangu Oglala Lakota) and having been present for the final defense of this dissertation held on [Date], we hereby recommend that this dissertation be accepted by Saint Mary's University of Minnesota toward the fulfillment of the dissertation requirements of the Doctor of Education degree in Leadership:

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this research study to my ancestors who did all they could to ensure Lakota people continued; to all of us rez kids, here we are making it; and to the land.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I could not have done this research study without community.

I would like to say thank you to my committee, Dr. Jack McClure (Chair), Dr. Yvette Pye, and Dr. Rustin Wolfe, without your valuable feedback and encouragement I would not have finished this dissertation.

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- *mitákuye oyas'in*

  *ic'iksa pa win*

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this Indigenous phenomenological research study was to document the experiences of Lakota women using creative practices to work in Lakota community. The research question was: “How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community?” An Indigenous data collecting method called Community Kinship Circle, a type of focus group, was used to gather *co-constructed knowledge* with six Lakota women working in Lakota community. The interpretation of the findings employed the theoretical lens of a phenomenological approach guided by Indigenous methodologies. The data were collected in a three-hour Community Kinship Circle with follow-up conversations for clarity. Coding and analysis of the transcribed data led to documenting the leadership experiences as being defined as Lakota kinship and relational practices guided by Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ. The findings revealed four topics with corresponding subthemes: Lakota women’s leadership (Leadership is a Western concept and Lakota women do not see themselves as leaders), Mitákuye Oyas’in (It is everything and responsibility, and it is known and it is unknown), kinship / being a good relative (Evolving and changing, rely on intuition and instinct, and Western influence causes difficulty and trauma), and creative practices (guided by kinship and grounded in Mitákuye Oyas’in, and to teach and share and connection to be people and land).

*Keywords:* Lakota women leadership, Indigenous phenomenological research, Community Kinship Circle.

# CHAPTER 1

# PROBLEM TO BE INVESTIGATED

Lakota scholar Amiotte (1983) stated,

> …as a Lakota, one is at once a micro-cosmic reflection of the macro-cosmic universe; it behooves him to continually attempt to be or become in concert with the sacred rhythm of that which causes all life to move or be in a state of process. In doing so, he is then assisting or participating in the ongoing process of creation. (p. 2)

## Research Problem Description

The process of learning and becoming is never finished. As a researcher, my aim was to ground my research in the principles of Mitákuye Oyás'in ("all my relatives or I am related to all that is"), a Lakota way of being to interrogate the process of learning and becoming a leader from the perspective of Lakota women. I documented the experiences of Lakota women who use kinship as a methodological approach to leading community. This research aimed to document that many Lakota women use their work in the community to be good relatives and that the Lakota specific principle, Mitákuye Oyas'in, guides aspects of work, the creation of art, and interaction with those outside the Lakota community. The ability to use creative practice to lead community is indicative of kinship. This link between Lakota creative practice, leadership, and kinship, as ikce (in an ordinary way), has not been documented in Western leadership discussions (Crazy Bull, 2004; Gambrell & Fritz, 2012; Lajimodiere, 2011, 2013). This lack of research and documentation can leave Lakota women outside of the standard leadership practices in the larger / non-Native world, the art world, workplace, and other spaces outside Lakota communities (Kovach, 2021). The current research findings document that kinship and how a push for being a good relative is core to Lakota leadership and Lakota arts.

To demonstrate how Lakota women's leadership in the Lakota community is essential, I documented their experiences working in community in kinship and how good relational practices are core to Lakota leadership. The research addresses the gap in previous research because Lakota women are left outside the standard practices when articulating Lakota leadership. Deloria (1944) noted that if a person leads with being a good relative, they can be better humans and find balance between self, community, and space (land).

**Positionality of Researcher**

This research study focused on the stories and experiences of Lakota women artists working and leading community using creative practices. I am a Lakota woman, and while I do not identify specifically as an artist, I do work with tribal communities and within creative practices aligned with the women recruited for my study. I share similar stories and experiences with the women that inspired this study.

As a minority woman from what Western society can view as underprivileged and living under the poverty line, I have never considered myself impoverished. I was privileged to be born and raised in my ancestors' homelands. Due to some futuristic thinking by my great-great-grandfather Chief Phuté (upper lip), I come from three generations of Lakota women with a master's degree in education. Chief Phuté founded the small town of Wanblee on the Pine Ridge reservation in late 1800s, ensuring that his thióšpaye (extended family/community) would have a future. He then traveled to Washington, D.C., with a Lakota delegation to petition the United States government to have a school and church built in his newly founded town. Chief Phuté knew the importance of prayer and education. Because of this, I have also had the privilege to attend tribally run schools, from Head Start to college undergraduate. I would not have been a successful student had it not been for tribal schools. When I attend non-Native institutions

without Native teachers, instructors, and/or professors, I recognize the importance of tribal schools, colleges, and universities both personally and so that we, as Native people, have the guidance needed to grow our scholarship. Being grounded in Native values and moving through school with those nuances of understanding that only other Native people can have has been vital to my growth as a student and scholar.

For both of my master's and now this doctorate program, I did not have an adequate background in Indigenous theory and pedagogy. Many of the skills I have gained have been from learning to fill in the gaps where the non-Native programs failed, always having to teach “Indian 101” and make room for myself. A balancing act happens between being culturally appropriate/grounded and conducting research and analysis in a Western institution. Finding myself alone in these spaces with non-Native professors and being the only Native student, I longed for the ability to center the growth of Indigenous knowledge, thought, and philosophy.

In my master's program, I contacted another Oceti Sakowin (defined in Appendix A) museum scholar while writing my thesis. She was old school, and I had to mail my message to her. After receiving it, she called me a few days later and said, “you are not doing anything new or innovated, and you are missing much of American Indian research.” (personal communications, Feb 2009) It was devastating to hear. I cried, feeling defeated. She then said it was not my fault; she pointed out the reason for school is for guidance in learning, and that because I lacked Native professors how could I know what I was missing? I did not know what I was missing, and if I did not know what I was missing, neither would my non-Native professors. She reassured me that my thesis project would be fine, and I would graduate, and our community would gain another scholar. She did send me some articles and books to read and told me it was my responsibility to finish and return to our community to give back. I reflected on this person

telling me my work was subpar because of my lack of Native leadership and guidance and now I work to be that guidance for others. The lack of Indigenous research methodologies and approaches in the higher education programs and curricula I experienced is what guides me today.

In Kovach's unpublished dissertation (2006), she references Maori scholar Dr. Graham Smith (whom she interviewed as part of her dissertation work) as stating, "those of us in relationship with western academic institutions will be asked from time to time to make strategic concessions" (p. 12) and this, the strategic concession, is the most challenging consideration. There are times in my life when I have had to make strategic concessions to get to where I need to be, and usually, they are acceptable; the ends justify the means. But there are times when it does not, and as I work to finish my research study and educational doctorate, I question every word, every completed sentence; consciously wondering whether strategic concessions are worth it in the end.

One last thing about my positionality as a researcher: I am writing this in English, a byproduct of the colonization of the Lakota people. My grandparents were forbidden to speak Lakota and beaten for speaking it. They were afraid to teach their children, my parents. This cultural genocide of the Lakota language has changed the Lakota people, our language, and our ability to speak for ourselves from our perspective (Thiong'o, 1986). Thus, I attempt to center the Lakota language as much as possible when it is used during this research study, as a modest refusal of colonization. There are times as well when only Lakota words and phrases can explain a thought or idea with more accuracy than English. Additionally, I use the first-person because the legacy of colonial erasure of Lakota people demands that I now assert my personal voice in my research. As a Lakota researcher and scholar my voice will be heard in this dissertation.

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this research is: How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community? Because this an Indigenous informed phenomenological study, the question was formed to be inclusive of both approaches; the "how do they experience" is related to the phenomenology research, and the "working in community" is related to the Indigenous research.

**Purpose Statement**

The lack of qualitative studies done by Lakota women about Lakota women for Lakota women is what guided me in this research. The purpose of this Indigenous phenomenological research study was to document the experiences of Lakota women using creative practices to work with the Lakota community. The leadership experiences I discuss are defined as Lakota kinship and relational practices guided by Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ. I offer this documentation as a contribution to my community, the Lakota community, to build the scholarship perspective and approach of Lakota women, which has been absent in the academy. The aim is that this is all done in the principle of Mitákuye Oyás'in – a Lakota way of being that encompasses the responsibilities and obligations of everything. I grounded the work in creatives practices as I understand this is how Lakota people know what we know, and how we transfer cultural knowledge.

**Delimitations and Limitations**

The delimitations of the study were adult women artists and culture bearers working and leading in community. They are members of the Oceti Sakowin (see Appendix A), primarily focusing on members of the Tituwan Lakota. I focused on these communities because they are

ones I know intimately and provide an ethical grounding in analyzing and writing about their lives. I understand within a Western paradigm, this process is not typical.

Working with Indigenous research methodologies and methods can bring about limitations with the different philosophical approaches to research, because Indigenous researchers often use different approaches to theories from a wide breadth of academic fields. The misunderstanding of these approaches and practices led to non-Native scholars misinterpreting the goals and foundations of Indigenous research. My aim for this project was to be Lakota-centric; as a consequence, this may have limited input and non-Lakota support. For that reason, I prioritized Indigenous scholarships, especially Lakota scholars throughout my research.

Generalizations about Native cultures have limited the ability to see them as the individual Nations they are. There are 574 federally recognized Native Nations in the United States and 63 state-recognized Native Nations (BIA, 2017a). Each of these nations has their language, morals, values, and ties to land; while many of them are similar and work together they are all different. Generalization of the outcomes of this research study for all Native Nations would be inappropriate. It will be beneficial and generalizable to the Oceti Sakowin band of Titowan (Lakota) people, which consists of seven bands: Oglala, Sicangu, Mniconjous, Oohenunpa, Itazipco, Sihasap, Hunkpapa, all currently located in South Dakota, parts of Minnesota, and Montana. (See Appendix A.) The findings will also further the educational goals of advancing specific leadership and guidance to other Lakota students, people, and those that do not fit into Western systems.

With the Native population only being about one and a half percent of the United States population (BIA, 2017b), a research study about an even smaller number of that one and a half

percent could be seen as not significant enough to render legitimacy. While this may seem a threat to external validity, this research study is not being done for mass consumption, my contribution targets other Lakota communities. I will stay true to Indigenous research methodologies (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 1999; Smith et al., 2016) and conduct the research by a Lakota person for the Lakota people, exercising sovereignty.

**Assumptions**

Philosophical assumptions are the belief in ideas that guide the development of research (Creswell, 2013). There are four philosophical assumptions to address when writing qualitative research; ontological (what is the nature of reality), epistemological (the who, what, and how of knowledge), axiological (does value have a role), and methodological (process and language of research) (Creswell, 2013, p. 21).

Western research theories and methodologies often fail Indigenous studies. There are philosophical differences in the worldview of the Indigenous communities compared to dominant U.S. views in that we do not center on human knowledge; we gather knowledge from all the natural worlds. This is the embodiment of Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ; we are all related – human and nonhuman alike. This centering affects the four philosophical assumptions, and Western qualitative research which focuses on centering human knowledge (Kovach, 2021, p. 34).

Finally, I assumed that the community members I collaborated with to conduct this study have a grounding in the principles of Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ and are leading communities. Using Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ as a philosophical theory demonstrates how critical Indigenous theories are to understand the connection between humans and nonhumans. Instead of centering human knowledge, I ensure that Lakota philosophies are prioritized in the analysis.

**Theoretical Approach/Framework**

A theoretical approach or framework is the researcher's position to view the world and develop and structure their study (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2014). I grounded this dissertation in Indigenous research methodologies, (Smith, 1999; Kovach, 2021; Smith et al., 2016) with an emphasis or specificity in a Lakota paradigm. I reiterate that Lakota kinship demonstrated through Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ and being a good relative were guiding approaches to my research.

As Indigenous people establish and re-establish our way, we use what is available to us; Indigenous research methodologies are "not meant to compete with Western research paradigms; rather challenge it and contribute to the body of knowledge of Indigenous peoples about themselves and for themselves" (Porsanger, 2003, p. 105). There has been a global movement of Indigenous scholars in the field of education to try and define our path, developing and discussing Indigenous research methodologies and Indigenous ways of knowing. Research methodologies are often associated with specific disciplines of knowledge and are viewed by those disciplines as the primary, often singular, way in which knowledge is generated (Smith et al., 2016, p. 132).

Indigenous methodologies are not new, as Emerson (2014) described them as "new ways of knowing and being that [are] so old that [they] look new" (p. 58). Indigenous people have been using Indigenous research and methodologies for generations; they have not been valued or seen as relevant through active colonization (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 1999; Smith et al., 2016). Furthermore, Indigenous studies scholar Simpson (2014) described Indigenous theories as "woven with kinetics, spiritual presence and emotion, it is contextual and relational" (p. 7). Our methodologies and theories must be centered on research produced about and for us.

**Contributions to Knowledge and Practice**

The significance of the study is practical, a challenge, and a contribution. Indigenous researchers and scholars need to be able to challenge what is valid as knowledge (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 1999; Smith et al., 2016) and to create space for the holistic – Mitákuye Oyas'in – knowledge that will ground the research. Broadening the spectrum of knowledge, applying the knowledge, and discussing indigenous research could help push the boundaries of Western systems to expand their approaches.

Practically and specifically, the aim was to deepen an artistic and intellectual scholarship of Lakota thought and philosophy through creative practices, to contribute to Lakota knowledge as part of a greater whole by focusing on women working in the arts leading community. The research documents alternative leadership approaches, processes, and ways to lead when centering relationship/kinship.

My hope is that this study will contribute to the ongoing conversations related to Indigenous and Lakota knowledge, as it is crucial for the Indigenous and Lakota people to exercise their sovereign rights as a Nation within a Nation. The ability to take control of their knowledge is a step towards reclaiming their culture, heritage, and independence.

**Definitions of Terms**

Several terms are used in this research study:

*American Indian, Indigenous, Native American, Indian, Native*. These terms are used interchangeably to describe the Indigenous peoples of the land they originate from.

*Artist.* Reaching outside a Western sense of the arts, for this research study, any Native person engaging in creative practices was considered an artist. Examples are the people who are involved with language revitalization and Native food sovereignty.

*Being a good relative.* Using the explanation of Deloria (1944), outside of accessories in life and upholding kinship, "there is a sense of responsibility to everyone a person deals with, and in fulfilling these responsibilities and obligations, along with "obeying kinship rules" (p. 36), one can be a good relative.

*Culture bearer.* Community members of the Native community who care about ancestorial knowledge, cultural teaching, and cultural language. Culture bearers carry knowledge that is not always documented and are respected members of community and turned to by their community for oral histories and teaching. They are experts in their field of knowledge but never claim to be experts. They do not boast about their knowledge and share only with those near their community (First Peoples Fund, 2013).

*Kinship.* The demand and dictations for all phases of social life hold people together in a relationship and, according to Deloria (1944), "all-inclusive and co-extensive with the Dakota domain" (p. 35).

*Mitakuye Oyasin* (also spelled *Mitákuye Oyás'in and Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ*). A Lakota phrase loosely translated to "we are all related" has been described by Lakota scholar and elder Picotte as a prayer meaning "you, too, are my relative" (Bordeaux, M. V., Bordeaux, C., & Long Soldier, L, 2017).

*Oceti Sakowin or Oceti Sakowin Oyate.* In the past, Lakota words for "People of the Seven Council Fire" have been known as the Sioux Nation, an inaccurate name. *Oceti Sakowin* are a group of Native people who are linguistically, culturally, and land based. There are three dialects: Lakota, Dakota, and Nakota. (See Appendix A.)

# CHAPTER 2

# LITERATURE REVIEW

How do we (Indigenous peoples) view ourselves and understand ourselves in a colonizing world? As a Lakota person in academia, how do I consider myself; how do I understand my cultural knowledge; and how do I explain/define it? How do I legitimize my cultural knowledge and understanding of the world without being simplified into words or ways of knowing that are not my own? Using a Western lens? Using the methodologies established by the colonizer? How are we, Lakota people, being defined by non-Indigenous scholars? How are we being written about? Who is speaking for us and why? These are all questions I ask myself daily and the questions that helped guide the literature review.

## Native Leadership: Long Hair, Feather, and Sunsets

The trouble with literature related to Lakota leadership qualities is that most of the published work is about Lakota historical figures/leaders like Crazy Horse, Sitting Bull, Red Cloud, Russel Means, and many others; or, it is the historical account of a documented battle like the Battle at Greasy Grass or the massacre (1890) and occupation (1973) of Wounded Knee (Gambrell & Fritz, 2012, Wilson, 2008). This can make it hard to move past these often-romanticized reviews or approaches to the stoic male Indian. Sometimes, in art critiques, I refer to this motif as the “long hair, feathers, and sunsets.” Not to negate or suggest that these historical figures were not leaders and should not be written about – they were/are important and deserved recognition – but to be the forever stoic male Indian can be a tough image to move away from.

**Indigenous Feminism**

Another struggle with these accounts is that documentation and research are primarily done by men about men. The information is often one-sided, written from a non-native viewpoint or through translation. Lakota women have been relegated to studies with titles like “Lakota Women Leaders: Getting things done quietly” (Grambell, 2012). If anyone has met the Lakota women in my family, they are not getting things done quietly. This romanticized historical inaccuracy of quiet Lakota women is a fabrication of colonization. Grambell pointed out that “leadership theories have maintained a dominant North American Bias” and “[t]o date, little research has been conducted that has considered contemporary Native leadership from a women's lens” (p. 294).

Currently, research regarding Native leadership ties their cultural groundings and language as being important to their perspectives. The discussion is usually about overcoming many obstacles, speaking their language, and attending the ceremony (grounded in spirituality vs. religion), to name a few. For example Dr. Iron Cloud (2019) stated in his dissertation, “the Lakota have exhibited fortitude in maintaining their traditional ways of leadership” and went on to describe all the traditional values of Lakota leadership, emphasizing a Lakota leader is to act in a way that the community wants them to act, essentially abiding by Lakota virtues embedded in cultural ways of knowing (pp. 4–5). Similar research analyzes cultural values or ceremonial protocol aligning with Western paradigms to describe leadership.

Another limitation of the previous research about Native leadership is the hyperfocus on the male experience. Dr. Iron Cloud gave a list of historical leaders in his dissertation; all 28 of them are men (pp. 2–3). While his study did include women, the basis for what constitutes a leader is that of men, written by men. There are many factors that impact the focus on male

leadership and the limitation of the leadership experience of Native women. These are all important and relevant contributions, but again, previous studies are missing the woman's point of view.

Mainstream articulation of feminism can be dismissed by Native women. Several years ago, I attended a reading by poet and author Elizabeth Cook-Lynn, a citizen of the Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, a Dakota community. At this event, she would read a section from one of her books or poems and then answer any questions the audience members had about the writing. What I remember most was when a young college student got up and introduced herself. She was a student at a local college, and she asked the author what her thoughts were on feminism. Cook-Lynn was quick to respond, stating, “That's a White women's fight,” and then she moved on, leaving this young college student to stand in silence. At that moment, I would have agreed with Cook-Lynn, if someone had asked me what I thought. Since that time, I have a broader understanding of the need for a feminism which includes an approach to feminism from an Indigenous perspective.

The importance of centering a Native feminism perspective is that it provides an ability to critique colonial approaches to leadership, and, through centering women's voices/stories about leadership, it can embody cultural foundations for Lakota women. Risling Baldy (2018) stated, “Native feminism must critically analyze patriarchal structures of authority and also work to decolonize and rebuild Native nations and identities, and this must take on a tribally specific view” (p. 8). Native communities vary, and while some have continued to uphold historical or traditional matriarchies, many communities have lost those leadership roles. Native feminism is a way I can approach disrupting colonialism, and all that colonialism entails, which is often male-dominated, capitalist-driven, extractive, and harmful.

The importance and purpose of centering Lakota women's voices and stories for this study was to gain new perspectives and to shine some light to missed leaders. The goal was to challenge the ideas and understandings of current leadership models (Peterson, 2018, pp. 3–4), not that I think or want Lakota women's leadership built on kinship to be seen as better than Western leadership approaches. The research is about adding to and uplifting Lakota women's voices; having a Native/Indigenous feminist approach can work to undo the colonial perspectives of Lakota women's leadership. Marshall (2002) pointed out when Lakota people's lives were altered by colonization:

> we [Lakota people] survived by living by the virtues we learned from our stories. We relied on being the kind of people our stories told us our ancestors had been; thereby, we remained true to ourselves and to them, and we are still surviving. By providing both knowledge and inspiration, stories continue to strengthen Lakota society and enable us to cope with our world, and the times we live in. Stories of virtue are at the core of cultural renewal for each new generation. But even more importantly, they reach us individually…. (Introduction p. xiv)

The importance of having stories and voices of Lakota people and, in this instance (this research study) involving Lakota women, is vital to strengthen Lakota people's knowledge and provide a Lakota women/feminine approach. Therefore, the stories that are shared throughout this research maintain a Native feminist approach by centering narratives that are often dismissed and disrupt the colonizing Western paradigm previously in place on leadership research.

**Kinship**

Dakota scholar and anthropologist Deloria (1944) stated that "Kinship is an all-important matter…and that all peoples who live communally must first find some way to get along together

harmoniously" (p. 30). Deloria aligned kinship with being a good relative, and that kinship means to be humanized. Lakota kinship is a complex network of ideas and formations of relationality dictated by virtues, ceremonies, and lineages and can differ from community to community. Some individuals might simply define kinship as blood or genetic relationships (sharing DNA). However, biology used in this manner upholds racial constructs that undermine the authority and sovereignty of tribal kinship bonds (TallBear, 2003, p. 96).

Kinship is tied to the ideas of being a good relative. Dakota artist Zitkala-Sa, (2003) a literary artist, wrote in her poem "The Indians Awakening" that a "harmonious kinship made all things fair" (p. 184). Although Zitkala-Sa is referring to the changing dynamic in the lives of American Indians as we transition to reservation life, the poem serves a reminder of harmonious kinship before colonization. The harmony created through kinship protocols is embedded in the idea of "being a good relative" and part of community.

Kinship is not just about human-to-human connection; it is connection to the world and everything in it. Kinship is the "cornerstone of Lakota culture" (Marshall, 2002, p. 210) and is a reminder that we are part of something greater than us. Kinship is about all forms of life and the earth. The Lakota phrase Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ is essential to understanding kinship; it is a prayer of sorts to say that reminds us that we are related to all, we are connected to all (Amiotte, 1983, p. 16; Marshall, p. 211). Mitákuye translates to "my relative." Amiotte (1983) stated, "Among the Lakota of North and South Dakota, to preface with Mitákuyepi, my relatives, my people or my everything, immediately signifies something very grave, serious, very profound or sacred is about to be said (p. 26); Mitákuyepi is the plural of Mitákuye. Oyás'iŋ translates to all (individuals, pieces, members, parts).

**Artist / Art / Creative Practices**

I have been referred to as an artist many times, and while I have attended art schools for both my undergraduate and master's degree, I do not consider myself an artist. I have participated in art shows and co-created with friends/family that I consider artists, and yet the title of an artist still does not feel appropriate for describing my creative practice. I was recently attending my oldest son's graduation from the same art school I attended. The keynote address was given by W. Richard West, founding director of the National Museum of the American Indian (NMAI). West spoke of his father, who was an artist, the work that West did to ensure the foundation of the NMAI, and the importance of the accomplishments of the Institute of American Indian Arts (IAIA), the only tribal College dedicated to Native Arts. Some of the greatest Native artists have come from IAIA. West (2022) reminded us in his keynote that:

> '[s]imply put, art created by Native peoples from time immemorial, has never been the child of Europe's Enlightenment, Western rationalism, or Western art, with their binary division between “nature” and “culture” and the multiples of vertical disciplinary categories that are its offspring – “art,” “science,” “history,” “ethnography,” to name a few. Native art comes, instead, from a far different place that sees art and culture as parts of the same whole – with far different intended purposes and community impacts. (pp. 4-5)

West’s (2022) assertion was that the focus of Native arts is to place Native art and artist as a whole and with intentions toward community. I see my work with community-based art and artists as integral to my research but calling myself an artist with the framework of western rationalism fails to encompass how I situate myself in the work. I see this current research as understanding art and culture as part of the same whole.

In her essay titled "No Word for Art in Our Language? Old Questions, New Paradigms" Dr. Nancy Mithlo (2012) outlined three strategies to articulate Indian arts: 1) the rejections of standard fine arts categories; 2) the assimilations of these same fine arts categories; 3) the creation of new categories that reflect Indigenous values of cultural reclamation, sovereignty, and land-based philosophies (p. 112). It is with the first strategies that I see alignment with West's placement of Native art. The second strategy, political resistance, is a valid and needed strategy but not one that I needed to engage with at this time in this research. The third strategy concerns American Indian curatorial practices, and, again, it is valid and a worthy discussion, but not included in this research study.

Mithlo's (2012) first stage, rejecting essential Western fine art standards, forces us to acknowledge Native knowledge systems and understand that when defining Native art, it is not a homogeneous view, like Native nations, and should be flexible – adjusting to the needs of the Native artist.

In 1958, Dakota artist Oscar Howe was rejected from a Native American Art show at the Philbrook Museum because his work was not "traditional" Native art. Howe wrote a letter back to the Philbrook in protest, stating:

> Are we to be held back forever with one phase of Indian painting that is the most common way? Are we to be herded like a bunch of sheep, with no right for individualism, dictated to as the Indian has always been, put on reservations and treated like a child and only the White Man know what is best for him... but one could easily turn to become a social protest painter. I only hope the Art World will not be one more contributor to holding us in chains. (Howe, 1958)

Howe is known for a modern approach to painting; the National Museum of the American Indian recently curated a traveling exhibition of their life works titled “Dakota Modern.” West (2022) claimed that the battle Native artists have been fighting for recognition in Western institutions, like museums and galleries, has been won (p. 2). Native art and artists have opened the doors; there is acceptance and legitimacy of Native art.

Howe's modern paintings told Dakota stories in the same way that their ancestors' art did, telling stories with paint. The difference was the materials used – natural pigments vs. tempera, hides, and ledger paper vs. canvas. Howe was on a continuum of Dakota art. There is no question that art and artists have been integral to the voices of Native people. Yet, how we, Native people, create does not always align with the standard in the Western art world. While we have at times wanted to be seen in the Western art world for our talents, we also understand and know the importance and the intention that art, and creative practices, give to our communities.

**Conclusion – Literature Related to Topic**

The common themes of Native women's leadership characteristics, as gathered from the literature, are grounded in community, meaning being fluent in one’s culture; and being resilient, moving forward despite all that is stacked against an individual. Gambrell and Fritz (2012), Lajimodiere (2013), White Shield (2009), Ross (2009), and others have pointed to these two basic ideas in their research. They have also pointed out that there is a lack of supporting research for Native leadership qualities, as well as Native women leadership qualities. As Gambrell and Fritz (2012) noted, “to date, little research has been conducted that have considered contemporary Native leadership from their point of view” (p. 316).

Continuing this work is vital to Native women exercising their sovereignty and self-reliance in the continuation of their cultures. Being tribally specific is just as important so that

we are not homogeneously viewing ourselves, which is, again, a powerful gesture in exercising sovereignty.

There are, of course, limitations to the research, as the work of Lakota, Native, or Indigenous knowledge is still being developed and processed into a Western system, which still looks at all Native cultures through a pan-Indian lens rather than at individual Nations. One could also argue that these are all women's ideas of Indigenous or Lakota leadership, and they are not all Lakota or Indigenous. Exploring the work about Lakota leadership and developing Lakota ways of doing and knowing through a Lakota lens will be important as the work moves forward.

**Indigenous Research and Methodology**

The approach of Indigenous research could be seen as a switch from an Indigenous perspective to an Indigenous paradigm. I use the term paradigm to encompass all aspects of Indigenous ways of knowing because the term perspective has a limited scope. A perspective can be dismissed as an opinion, but a paradigm indicates a larger framework of understanding. So, a paradigm switch needs to happen (Wilson, 2001, p. 178). A Western research approach is systematic about isolating certain information, whereas an Indigenous approach engages in a more comprehensive process and how everything is interrelated (Little Bear, 2015). Wilson (2001) explained the difference between the Western paradigm and Indigenous paradigm:

> One major difference between the dominant paradigm and an Indigenous paradigm is that the dominant paradigm builds on the fundamental belief that knowledge is an individual entity: the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge, knowledge is something that is gained, and an individual may own, therefore, knowledge. An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledge is relational. Knowledge is

> shared with all creations. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects I may work with, but it is a relationship with all my creations. It is with the cosmos; it is with animals, plants, with the earth that we share this knowledge. It goes beyond the idea of individual knowledge to the concept of relational knowledge. (pp. 176–177)

Wilson's inclusion of nonhumans is an example of a comprehensive approach to the interrelatedness that is important to an Indigenous paradigm.

The viewpoints and approaches differ from those in Western research, but the agenda for Indigenous research can also challenge that perspective. Western research about Indigenous people tends to "describe, organize and define Indigenous people in the context of Western thought," and the intent of an Indigenous research agenda done by Indigenous scholars' is "to use research data as a knowledge base to help ensure our existence as unique Indigenous nations for thoughts of years to come" (Crazy Bull, 2004, p. 14). The limitation of a Western research agenda does not incorporate a broad indigenous paradigm. That is why an Indigenous research agenda is needed to approach Indigenous research topics.

Not only are Indigenous people approaching research from a cultural standpoint, but we also understand that our epistemologies are not the same. For example, kinship values from a Dakota perspective means that we must have some type of cultural or relational tie to any individual that we talk to one on one in our communities. Dakota ethnographer Deloria (1944) demonstrated this when they gathered ethnographies in the early 1920s; Deloria shared that a leader from one of the Dakota tribal communities would not speak with her until the leader established a kinship bond by asking who her father was. Once Deloria shared information about the kindship bond, the tribal leader responded "welcome daughter" (p. 267). This interaction is

the opposite of a western way of gathering research in which isolation and individuality is important. In an Indigenous paradigm, being interconnected is essential. This is all related to Indigenous ways of knowing, as well.

Although we might reject most Western frameworks within different research agendas, we must take into consideration Indigenous epistemologies that center our culture viewpoints while also incorporating aspects of Western approaches. The ongoing impact of colonization and genocide is that our knowledge has been fragmented and jumbled. So, we must design a research agenda to create a hybrid of sorts, using Western avenues until we can find our way; find our own words for what we are trying to say (Meyer, 2001). All this is to say that I center an Indigenous paradigm while trying to navigate a Western way of looking at research. I am a part of the communities I am gathering data from while also using Western words like paradigm and phenomenology.

The approach to the Indigenous research methodologies is about finding our way, and part of that way is to decolonize. So, how do we, as Indigenous people decolonize research? While there is not a straightforward answer, there has been some discussion about what decolonization is *not,* and sometimes not knowing what something is, helps to define what it is. Decolonization is not a metaphor and not to be used as the latest buzzword for other issues that need attention, like “decolonizing our schools” or “decolonizing student thinking” (Tuck & Yang, 2012, p. 1). Decolonization is a real process that must happen to bring visibility to Indigenous issues (pp. 1–3). If the word is continually referred to or seen metaphorically, there will never be moves to do it; it will not be real (p. 1). Again, it is important to give validity to decolonization and its process to bring light and change to Indigenous issues. The process of

decolonization can ease the strategic concessions, as well as provide space for non-western learners.

Lastly, the notion of objectivity presents a knotted dilemma as to how an Indigenous person remains objective when they are part of the community they are researching. How does a Native researcher adhere to Western tenets of objectivity, while also following cultural protocols for working within their community, with elders and culture bearers? As a member of that community, an Indigenous scholar is no longer objective; they are interested in the outcome as much as the community members. Furthermore, they are likely to conduct rich and insightful research because they are trusted. Additionally, as community members, Native scholars are, themselves, the research. They are, therefore, responsible and highly accountable for caring for that knowledge and understanding (Weber-Pillwax, 1999, pp. 37–40).

**Power and Control**

Indigenous people struggle with establishing the legitimacy of their ways of knowing and retaining ownership of their knowledge, especially when an outsider is involved with the study. An outsider is considered someone who is not of the community and not Indigenous. Yet, some researchers may have familial ties to a community but have distanced themselves from the teachings, protocols, and knowledge of the community, embracing, instead, Western ideologies and practices.

When Nabovok republished a book about Acoma ceremonies after discovering information that the Bureau of American Ethnology published in 1942, Nabovok decided to "legitimize" the book's authors, an Acoma man and his son. Nabovok believed the original publishing did not give enough credit to the Acoma man who offered the information. So, it needed to be republished with credit given where credit is due (Worrall 2015). Clearly, Nabovak

(1942) thought this was an acceptable and even noble thing to do, especially because it was already available in the public domain.

But what if that information was never the Acoma man's cultural knowledge to share in the first place? The leadership and legal counsel of the Acoma Pueblo “have stressed that the Pueblos' religious and cultural knowledge is carefully controlled” and “conveyed on a need-to-know basis” even to members of the Pueblo (Villela, 2016). So, if this is true today, it would also be true in past generations. This is why an Indigenous paradigm is needed to guide research about, for, and with Indigenous communities.

It was not until 1978 that “The American Freedom of Religion Act” was passed. Only 38 years ago, the information and practices in the current book would have been illegal. We may assume that this Acoma man did not know, in 1942, that it was illegal to share this cultural knowledge. Perhaps the man assumed that Acoma people and their religious leadership were being assimilated and that sharing was an act of salvage ethnography (to save the stories and customs of his people). But as we fast forward to the 21st century when the information is discovered again, we find that the Acoma Pueblo people have not been assimilated and now have freedom of religion. It would seem, therefore, that this knowledge should be theirs to re-share or not share. Nonetheless, Nabovok (1942), as an outsider, felt the need to legitimize the original author but did not comply with requests from the Pueblo to send them a copy of the manuscript for their review (Vallo, 2015). Why is Nabovok compelled to “give credit where credit is due”—to the original Acoma Pueblo man—but ignore requests from the Acoma pueblo leadership? When asked by National Geographic, “How did the Acoma tribe regard this project?” Nabovok laughed and side-stepped the question by saying the information was already in the public domain and that Nabovok was dignifying it. Yet, Nabovok still did not interact with the current

Acoma Pueblo, despite agreeing to send a manuscript before publishing. Further, the original Acoma man did not have permission from his nation to share sacred cultural knowledge (Reese, 2015).

The case study of Nabovok (1942) republishing improperly collected Acoma sacred knowledge without tribe or religious leaders' consent illustrates the importance for Indigenous people to have greater control over their cultural knowledge. This book threatens to re-expose sacred information to a larger audience and, most critically, is also “a modern-day example of sensationalized disrespect and disregard of tribal culture, community, and sovereignty” (Vallo, 2015). Strangely, so many seem to think that Indigenous consultation is unnecessary when Indigenous peoples are right there and, in most cases, they are still practicing their cultural knowledge and may if asked, help clarify and make corrections.

The case study with the Acoma Pueblo and Nabovok (1942) speaks to the struggle for identity, power, legitimization, intellectual property rights, ownership, and working with Indigenous communities. Nabovok's self-appointed agency to republish reminds us that all those issues do not seem to mean much when Indigenous intervention and sovereignty is asserted.

The dominant/Western world has had a volatile relationship with Indigenous peoples since the beginning of contact. Maybe because that has never been acknowledged in an authentic way, that relationship continues today. The ideas of reconciliation, integration, and incorporation in academia are being challenged because “the academy is an invention of the West and, in the case of Indigenous peoples, was expressly designed for our evisceration” (Grande, 2011, p. 41), so how can those two come to an agreement? Grande said that Indigenous programs and classes added in universities are part of assimilation. No matter how many programs and classes support Indigenous people at the university, they must still fit into the construct of Western academia.

Indigenous people are continually trying to fit into the box that is Western academia and their ways of knowing and researching, and we find ourselves “dulled by the guessing game of another culture” (Meyer, 2001). Indigenous communities have been and are taken advantage of when sharing their ways and knowledge from the beginning of historical contact with the Western world. Indigenous communities need control over their knowledge and its use; it should be protected from “misinterpretation and misuse” (Porsanger, 2003, p. 117).

Indigenous knowledge and research methodologies strengthen our identity as “it supports Indigenous people's efforts to be independent, not only legally, politically or economically, but first and foremost intellectually” (Porsanger, 2003, p. 117).

Western practices still define Indigenous practices, and we are still working to define ourselves. While this is happening, we will continue to ask ourselves what are Indigenous research methodologies; what is Indigenous knowledge?

**Conclusion**

What is missing from this literature review is an overview of the Non-Native / Western leadership approaches, themes, critiques, etc. I come to another strategic concession. In the interest of time, energy, and the need to focus on Indigenous and Lakota thought, philosophy, and understanding, I looked to Northouse (2016) for an overview defining leadership (Box 1; pp. 2–5). Northouse summarized the evolution of leadership definitions from 1900 into the 21st century. Northouse pointed out it has been more than a century since leadership became a topic, starting in the first three decades of the 1900s emphasizing control and power, then in the 1930s focusing on traits; then the 1940s and 1950s discussions of group theory influences over a group; moving into the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s which was about behaviors, and reciprocation with resources as means of motivations and looking into the nature of leadership. The 21st century

brought about thoughts and discussions about the process of leadership, and these leadership approaches emerged: authentic leadership, spiritual leadership, servant leadership, and adaptive leadership.

Northouse's (2016) definition of leadership is “Leadership is a process whereby an individual influences a group of individuals to achieve a common goal” (p. 6), emphasizing process and that it is not about characteristics or traits. Northouse discussed the issue of power and elitism, and that leadership is about relationships with a group (p. 7). Daft (2015) defined leadership as “an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect their shared purposes” (p. 5).

While I agree with Northouse's (2016) and Daft's (2015) definitions and issues with power, there is something missing for me. Northouse's notion of leader and followers which still implies power, is missing this whole idea of kinship, the wholeness that Marshall (2002) and Amiotte (1983) speak of when discussing the Lakota principle Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ. Kinship is not just people/humans; it includes the land, the insects, the ancestors, the animals, the wind, the sun and moon, the stars – all that is.

Many Western Non-Native/Non-Indigenous leadership theories, models, approaches, scholarship, etc., appear to be missing the wholeness, missing Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ. While Northouse (2016) and Daft (2015) do discuss and emphasize relationships, shared purpose, and reciprocity, their work still has an implication of power and control.

Western / Non-Native leadership models do not reflect my community. Kenny (2012) affirmed this in their experience as a professor in leadership and change, stating that their sense of Native student's experience weaving through the literature is that Native students can find useful information but “the literature as a whole rarely fits with our experience as Aboriginal

people" (p. 8). Kenny also stated that, "For thousands of years prior to colonization, leadership in Indigenous communities was based on the character of the land and the needs of the people in their traditional territories" (p. 8). This aligns with the principle of Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, being in relationships, and that it is about more than people, more than humans.

# CHAPTER 3

# METHODOLOGY

## Description of the Project and Background

I chose a qualitative method because the research was conducted with individuals from the Oceti Sakowin community, emphasizing the Lakota, and focused primarily on the information gathered with the Community Kinship Circle and follow-up discussions. True to a qualitative method study, this research focused on the communities and cultural attitudes, words, mannerisms, and interactions I observed during the process.

Because there are 574 federally recognized and 63 state-recognized Tribal nations in the United States alone (which does not account for Tribal nations that have been eliminated or remain unrecognized), it is important to acknowledge the foundational diversity. Each nation has different customs, languages, and ways of engaging with the world and the land; while some may be similar, they are all distinct in their ways of being and doing. It is important that this study focused on the Oceti Sakowin with an emphasis on the Lakota because more work must be done to recognize and celebrate that uniqueness. This focus was also a conscious academic stance, a resistance against Pan-Indian generalization. Occasionally, generalization of Native people can be useful, for example, Native peoples are often ignored or not included in social science research because of small sample sizes (Shotton et al., 2013). In "Beyond the asterisk," Shotton et al. (2013) called for a practical authenticity where Native peoples can be appropriately represented in contemporary scholarship. Towards the aim of authenticity and specificity, therefore, I advance Lakota women's knowledge of Lakota thought and philosophy – especially considering the near absence of qualitative research done by Lakota women. Marshall (2002)

emphasized, in his practice as a writer, that stories are how Lakota people know who we are, how we learn lessons, virtues and remain true to ourselves (p. xiii).

**Project Design Methodology**

For this study, I used a phenomenological methodology guided by and incorporating Indigenous approaches and protocols. Phenomenology allowed me to illuminate detailed descriptions and personal meanings of lived experiences related to Lakota women's leadership. Indigenous methodologies allowed me to avoid Western research paradigm issues related to Native communities (Kovach, 2021; Smith, 1999; Wilson 2008) There are two approaches to phenomenology—transcendental, and hermeneutics.

Transcendental phenomenology is based on a principle identified by Husserl (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016), who believed in and wanted to get at the essence of a phenomenon. Husserl was asking researchers to essentially show up and act as though they did not have any connection to or knowledge of the phenomenon they sought to understand. Husserl introduced the idea of bracketing, which is the idea of suspending one's judgment or biases. Husserl believed that with bias, people could prescribe the ending.

Heidegger, a student of Husserl (Horrigan-Kelly et al., 2016), believed that a person could not use bracketing and could not put their bias into a box. Heidegger did not believe researchers could separate themselves from the world, ourselves, or what they already know. This idea felt the most aligned with Indigenous research methodologies, that a person is a part of the phenomenon. Kovach (2009) stated, when applying theory as an Indigenous person that, the Indigenous "researcher has contextual knowledge of the research participants' Indigenous community" (p.166, box 7.1). Heidegger understood interpretation as a whole; as researchers

break down the information and see the parts, they can then bring it back together into a whole, circling or spiraling and deepening the understanding of that phenomenon.

Indigenous methodologies involve a unique approach to research and knowledge production that centers the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous peoples. A project design for Indigenous methodologies prioritizes the principles of respect, reciprocity, and collaboration with Indigenous communities. For Lakota communities this includes the principle Mitákuye Oyas'in. It involves engaging in meaningful dialogue and building relationships with community members, ensuring their active participation and consent throughout the research process. This was incorporated into the Community Kinship Circle design protocols. The design incorporated Indigenous ways of knowing, such as oral traditions and storytelling, and prioritized the ethical considerations and cultural protocols specific to each community. Overall, the project design aimed to empower Indigenous communities and contribute to their self-determination and well-being.

As stated in Chapter 1 page 5, the research question is "How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community?" Because this an Indigenous informed phenomenological study, the question was formed to be inclusive of both approaches; the "how do they experience" is related to the phenomenology research, and the "working in community" is related to the indigenous research.

**Sampling and Participants**

Participants were selected to comprise a purposeful sample from the Oceti Sakowin Nation with representation of women from the Lakota Nation who currently work in creative practice and with the Lakota community. An invitation letter was sent by email (Appendix D) with a questionnaire for available times (Appendix E) to an established list of 20 Lakota women

artists, with a goal of four to seven participants; six Lakota women responded. Because this study focused on Lakota women's leadership, the list was developed with criteria of those on the list to be women; Lakota; an artist or if they do not identify as an artist, work creatively; and leading or organizing community in creative activities. The researcher created the list in collaboration with other Lakota women researchers.

Purposeful sampling was used with a strategy of criterion sampling. Purposeful sampling is a nonrandom selection of individuals for study with an understanding of the needed knowledge of the research purpose (Creswell, 2013; Fraenkel et al., 2014). According to Creswell (2013), the strategy of criterion sampling is that all individuals in the study "meet some criterion" and are "useful for quality assurance" (p.158). I was purposeful in the sense that I used an Indigenous paradigm to guide my sampling because I was aware of the women I recruited, and they were aware of me.

**Instrumentation – Focus Groups and Community Kinship Circle**

A combination of instruments was used to gather data so that the findings are rich and deep while not being overwhelming or creating unrealistic expectations. I engaged with focus groups called Community Kinship Circles; I will go over the difference and similarities (between formal academic focus groups and kinship circles) in the next section. I conducted follow-up conversations as I anticipated that many of the descriptions and information provided by my participants would need further exploration. The follow-up conversations allowed me to clarify the preliminary information.

***Focus Groups***

When starting this process, I knew I wanted to use a focus group because they are useful in a phenomenology study (Yin, 2016). While focus groups are valuable, a group discussion

must incorporate Lakota nuances and approaches to being in the community. Focus groups are defined as "a form of data collection whereby the researcher convenes a small group of people having similar attributes, experiences, or "focus" and leads the group in a nondirective manner. The objective is to surface the perspectives of the people in the group with minimal influence by the researcher" (p. 336). The advantage of focus groups is that data can be gathered quickly, because they usually have a set time and can get through some complex information. They are also flexible and adaptable research tools, especially when the researcher may not have a solid relationship or knowledge of the participants. The disadvantage of focus groups is that one participant could dominate the conversations and silence individual voices, especially if a person is introverted or needs more time to process information. Differing opinions can also cause participants not to speak up or participate.

For this study, it was important that I was able to incorporate Indigenous and, specifically, Lakota approaches. Indigenous methodologies are not new (Emerson, 2014, p. 58); they have been employed for generations, but because of colonization efforts, they have lost their value to mainstream research (Tachine et al., 2016). Similarly methodological approaches have been used by other Indigenous researchers who use talking circles or sharing circles but rely on this approach to generate a relational and interconnectedness that is needed by Indigenous participants.

When used in phenomenology studies, focus groups can enrich participants' experience and help to identify commonalities and differences in the phenomenon. It is important to ensure proper documentation to show participants' voices. Clarifying the roles of everyone in the room is important when running focus groups in phenomenology (Dibley, 2020). A focus group will

allow me to address the many cultural dynamics that will be shared across the group without invalidating indigenous voices and worldviews.

### ***Community Kinship Circles***

Drawing from Sharing Circles, defined as “an open-structured, conversational style methodology that respects story sharing with a tribal cultural protocol context” (Kovach, 2021, p. 220), Community Kinship Circles focus on and value the relationship with participants. Kovach discussed the sacredness of Sharing Circles, and that those spaces are ceremonial, and while I appreciate and understand the importance of this, I see the Community Kinship Circles as a more common space. In the Lakota community, we have the word ikce, defined as common/ordinary, and that it is part of the aim of Lakota life, to be ikce, to be ordinary so that we are not above or below anyone, but everyone is on the same level. There are other processes, part of Sharing Circles, that were used as part of the Community Kinship Circles, incorporating welcoming protocols, offering food, and offering space, time, and comfort to participants to share (Kovach, 2021, p. 164).

## **Research Justification**

Understanding the values and meaning of Lakota kinship was vital to developing a Lakota woman leadership model. True to a qualitative method study, (Creswell, 2013, p. 44) this research focused on the Lakota cultural attitudes, words, mannerisms, and interactions I observed during the process. I chose a qualitative method because the research was conducted with individuals from the Lakota community and focused primarily on the information discussed and developed by the participants in the Community Kinship Circles (set up in the style of sharing circles).

**Validity and Dependability**

***Internal Validity***

Some areas that may threaten internal validity are morality, subject attitude, instrumentation, and collector bias. In the attempt to control the morality threat, I was flexible and chose participants who could dedicate time and energy to the project. It was important that I was patient with the community as they navigated the study and cognizant of past researchers' use and abuse of information attained from Lakota community members. In this instance, I relied on my connection to and long family history with the community and professional experience.

I used the Community Kinship Circle (sharing circles) with follow-up conversations for clarity to address instrument validity; using both methods to collect data from the same group gave multiple perspectives and insights that boosted the validity of the study. The Community Kinship Circle (sharing circles) with follow-up conversation was transcribed and sent to the participants for review.

***External Validity***

The generalization of Native cultures has been detrimental to the ability to see the individual Nations as they are; since there are many native nations, of which 567 are Federally recognized and 67 are state recognized (BIA, 2017a). Each of these Nations is unique, and while many work together, these core differences must be respected. The generalization of this research study for all Native Nations would be inappropriate, However, these findings could be helpful and generalizable to the Oceti Sakowin band of Titowan (Lakota) people, which consists of seven bands: Oglala, Sicangu, Mniconjous, Oohenunpa, Itazipco, Sihasap, Hunkpapa, all who are currently located in South Dakota, parts of Minnesota, and Montana. (See Appendix A.)

**Procedures and Data Collection**

For this study, I conducted one Community Kinship Circle with participants; it was held at Racing Magpie, a community art space, in Rapid City, SD. The Community Kinship Circle was recorded with video. I provided travel support and a meal to participants.

Again, relying on the Sharing Circle procedures outlined by Kovach (2021), prior to Community Kinship Circle, I had a pre-interview conversation with the participants to share information about the study, the topics, consent, and what would be done with the data collected. When possible, I let them know who their co-participants would be; while this is not outlined in Sharing Circle procedures, I thought it was important for people to know who would be in the room and who they would be sharing space with during the Community Kinship Circle. Once participants were at Racing Magpie for the Community Kinship Circle, the conversation began with personal introductions. I introduced the topics we would discuss: 1) leadership, 2) Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, 3) kinship and being a good relative, and 4) creative practice; I allowed the participants to tell their stories and describe their experiences in their way and at their own pace, creating an organic and adaptable space (Kovach, 2021, pp. 165–166).

**Community Kinship Circle Questions and Topics**

The Community Kinship Circle was informal and guided by four topics: 1) leadership, 2) Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, 3) kinship and being a good relative, and 4) creative practice. There was one broad question that accompanied each of the topics to prompt the participants to describe their experiences (see Appendix C) and a prompt question to help the conversation move along (see Appendix B). The questions were developed based on the purpose of the research study, stated as: The purpose of this Indigenous phenomenological research study is to document the experiences of Lakota women using creative practices to work with the Lakota community. The

leadership experiences I discussed were defined as Lakota kinship and relational practices guided by Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ. The topics guided the participants to tell their stories; it is important in an Indigenous methodology approach to let the participants guide the circle, honoring their knowledge, and give space for memories, holistic conversation that is not force by formalities. Fraenkel et al. (2012, p. 126) stated that open ended questions allow participants to provide valuable information.

**Indigenous Interview Protocol**

Indigenous interview protocol refers to the specific guidelines and practices that are followed when conducting interviews with Indigenous individuals or communities. These protocols are designed to ensure that the interview process is respectful, culturally appropriate, and acknowledges the unique perspectives and knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples.

One key aspect of an Indigenous interview protocol is obtaining informed consent from participants, which involves explaining the purpose of the interview, the potential risks and benefits, and ensuring that participants have the right to withdraw their participation at any time. It is also important to establish a trusting and respectful relationship with participants, as well as to prioritize their comfort and well-being throughout the interview process.

An Indigenous interview protocol also emphasizes the importance of reciprocity and mutual respect. This means that researchers should approach interviews with a willingness to listen and learn from participants, and to acknowledge and value their knowledge and experiences. It is also important to ensure that the research findings are shared back with the community in a way that is accessible and beneficial to them.

Overall, an Indigenous interview protocol recognizes the importance of cultural sensitivity, ethical considerations, and the empowerment of Indigenous voices in the research

process. By following these protocols, researchers can ensure that their interviews are conducted in a respectful and meaningful manner that honors the rights and perspectives of Indigenous peoples.

For this study I focused on Lakota cultural protocols to ground the research data gathering in Indigenous methodologies. The before and after protocols are from and adapted from Kovach (2021) and include steps and considerations when working with indigenous communities for data gathering and using story gathering as research methodologies (p. 166). The protocol is broken into two steps, before and during the research conversation. The adaptation for the current research was to use a more specific Lakota cultural approach and nuance.

***Before the Community Kinship Circle***

Steps before the Community Kinship Circle included that the researcher:

- has an embodied and conceptual knowing that story as research method is embedded in Lakota epistemology, theory, and context – these cannot be separated.
- has an appreciation that story is a gift given with responsibilities associated with it.
- has contextual knowledge of the research participant’s Lakota community.
- has a consciousness of their identity positioning and has unpacked any assumptions or biases about the research, research participant, and the community to which the research participant belongs.
- knows that one’s credibility and trustworthiness as a researcher and person will factor into whether a research relationship is forged.
- understands that if the researcher is unknown to the research participant, time will be required to build trust.

***During Community Kinship Circle***

Steps during the Community Kinship Circle included:

- The researcher has a "pre-conversation" (before recording) with the research participants to share information about the purpose of the study, the research questions that will be asked, the approach to be taken, consent procedures, how findings will be shared, and the benefits of the research for the Lakota community.
    - Participants can ask for clarification at any time before, during and after the circle.
    - Participation is voluntary.
    - Consent can be withdrawn at any time.
- The Community Kinship Circle was expected to take approximately two to three hours; but was flexible and responsive to the participants, and the researcher can adjust time as needed.
    - The researcher is considerate of participants time and energy.
- The research conversation begins with a protocol of cultural introductions and meal sharing and, when appropriate, cultural gifting takes place.
    - Participants received mileage support for travel to participate in the circle.
- The researcher is comfortable with allowing participants to tell their stories in their own way and at their own speed and recognizes that the research conversation will take its own time.
- The researcher is actively and reflectively listening given that both are necessary; notetaking can be distracting to the organic nature of the conversation so video and audio recording was set up for the Community Kinship Circle.

    - Consent for video recording is sought before beginning the discussion.
- The researcher is part of the conversation, and the conversation is dialogic, relational, and reflective, not just a matter of extracting information from participants.
- The researcher acknowledges that emotions may be triggered by the research, and if the research participant shows anger or sadness, the researcher does not aggravate the situation.
- The researcher asks individuals if they have support systems to debrief should the interview prompt an emotional response. Resources are provided should the need arise to connect with an outside support system.
- The researcher is prepared to turn off the audiotape and halt the conversation if necessary.
- The researcher does not "bag the data" and run. There is an expectation of reciprocity, respect, and care for the research participant.
- Findings of the study are shared with participants upon completion of the study.

### *After the Community Kinship Circle*

According to the Indigenous interview protocol, after the circle, the researcher reviews the recording and transcriptions, shares the transcripts of the circle, and conducts follow-up conversations as needed for clarification.

## Coding and Analysis

According to Kovach (2021), research can be extractive. It matters how I code and analyze, and I approached it with care and intention. I interpreted the findings from the theoretical lens of a phenomenological approach influenced by Indigenous methodologies. Phenomenology is identifying a lived experience of a phenomenon through stories/narratives

from participants (Creswell, 2013). The Indigenous methodological approach is research done by Indigenous people, with Indigenous people, and for Indigenous people, drawing from traditional and cultural knowledge.

Kovach (2021) stated that “applying theory in analysis can be inferential and enigmatic” and, because of this, has outlined several questions that, when using Indigenous methodologies could be asked of the researcher to ensure a “systematic process when applying theory in analysis” (p. 202). Kovach suggests researchers journal how the theoretical perspective informs the analysis of research findings; ensure consistency; state clearly why the theory has been chosen, including gaps; and understand how the theory influences the interpretations (p. 202).

**Ethical Concerns and Subject Risk**

Indigenous people struggle with the legitimacy of their ways of knowing and having ownership of their knowledge, especially when an outsider is involved with the studying. Indigenous communities have been taken advantage of when sharing their ways and knowledge from the beginning of historical contact with the Western world (Weber-Pillwax, 1999).

Because of the historical background of extraction, deceit, and misuse of Indigenous information, I took extra precautions and was vigilant when working with the Lakota community. Ethical concerns occur during the entire research process, from research planning to confidentiality of the participants, consent, data storage, and research responsibility. Reciprocity is an important aspect of Indigenous methodologies and is an ethical concern. It is important to carefully outline steps and procedures when planning Indigenous research.

Confidentiality and participants’ was honored at data collection and analysis, and in presentation of the results. I discussed the importance of confidentiality with the participants and worked with them to identify pseudonyms.

Participant consent is an integral part of research. Participants must be protected from "physical and mental discomfort, harm, and danger that may arise from participating in a study" (Fraenkel et al., 2014, p. 63). To address and minimalize protection of participants in the study, I clearly communicated the research design, my role, and their role in the research.

Once IRB approval was secured, I started contacting potential participants. The community members who agreed to a participate were provided a consent form to review, ask questions about, and sign. Community Kinship Circle

The data was encrypted and kept in safe spaces only accessible to me. Handwritten notes and sketches were always kept with me when in use and stored in a locked file cabinet when not in use. All digital recordings, both video and audio are stored on Google drive under password protection, and a dedicated hard drive as a backup.

***Researcher Responsibility***

This study centered on the stories and experiences of Lakota women artists working and leading community using creative practices. I am a Lakota woman, and while I do not identify specifically as an artist, I do work in creative practices and with community. I share similar stories and experiences with the women of this study. It is important to mention that as a Lakota person, the concepts/cultural knowledge I discussed with participants are concepts/cultural knowledge that I am grounded in, and I cannot separate myself from that concepts/cultural knowledge. As a citizen of Sicangu Oyate, I carry the community's responsibility as I conducted this study. I did not take the responsibility lightly was the gift I hoped the participants would share with me.

# CHAPTER 4

# RESULTS

This Indigenous phenomenological research documented the experiences of Lakota women who use creative practices when working with community. To gather their experiences of the community participants the research addressed the following question: *How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community*? The data collection occurred during the month of September 2023, and while the pandemic had been declared officially ended by the World Health Organization, COVID-19 infection remains real and prevalent to vulnerable communities. Because the of worry of an increase of COVID cases in the community, the Community Kinship Circle was conducted in a hybrid manner with two participants in person and four online over Zoom. The in-person participants wore masks for most of the three-hour long Community Kinship Circle; the only time the masks were removed was to eat a small meal.

This chapter will first present the demographics for each community participant. For privacy and anonymity, the community participants were given pseudonyms. I am using relative terms from the Lakota language; it is respectful to address and place folks by their relative term. (Deloria, 1944, p. 43) Use of the term Tȟuŋwiŋla refers to an aunt who is not blood related, and the use of the term Čēphanši refers to a female cousin. Secondly, the themes that emerged from the data as it relates to the topic, will be presented. Lastly, the chapter will conclude with a description of essence of the community participants.

## Participants

Participant demographics are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of the Participants*

| Pseudonym | Oceti Sakowin | | | Identifies as an Artist | Creative Practice | Organizing Community Activities |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Nakota | Dakota | Lakota | | | |
| tȟuŋwiŋla wánči | | | Oglala | | x | x |
| tȟuŋwiŋla núnpa | | | Mniconjous & Oglala | | x | x |
| čēphanši wánči | | | Oglala | x | x | x |
| čēphanši núnpa | | | Oglala | | x | x |
| čēphanši yámni | | Sisitonwan | Mniconjous | x | x | x |
| čēphanši tópa | | | Oglala | | x | x |
| researcher | | | Sicangu & Oglala | | x | x |

All the community participants introduced themselves to the group, and as is custom in the Lakota community, when we introduce ourselves, we tell our specific tribe, who our parents and both maternal and paternal grandparents are, and the specific communities we come from. This helps to place us in our community, it also tells of any relational connections that may not be known.

***Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči***

Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči self-identified as a teacher and culture bearer. She has worked for the local tribal college as a Lakota Language and Lakota culture instructor for the last 26 years. Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči also organizes and co-leads a monthly sewing circle at Racing Magpie, an arts

focused organization. The sewing circle is a group opened to anyone interested in sewing. Thuwinla wánči stated that the sewing circle is not necessarily a formal group, but more a place that people interested in sewing together can come to learn. The group usually serves a meal and meets anywhere from three to five hours. Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči described some of her community work outside of creative practices like creating and delivering meals for the houseless community. In the city where she lives the houseless community is primarily Lakota people.

***Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa***

Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa co-leads the sewing circle with Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči. Together they are the foundation of this group ensuring consistency and openness. Thuŋwiŋla núŋpa never identifies as culture bearer or teacher, but one other community participant, Čēphanši tópa, identified Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa as the one who taught her traditional food preparation. Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa also participated in and saw to the installation of a community garden at Racing Magpie.

***Čēphanši wánči***

Čēphanši wánči is a professor for an MFA in creative writing, as well as poet and visual artist. She mentions enjoying teaching college age students. Čēphanši wánči said that she grew up mostly in the Southwest, but frequents Pine Ridge, visiting family and participating in family gatherings. She also spends her time home in the Pine Ridge area working with other Lakota artists to co-create art installations, conduct workshops, and participate in readings.

***Čēphanši núŋpa***

Čēphanši núŋpa teaches in a Montessori school; she said that although most call her a teacher and language learner, she sees herself mostly as a mom who is acquiring knowledge and skills to pass on to her children and grandchildren. Čēphanši núŋpa organizes cultural activities to support the youth in the community. Some of the activities include beading, sewing, and

singing. Čēphanši núŋpa originally stated she was not sure what her creative practice was, or if she was creative at all. As she described her work more, she stated that "every creative practice I learn, its usually centered on or its usually based around education and you know, a utilitarian aspect."

***Čēphanši yámni***

Čēphanši yámni works in the arts as an administrator and as a multidiscipline artist. She attended a tribal arts college where she received her museum studies degree and is currently working on her MFA in studio arts. Čēphanši yámni's approach to art, exhibitions, and community planning is to ensure that grandmother earth is protected and uplifting the arts. She uses arts and arts activities to raise awareness and engage community in climate activism.

***Čēphanši tópa***

Čēphanši tópa stated she is a community educator. She and her husband travel the region and teach people how to butcher bison, along with other animals like turtle and beaver. They (she and her husband) focus on traditional foods. Čēphanši tópa stated during the circle that she did not necessarily like the word "traditional" but is using the word to be legible to the masses. She works to get back to gathering from the land and back to using all parts of an animal while creating no waste. Historically this is how Lakota people lived, thus the use of the word "traditional." Čēphanši tópa started her work in reconnecting to understand what is means to be a Lakota woman in current times. It is a deeply personal journey for her and one she described as an act of resistance. She is always asking "why"; why do we eat it this way; why do we gather at this time; why does the animal act in this way or that; etc. Because these are not formal resources or academic books for Lakota ways of eating before colonization, Čēphanši tópa and her husband began to seek out mentors, and to connect with community. Her approach has been to

dive into situations and invite people to participate, and there have been times when someone steps up to share knowledge.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

For this Indigenous phenomenology study, I used a few data sources to conduct the research of how Lakota women experience their leadership in community. The main way I collected data is through a Community Kinship Circle, which is similar to Kovach's (2021) sharing circles, the difference being that I approached the space as ikce (common) rather than sacred. The Community Kinship Circle was an informal gathering which was recorded with video and audio. My deep connection to the Lakota community and participation in cultural activities over my life, and data collection for the research helped situate my analysis of what community participants experienced in their leadership. As I have previously explained, my kinship and interconnectedness with the Lakota culture and community are essential to how I support, analyze, and discuss the findings (Deloria, 1944; Meyer, 2001; Weber-Pillwax, 1999).

I used the artificial intelligence software Otter.AI through the Zoom video conference platform to transcribe the Community Kinship Circle. Because the Community Kinship Circle was conducted in a hybrid (in-person and on video) manner, and folks had masks on and internet connects at different times were slow – The Otter.AI transcription were not exact, and I used the Zoom video recording to ensure accuracy in the transcriptions. I then shared the transcriptions with each community participant to ensure their comfort with their words. There were a few instances in the video and Otter.AI transcriptions that information was not accurate, and I clarified the transcriptions as part of individual follow-up conversations with the community participants. Some of the need for clarity was when community participants would use the

Lakota language, and because I am not fluent in the Lakota language, I asked in the follow-up conversation for the correct words, deeper explanation and for spellings.

I reviewed the transcripts and video numerous times, writing notes in the margins of the transcripts, and a notebook – I was working to gain a deep understanding of the discussion, reliving each moment of the conversation, immersing myself in the nuances. With each review, I began to note understandings and experiences within the four topic areas. Wilson describes this analysis process of a collaborative, noting that data collection and analysis often happen simultaneously. Wilson stated, "As I was listening, I was leaning, and as I was learning, I was sharing" (p. 131). This aligned with the next steps as I began to note the understandings and experiences, I was sharing with other Lakota women artists and scholars, especially Dr. Clementine Bordeaux (my sister) to process the information, and to ensure cultural alignment. Because I have concerns about misrepresenting the Lakota community, the collaborative analysis with other Lakota women scholars was vital to the collective knowledge that the community participants shared and created together.

I acknowledge that this analysis is currently Indigenous heavy, and this is a phenomenological study as well, a hermeneutic to be specific. The hermeneutic circle asks how my/our understanding grows through the analysis, and as the Community Kinship Circle discussed each topic, the community participants would expand on their own experiences. The discussion became more enriched and deeper. I came to the Community Kinship Circle with the understanding that each participant was using kinship, creativity, and Mitákuye Oyas'in to be a leader in the community. The community participants' understanding, and their experiences, are much deeper than that, and they helped to explain that they move through the world doing what is necessary with no expectation of leadership.

**Validity**

I implemented two strategies to establish validity. The strategies also align with the Indigenous methodologies. The first strategy was prolonged engagement and persistent observation which Creswell described as "building trust with participants, learning the culture, and checking for misinformation" (p. 250). This aligns with Indigenous methodologies because I have a long-standing relationship with the community – as a citizen of a Lakota Nation, I understand cultural protocols and nuances, which gives me access to information that may not be available to non-Lakota researchers. The second strategy was the use of triangulation, described by Creswell as "making use of multiple and different sources" (p. 251). This includes the Community Kinship Circle data, along with follow-up conversations, the literature, and collaborative analysis.

**Discussion Topics**

For this study, I intended to gather community participants' experiences addressing the following question: *How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community*? In the Community Kinship Circle we also focused on four topics: 1) Lakota women's leadership; 2) Mitákuye Oyas'in; 3) Kinship and being a good relative; and 4) Creative practice/artists. I focused the conversation, as we had limited time (three hours) and I wanted to ensure we addressed these aspects of their experiences.

It is important to note that all six of the participants stated that "I may not want to hear what they had to say," as they each had their own ideas and thoughts about specific things related to Lakota culture and community. I share this as I am the only one who has questions about our culture, the Lakota culture, and want a deeper understanding. See Table 2 for a list of topics and themes.

**Table 2**

*Themes Generated*

| Topics | Themes of Understandings and Experiences |
| --- | --- |
| Lakota women's leadership | • Western concept and does not see themselves as a leader<br>• Fulfilling kinship responsibilities and doing what must be done or doing the hard things |
| Mitákuye Oyas'in | • It is everything and everyone's responsibility<br>• It is known and it is unknown |
| Kinship/Being a good relative | • Evolving and changing<br>• Rely on intuition and instinct<br>• Western influence causes difficulty and trauma |
| Creative practice | • Guided by kinship and grounded in Mitákuye Oyas'in<br>• teach and share and connection to be people and land |

## Lakota Women's Leadership

Discussion in the Community Kinship Circle around the topic Lakota Women's Leadership revolved around two themes: Leadership is a Western concept and Lakota women do not see themselves as leaders and each woman has kinship responsibilities which include doing what must be done or "doing the hard things."

### *Western Concept and Do not see Themselves as Leaders*

Čēphanši núŋpa, Čēphanši yámni, and Čēphanši wánči all noted they believed leadership is a Western concept and that Lakota women do not usually see themselves as leaders. Čēphanši wánči noted that she thought of leadership in terms of a certain role or in certain circumstances, adding that she did not enjoy the role or the spotlight.

#### *Čēphanši núŋpa*

> I believe it is a Western concept. I feel that Lakota women lead by example, through modeling and not convincing people to jump on a ship. Leadership is a word put on us to

make us strive for the top, through the facade of scarcity of resources. I believe Lakota women lead out of necessity. For the survival of the collective for the health of the oyate (Lakota nation) - Leadership in the sense of looking at one person as a collective, for what to do has come with the unraveling of our kinship system.

*Čēphanši yámni*

I don't see myself as a leader, and that's not saying that I have never been put in that position, as leadership is power, and I don't want power. I am not going to gatekeep any of the knowledge that I have or learn…I say that I don't want to be a leader because I know how hard it is, and I know that you don't get a break, you don't even get support. So, I don't wanna be a leader. It's a Western concept.

*Čēphanši wánči*

The idea of leadership is not actually something I always relate to, unless I am being asked to be a certain role, like a specific role and the guidelines are clear. And I was thinking what are those times when I feel like I'm in that place of leadership and it's always like a Western institution. Like teaching is the biggest example. I am very aware of what I am doing there, and I am aware of boundaries and I am aware that the students are watching me. And so maybe there's a few examples where I am quite aware because I've been appointed or asked to do a certain thing. I am not sure I always understand this word of being a leader nor is it something I relate to; I don't necessarily enjoy having attention, the spotlight.

And even in my work outside of teaching as an artist or as a writer, the projects I choose to do, the things I engage with. It's because I want to learn something. First, I want to learn something. I want to become a better person, hopefully, on the other side, you

know, and also, I want my work to be useful to others, but I don't as an artist, when I'm working in that way. I enjoy making creating and the process. I don't necessarily enjoy having attention or the spotlight put or all that other part of that kind of work.

### ***Kinship Responsibilities and Doing the Hard Things***

Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa used her mother as an example of accepting and demonstrating kinship responsibilities. Leaders can be quiet as her mother was but as a woman Lakota she was “a strong force.”

*Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa*

I will use my mom as an example because she was our only parent. I was thinking back on a time, and she was 30 years old when she had four little ones. And she was on her own. And she raised us, and she was quiet, really quiet and she doesn't just say much, she just did things. And so, I think she was really strong to us, a leader and I just always go back to her, because of her I am the way I am. I mean, a woman Lakota she was strong force. Being that young, but still, you know she was a good leader for us. And for others too. And there's a lot of them out there. There's a lot who are strong. I'm still learning. I'm 67 years old and I still learn from young ones and then I always try to teach. I never keep anything. I just spread it because what we learn, we have to give it to others because once we're not here, it's not gonna just wander around someplace until somebody grabs it, you know. So, we have to teach.

## **Mitákuye Oyas’in**

The Community Kinship Circle noted that Mitákuye Oyas’in encompassed two themes: it is everything and people share responsibility and “it is known and it is unknown.”

***It is Everything and Responsibility***

Tȟuŋwiŋla wanci and Čēphanši núnpa talked about the nuances of everything being related. Tȟuŋwiŋla wanci talked about nature and how everything is related while Čēphanši núnpa said that it meant "all my relations."

*Tȟuŋwiŋla wanci*

> As soon as you open your eyes in the morning when you're waking up, everything you see is related. We're all related to trees, and to everything. Mitákuye Oyas'in is being aware of your entire surroundings.

*Čēphanši núnpa*

> My grandma taught me how to say it at a young age. and she explained to me that it means all my relations. At a very young age we understood that meant like more than people. And I think being raised by my grandmas. I had a very developed world view as a younger person. And a lot of people would say that I was older for my age that I reminded them of a grandma and, it was because I was raised by grandmas. And so, when I had my own children, we know what it is in theory, but when it becomes whenever, you know, putting that into practice, and living that is a whole learning process. And so, when I became a mother, you know, there was a lot of different things in my life that were tumultuous, learned that, oh, if I do this, then this happened. Oh, if, if I do this, then this other thing happened. And so, I'm gonna choose this. But I also was very, I guess, enraged at the state of the fabric of our kinship and the way that it was tattered and all the things that I could see that were related. And if I didn't have that understanding of Mitákuye Oyas'in. And it wouldn't have bothered me as much. But because I realized that everything is related on a very complex, deep level that we can barely fathom as

> human beings. It gave me deep sadness and I was very sad and like, almost hopeless. Like what are we supposed to do? Because look at the state of our Oyate (Nation). So, I began to focus on like, myself and healing what they call healing, but really just trying to learn who I was and who I wanted to be for my children and for my students. And with that, I began connecting with the land and connecting with people in real life. And I think that I have learned a lot more about what Mitákuye Oyas'in. It is. You know, it's everything, even if we don't understand it, even if we're not practicing it. It's still at play. And those are my thoughts.

***It is Known and Unknown***

Čēphanši tópa discusses this team in terms of Mitákuye Oyas'in being a learning process. She said that much of the known and unknown refers to dealing with the trauma of things that "were forced upon us, literally and violently."

*Čēphanši tópa*

> I think it's all a learning process. Personally, I think that everything that we're going through right now in this day and age, we're all still learning. We're all trying to understand, you know, our purposes and, you know, how to understand who we are, because I think a lot of us are desperate to be connected to something, connected to our people connected to communities connected to something. So just from my own experience, working with all sorts of people, doing the work that we do, you know, there's that understanding that I take from it is, you know, you were talking about Mitákuye Oyas'in earlier, and starting to really understand what that means. Not just with humans with other humans but with ourselves and with the planets and with the various loves everything. You know, it's all still a learning process. We're all still trying to figure

> it out. Because this is years and years and years and years of unresolved trauma. You know, a lot of stuff that was forced on us that we had no clue how to deal with. And so now we have to live and still try to get through a lot of that trauma that we were dealt with that was forced on us literally, violently.

**Kinship/Being a Good Relative**

Discussion in the Community Kinship Circle around the topic kinship/being a good relative revolved around three themes: evolving and changing, relying on intuition and instinct, and Western influence causes difficulty and trauma. Evolving and Changing

Čēphanši núnpa talked about this theme in the context of her extended family, specifically her great grandmother. Like most other participants, Čēphanši núnpa told a story of a family that would visit her great grandmother and not leave until she cooked them something!

*Čēphanši núnpa*

> What it means to be a good relative in context. My dad and my mom always tell me stories of when I was young, my great grandma, she babysat me off and on from the time when I was a newborn till she passed away when I was around seven or eight. And every time someone walked into her home, she would start cooking. There was this a story of this family that knew that about her. And so, when they didn't have anything, they would bring their whole family and they would sit in her little house and they would visit and visit and my dad, he always tells me the story to remind me of how to run my home. He said, but everybody's not perfect. Even your grandma, he said I knew she would get irritated with this family because sometimes they would come very late at night, and they wouldn't leave until she fed them. And in her old age, she became more stubborn until there were times where they would have a showdown where she would sit there and try to

> outlast them, but they would not leave until she cooked. And so, he said eventually she would get up and he said she had kind of a limp, and she would get her cane and go to the stove and she would start cooking. And then they would eat and then they would go to bed.

***Rely on Intuition and Instinct***

The second theme in kinship/being a good relative involved relying on intuition and instinct. Čēphanši wánči talked about the realization she had on the connection between the importance of developing intuition and instinct and how that was tied to being a good relative. She told a story about how her responsibilities as a relative changed as her nephews and nieces grew.

*Čēphanši wánči*

> I was thinking about how I feel like it's something that I'm always growing into. And my understanding and my role changes. As it evolves. It grows as I change. So, an example is it's only recently that I really feel the responsibility of what it is to be an auntie to be an aunt. At this age, it's different than when I was younger. When I was younger, I was like the cool auntie. I was the young, cool auntie. The weirdo artists kind of on the outside. I did what I wanted and that had a certain kind of feeling and kinship and connection that I had with the younger ones in in the family. However, there's something that has changed in the last few years. I'm suddenly, I'm older, and my nieces and nephews the younger ones are getting older. Their problems are getting bigger and more serious. Their decisions the things that they're going through are life changing. And so, the way that I, I'm much more aware of my words, the things I say to them, my presence with them. And so, it has really changed and the other thing I think about when someone* was talking

> about intuition, And I had never heard someone talk about intuition in this way like with the words that she chose, but she talked about intuition. She said that it was our responsibility as Lakota people to strengthen our intuition. I had never heard someone say that, like as a responsibility to strengthen it in order to be a good relative.

***Western Influence Causes Difficulty and Trauma***

The third theme in kinship/being a good relative involved discussion about how Western influence causes difficulty and trauma. Čēphanši yámni spoke of generational trauma beginning with her grandmother being orphaned and sent to a Christian boarding school.

*Čēphanši yámni*

> [When asked about being a good relative and kinship] That's a hard one. I think that one is kind of. I feel like for me. It's more of like an unedited section of this like manifesto that I'm just writing in my head. Yeah, 'because I feel like it's been greatly interrupted. What I am and what I was. Well, what I am now is probably completely different to what I was supposed to be – who would I be if my grandmother had not been orphaned, and sent to a boarding school, and along with all her sisters and my aunts being sent to boarding school, and then, all of them being raised Christian and that Christian mentality being like. passed on. That's like, that's the realness of what I've had to contend with at what I've had like you're given something, and that's like what you have to live with. And so, because of that, like there's trauma, there's generational trauma. There wasn't ever this I can say all these flowery things about what kinship was, but I would be completely lying - If I don't say I come from a place of deep loss. Deep disconnection deep assault. Deep. Everything like wounds hurt wounds, and that it's taken. And so, I guess, like I feel like I'm at odds with it right now, because I'm trying to deconstruct it and trying to figure

> out what was it really? And what can it be? And can it be that? And if you don't agree with it, then are you still local? If you don't identify with it. Are you still a part of the sacred?

## Creative Practice

Discussion in the Community Kinship Circle around the topic of creative practice relative revolved around two themes: Guided by kinship and grounded in Mitákuye Oyas'in and teach and share and connection to be people and land.

### *Guided by Kinship and Grounded in Mitákuye Oyas'in*

Čēphanši wánči had a unique perspective of creative practice; she described it as a sense of accountability to her family and others who read her work.

*Čēphanši wánči*

> There're different ways that that idea [creative practice] comes into the way that I work and that I practice. The first thing I think about is a sense of accountability. So, you know, especially as writers, or when I'm working visually and making something but especially when I'm right, there's words on the page, and they're put out there in the world. And it almost feels like it's written in concrete, you know once it goes out. So, I always feel the people that I feel most accountable to, the very the people who are most important, are my family and my community. And so they're foremost in my mind. And so there's like, also simple or practical ways that I work with that. So for example, if any of my relatives I, for most, for the most part in my writing, I do not include people's names. Every now and then I do but for privacy, I do not include their specific names. I might refer to them as my auntie or you know, something like that. But even if their name is not in it, I still go to them and I show them what I've written first, and I asked their

permission and I asked if they feel good about that. And part of that too, is I feel like my work my writing, my art would not exist without them. Because it's for us and it's about us, you know, and I always try to credit them credit people where they need to be credited. But in that regard, I almost feel like everything I do is a collaboration. So I am even if it's like a memory, a memory involves others, you know, so and that memory comes into my work for a reason. So, in that, that is one of the ways that I think that those ideas influence my work my way of working. And I think it's a lot of it, like I said is that sense of connection and accountability and respect for the people that I love my family my community.

***To Teach and Share and Connection to be People and Land***

Čēphanši tópa and Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa had differing views on teaching and sharing. Čēphanši tópa said “we’re not teachers, we’re just sharing.” Conversely, Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa said she always tries to teach and that it is important to spread around “what we learn.”

*Čēphanši tópa*

During the buffalo butchering and the natural food classes. Whenever we go into it, it's always you know, we're not teachers, we're just sharing what we understand because of that being placed above somebody else, you know, and look at me, I'm the only one who knows you know, and I think that's why it's been so successful for us because, you know, it's like leveling that playing ground. You know, when we're learning where it's like, we're all learning this. Everybody has something to contribute.

*Tȟuŋwiŋla núŋpa*

I always try to teach. I never keep anything. I just spread it around … because I was talking about what we learn, we have to give it to others because once we're not here, it's

not gonna just wander around someplace until somebody grabs it, you know. So we have to teach.

We grew up in a big family and my mom was raised with two of her nephews. My grandma and grandpa raised two of them until they were more like younger brothers to her. And my mom was the youngest out of her family. And so growing up, when we had like Thanksgiving dinner, she used to buy a lot more than what we could eat. And she always used to say just leave it and then here comes our cousin with his family and a bunch of kids so they would come in, and she just knew that they were going to be there. And so that's how what she did she like took care of more like little brothers, you know and their family and their kids. And so, that's how, I mean for a long time when we were small, I kinda knew they were, they weren't really her brothers, but that's how I see them like her younger brothers. And she loved her all her nieces and nephews, and not just I mean, she showed it. And so I used to say, I wonder how she can do that. And then I said, and I was telling my sisters, and I said, Now I know how mom feels. After you all had kids, and I said I love them just like my own and that I didn't see them as nieces and nephews but like my kids and their kids are my grandkids. You know, that how we all are, our whole family is that way and each one our grandkids or kids they're all just like their kids than their grandkids and all the kids all the little ones are comfortable in each one of the families because the closeness. That's how I see it and then I see that other families too. I mean, they just take care of each other you know, like, you could take care of your own kids or, or how you would treat your mom you treat your aunt that way too. It's your uncle's or like your dad and then male cousins are more like brothers, either recently or, you know, tiblo (older brother). And so that's how we grew up. And like, I

guess it's also respect, showing respect to the ones out there that aren't related to us, you know, but we still see them as our tuwin (aunt) like the older ones.

**Final Observation**

As a final observation I wanted to share the story a quick edited version of Pte San Win (white buffalo calf woman), a sacred woman who brought the pipe to the Lakota people. The community participants all agreed that Pte San Win could be seen as a first woman leader. Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči stated "Pte San Win, was the beginning of our role as leader, gave us [the Lakota] all of the infrastructure to deal with everything, it was a woman to bring that forward, she was the original"

The gifting of the pipe as told by Arvol Look Horse, the 19$^{th}$ keeper of the original pipe from Pte San Win:

*At that time, not long after the Flood, the People still followed the buffalo, but they had forgotten the Creator and the teachings of the buffalo. They were trying to control one another, be more than who they are. The buffalo disappeared and the People were starving and crying. They grew too weak even to move camp, and so they sent out scouts to look for buffalo or other game. But always they returned empty-handed. Then one day they sent out two scouts, who saw not even a rabbit the whole day. Dejected, they started back to camp from their failed hunt, traveling through the woods and rolling hills, northeast of the sacred Black Hills. It was a beautiful day, the sky blue with few white clouds. As the two scouts were returning to the camp, they saw a woman come over a hill, and they watched in awe, wondering what a woman alone could be doing out here in the middle of nowhere.*

*Dressed in a beautiful white buckskin dress, this woman approached them carrying a bundle in her arms. One of the scouts, seeing the beauty of the woman, felt lust for her. He said, "She's so beautiful. I think I'll take her for a wife." As they were talking, she came closer and she pointed to the one with the bad thoughts, as if beckoning him. He went towards her, thinking to take her. The other scout tried to stop him saying, "She's sent by the Great Spirit. She's the answer to the People's prayers for help. She must be a Spirit-woman. Don't approach her with such thoughts on your mind." But the lustful scout refused to listen. As he reached for the woman, a swirling cloud suddenly came down and enveloped him. When the cloud lifted, he was laying there at her feet all bones, a skeleton with snakes crawling from his head. Then the Spirit woman pointed to the other scout, who trembled before her, and she said, "Go, tell your People what you have seen here. Tell them to build an altar of sage and cherry branches, and also to put up a great tipi, and I will come tomorrow from where the sunsets. Tell them I have a great gift to give them, a gift kept in this sacred bundle. And she told him, "Tell them just what I have said. Don't make more than what it is and don't make less than what it is!"*

*The scout thanked her for the Message. Still filled with fear, he backed slowly away from the woman, then ran back to the camp and told the People what had happened and what the Spirit-woman had told them—no more, no less. In the camp, the Buffalo People followed the instructions given by the scout and put up their tipi and prepared the altar with sage and cherry branches to each cardinal direction. Behold the very next day, as she had promised, she returned out of the sunset. As she moved toward them, carrying the Bundle in her outstretched arms, she sang a beautiful song that we still sing today. Walking clockwise around the altar of sage and cherry branches, she set down the*

*Sacred Bundle in the altar, then opened it to reveal the sacred ca.nu.pa. She told them, "This ca.nu.pa, you will make direct personal contact with Waka. Ta.ka.."She said, "Following the way of this sacred ca.nu.pa, you will walk in a sacred way upon the Earth, for the Earth is your grandmother and your mother and she is sacred." She told them, "The red stone of the ca.nu.pa's bowl represents the blood of the People, and it also represents the female. And the wooden stem represents the Tree of Life, and it also represents the male. The Tree of Life also represents the root of our ancestors, and as this Tree grows so does the spirit of the people." She said "When you put the ca.nu.pa's bowl and stem together, you connect the world above and the world below. The only time the ca.nu.pa is put together is when you are in prayer. And when you pray with the ca.nu.pa, humble yourself. Present your prayers to all 4 Sacred Directions, and then pray to the Great Spirit above and Mother Earth below. Sing your songs and pray for life, peace, harmony and happiness."*

*She warned, "You must have a good heart and a good mind to go to the ceremonies. Honor the Sacred Places, the Sacred Ceremonies, and the Sacred Sites. Each Sacred Site is an altar to the Great Spirit. Gather there often and pray the prayers and sing the songs I have taught you. In time, you will understand the meaning of the Seven Sacred Rites that come with this sacred bundle." She left in a clockwise motion returning to where the sunsets. On top of the hill, she stopped and looked back, then rolled over and became a young beautiful black buffalo. The second time she was a red buffalo, then a yellow buckskin buffalo, and finally a white buffalo. This is where she received her name Pte Sa. Wi. and our Seven Rites were given.*

*This gathering was for me the beginning of another road as balance and harmony must be brought back to our individuals, families, and nations. She motivated us, empowered us and we made it this far and the future will be better as we must teach others, our children especially as Winyans are the backbone of families and need to be respected and honored.*

I share the story as evidence that Lakota women have grounded the community and guided them in a type of leadership. Guiding with kinship, creativity, and the principle of Mitakuye Oyasin.

Pte San Win reminds the community of their kinship responsibilities, that the must stay connected with their ancestors, with the earth, and with each other in ceremony – or action. She brought the pipe and a way to interact with the pipe – the pipe is a made object, a creative practice, along with songs, and motions to accompany the pipe – all of these are creative practices.

# CHAPTER 5

# CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this Indigenous phenomenological study presented in Chapter 4 reflect the understandings and experiences of six Lakota women who are artists, creatives, and culture bearers, working in the Lakota community. I used an Indigenous phenomenological approach which allowed me to illuminate detailed descriptions and personal meaning, and through indigenous methodologies, avoid Western research paradigm issues related to Native communities discussed in Chapter 2. This ensured that the Lakota community participants were given the cultural respect and reciprocity they deserved and aided in creating meaningful dialogue. During a follow-up conversation, one community participant stated, “I trust you, I know you wouldn’t put anything out that shouldn’t be.” With the community participants’ permission and support, I aim to share a meaningful reflection of their experiences and understandings.

## Discussion of Findings

These findings present the experiences and understandings of six Lakota woman artists, creatives, and culture bearers, chosen via purposeful sampling. I included understandings with the experiences because the participants in the Community Kinship Circle immediately began to work together to co-construct the meaning of the different topics to those that we discussed. It gave them common beginning that allowed for expansion.

This is a study about *leadership*, yet I have purposely omitted that term in this chapter, as all the participants said that they did not think of themselves as leaders in a Lakota way. One participant did state, however, that in a Western setting she would consider herself a leader because she is appointed or paid to “lead” a class; the roles are clear in that setting.

*Čēphanši wánči*:

> In Western institutions, we received titles and positions that tell the world how to view us. But in our community, as Lakota people, we are one amongst everyone. We give what we can, and we hope that is creates something good. This is not because we are paid or appointed, it is because it is part of our responsibilities and kinship.

The participants who are teachers but not in a Western setting, such as teaching buffalo butchering, also did not see themselves as leaders. It was only in relationship to a Western setting where a participant would consider themselves a leader.

Discussion in the Community Kinship Circle focused on four topic areas, each topic included one to three sub-themes. A thorough and an in-depth analysis of the community participants' collective narratives co-constructed experiences and understanding in each topic.

1. Lakota Women's Leadership. This topic included two themes: Leadership is a Western concept and Lakota women do not see themselves as leaders. Lakota women describe their roles as fulfilling kinship responsibilities and doing what must be done or doing the hard things.
2. Mitákuye Oyas'in. This topic also included two themes: It is everything and responsibility, and it is known and it is unknown.
3. Kinship/Being a good relative. This topic included three themes: Evolving and changing, rely on intuition and instinct, and Western influence causes difficulty and trauma.
4. Creative practices included two themes: They are guided by kinship and grounded in Mitákuye Oyas'in, and to teach and share and connection to people and land.

**Research Question**

The research question that guided this study was: How do Lakota women experience their leadership when working in community? The four topics were derived from this single research question.

***Lakota Women's Leadership***

The community participants collectively agreed that leadership is a Western concept, and the introduction of it to their (our) communities has caused a disruption in the Lakota way of life. The community participants each mentioned that they did not want to be seen as a leader, nor did they seek out the responsibility of leadership. They all felt there was a responsibility to the role, even if the role was not wanted. While the group did not specifically use this term, it can be described as kinship responsibilities. Each community participant said things like "Who else will do it?", "I am doing this for my children," "I do this to teach others," "I feel like my role is to challenge and do or say the hard things." Most of the group referenced their grandmother as being the leader they most looked up to. One community participant did not have this experience with a grandmother but did with other elder women in their life.

*Tȟuŋwiŋla wánči*

> I am a product of the boarding school era, but being raised by grandma in the leadership role that she had you know, within her, everything was the wahokunkiya (women's advising) part, the advising, you know, as we were growing into teachings. We're all hands-on and the words that she had said or spoken to us–I really didn't pay attention till maybe in my later years after Grandma had passed away. I thought about a lot of the things that she had said and how much of a role she played in my life. Being taught and told how to forgive and be part of the Boarding School Era had I not known that I

> wouldn't be who I am today, you know, just so I'm always grateful. I would say I'm really grateful for my grandma. Being there in my life and being a huge leader in my life, it gave me a lot of knowledge about everything that I do.

***Mitákuye Oyas'in***

The discussion of the Lakota philosophical theory Mitákuye Oyas'in was to ensure the group, community participants, had the same understanding, as it was important to prioritize throughout the analysis. Based on the communities co-constructed knowledge, there are two experiences and understanding that emerged for Mitákuye Oyas'in. One, it is everything, meaning our relationships to others including all that we see and cannot see and it carries with it responsibilities to both, the human and nonhuman relatives. Two, it is known and unknown to us. Known  because we understand it; it carries with it a burden because of its vastness; and unknown because we have a limited understanding of it and much to learn.

The understanding of Mitákuye Oyas'in was integral to the way community participants moved through the world. Marshall (2002) and Amiotte (1983) noted that we are a part of something greater than ourselves and that we are all connected.

***Kinship/Being a Good Relative***

The experiences with kinship and being a good relative could be negative at times, and troublesome. This was another area in which the group felt the Western influence has caused a disruption in the way that they have understood it. As Dakota scholar Ella Deloria (1944) said, it is an all-important matter. It is a complex network of ideas and can differ from community to community. The community participants explained that it is significant to them, and while there have been times in their lives that it has caused harm, the idea of kinship and being a good relative is always front and center as they make decisions about their day to day lives.

*Čēphanši núnpa*

> I constantly think about it [kinship and being a good relative] about, it's just that once you learn a little bit about it, you're always thinking about it in the back of your mind, you know asking, is this conducive to whatever I'm doing?

There is also an understanding that kinship and being a good relative is evolutionary, and it changes along with the person. A person's role in their community or in their work contributes to the aspects of kinship and being a good relative. There is no single way to be a good relative, it is something that will always change, as the person changes. Participants discussed that to remain flexible in those changes, participants discussed the need for requires intuition and instinct; they also talked about the importance of growing and developing those two senses as kinship responsibilities and understanding being a good relative evolves.

Oglala Lakota scholar, artist, and poet Layli Long Soldier explained:

> …instinct is not the same as intuition, though I believe they are cousins. In intuition, there is room for planning and negotiation. Let's say, I have an intuition that my nephew has a crush on someone. There is time for me to watch, to talk to him about it; room to guide. Yes, usually my intuition is right about these things. But instinct is much older than me and it will not let me negotiate. I can't ignore its command, so I frequently submit. I listen to my elder. (Long Soldier, 2020)

These two senses are important to kinship and being a good relative; it is the responsibility of the person to hone them to continue to be a good relative.

***Creative Practices***

Creative practices are processes in which community connects to each other culturally and outside the binary of the division of Western perspectives; they provide fertile opportunities

to teach and share with community. This work is done with intentions of kinship and being a good relative, and the embodiment of Mitákuye Oyas'in.

The value of creative practices is not in the final product, but in the process. Each community participant spoke of the process of working with community: butchering a bison, creating a poem, or teaching children. All these endeavors fall within a continuum of Lakota creativity. Čēphanši yámni, in our follow-up conversation, confided that her dream would be to live on the prairie and make art with friends and family all day. In other words, making art is not an individual pursuit—it includes others, community, the collective. The process of creativity reminds us/holds us, whether we know it out not, of/within historical practices – grounding us with our ancestors. Again, it is not the product, but the process of creating together that is Lakota women's leadership because the end product will be meaningless without cultural continuity.

**Theoretical Implication**

The importance of Indigenous focus research done by Indigenous people in an Indigenous methodology broadens the spectrum of knowledge and pushes the boundaries of Western systems, expanding their approaches. Theoretically the establishment and re-establishment of Lakota ways of being is vital to the continuum of the Lakota people. The literature revealed in Chapter 2 that Lakota people have many leaders, often viewed as romanticized stoic male Indians – rarely is there a perspective on Lakota women leadership.

Grambell (2012) published a study titled "Lakota Women Leaders: Getting Things Done Quietly" and while I still do not agree with the notion that Lakota women are quiet—as I see it as a fabrication of colonization – I can now understand the implication Grambell's study was intending. Lakota women lead through action, they do not proclaim to be a leader (or assume this title), as it is a stagnant post; the action in leading is where Lakota women's' leadership lies. The

actions are then the principal factor for Lakota women's leadership, the actions of the creating, where they get to teach and share; of fulfilling their kinship responsibilities by being a good relative; and embodying Mitákuye Oyas'in throughout their lives.

*Čēphanši wánči*

> I'm thinking of something that's conceptual with regard to action… the fact that Lakota language is a verb-based language. Sentence structures are formed around what the subject is doing—there is no complete sentence without a form of action. An example is a person cannot "be" outside. They must be doing something outside. At least, this is what I understand from language classes! And I have thought about that a lot! As I've said before, the is no "is-ing" in Lakota language. We must be doing something in order to be spoken of.

*Cephansi núnpa* [when discussing her leadership experiences]

> I think about that, but I think that it's almost like taboo for us to say that as Lakota women, because of the whole you know, camp life mindset and everyone has a role and everyone knows who to go to, the people to look towards for guidance and things like that. And it doesn't really need to be verbalized like, you know, I'm the leader, or I'm a leader. And if that's how people, you know, view me or want to say about me, then I'm very humbled and honored and gracious, but at the same time, almost want to reject that position. And the idea of fulfilling this image of what it means to be a leader, because then I feel like I become more susceptible to going off of my I don't know how to say it like my path. You know, straying from the principles of being of our way of life, I guess.

In my positionality statement at the beginning of this dissertation, I stated that I was writing this in the English language because of the colonization of the Lakota people, and that

erasure of the Lakota language has taken away our ability to speak for ourselves from our perspective. There are times when the Lakota language is the only way to explain an idea or perspective, and as I consider theoretical implications I am overwhelmed with grief and sadness. The grief that I will never be fully understood in this Western institution, and the sadness for what has been taken from me and my community.

Yet, there is much to learn, share, and grow. As I assert the importance of the Indigenous, specifically Lakota, methodologies in this research, the community participants and I demand to be heard and recognized. We are moving beyond the romanticized stoic Indian man, the colonial fabrication of "quietly getting things done," and showing through action what it can mean to lead community.

In my continued attempt to disrupt colonialism, and as I have stated in the literature review – colonialism is often male-dominated, capitalist-driven, extractive, and harmful – the Lakota women I sat with during the Community Kinship Circle showed up ready to be with each other and grow. The importance of centering their stories, thoughts and approaches to leadership gives me/us/them the ability to support and rebuild Lakota identities from an Indigenous (Lakota) feminist approach. The documenting of their experiences and understanding gives something to other Lakota people to read about Lakota women. As Marshal (2002) has said, "we [Lakota people] survive by living the virtues we learn from stories…remaining true to ourselves" (p. xiii).

**É-hča khó Ikčéka** (The Essence With the Ordinary)

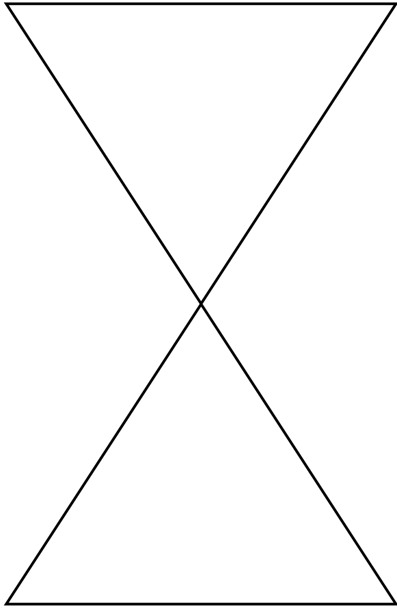
A refusal. The community participants in this study shared a collective refusal. The refusal to accept that leadership was an experience they had or wanted. They did share their personal reflections of their lived experiences working with community. The experience of being

with community is described in action, the act of making and doing, being with community. These acts of doing and being all came from either a reflection of their own teachings, and/or out of the absence of it in their lives – so that they might do and be for those who are coming after them.

The Lakota people have a symbol we call it kapémni (figure 1), which translates to "swirl around." The symbol though is a vortex of sorts, and a reflection, a mirroring of two spaces, above and below. The translation is an action, and not necessarily the object but what the symbol is doing. These two things action and reflection tell me of Lakota women, the community participants. In the reflection, the community participants are expressing equality – and not in the contemporary terms of "diversity, equity and inclusion," but in a reciprocal relationship. See Figure 1.

**Figure 1**

*kapémni*



The experiences in/with community they shared are the everyday. They (the experiences) are ordinary/common – ikčé. The Lakota life is meant to be ordinary, to be common – no one is above anyone else. Leadership for the women in my study results in a reflection of our actions as common people in Lakota communities. They employ an ethnographic refusal by challenging and being aware of settler ideas of leadership while also demonstrating a grounded concept of Lakota leadership.

The community participants who shared their experiences exemplify the Lakota life, reflecting Pte San Win's actions, and refusing Western ideologies. Although they have all had times of frustration and even hopelessness, they have taken those moments to pause and reflect their grandmother's teachings or Pte San Win's teachings, or how they hope to reflect themselves to others. The participants are always thinking of others in their actions, as in "How do I pass this along? How can this help others?" All the while, they never abandon themselves.

The community participants are in a deep reciprocal relationship with the community on an everyday level. They spend their time doing and being with community, rather than trying to influence them as a leader might. They are looking to be integrated into the community rather than singled-out with "importance."

**Recommendation for Practice**

The experience and understandings that emerged from this research indicate that Lakota women are leading community using their creative practices *outside* of the Western system. They do this guided by kinship and being a good relative and grounding themselves in Mitákuye Oyas'in. While they struggle with the Western concepts that have clouded the Lakota way of being in the world, they want to continue to learn and grow in a Lakota way. The findings in this research suggest ways to help Lakota women continue to lead in a Lakota way:

- Create time and space for Lakota women to meet and discuss kinship and being a good relative – untangle from Western influences.
- Continue community focused creative practices. Examples include sewing circles, women advising circle, local food harvesting (buffalo butchering, medicine gathering, etc.)
- Ensure there is space to evolve and change; Lakota culture is not stagnant and should not be stuck in harmful ways (especially those influenced by Western society).

Finally, Lakota women need their own space and time to create, to untangle from settler colonialism.

**Limitations of the Study**

There were four limitations to the study. The first was the continued constraints created by the COVID-19 virus. While the at this point the global pandemic has been declared over, the infections of the virus still threaten vulnerable community members. This caused the Community Kinship Circle to be a hybrid meeting, with some attending in person and some online. There were difficulties with internet connections, and then not being able to be together as a whole group. The intention was to share a meal together, which is customary in the Lakota community, giving us time to connect with each other before we spend time sharing our experiences. There are some in-person nuances that we lost while in the hybrid meeting, and those may have affected the quality of the experiences and understanding shared. The second area of concern would be the small sample size. The study results reflect only the experiences of six women participants, and to the Lakota Oyate (Nation). The findings may not apply or be generalized to those outside the Lakota community. This is also true of research conducted using Indigenous methodologies. The third would be my connection to my community as I am part of the sample population. Therefore, the Indigenous phenomenological approach to the shared meanings with the participants could be viewed as potentially biased. The fourth and final limitation would be that I focused the group to discuss only four topics, which may have limited their responses.

**Consideration for Future Research**

The purpose of this research was to document Lakota women's experiences, as it is rarely documented, and rarely done by Lakota women themselves. We need more research conducted in this manner. It is important for Lakota women to be able to develop and strengthen their own voice in research. At the end of the Community Kinship Circle all the community participants

expressed a want and need to continue these sort of conversations, Lakota women together collectively discussing and sharing about our experiences.

It is evident through this study that a specific Lakota approach is needed, and any future studies about Lakota women should be done by Lakota women for Lakota women. Some of those studies could be:

- the development of a fully Indigenous research study of Lakota women leading,
- a study into the importance of Lakota arts and culture and its relationship to Lakota epistemology,
- a similar study with a larger sample size, and multiple Community Kinship Circles and open the topics up to include more than just four focus areas.
- research and exploration into the Lakota language as a path to decolonization.

**Conclusion**

The final chapter has provided an overview of the findings, the theoretical implications, recommendations for the future practice, limitations of the study, and considerations for future research. The overarching experiences and understandings that emerged for the community participants guided the foundation for the theoretical implications. Marshall (2002) stated that "By providing both knowledge and inspiration, stories continue to strengthen Lakota society and enable us to cope with our world, and the times we live in." (p. xiii). Documenting these Lakota women's experiences and understandings of the way they lead community is foundational to the continued strength of the Lakota Oyate.

Through this process I hope to contribute to ongoing conversations related to Lakota knowledge – a "for us by us" type of thing. This is an act of reclamation. The purpose was to document the experiences of Lakota women using creative practices to work in community. I

also understood that leadership experience could be defined as Lakota kinship and relational practices guided by Mitákuye Oyas'in. Also, I did this to offer other Lakota scholars a touch point, as I have always felt my academic experience did not include enough Indigenous theory and pedagogy. The stories these Lakota women have shared with me are a step to strengthen the Lakota people's knowledge and Lakota women's feminism approach. Despite the domination of Western influences and culture on this land, the values and practices of "leadership" among Lakota women remain timeless.

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## Appendix A

## Oceti Sakowin Detailed Description

This document was developed by Mary V. Bordeaux in 2015 as an accumulation of information for a handout for museum docents to use.

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**Oceti Sakowin** (Seven Council Fires). The original council fire was the Mdewakontonwas, and when and how the subdivision happened is unknown, but what is accepted is the temporal order of the seven council fires (or Oyates) that make up the Oceti Sakowin. The order is:

**Oceti Sakowin (Seven Council Fires)**

1. Mdewakantonwas (Mysterious Lake or Spirit Lake Village) – original council fire
2. Wahpekute (Shooters among the leaf or Leaf shooters)
3. Wahpetonwan (Dwellers among the leaf or Leaf Village)
4. Sisitonwan (Those that live among slimy fish entrails or Swamp Village)
5. Ihanktonwan (Those who camp at the upper end or End Village)
6. Ihanktonwanna (Those who camp at the lower end or Little End Village)
7. Titonwan (Prairie dwellers or Plains Village)

The Oceti Sakowin group is divided into Three Divisions: Dakota, Nakota, and Lakota (these three divisions are equivalent to the term "Sioux." However, the term Sioux is inappropriate since it is not a word of any of the three divisions of the Oceti Sakowin group.

**Dakota or Isanti Oyate pi (Knife lakers) or Santee**

- Mdewakantonwas ((Mysterious Lake or Spirit Lake Village)
- Wahpekute (Shooters among the leaf or Leaf shooters)
- Wahpetonwan (Dwellers among the leaf or Leaf Village)
- Sisitonwan (Those who live among slimy fish entrails or Swamp Village)

**Nakota or Wiciyela pi (Those who speak like men)** or Yankton

- Ihanktonwan (Those who camp at the upper end or End Village)
- Ihanktonwanna (Those who camp at the lower end orLittle End Village)

**Lakota or Tinte ta tunwan pi (Those who live on the prairie)**

- Titonwan (Prairie dwellers or Plains Village)
  - Oglala (Scatters their own)
  - Mniconjous (Planters along the streams)
  - Sicangu (Burnt thigh)
  - Oohenunpa (Two paunch boiling kettle)
  - Itazipco (No bows)
  - Sihasapa (Blackfoot)
  - Hunkpapa (End of Horn)

**Reservations on which these Nations can now be found**
The word "Sioux" is the official federal name the United States Government gave the Nations and is thus still used. Some Nations are working towards it, and some have successfully changed their official names. Example: Sisseton Sioux Tribe's name has been changed officially to Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate.

**Dakota or Isanti Oyate pi (Knife lakers) or Santee**

- **Mdewakantonwas ((Mysterious Lake or Spirit Lake Village)**
  - Yankton Sioux Tribe of the Yankton Sioux Reservation – Marty, SD
  - Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe of the Flandreau Reservation – Flandreau, SD
  - Santee Sioux Tribe of the Santee Reservation – Santee, NE
  - Upper Sioux Community – Granite Falls, MN
  - Lower Sioux Indian Community in the State of Minnesota
  - Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community of Minnesota – Shakopee, MN
  - Prairie Island Indian Community in the State of Minnesota
- **Wahpekute (Shooters among the leaf or Leaf shooters)**
  - Crow Creek Sioux Tribe of the Crow Creek Reservation – Fort Thompson, SD
  - Santee Sioux Tribe of the Santee Reservation – Santee, NE
  - Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation – Sisseton, SD
  - Upper Sioux Community – Granite Falls, MN
  - Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, MT
- **Wahpetonwan (Dwellers amount the leaf or Leaf Village)**
  - Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation – Sisseton, SD
  - Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe of the Flandreau Reservation – Flandreau, SD
  - Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, MT
- **Sisitonwan (Those who live among slimy fish entrails or Swamp Village)**
  - Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate of the Lake Traverse Reservation – Sisseton, SD
  - Spirit Lake Tribe – Fort Totten, ND
  - Upper Sioux Community – Granite Fall, MN

**Nakota or Wiciyela pi (Those who speak like men) or Yankton**

- **Ihanktonwan (Those who camp at the upper end or End Village)**
  - Yankton Sioux Tribe of the Yankton Sioux Reservation – Marty, SD
  - Santee Sioux Tribe of the Santee Reservation – Santee, NE
  - Upper Sioux Community – Granite Falls, MN
- **Ihanktonwanna (Those who camp at the lower end or Little End Village)**
  - Stand Rock tribe of Standing Rock Reservation (S.D. and N.D.) – Fort Yates, ND
  - Spirit Lake Tribe – Fort Totten, ND

**Lakota or Tinte ta tunwan pi (Those who live on the prairie)**

- **Titonwan (Prairie dwellers or Plains Village)**
  - Oglala (Scatters their own)
    - Oglala Sioux Tribe of the Pine Ridge Reservation – Pine Ridge, SD
  - Mniconjous (Planters along the streams)
    - Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of the Cheyenne River Reservation – Eagle Butte, SD

- Sicangu (Burnt thigh) or Brule Sicangu
    - Rosebud Sioux Tribe of the Rosebud Sioux Reservation – Rosebud, SD
    - Lower Brule Sioux Tribe of the Lower Brule Reservation – Lower Brule, SD
- Oohenunpa (Two paunch boiling kettle)
    - Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of the Cheyenne River Reservation – Eagle Butte, SD
- Itazipco (No bows)
    - Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of the Cheyenne River Reservation – Eagle Butte, SD
- Sihasapa (Blackfoot)
    - Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe of the Cheyenne River Reservation – Eagle Butte, SD
- Hunkpapa (End of Horn)
    - Crow Creek Sioux Tribe of the Crow Creek Reservation – Fort Thompson, SD
    - Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes of the Fort Peck Indian Reservation, MT

Note: These two sources were used to form the contents of this appendix:

- Oceti Sakowin Arts and Identities – Cultural Competency Training, January 6, 2014 – Instructor Craig Howe, PhD
- BIA (Bureau of Indian Affairs), *Federal Register, 80*(9). Wednesday, January 14, 2015
- Handout from the Oglala Tribal Historic Preservation Office, April 2015 www.bia.gov

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## Appendix B

## Community Kinship Circle Topics and Questions

These topics were used to guide the participants to tell their stories; it is important in an Indigenous methodology approach to let the participants guide the circle, honoring their knowledge, and to give space for memories and holistic conversation that is not forced by formalities. It is important to have less structured research tools to allow participants to relate to each topic and, as Kovach (2021) stated, “Sharing one’s own story is an aspect to co-construct knowledge from an Indigenous perspective” (p. 166). There is a need for flexibility and to not be prescriptive, so participants can co-construct knowledge from each other’s stories.

**General Overall Question**:

How do you experience leadership when working in community?

**Topic 1**: Leadership

- Could you describe Lakota women’s leadership?
  - *Probe Question:* Do you consider yourself a leader?

**Topic 2**: Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ

- How would you explain Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ and its connection to Lakota women's leadership?
  - *Probe Question:* Does Mitákuye Oyás’iŋ guide your work in community, your creative practice; and your interaction in the Lakota community?

**Topic 3**: Kinship & being a good relative

- How would you explain kinship and being a good relative and its connection to Lakota women's leadership?

    - *Probe Question:* Does kinship and being a good relative guide your work in, your creative practice, and your interaction in the Lakota community?

**Topic 4**: Creative practice

- Do you use your creative work with community to be a good relative?
    - *Probe Question:* Can you share examples?

# Appendix C

## Construct Matric for Topics and Questions

Construct Matric for Topics and Questions (divided by subject)

| Literature | Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ | Kinship & being a good relative | Leadership | Creative Practice |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Amiotte, A. (1983). Perspectives on Lakota world view. | x | | x | |
| Bordeaux, M. V., Bordeaux, C., & Long Soldier, L. (2017, June). | x | | | x |
| Deloria, E. C. (1944). *Speaking of Indians* | | x | | |
| Deloria, E. C., DeMallie, R. J., Veyrié, T., & Deloria, P. J. (2022). *The Dakota way of life.* | x | x | x | |
| Gambrell, K. M. (2016). Lakota women leaders: Getting things done quietly. *Leadership, 12*(3). | x | | x | |
| Howe, O. (April 18, 1958). [Letter to Miss Snodgrass, curator at Philbrook Art Center]. | | | | x |
| Marshall, J., III. (2002). *The Lakota ways: Stories and lessons for living.* | x | x | x | |
| Mithlo, N. M. (2012). No word for art in our language? Old questions, new paradigms. | | | | x |
| Peterson, L. R. J. (2018). *Uncovering Indigenous models of leadership.* | | | x | |
| Tall Bear, K. (2003). DNA, blood, and racializing the tribe. | | x | | |
| West, W. R., Jr. (2022, May 15). *W. Richard West Keynote.* | | x | | x |

## Appendix D

## Recruitment Email

Hello (*Relative term*),

I hope this message/email finds you well. As you may know, I am working on my doctoral education, and I am reaching out to you with the hope that you can participate in a Community Kinship Circle (similar to a focus group) for my research project.

The Community Kinship Circle would consist of a couple of hours, in person, if possible, at Racing Magpie in Rapid City, SD. If folks are hesitant about being in person for any reason, the Community Kinship Circle could be done via Zoom. The informal group conversation would be a discussion in community about leadership, Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ, kinship/being a good relative, and creative practices.

My research project is looking at documenting Lakota women artists/culture bearers/creatives leading, guided by the principles of Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ. My hope is that in our Community Kinship Circle, I (we) will gain a deeper understanding of Lakota women leadership. The title of my dissertation (research project) is *Mitákuye Oyás'iŋ and a Lakota Leadership Paradigm: A Qualitative Study of Lakota Women Artists Leading Community.*

If you are interested in participating, please fill out this short questionnaire that will inform if you are able to participate and what dates are available for you.

A meal will be provided during the Community Kinship Circle, and mileage to folks who have to drive a distance further than 20 miles.

If you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me through email at mvxxxx@smumn.edu or via phone or text at (605) –XXX-XXXX.

yuónihaŋyaŋ (respectfully),

Mary V Bordeaux
*(Sicangu Oglala Lakota)*
EdD Candidate | Educational Doctorate
Saint Mary's University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN

# Appendix E

## Community Kinship Circle Participation Questionnaire

This form will be included in the invitation email as a hyperlink embedded in the text and be a Google form.

Name (First and Last)_________________

Are you able to participate
- Yes
- No
- Maybe

Please check all dates available to participate in Month Year
- Example Date
- Example Date
- Example Date
- None of these dates works for me

Please check all dates available to participate in Month Year
- Example Date
- Example Date
- Example Date
- None of these dates works for me

Do you prefer mornings or afternoons?
- Morning – start at 10 a.m.
- Afternoon – start at 1 p.m.
- Either morning or afternoon

Contact information

Phone________________

Emails________________

Preferred way to be contacted
- Email
- Phone
- Either

WOPILA TANKA for completing the questionnaire. I appreciate your time!

If you have additional questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to me, at (605) – XXX-xxxx or via email at mvxxxx@smumn.edu.