

A HAUDENOSAUNEE INTRINSIC MULTIPLE CASE STUDY ON THE  
INFLUENCE OF DISSONANCE ON YUKWATSISTAY^ FOR YOUNG ONEIDA  
WOMEN AT PREDOMINANTLY WHITE INSTITUTIONS

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF MINNESOTA  
BY

PRISCILLA ELISE BELISLE

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

DR. LYNN BRICE, ADVISOR

APRIL 2023

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## Acknowledgments

This dissertation marks the end of a long, winding road encompassing much more than educational pursuits. Any significant journey is marked by fear, doubt, and uncertainty, and this one is no different. However, my journey would only be complete with lessons in love, patience, and perseverance. Many people were key to my success in everything I have accomplished, and this dissertation is no exception. I am and will always be grateful for those who supported me through this journey's highs and lows.

I would first like to acknowledge my Dodo, my first teacher, and the matriarch of our family, my grandma Dellora. You instilled in me the value of education from my earliest memories of alphabet flashcards and taught me to read at just three years old. Your perseverance throughout your life is my inspiration and proof that Oneida women can do anything we set our minds to. For my whole life, you have supported me more than you can imagine and have always been there at every step of my journey supporting and cheering for me. You have constantly reminded me that I am loved and capable of great things. I am forever grateful to have you in my life. I love you.

To my mom, Annette, thank you for being the greatest advocate for me and my education since my days at Head Start. Throughout my life, you have shown me what it means to be a strong Oneida woman, and I am forever grateful for all the lessons you have taught me. You have taught me to be a deep thinker, to trust myself, and to embrace my intellect. You have never doubted my educational abilities; because of you, I am a proud nerd. Without your support, I would never have been able to make it this far, not only in my education but in my life.

To my children, Yakon<sup>^</sup>sti·yó, Vivienne, Emmett, Charlotte, and Harrison, I would not be the woman I am today without each of you, and motherhood is by far the most incredible project I will ever have. Thank you for always being there to bring a smile to my face and joy to my heart on my most challenging days. Thank you for understanding when I had to write, even though all I wanted to do was spend time with you all. I can't believe how much we have all grown together these last twelve years. Each of you has been my inspiration for finishing, and I hope all the things I have learned throughout this process will inspire and influence you in the best way. I love you all more than you can imagine.

To my husband and best friend Cody, although you joined me on this journey after I was already downstream, you have guided me to the finish line. Without your constant support, love, and encouragement, I would never have reached the end. You are the Sam to my Frodo, staying by my side and carrying me when I thought I could go no farther. Throughout these last few years, especially the last few months before the end, you have shouldered so much responsibility that I could have the time and space to write. You lifted me and set me on my feet even when I didn't want to look at my dissertation anymore. There is no way to convey to you the deep thanks I have for you and all you have done to support me. I love you forever.

To my best friend Rosa, thank you for being there as I crawled to the end of this journey. You always had an ear to listen to me when I needed to vent or reassurance that I could go on. Indeed, only those that have gone on this journey can understand the personal highs and lows of completing a doctorate, and I am grateful for our

conversations over the years as we both made our way to the end. Thank you for being my friend, and I look forward to what life brings us next!

Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Lynn Brice, who has never let me settle for anything less than excellence throughout this dissertation process. Who pushed me to be the best scholar I could be, believed in me even when I thought everything I was writing was crap, and helped me find my voice through it all. You were right, Lynn, all along. You have been more than an advisor; you are a mentor and a dear friend. From you, I have learned to trust the process and myself.

To my EdD cohort, although we are all on different paths now, I am better to have known all of you. We started this journey together many years ago, and I have often thought of you all over the years. I would like to especially acknowledge the last of us, those that trudged through right to the end, you have each taught me the value of perseverance, and I am so glad to be finishing with all of you. To Dr. Brian Jackson, Dr. Marti Ford, and Dr. Thelma Nayquonabe, thank you for your friendship as we reached this finish line. We did it!

Embarking on a doctoral journey is not for the faint of heart; no one goes it alone. There are so many people that have been a part of these last twelve years that it would be impossible to thank you all. Just know that I am so grateful to every person who has been there for me, no matter how big or small of a role you had. It truly takes a village.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my children. May your fires always burn strong and bright for all the world to see.

## Abstract

Students from Native communities often face challenges in predominantly white institutions (PWIs) when navigating their academic and social experiences (Smith, 2001; Goodyear-Ka'opua, 2013; Quiver, 2020). However, the literature shows that students who maintain a strong connection with their cultural identity and traditions have a greater sense of resilience and are better equipped to face the challenges that they encounter in PWIs (Yosso, 2005; Huffman, 2003; White Shield, 2009; Huffman, 2010; Fryberg et al., 2013). This Haudensaunee intrinsic multiple case study deeply explored the experiences of three young Oneida women attending predominantly white institutions of higher education and how their understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> (the fire or spirit within each of us) helped them navigate experiences of dissonance. The research sought to understand 1) what experiences of dissonance young Oneida women encountered as they attended PWIs; 2) in what ways young Oneida women drew upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance; and 3) In what ways experiences of dissonance helped young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The experiences of the young Oneida women in this study highlighted the importance of the dialectic between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in navigating new stages of life and adjusting to the challenges of attending a PWI. The findings revealed that encountering dissonance led to personal growth and positive change and found that a strong cultural identity was necessary to embody other Oneida cultural values, including the good mind. Overall, this study highlights the importance of cultural identity and introspection in navigating the

challenges of attending a PWI and serves as a reminder of the need for institutions to create a supportive and inclusive environment for all students.

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## **Chapter I: Introduction**

### **Introduction to the Study**

Across Native American communities, a generation of youth is reaching adulthood, bearing the consequences of generational trauma and the expectation of maintaining historical and cultural traditions. Native young people, particularly those entering adulthood, are caught between the legacy of past oppression and assimilation of Native Americans and the ancestral hope for the Seventh Generation. Understanding the dilemma of Native youth requires an informed and critical account of maintaining a connection to cultural values, the intersectionality of Native identity, and the multidimensionality of living in the current world for emerging Native American adults.

Before contact with Europeans, Native Americans had advanced systems of education that were specific, effective, and meaningful to each Tribal Nation. Each Tribal Nation transmitted ancestral knowledge, values, skills, beliefs, and responsibilities in real-world settings such as in the cornfields, around the fire, gathering berries, or hunting grounds. After contact, colonial settlers grossly misunderstood tribal educational systems. They thus made efforts to impose formal education onto Native Americans with the purpose of assimilation and acculturation to make Indians “civilized.” The effects of a Western approach to education for the assimilation of Native people cannot be understated. Formal education profoundly disrupted the very foundation of Native American culture and society because many Native people subjected to formal educational policies lost or became confused about their heritage and identity. Despite the

attempts to erase Native American cultures through formalized educational policies and practices, many tribal communities have spent decades revitalizing their languages and cultures, including traditional values. There is a strong sense in many Native American communities that the current and future generations will reclaim and restore ancient lifeways while also acquiring a college education to help their communities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. As a result, Native American students often find themselves in the intersecting spaces of continuing traditional ways and gaining higher education, all while fighting the effects of historical trauma.

There is an expressed need for higher education in Native American communities (Fann, 2004). Native students often enter college with values, beliefs, and goals beneficial for themselves and their tribal communities. Tribal Nations often look to colleges and universities to prepare tribal members to enter the tribal workforce or to preserve their people's political and cultural integrity (Fann, 2004). Considering that approximately one-third of Native Americans live on reservations or within their tribal community, it is crucial to consider the background and experiences of Native students entering college from their tribal communities (Brayboy & Castagno, 2011).

Attending college can be a unique environment for many young Native adults and can deepen their understanding of cultural values and identity. However, when Native students from reservations enter a new situation, they may experience culture shock. Pavel and Inglebret (2007) described the experience of Native students leaving their home communities:

The distance you travel may be great – not so much in physical miles but the distance from our Native cultural values and upbringing to the culture of the college or university that you attend, particularly if you choose to attend a predominantly white institution. (p. 156)

Native American students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) across the country face a litany of socio and cultural differences that often conflict with their internal values and beliefs. Jackson et al. (2003) found that Native students often experience active and passive racism, and many express that their norms do not match the new college environment. Adding to the Native student college experience is a pervasive environment of marginalization and discrimination, or what Gusa (2010) termed "White institutional presence." Gusa defined "White institutional presence" as the "customary ideologies and practices rooted in the college's design and the organization of its environment and activities" (p. 467).

While navigating PWIs can be challenging and sometimes inhibiting, there are moments when Native students rely on their inner strength, which can become a reflexive experience that fosters personal growth. In describing social learning theory, Wals and van der Leij (2007) remarked that the dissonance created by introducing new knowledge, alternative values, and ways of looking at the world could become a compelling force for learning, creativity, and change. When Native students experience dissonance at PWIs, the dissonance can be challenging as they come into conflict with different belief systems. Under these circumstances, it is crucial to understand the perspectives of Native

students, the impact dissonance has on an overall sense of self, and the role of cultural values in academic and social participation in the university community. For Oneida people, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is a source of strength upon which Oneida students draw to provide a cultural understanding of their experiences of dissonance. While navigating and participating in PWIs, Oneida students should not have to compromise yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. On the contrary, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> guides how Oneida students live their lives and shapes their view of the world, interwoven with who they are as young Oneida people.

Cultural values are essential for Native American students and cannot be separated from the student experience (Huffman, 2001). According to Huffman (2013), “Ultimately, one’s cultural identity serves as a social psychological anchor, enabling the tribally oriented individual to gain the confidence necessary to engage the mainstream institution without fear of cultural loss” (p. 23). For Oneida people, education and cultural values are intimately intertwined. Historically, cultural values were instilled early, forming the basis for an Oneida worldview. Further, embedded within the cultural value of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is, among other constructs, the importance of voice and the identification of personal gifts. For education purposes, contemporarily, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> provides Oneida people hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose, which is necessary to navigate higher education institutions, especially PWIs, successfully.

For this dissertation, I interviewed 3-5 Oneida women between 18-22 enrolled in their undergraduate studies at a PWI. I utilized a qualitative design to collect first-hand experiences of Oneida women as they navigated their respective institutions and applied a

narrative case study approach in my analysis. To frame my findings, I drew upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, traditional and contemporary roles of Oneida women, and a Haudenosaunee perspective on dissonance. I collected data on the Oneida cultural value of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as the participants encountered dissonance at PWIs.

## **Background of the Study**

### ***Native American Education***

To fully understand the complex experiences of Native American students in higher education, it is essential to be aware of the broader context of the education of Native Americans in the United States. Central to this awareness is the knowledge of the systematic oppression and genocide that accompanied westward expansion, wholly contributing to the significant loss of land, language, and culture for Native Americans (Mosholder & Goslin, 2013). Regarding Western education, Native Americans have been subject to destructive policies, most notably those surrounding the creation of Indian boarding schools. In 1879 the first Indian boarding school in the United States, the Carlisle Industrial School, was opened by Richard Pratt. The school aimed to assimilate Native American people into American society by replacing their culture with Christianity, English, and American perceived roles for men and women. Pratt's education model quickly spread, and by 1902 there were 25 federally funded off-reservation schools specifically for Native American children (Hauptman and McLester III, 2006).

Native Americans experienced many losses during the boarding school era: loss of language, loss of culture and ceremonies, loss of social interaction with parents and elders, loss of parenting skills, and loss of a worldview, are a few to name. The inevitable product of the boarding school era was an entire generation of Native people who could not be immersed in their culture and language, causing a rapid decline in knowledge of the traditional ways of life. The legacy of the "formal" education of Native Americans post-contact continues to be marred by tragedy, loss, and trauma. What is essential to consider about the boarding school era is the generational impacts that last to this day, often termed generational or historical trauma.

In groundbreaking work, Duran, Duran, Brave Heart, and Yellow Horse-Davis (1998) defined historical trauma as "trauma that is multigenerational and cumulative over time; it extends beyond the life span" (p.342). Multi-generational trauma means that those traumas suffered by Native people historically continually plague subsequent generations. Additionally, Duran et al. explained how historical traumas are inextricably linked, forming a seamless collective experience of continuous trauma (1998). Duran et al. categorized historical trauma into six distinct (yet overlapping) phases: first contact, economic competition, invasion war period, subjugation and reservation period, boarding school period, and forced relocation and termination period (1998). Over time, intergenerational effects emerged, including shock, survival mode, stunned silence, self-blame, accumulated loss/grief, loss of balance, "disguised" trauma responses, learned helplessness, despair, shame, and physical illnesses (Solanto, 2008). Understanding

Native American history and the lasting impacts of historical trauma are necessary precursors to understanding the current context of Native American students in postsecondary education. Many Native people learned to fear educational experiences during the boarding school era, and those who attended boarding schools passed on a distrust of government-controlled schools. (Neutuch, 2018). For many Native Americans, their families still bear the scars of boarding schools, making formal, public education challenging.

Over time, the change in purpose and intent of Native higher education is evident as the history of higher education for Native people evolved. When considering higher education specifically, McClellan, Fox, and Lowe (2005) separated its history into three distinct eras: colonial, federal, and self-determination. In the colonial era (1492 – 1775), colonial settlers developed higher education for Native Americans to garner financial support for several colonial colleges, with no real intent to educate Natives. Moving into the federal era (1776 – 1933), tribes began entering into treaties with the federal government, which sometimes had provisions for higher education in the form of scholarships that could be used only at white institutions. Lastly, during the self-determination era (1934 – current), Native higher education shifted to include providing opportunities for vocational education. Still, while enrollment levels remained relatively low and steady for many years, in the 1960s, the enrollment level of Native students in higher education increased as the federal government pursued policies of self-determination for tribes. Policies of self-determination fostered Tribally controlled

colleges and universities (TCUs) and expanded Native studies programs at state and private institutions.

To provide a context for the experience of Native students within PWIs, this study must first be grounded in the more extensive background of Native students in higher education (McClellan, Fox, & Lowe, 2005). Higher education, especially at PWIs, has been challenging for many Native American students, as evidenced by low attendance, persistence, and completion. While the number of Native American students enrolled in higher education has more than doubled in the last 30 years, they continue to make up only 1 percent of the total enrollment in colleges and universities (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). Due to the small percentage of Native students in higher education, there is often little attention paid to the undergraduate experience of Native Americans. The available research, both quantitative and qualitative, on the experiences of Native American students attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) is limited, and there is even less research devoted to examining the experiences of Native women while at these institutions.

While Native American students bring a wealth of cultural knowledge, experience, values, and strengths to institutions of higher learning, significant gaps have persisted between Native American students and all other students regarding retention, persistence, and graduation rates (Al-Asfour & Abraham, 2016). The gap between Native and non-Native students is not surprising, considering that Native American students comprise only 1% of the total undergraduate population in the United States and less than

1% of the graduate population (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). Given the few Native Americans attending postsecondary institutions, research and data reports do not often include statistics on Native students. However, some data on enrollment, persistence, and completion are available. Nationally, college enrollment rates for Native American students have been consistently falling. Between 2016 and 2018, the undergraduate enrollment of Native students ages 18-24 decreased from 128,000 to 124,000 (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). The Postsecondary National Policy Institute reported in 2020 that 16% of Native Americans attained bachelor's degrees, and 9% attained an associate degree (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020). While Native American students enroll in college at lower rates, graduation rates have slightly increased. From 2010 to 2019, the percentage of Native students aged 25-29 that attained an associate or bachelor's degree increased from 21% to 25% (Postsecondary National Policy Institute, 2020).

There is clear evidence that historical trauma passed down from previous generations continues to affect the current generation of Native Americans (Brave Heart, 1998; Cain, 2007). The effects of historical trauma often indicate higher levels of depression, anxiety, negative feelings, and lower levels of resilience (Altaha, 2012). Altaha (2012) found that Native students from reservations often think about historical loss more often than Native students who have not lived on an Indian reservation and have fewer positive perceptions of their experiences in college, often leading to attrition, lower persistence rates, and low graduation rates. While it may be true that historical

trauma is a significant psychological issue for young Native people, what the research does not show is the role cultural values have in helping to overcome the effects of historical trauma and successfully navigating PWIs.

### ***Oneida Nation***

For Oneida and Indigenous people worldwide, where we live (our natural environment) is closely tied to much of our teachings, beliefs, values, and histories. The Oneida people are part of the Haudenosaunee or People of the Longhouse, commonly known as the Iroquois Confederacy. Originally from present-day upstate New York, the Oneida moved from their homelands to Wisconsin in the mid-1800s due to pressures from the State of New York and increasing European populations. A fraction of Oneida stayed in New York, a fraction settled in Southwold, Ontario, and the remaining settled in Wisconsin in traditional Menominee territories through treaty negotiations with the United States. As Haudenosaunee people, the Oneida share a culture, language, and values no matter where they live. However, the New York to Wisconsin movement resulted in three distinct Oneida communities, each with separate governing and political systems. The two Oneida communities in the United States are considered individual federally recognized tribes. Each has a different tribal governing structure and relationship to their respective states and the U.S. government. For this study, when referring to the Oneida people generally, I mean the culturally distinct Indigenous group with a shared language and values. Additionally, from this point forward, when I

reference Oneida or Oneida Nation as a governmental entity or physical location, I mean the community in Wisconsin.

The Oneida Nation Reservation is 64,500 acres and straddles two counties in northeast Wisconsin: Brown and Outagamie. About half the land is residential/urban and half rural/agricultural. The Oneida Nation has approximately 17,268 enrolled members around the world. Of this number, there are 7,626 that live on the reservation or near the reservation in Brown and Outagamie Counties (Oneida Enrollment Statistics, 2020). However, due to land ownership being intermingled between Native and Non-Natives, most of the 24,460 (82%) people living within the boundaries are non-Native (American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates, 2018).

The Oneida Nation has a demonstrated commitment to its members' higher educational needs and pursuits affirmed in tribal resolutions, which created a tiered system for higher education scholarships and established a Higher Education Scholarship implemented by the Higher Education Department. The higher education scholarship program intends to strengthen the Oneida Nation by improving the quality of life and reinforcing a positive circle of life for future generations (Oneida Higher Education, 2021)

Since adopting the original Education Resolution in 1996, Oneida Nation has provided millions of dollars in scholarships to tribal members (Education Resolution, 1996). The Oneida higher education scholarships have helped Oneida tribal members pursue professions in various career tracks, increasing the likelihood of obtaining a job

with the Oneida Nation. While Oneida Nation funds scholarships for all ages, the most frequently reported age of students receiving funding from 2015-16 through the 2018-19 academic school year averaged 21 years old, with the youngest students at age 17 (Program Data Report, 2020).

Many Oneida Nation members attending college desire to give back to their community to express reciprocity. Page-Reeves et al. (2019) wrote that a Native student's innate desire to give back or contribute to their respective communities is critical to finding their path in life and is not unique among individual tribal communities. Collaborative thinking is dominant in an Oneida worldview and invokes a collective rather than personal good. Using educational achievements to better the overall tribal community is one modern way young Oneida people respond to this innate desire.

The desire to give back can also be reflected in the degree disciplines or majors Native students choose to study. Many times, Native students favor options that appear to offer a more significant potential to serve their communities. These "helping" professions include teaching, social work, and healthcare. Data from the Oneida Higher Education 2020 Annual Report mirrors the choice to pursue "helping" professions, reporting that Oneida Nation students' second and third top majors were in the social sciences and health (Annual Report, 2020). When considered together, social science and health majors represent most Oneida Nation college students' career choices.

While the creation of the Higher Education Scholarship suggested a high dedication from the Oneida Nation to the education of its citizens, the commitment to

education is much more profound for the Oneida people. Learning and the pursuit of knowledge are deeply embedded within Oneida's lifeways, and education was a deliberate process that began at birth and continued throughout the lifespan. Since time immemorial, elders in Native communities have shared and passed on ancestral wisdom and traditions to the younger generations. Elders shared stories, songs, dances, customs, and values. The elder-youth relationship was an essential part of an Oneida person's life because the elders were most often with the children as parents usually worked. The elders (usually women) identified the gift or traits that each child exhibited, and as the child grew older, they placed them with others in the community with similar skills. Oneida people continue to believe they have a bag that carries their gifts when they are born on this earth, which they will use to bring happiness and peacefulness to all people (Cornelius, 2010).

Another feature of traditional Oneida education is that it respects and fosters individual learning styles and recognizes individuals' learning needs and wants rather than a group or class (Cornelius, 1999; Hermes, 2005; Lipka, 2005). Randy Cornelius (2010), an Oneida Elder, attests to this fact:

Grandparents can see gifts. We are all sent here for a purpose. Orators, storytellers, singers, memory, hunter, etc., they were pushed in that direction to make that blossom. That is how they contributed to the community. How can you pitch in, so others benefit versus the individual?

While the Oneida Nation is dedicated to the higher education needs of its membership, stemming from a deep history of highly valuing education culturally, data from the Oneida Nation Higher Education Department reveals that Oneida tribal members are graduating at much lower rates when compared to national statistics (Program Data Report, 2020). From 2010 to 2019, the average enrollment total for tribal members ages 18-70 (the lowest and highest reported age of students receiving an Oneida higher education scholarship) was 13,454 (Enrollment Statistics, 2020). During that time, 508 tribal members, or 3.7%, received a bachelor's degree, and 453, or 3.3%, received an associate degree (Higher Education, 2020). Further, from 2010 to 2019, the total number of students receiving funding from the Higher Education Scholarship program decreased from 1,318 to 791 (Program Data Report, 2020).

Young women are the largest demographic of Oneida enrolled members attending colleges and universities. Data from Oneida Higher Education shows that in 2019, 65% of students receiving funding were women. The most frequently reported age group was 19, and 68% of students attended either public or private 4-year institutions (Program Data Report, 2020). Data from other years reflects the same pattern: most Oneida students receiving higher education funding from the Oneida Nation were young women attending PWIs.

The Oneida people have a strong history and commitment to the education of their people. Oneida greatly values education, from the historical underpinnings of education as an integral part of Oneida lifeways to a commitment to higher education

funding and support for the Oneida people. However, Oneida Higher Education Department data shows that Oneida people are enrolling and graduating at lower rates than national averages. Many factors may influence the higher education rates of the Oneida people; however, what needs to be understood is the capacity of Oneida values, particularly yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, in successfully navigating PWIs.

### **Strengths-Based Approach**

Assumptions of deficit have characterized the interactions between Native people and colonial settlers since the first contact. Discourses of deficit occur when practices and policies aimed at alleviating disadvantage become so mired in narratives of failure and inferiority that those experiencing the disadvantage become the problem. Halpern (2016) argued that continual reporting of negative stereotypes and prevalence rates reinforces undesired behavior. Crucially, advocating for a more strengths-based representation of Native students in higher education should not be mistaken for calls to deflate the realities of disadvantage in the socio-economic circumstances faced by Native people or deny the conditions Native people experience. Operating predominantly from a deficit approach provides only one side to a multifaceted story and inhibits alternative solutions or opportunities that facilitate growth and thriving. A reductionist and essentializing vision of what is possible becomes pervasive.

Maton and colleagues (2003) wrote that individual strengths "encompass varied cognitive, affective, psychological, moral, and behavioral capacities, such as self-efficacy, positive coping, practical knowledge, special talents, and persistence, to name

but a few" (p. 5). From a Haudenosaunee perspective, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> grounds individual capabilities, including using a good mind, encouragement, family, and community relationships. Additionally, the Haudenosaunee encompass traditional values like sharing labor and maintaining a duty to family, clan, and nation, and being thankful for nature and the Creator for their sustenance. These values resonate with the idea that strengths are multifaceted and reflect the individual, family, and community. Family and community strengths may include "varied instrumental, relational, structural, and cultural characteristics, such as providing culturally proscribed norms that regulate behaviors in healthy and purposeful ways and facilitate a positive sense of belonging to a valued community, again to name but a few" (Maton et al., p. 5).

There has been a long-standing history of deficit-based approaches to research conducted on Native American people, including deficit-based conclusions, which do not recognize Native knowledge and perseverance as unique in their own right (Cooper & Driedger, 2018). Even a quick search on the experience and statistics of Native American college students finds many articles, studies, and other resources on the failings of the Native student. This study prioritizes the innate cultural strengths that Native students possess and rely upon as they navigate PWIs. This study is also grounded in a Haudenosaunee perspective, which values the use of the good mind and the encouragement of the best in each of us.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly white institutions of higher education influenced young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. This study included three young Oneida women raised within the Oneida Nation community and pursuing an undergraduate degree at a PWI, aged 19-20. At their respective PWIs, the young Oneida women in this study faced values, belief systems, world views, and ways of knowing and understanding that contrasted with their home social-cultural community. For Oneida people, the core values and beliefs of Haudenosaunee are the basis of existence. They guide interactions with each other and all of creation, both seen and unseen. Haudenosaunee core values are instilled at a young age and are the foundations upon which we develop our sense of self. This study was grounded in Oneida cultural values, and as such, I assumed a strengths-based perspective.

While all the Oneida core values are equally essential and intimately intertwined, for this study, I focused on "yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>" or "the fire or spirit within each one of us." I chose yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> because it speaks to the core or center of our being and who we are as individuals. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> encompasses all parts of the self needed to be personally congruent and self-actualized. To understand the complexity of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is to understand many overlapping components that encapsulate the individual and the family/community, the spiritual and the human worlds, and the holistic aspect of our being (mind, body, heart, and spirit). Together, these components work in concert to

provide a personal understanding of the self and are necessary elements of self-actualization and personal congruency for Oneida people.

This study was significant on many different levels. There exists a paucity of published research on Native American women generally and an even smaller body of knowledge on their experience in education (Waterman and Lindley, 2013). Yet, Native American women enroll in college at higher rates than men, and the rate has risen steadily over the last four decades. In 1978, the number of Native American women in college exceeded the number of men by 11%, and by 2002 that number grew to 42% (Fann, 2004). Native American women occupy a significant space in tribal communities, considering their historical and contemporary cultural roles within the tribal structure. Data shows that Native American women are the largest demographic of tribal communities attending college. For the Oneida Nation, young Oneida women attend colleges at higher rates than other age and gender groups.

Further, no educational research has been conducted specifically on Oneida Nation members who have attended predominately white institutions — nor on young Oneida women working towards or who have earned degrees at higher education institutions. In addition, most of the available research is primarily written from a deficit lens, meaning that the focus of the narrative is on the barriers or gaps that Native students must overcome to be successful in higher education. In comparison, this study assumed that young Oneida women were entering PWIs with a well-established personal fire and support system that nourished their fire. As explained further in Chapter 2, yukwatsistay^

is an Oneida cultural value that speaks to an innate sense of self necessary to help Oneida women navigate PWIs.

Lastly, there are various phenomena associated with the lived experience of Native American students in higher education, both Tribally Controlled Universities and PWIs. However, this study focused on the meaning that young Oneida women ascribed to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, mainly to illuminate how a strong cultural sense of self is an asset while navigating PWIs. Understanding the experience of the young women in this study as they navigated PWIs allowed for a deeper understanding of how they drew upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> on a personal, family, and community level. Their experiences shed light on understanding the foundations of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and what components were necessary to cultivating and sustaining a strong personal fire. The implications of this study go beyond the experiences and stories of the young women in this study and even those of the Oneida Nation community attending college because it is crucial to have a strong fire in all aspects of life.

The questions that guided this research were:

1. What experiences of dissonance do young Oneida women encounter as they attend PWIs?
2. In what ways do young Oneida women draw upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance?
3. In what ways do experiences of dissonance help young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>?

## **Scope of the Study**

I adopted a multiple case study design in which three Oneida women participated in extensive individual and group conversations to study the impact of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> within the context of PWIs. Haudenosaunee society is matrilineal, in which women have leadership roles in their clans. Oneida people highly value education, with a strong encouragement for women to pursue higher education, as indicated by the majority of Oneida Nation members who attend college being women. That said, I chose to focus specifically on Oneida women for this study.

As in all research, there are assumptions and limitations. To some degree, it is a limitation, having focused on women from one specific community, Oneida Nation in Wisconsin. Yet indigenous-based research is community-oriented, and a tenet of such research is to serve the community's needs. Thus, the study was intended to speak to the Oneida community specifically and other Indigenous communities for whom the education of young women is a significant interest. The study drew upon the Oneida people's unique cultural beliefs and traditions to fashion an authentically Haudenosaunee theoretical framework to analyze the participants' experiences as they attended a PWI. Doing so allowed for examining the relationships between yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, a principal teaching of the Oneida, and dissonance, a sociopsychological construct related to growth and development.

I assumed in this study, as White Shield (2009) explained, that there is an "internal resilient resource existing within Native women [that] enables them to

overcome the staggering 'odds' confronting them in the higher education system of the majority culture" (p. 48). For the young Oneida women in this study, their internal resilient resource was yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The extended familial and communal circles that served to sustain and maintain their fire were part of an implicit cultural responsibility they all shared. Further, I assumed that the synergistic relationship between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is encouraged within Haudenosaunee culture. Understanding this relationship can help Oneida women reconcile these two forces, resulting in personal growth and introspection.

### **Responsibility of the Researcher**

Research within Native communities, as for many other people of color, has historically been linked to Western colonialism, and as such, an environment of distrust permeates the research relationship. While the historical relationship between researchers, their research, and the Native communities they collect information on has significantly favored the researcher and their agenda, recently, there has been a surge in methodologies that seek to create a more balanced relationship. These include many community- and participatory-based approaches that engage Native communities in research and emphasize the need to give back to the focus community.

The responsibility of researchers to Native communities is a complex relationship impacted by many factors, including the research topic, whether the researcher is non-Native or Native, the Native community of focus, and the demographics of the research participants. However, no matter the research factors, there remains a responsibility to

conduct research that is impactful to the community and important to its members to reflect a balanced relationship between all those involved. For Native researchers researching Native communities, especially if the researcher is a community member, there is an added responsibility that impacts the research due to familial and community connections.

### ***Researcher Experience***

The process I went through when coming to the purpose of the study holds significance for me because it was a mental, emotional, and spiritual development. Shining some light on my process helps illuminate the study's more considerable relevance for me as the researcher and the importance for the Oneida Nation community and larger academic circles.

I do not enter this study flippantly; I know that the space I occupy in this research comes from a privileged perspective. I have had the opportunity to pursue higher education successfully in part because I come from a culturally strong family. However, I do not have more knowledge than others in the Oneida community, but I have had the space to understand my connection to my fire/spirit. Not everyone from the Oneida Nation community has had the same opportunity. I also have an insider perspective as I was raised and live in the Oneida community. I also know that I share a personal experience with all Oneida young women in colleges and universities across the country. I was that young Oneida woman at one time, entering college and experiencing dissonance from my peers, faculty, and a predominately white university system. I am

now raising daughters and sons who may share in this experience one day. Due to my connection to the research topic, I was mindful of my expectations of the research and created a space in which the participants' voices and experiences were fully heard.

Throughout this dissertation, I wrote that having a voice is a significant cultural value and a strong belief of the Oneida people. As such, I felt a great responsibility to accurately represent the stories of the young women participating. In my experience as both a tribal member living in the community and a former tribal employee, whether we (as a community or tribal organization) are creating programs or laws, or policies that will impact or benefit people in some way, it is not very often that we go to those people and ask, "what is your experience?" "What do you need from us?" "How can we help you through this?"

As a young woman attending a PWI, I experienced complex thoughts and emotions as I navigated a system that largely conflicted with my cultural beliefs. During my time in college, my interactions with students and faculty shaped me on many levels (emotionally, mentally, and spiritually) and impacted how I understood my fire. When I reflected on my own college experience, I realized that it was not unique and that there was value in hearing the stories of other young Oneida women as they were navigating their college experiences.

I was raised on the Oneida reservation and attended tribal school, graduating from the Oneida Nation High School in 2001. Although I lived on the reservation, I had been in contact with non-Natives my entire life, whether that was different teachers,

community members, or co-workers. Then, when I was seventeen years old, I began my first semester at a PWI and was wholly unprepared for the range of thought and emotion I came to feel as a college student. I recall a pivotal moment that opened my eyes to the fact that not everyone experiences and interprets the world as I do. I was in a course entitled “Foundations of Western Culture,” and the professor was lecturing about the foundations for democracy in the United States. She showed a picture on the screen of the dollar bill and drew our attention to the depiction of an eagle on the back. She indicated that the eagle was clutching thirteen Greek spears as an homage to the birthplace of democracy, which the “founding fathers” used as their model when creating the United States. This was a medium-sized class of around 45 students, and I was the only Native in the classroom. At that age, around eighteen at the time, and still finding my voice within this institution, I found the courage to speak up. So, I raised my hand and waited to be called on. The professor acknowledged me, and I told her and the class that those were not thirteen Greek spears, but thirteen arrows meant to represent the original colonies. I further explained that the bound arrows came from our Great Law of Peace when the Peacemaker broke a single arrow to show that we are weak alone and then bundled five arrows to show that together we may bend, but we do not break. As I shared my knowledge with the class, I felt proud to share a part of history that many probably were never taught. However, the moment I was done speaking, the professor immediately shot down my input by dismissing my comment and reiterating that democracy came from Greece. There was no room for discussion, and what I said was wrong.

My voice was not important in that instance, and because I was young then, it was mentally and emotionally challenging. I come from a family where your voice is especially important, and my mom has always taught me that my opinions and what I have to say are valuable. So, I entered the university with a strong set of cultural values and beliefs, and the story I mentioned is just one example of a value I had that was challenged. For me, the university system itself was marginalizing, and typically I was in courses where the professor-student relationship was very clearly hierarchical. This differed from the circular or level relationship with everybody I was familiar with. As a young woman at a PWI, I was already disenfranchised, and then I was further alienated and discouraged because my voice was shut down in numerous instances. This impacted my spirit on a personal level, and typically when the dissonance was overwhelming, I went home and talked to my mom or my other supports. My supports would remind me of my value as an Oneida woman and “rekindle” my personal fire by listening to me, helping me understand the experience of dissonance, and encouraging me to continue my education.

Considering my own experience, it was essential to approach this study in a way that honored yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and added to our fires – for myself, the participants, and the community. I aimed to ensure that I was aware of the multidimensionality of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as I wrote, collected data, and discussed findings. I asked myself, am I operating as a conscious being and fostering connections between all people and pieces

of this project? Am I encouraging creativity and curiosity in both the participants and me? Have I done my best to be kind and caring to everyone involved?

## Chapter II: Literature Review

The available literature on the experience of Native American students in higher education has been growing over the last several decades (Huffman, 2001; Jackson et al., 2003; Huffman, 2008; Reynolds et al., 2012; Tachine et al., 2016; Fish & Syed, 2018), providing insight into the lived experiences of Native students. However, within that body of literature, there is a lack of research devoted to the experience of Native American women attending predominantly white institutions (PWIs) and of particular interest for this study on Oneida women. Furthermore, because of the U.S. government's involvement in Native American education, the recent experiences of Native American college students are often characterized by educational disparities (Fish & Syed, 2018).

The present literature review summarizes the experience of Native American college students. It situates the Oneida cultural value of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> (the fire or spirit within each of us) as a critical factor for young Oneida women as they encounter dissonance while navigating PWIs. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is central to an Oneida worldview and sense of self and provides the foundation for how Oneida people find hope, belonging, meaning, and purpose throughout their lives. In this literature review, I situate the experience of Native American students attending PWIs and briefly explain transculturation theory to characterize their experiences further. To situate the lives of the Oneida women in this study and to lend credence to the selection of young Oneida women as the research participants, I describe the historical and contemporary roles of Oneida women within the community. I briefly describe Oneida's cultural values and

deeply explore yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a foundational cultural value for the Oneida people and, more specifically, consider yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> within the scope of the lives of young Oneida women. Lastly, I provide an interpretation of dissonance grounded in Haudenosaunee ways of knowing while stating that dissonance can be a process of empowerment and growth.

### **Native American College Student Experience**

For Native youth everywhere, there will always be relational and societal influences that create, assign, maintain, and shift their cultural identity. The current reality for Native American youth is characterized, in part, by the far-reaching and long-lasting effects of generational trauma, such as child welfare issues, trauma from poor parental practices, drug and alcohol use, and external forces, including acculturation and oppression (Duran et al., 1998; Antone, 2013). The literature indicates that all too often, the contrasting world of the PWI and the resulting feelings of isolation, confusion, and alienation are too tricky for Native students, resulting in higher rates of attrition and dropouts and lower rates of persistence and graduation (Lin et al., 1998; Jackson et al., 2003; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; Mosholder & Goslin, 2013; Lopez, 2017). After several decades of talk about Native Americans in higher education, it appears easier to identify and magnify the shortfalls of their experiences (i.e., high dropout rates, low persistence rates, low graduation rates, and high rates of attrition) than to identify the strengths and assets Native students already possess before entering college. However, a closer look at the negative statistics for Native communities and the Native students from

those communities reveals the remarkable adaptability and resilience of Native people to endure generations of social and economic oppression and the challenges of becoming a U.S. minority in their homeland.

While it is true that Native students face a multitude of challenges when pursuing higher education, what is clear is that breaking deeply entrenched discourses about deficits requires a new kind of thinking inspired and informed by the lived experience of Native students with strong cultural backgrounds and values that simultaneously lead to individual and collective growth and transformation. Halpern (2016) argued that continual reporting of negative stereotypes and prevalence rates reinforces undesired behavior. Crucially, these should not be mistaken for calls to deflate the realities of disadvantage in Indigenous people's socio-economic circumstances or deny the conditions they experience. Fogarty et al. (2018) described the discourses of deficit that occur when discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. They stated, "Discussions and policy aimed at alleviating disadvantage become so mired in narratives of failure and inferiority that those experiencing the disadvantage are seen as the problem, and a reductionist and essentializing vision of what is possible becomes pervasive" (p. 1). Much like Fogarty et al. described, focusing on the failures of Native students steers the discussion away from the internal and innate strengths that Native students bring to the college environment. Operating predominantly from a deficit approach provides only one side to a multifaceted story and inhibits alternative solutions or opportunities that facilitate growth and thriving.

The reality of life for most Native American youth is complicated; however, the individual perceptions of and how Native youth value themselves impact how they approach new situations and react to adversity (LaFromboise et al., 2006; Wexler, 2013). Resilience and sense of self are interdependent, and a strong sense of self is helpful in adverse circumstances because it builds resilience. Resilience, in turn, builds up a sense of identity (Wexler, 2013). Further, the degree to which cultural connectedness influences a sense of self and resilience is vital to the long-term well-being and success of Native youth. Understanding the connection between a sense of self, resilience, and culture for Oneida youth further characterizes the current reality of the young Oneida women in this study and situates their experiences at PWIs as multifaceted and multidimensional.

### ***Transculturation***

Several people have studied the overall experience of Native college students (Huffman, 2001; Huffman, 2008; Tachine et al., 2016; Fish & Syed, 2018), but the theory that most emphasizes the importance of cultural values as an integral part of the experience, and thus most relevant to this study, is transculturation. Transculturation is a term Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortiz coined in his 1940 article "Our America." It is used to characterize the phenomenon of merging and converging cultures, with Ortiz explicitly addressing the complex cultural makeup of Cuba (Ortiz, 1947). Transculturation emerged as a corrective response to the then-predominant anthropological concept of acculturation. When Ortiz introduced transculturation, acculturation suggested a top-down cultural relationship whereby a privileged donor culture transfers Western

civilization to a recipient group in a colonial setting (Fiddian, 2000). To counter this idea, Ortiz (1947) described the process of transculturation as "the different phases of the process of transition from one culture to another ... this does not consist merely in acquiring another culture [acculturation], but the process also necessarily involves the loss or uprooting of a previous culture" (p. 102).

A. Irving Hallowell picked up the term transculturation in the 1960s and began using it to describe Indian-White relations in the United States and Canada. Hallowell (1957) further explained transculturation as:

The process whereby individuals under a variety of circumstances are temporarily or permanently detached from one group, enter the web of social relations that constitute another society and come under the influence of its customs, ideas, and values to a greater or lesser degree. (p. 563).

Other disciplines have since adapted transculturation, including performance art, communication theory, music theory, education (Taylor, 1991; Rogers, 2006; Colson, 2014), and, most relevant to this study – Native American experiences in higher education (Huffman, 2001; Huffman, 2008). Huffman has spent many years studying the persistence of Native American students in higher education and, specifically, has applied transculturation theory to their experiences. After studying the experiences of Native American college students, Huffman further defined transculturation as a process by which an individual enters and interacts with another culture without losing their cultural identity. This process involves individuals who are detached from a group due to various

circumstances and then enter into another society where they come under the influences of its customs, ideals, and values (Huffman 1990). The concept of transculturation incorporates the idea that Native college students do not need to relinquish their cultural identity to be successful. Instead, the transculturation hypothesis assumes that Native students increase their cultural repertoire by adding the skills needed while keeping their Native heritage intact. Transculturation conceptualizes individuals as fully capable of interacting with two cultures without cultural loss. Transculturation is also a process of extensively exploring a cultural context, testing out another culture, realigning with what is learned, and leading to more discovery (Huffman, 1990). It is also a journey into one's own culture, and each discovery about a new culture reveals the complexities of one's cultural world (Huffman, 1990). Therefore, the student is constantly developing.

Huffman (2001) hypothesized that "transcultured" students use their Indigenous identity as an "emotional anchor" in the face of adversity and cultural discontinuity. "Transcultured" students begin college as "cultural outsiders" and then, at a specific point, forge a solid cultural identity. They acquired the confidence, self-worth as an Indigenous person, and purpose to succeed in their higher education experience.

While Huffman's theory of transculturation for Native students serves as a valuable concept for this study, I will seek to expand the dimensionality of the Native student experience. Huffman described the transculturation of Native students as a linear process whereby students either move or do not move through a series of defined stages. Each stage has associated criteria indicating progression and a greater likelihood of

success in college. While Huffman's theory is one way to describe Native students' experiences, it is rooted in a colonial understanding of cultural exchange. Further, while Huffman places the realization of a strong cultural identity in the second stage of transculturation, I propose that the young Oneida women in this study enter PWIs with an existing awareness of their cultural identity and, therefore, knowledge of and reliance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Huffman's transculturation theory focuses on the broad experience of Native American students and as previously mentioned, roots those experiences in a linear model of progression through stages. Rosemary White Shield built upon Huffman's theory of transculturation by considering that students enter college already being highly aware of their innate cultural strengths (2009). White Shield specifically researched Native women in predominantly white colleges and universities utilizing a Medicine Wheel Culturally Intrinsic Research Paradigm Model congruent with Native epistemology, spirituality, value systems, and realities (2009). Using the Medicine Wheel Model, White Shield interviewed Native women students about their experiences while at college to understand the women's perspectives on using their cultural and spiritual strengths as a source of hope and support in their higher education experience (White Shield, 2009).

In her study, White Shield (2009) identified four interwoven clusters demonstrating that Native women pursuing higher education were grounded in their reliance on innate cultural and spiritual strengths. Further, the clusters were neither linear

nor compartmentalized, as is with the stages of transculturation identified by Huffman, but instead resembled a spiral shape where clusters overlapped and could not be understood in isolation or without considering the other clusters. White Shield's findings build on Huffman's theory of transculturation in that it offers a more nuanced characterization of the experiences of Native college students, particularly women, by showing that awareness of cultural and spiritual strengths is not a distinct stage but instead cannot be differentiated from the overall college experience. Further, White Shield also found that students' spirituality was an innate strength that shaped how they experienced reality and the world. When faced with internal and external challenges during their higher education experience, they relied on spirituality to overcome difficulties (White Shield, 2009).

In this study, the relationship between transculturation, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, and dissonance can be represented as a spiral. Individuals bring their personal experiences, beliefs, and values to any situation that influences their perspectives and worldview. In new situations where cultural identity is tested, such as the immersive environment of a PWI, individuals experience dissonance that prompts a reflective period where cultural values are relied upon to make sense of the experience. This process repeats with each new experience of dissonance and is refined as the individual learns and grows over time. Ultimately, individuals align and merge the experience with their existing cultural identity to affect growth and maturity.

The description of transculturation as an overlapping spiral rather than a linear progression is particularly relevant to this study as I propose that young Oneida women enter PWIs with an innate sense of Oneida core values, specifically yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, and draw upon this cultural strength to navigate their experiences. Further, like White Shield, I also propose that yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, as an Oneida cultural construct, comprises interconnected pieces that cannot be considered in isolation. Additionally, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> cannot be separated from other Oneida cultural values nor the role of women as it forms the basis of an Oneida woman's worldview, sense of self, and understanding of place in family and community. While this study is not about the phenomena of transculturation, it is essential to include a description of transculturation, particularly the way White Shield applied it, to characterize the participants' experiences in this study. Therefore, the main aspects of transculturation that I am drawing upon for this study are that a) Native students enter college with innate cultural and spiritual strengths; b) Native students draw upon innate strengths to overcome internal and external challenges; and c) Native students' college journey is a spiral that is interwoven with experiences, strengths, and cultural responsibilities. Thus, to reiterate, the purpose of this study is to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly white institutions of higher education influence young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

### **Oneida Women's Experience**

It is essential to discuss the roles of Oneida women in both a historical and contemporary context to achieve the purpose of this study. The role of Oneida women in their family and community is directly linked to their sense of womanhood and is a cultural strength that impacts their view of themselves and the world. For Oneida people, our stories, ceremonies, and teachings provide a foundation for interpreting and expressing our current reality (Antone, 2013). For Oneida women, their reality is based on cultural roles and responsibilities and thus impacts our experiences in the world. For young Oneida women raised on the Oneida reservation in Wisconsin, entering predominantly white, patriarchal university systems also means encountering values, belief systems, world views, and ways of knowing and understanding that often contrast the familiar social-cultural community.

Adding further nuance to the current reality of the young Oneida women in this study is their life stage. Individuals' experiences throughout life provide the foundation for inner strength and the knowledge needed to have a good mind. The seven stages or periods of life that Antone (2013) described are:

1. Creation or spirit stage – tahotikushututiyukwak:shataukwetase, Faces Coming from Mother Earth (conception)
2. Caring time – o:wilase, cradleboard to childhood
3. Changing times voices – tehutw^natenyeseakanitotiy^sha young boy/girlhood (puberty)

4. Responsibility time – wahutotyake – wahuwatilihutu – they are appointed hunters (young men) and gardeners (young women)
5. Family time – wshut?wa:tsilu:ni, father, mother, uncle, and aunt
6. Teaching time – wahonatlsla:y^ton-sh^n^ laotnikula, peaceful mind, grandfather, and grandmother
7. Serving people/Creator time – lotiyaneshukutiyaneshu – yukwasotsla, leadership in an extended family, clan, community, or Nation (p. 57)

The young Oneida women in this study are at the age of "responsibility time." At age fourteen and lasting until the early twenties, responsibility time is when individuals develop a greater depth of survival skills and attend to life. Traditionally, young Oneida girls learned caring for and their relationship to the land, agricultural processes, traditional medicines, and womanhood (Antone, 2013). While the young women in this study may not necessarily have learned traditional skills typically assigned to girls, a deeper understanding of the Haudenosaunee phases of life reveals that the teachings address the whole person because Haudenosaunee culture is holistic. The teachings and lessons of each stage of life flow into the next, and each state is not separate from the other but part of a larger cycle that continuously revolves. Whereas people tend to understand aging as the passage of time in a linear sense, Haudenosaunee people see aging as a spiral whereby individuals cycle back and forth to revisit areas of difficulty. However, each time can visit a stage from a different perspective, with new insights and increasing awareness and consciousness. During each life stage, individuals draw

knowledge from foundational cultural ways of knowing (Creation, ceremonies, Great Law, Kaliwiyo) and, in doing so, further evolve their natural gifts and enhance who they are as a person. Thus, as individuals move through life stages and connect with Creation, their fire (yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>) is stoked and maintained. The young Oneida women in this study are at a pivotal life stage as they begin to understand their responsibilities to self, family, and community and their place in the greater world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Oneida Cultural Constructs**

For Oneida people, our core values and beliefs as Haudenosaunee are the basis of our existence. They guide interactions with each other and all of Creation, both seen and unseen. Oneida's core values are instilled at a young age and are the foundations upon which Oneida people develop their identity. In what follows, I explain Oneida's core values and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a core cultural value for the Oneida people. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is not a concept that is replete in the literature, so I rely heavily on knowledge gained from being raised in the Oneida community and my many mentors and teachers throughout my life. I would never consider myself an expert but rather a novice in writing about and applying an Oneida worldview in an academic setting. While I do not think any Oneida person would consider themselves an expert in their cultural worldview and identity, many deeply understand tsi?niuwalihot<sup>^</sup> (our ways) and see the world differently from non-Natives. As a result of a lifetime of interactions and conversations, many Oneida people have guided my cultural understanding, and as such, Oneida values and principles will guide this research. Much of this chapter proceeds to understand Oneida values and

Oneida cultural constructs that blend my personal experiences and interpretations and those of my elders and mentors.

To describe Oneida cultural foundations and an integral Oneida value such as yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, for instance, is a difficult task, and as such, my descriptions may not be complete. However, for this study's purposes, I have done my best to capture the complexity of relevant Oneida cultural ways of knowing and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a foundational cultural construct for the Oneida people to provide a solid foundation for the theoretical framework of this study. Much of what follows came from conversations and informal interviews with my mother, Annette Cornelius. I want to cite her as a cultural knowledge keeper at the beginning of this chapter to distinguish what information is specifically from her and what is from myself or others. My mother was born and raised in the Oneida community in Wisconsin. She possesses a Bachelor's Degree in Human Biology focusing on Nutritional Sciences and a Master's Degree in Teaching and Learning. She is also a certified Reiki Master, Herbologist, and Wellness Coach. Aside from her educational credentials, as an adult, my mother has spent most of her life learning and deepening her understanding of Oneida culture, specifically Oneida healing methodologies, medicinal plants, and family dynamics. Through her guidance, I have come to understand Oneida values and ways of knowing.

### ***Oneida Creation Story***

It is essential to start with a brief description of the Oneida Creation story to understand Oneida's cultural ways of knowing, including women's roles and cultural

values. The Creation Story details the beginning of all life as the Oneida know it, and it is the foundation of our belief system. The Creation is a complex story about the origin of Oneida people from the Sky World and Sky Woman's descent to earth. When Sky Woman came, the earth had no land, and as she descended, the original inhabitants gathered to prepare a place for her on the back of a great turtle. Sky Woman had brought seeds and plants from the Sky World and planted the seeds into the dirt. She shuffled her feet counterclockwise around the turtle's back, and as she shuffled, the turtle grew larger and larger, becoming Turtle Island (North America). Sky Woman initiated the first Creation that occurred in this world. Sky Woman's daughter was born as the world evolved, later bringing forth twin boys. The twins stood for the 'twinness' of life and had the power to finish Creation. Within the Creation Story are also teachings of duality, balance, and harmony, including right and wrong, light and dark, and the power of human consciousness (Cook, 1989; Antone, 2013). From the teachings of the Creation Story, the foundations of an Oneida sense of self and worldview are established and include the original instructions, the role of woman and man; concepts of the family; connection to the land; and fire, the sacred element of spirit, (Cook, 1989; Antone, 2013).

The Oneida Creation Story has many lessons and teachings. Among the teachings of Creation is the expectation that each new generation adds to this current Creation (reality) with new insights into ancestral knowledge, culturally known as "adding to the rafters." Within the oral tradition, Haudenosaunee knowledge provides clarity, supports

our identity, and gives us purpose. Ancestral knowledge is the source of our foundational teachings while reinforcing and enlightening yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> - the fire or spirit within us.

The Creation story, combined with ceremonies, Kayalakowa (Great Law), and the Kaliwiiyo, are the sources of Haudenosaunee knowledge and serve as the foundation for our values, morals, belief system, practices, and governing system. The repository knowledge in the teachings and stories guides and directs our actions and relationships to each other and the natural world and provides the basis for how our Indigenous knowledge is expressed and advanced as we navigate the contemporary world.

### ***Oneida Core Values***

Oneida epistemology is shared and communally maintained cultural knowledge not established by fixed methods of cultural transmission because each generation expects to "add to the rafters" or refine and add to the culture. However, core cultural knowledge, including a shared history (e.g., Creation, clan systems, Kayanlakowa, Kaliwiyo) and cultural values and principles (such as yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>), are consistently maintained across generations. While cultural practices may change over time, the core Oneida worldview has stayed rooted within the community and people.

While the foundational principles for the Oneida people come from many sources of repository knowledge, the Oneida core values specifically came from the Peacemaker during a time of chaos and war between the Haudenosaunee people. The period before the Peacemaker was a dark time in Haudenosaunee's history when the culture, ceremonies, and peaceful way of life – the original instructions, were almost lost. The

mission of the Peacemaker was to remind the people of their original responsibilities given by the Creator and restore values of kindness, love, joy, and peace (Porter, 2008).

Through the Peacemaker's teachings, the Oneida derive their core values. The core values are:

1. Kahletsyalusla – the heartfelt encouragement of the best in each of us
2. Kanolukhwasla – compassion, caring, identity, and joy of being
3. Ka?nikuhli:yo – the openness of the good spirit and mind
4. Ka?tshatst^sla – the strength of belief and vision as a people
5. Kalihwi:yo – the use of good words about ourselves, our Nation, and our future
6. Yukawa:tsile? – our family and our Nation
7. Yukwatsistay^ - our fire, our spirit within each one of us

The development of strong cultural values is essential to ongoing personal growth. Peregrym and Wollf (2013) wrote that individuals develop values through continuous interactions and connections with people in various parts of their life, such as at home, with peers, and in educational settings. Thus, values develop through experience and learning from experience. As individuals age, they reform themselves over time, and values help to reflect and interpret experiences. Antone (2013) described the development of values and the refinement of the individual self in his interpretation of the Haudenosaunee stages of life, where he presented the continuous spiral of growth as we age.

As we age, we align ourselves and our actions with cultural values. In all our interactions with Creation, we approach each situation with a good mind. An example of this is how we ask others for help. We say *awatuka* or “Is it possible?” This small action reflects non-interference and respect for another person's sovereignty. Oneida cultural values also reflect resilience and a joyful existence.

For Oneida people, our cultural values provide the basis for the connections and practices with the world around us. Indigenous needs are rooted in spirituality and cultural ways of being and go beyond the Western notion of human needs, including food, clothing, and shelter. From an Oneida perspective, individual capabilities are grounded in the strengths of the core values, including the good mind, personal fire, encouragement, family, and community relationships. Maton et al. (2004) wrote that individual strengths include various cognitive, emotional, psychological, moral, and behavioral abilities, such as self-efficacy, active coping, practical knowledge, unique talents, and perseverance. The deeper understandings of the core values resonate with the idea that strengths are multifaceted and reflect the individual, family, and community.

### **Roles of Oneida Women**

"Women are considered the progenitors of the Nation" ---The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations: The Great Binding Law, *Kayantlakowa* (as cited in Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017, p. 37)

In this section of the chapter, I describe the historical roles of Oneida women and how their roles continue to persist in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is essential to understand the historical and contemporary roles of Oneida women to understand the space the

participants in this study occupy as young Oneida women from their community. Our historical and modern cultural roles partly define the identity of women in Oneida communities, and according to Mohawk Clan Mother Iakoiane Wakerahkats:teh (2017), "it is the women who are responsible for bringing along the next generation to carry the culture forward" (p. 2).

For Oneida women, there are many ways our historical and cultural roles and responsibilities have not only continued but evolved and grown over time. Haudenosaunee women were the center of society. Paula Gunn Allen (1986) described this centrality of women as a gynocracy, meaning that matrilocality, matrifocality, matrilineality, and maternal control of household goods and resources were present and active features of traditional tribal life. It is essential to acknowledge that there are countless ways traditional cultures have survived, considering the devastating impacts on tribal communities due to colonization. Another important element of the current role of Oneida women is the multitude of ways higher education has provided an avenue for Oneida women to reclaim their leadership roles in the community and work to rebalance Oneida society.

### ***Historical Roles of Oneida Women***

Historically, the Great Law of Peace outlined many of the roles of Haudenosaunee women. In Haudenosaunee communities, women were considered the keepers of the culture and were responsible for defining the community's political, social, spiritual, and economic norms. In this regard, the Haudenosaunee recognize that the

community identity is rooted in the responsibilities of women (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017). The Great Law of Peace serves as the constitution for the Haudenosaunee people; it is the foundation of our core values and prescribes our relationship with other people and all of Creation. While the Great Law identifies Haudenosaunee principles for all nations, "perhaps the most identifiable characteristic of the Great Law is its recognition of the 'status and suffrage accorded women by the Haudenosaunee [, with] approximately one-fourth of the Great Law's clauses recogniz[ing] the power and influence of women in the Iroquois culture" (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017, p. 37).

In the past, Haudenosaunee women occupied a significant and influential position (Shafer, 1990). As described by Paula Gunn Allen (1986), Haudenosaunee society was a gynocracy. Descent, or clan membership, was traced through the mother rather than the father, as it was in Western society (Shafer, 1990; Champion Randle, 1990; and Tooker, 1990). After marriage, a Haudenosaunee man moved into his wife's longhouse (matrilocality). Historically, women of Haudenosaunee communities also made decisions regarding the village's location, the timing of planting, resource division (based on need, not equal distribution), and were responsible for raising children (Brown, 1989). While agriculture and food preparation are traditionally dual responsibilities, it was common practice that women were responsible for both roles (Cook, 1989; Brown, 1989; and Cornelius, 2021). Simply put, women were responsible for everything occurring

within the village, while men were responsible for everything outside the village.

Additionally, women managed to prepare and store dry foods.

In addition to the functional roles of women, they held an influential position in the governing structure of the Haudenosaunee. Each clan had a Clan Mother who acted as the leader of each clan. Clan Mothers selected male chiefs to act as spokesmen and to represent the clan in Grand Council. The Clan Mother also had the authority to remove the chief if they did not act on behalf of the clan (Shafer, 1990; Champion Randle, 1990; Tooker, 1990; Alfred, 1999; and Cornelius, 2021). Katsi Cook (1989) quoted Seneca Elder Ernie Mohawk to describe women's leadership role, who stated, "I'll tell you, the women – they had the power. If you wanted to get anything done, you had to go to your grandmother. If she agreed, you could take it to the clan mothers, and they would decide if they would take it to the Chiefs and put it through council" (p. 82). While Clan Mothers performed a vital role in traditional government, the women of each clan family also tended to understand the household's issues deeply. Women spent most of their time in the community managing the homes and economy and thus knew the pertinent issues. Further, while the women could send the chiefs out to be the spokespeople for their families, many political decisions were made at the local family and womanhood level.

While Haudenosaunee women were not completely dominant, they significantly influenced the economic, political, and social organizations that shaped Haudenosaunee society. Haudenosaunee women significantly influenced their communities and enjoyed social equality not seen in Western societies. However, once contact with Europeans

occurred and the later Federal Indian policies were enacted, particularly removal and relocation to reservations, life for Haudenosaunee communities drastically changed. Nevertheless, Haudenosaunee women continued to pass on cultural values, lifeways, and traditions to their children. While the traditional roles for women, including decision-making and leadership, have changed disproportionately and vastly due to colonization, many Oneida women are actively working to rebalance community roles. Oneida women are regaining and rebalancing their traditional roles by breaking down barriers, reclaiming knowledge, and defining success on their terms, including attaining higher education.

### ***Contemporary Roles of Oneida Women***

The current role of women in the Oneida community and Indigenous communities worldwide is multifaceted. Women are generally seen as the transmitters of cultural wisdom and knowledge and, as such, are vital to the community's survival (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017). Nevertheless, Native women also navigate social, economic, and political problems rooted in colonial policies that affect tribal communities. Whether Native women are young adults (who will be participants in this study), adults, mothers, grandmothers, or elders, they are continually affected by the dichotomous nature of carrying on traditional cultural lifeways in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Oneida women have reclaimed their identity as community leaders and knowledge holders by navigating the academy successfully and returning home to the Oneida community to help create change.

The practice of matrilineality or lineage following the mother's line (or clan) is still followed in the Oneida community today. The importance of clan family and clan membership is a fundamental aspect of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and will be explained later in this chapter. For Oneida people, membership in a clan is an essential aspect of our sense of self, as each clan has specific responsibilities. The Oneida have three clans: turtle, bear, and wolf. The turtle clan is the keeper of the land, and their responsibility is the environment. The bear clan is the keeper of the medicines, and generally, knowledge of traditional medicines is gifted to members of the bear clan. The wolf clan is the pathfinder responsible for guiding the people to live the way the Creator intended. The responsibilities of each clan are essential because members of each clan tend to naturally express the responsibilities and gifts the clans are said to have. As young people enter responsibility time, they begin to understand more deeply their many obligations as young men and women. Their clan responsibilities are another layer of the intricacy of an emerging sense of self for young Oneida people.

The naming of individuals is a role of women that continues to exist in the Oneida community. Contemporarily, while both men and women can give names, women are typically the holders of names, and each clan has several women that generally name people in the community. The Oneida names are recorded to identify familial lines. Knowing the family lineage is still very strong with many women in the Oneida Community, and several take care of that responsibility, depending on the clan.

Perhaps the most disrupted responsibility of Oneida women has been their traditional role in governing. As previously mentioned, historically, Clan Mothers were responsible for selecting and counseling chiefs. However, since colonization, the governing system of the Haudenosaunee has been dramatically changed, especially since the Indian Reorganization Act (IRA) of 1934. The IRA was a federal act that, in part, changed the traditional governing systems for tribes across the country to one that mimicked the constitution-based governing system of the United States. A change in governing meant that the United States no longer recognized the traditional Grand Council of Chiefs that governed the actions of the Haudenosaunee, which dramatically diminished the role of Clan Mothers and other women in governing.

Nonetheless, as a testament to the tenacity of Oneida women, they have found many ways to continue to impact decision-making in the Oneida community. For example, Annette Cornelius (2021) shared a conversation with her mother in the early 2000s. She asked her mother to describe a time of significant, positive change in the Oneida community that was sustained over time and who was responsible for the change. Her mother described the women in the community. Annette asked her if there were men involved. Her mother recalled that while men may have gotten credit for the change, his wife, mother, or other female relatives guided the change (Cornelius, 2021). Her mother noted that a shift in roles was occurring. Oneida men are not the only speakers anymore, as women are taking on a more public voice. This shift is an evolution of an Oneida

cultural practice, embodying a contemporary role for Oneida women that has foundations in the culture.

Embracing the role of keepers of culture, many contemporary Oneida women maintain Oneida traditional values and lifeways. While the tasks of maintaining an Oneida culture have changed over time, the importance of education and the role women have in children's education continues to remain strong in the Oneida community. However, the transference of our traditional knowledge is a communal process. One of the women's primary roles is to create deep thinkers and help young people see beyond what is presented. Culturally, the community's women constantly pushed individuals to think beyond what they believed they could do. Oneida women are very analytical and expected to multitask day-to-day activities and foresee future generations' needs. The seventh-generation philosophy is the responsibility to consider the needs of future generations and the impact of current decisions on future generations. The Seventh Generation today refers to decisions made about energy, water, and natural resources and ensuring those decisions are sustainable for seven generations in the future. However, the seventh-generation philosophy can also be applied to relationships - every decision should result in sustainable relationships seven generations in the future.

The work of being an Oneida woman in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is as challenging as ever, and yet Oneida women will persevere as they have for thousands of years in an imperfect world, shaping life out of what is there (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017). Many traditional roles of Oneida women have been shaped by colonization, oppression, and

globalization. Maintaining traditional roles in the face of lingering adversity is challenging yet rewarding as Oneida women reclaim and rebalance their place in the community. Young Oneida women are especially learning how to balance life in the 21<sup>st</sup> century with obligations to the community, including cultural knowledge, leadership, and familial responsibilities. A vital component of the reclamation and balancing of women's roles is a strong sense of self which, for Oneida people, largely stems from yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and the "logs" necessary to maintain and sustain a strong fire. In the next section of this chapter, I extensively detail the interrelated components of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in the context of the lives of young Oneida women and their current stage of life.

### **Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> (the fire or spirit within each one of us)**

For the Haudenosaunee people, fire is a powerful metaphor used to describe the spirit of all aspects of life. Oneida people believe that a spirit or fire endows every piece of Creation. Oneida people also believe that everyone is inherently endowed with a personal fire from the time they are conceived and bring that fire with them when they are born. Our physical body encases yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and provides individuals with the means of expression and mobility in the physical world. As individuals age and grow through life, they gain a deeper understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and learn what stokes their fire. As young Oneida women enter adulthood and gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of their roles as Oneida women, they are also at a point of maturation traditionally called "responsibility time." During responsibility time, young Oneida women and men learn their place in their family and the community and the associated

responsibilities they will carry with them as they grow into new stages of life. Parallel to the new understandings gained during responsibility time is a deeper understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, which is the central construct of this study. As we age, our connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> becomes more personal as we learn how to maintain our fire with the constant interaction of our family. Maintaining our fire is a significant responsibility that the young women in this study are entering. Having discussed the historical and contemporary roles of Oneida women, this chapter will discuss yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in the context of the responsibility time stage of life as young Oneida women are defining their role in their family and community and navigating PWIs.

Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is multifaceted, multidimensional, and dependent on numerous personal, social, and cultural factors, meaning every individual has a personal interpretation of their fire and its meaning in their lives. As the foundation of an Oneida worldview, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is characterized by its "holistic view of the environment and social structure; it is a spiritual voice that integrates the emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual vision of Native Americans" (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017). As explicated below, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is holistic and balanced, and Oneida people draw upon the interconnected contexts of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to find meaning, purpose, hope, and a sense of belonging in our lives. In this study, the young Oneida women may have many interpretations of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and its role in their lives. Indigenous sense of self is like a vast metaphoric ocean where there are not many pathways to a single destination but many pathways to many destinations (Lupe, 2007). Therefore, this section will not define

what it means to be a Native person or an Oneida woman. However, significant cultural values provide a foundation for how individuals perceive themselves and the world. In this section of the chapter, I will describe the Oneida cultural value of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to help the reader understand the interrelated components that form the cultural foundation of an Oneida worldview.

### ***Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and the Life Stages***

Haudenosaunee culture is holistic, and new life stages continuously evolve (Antone, 2013). While there are general ages that correspond to the stages of life, progress through the life stages is highly individual, and people may find themselves at different stages regardless of age. However, knowledge is drawn from traditional sources or epic narratives through life stages, including Creation, ceremonies, Great Law, and Kaliwiiyo. The teachings within the epic narratives of the Haudenosaunee people contain the elements of who we are, and the stories of resilience heard in these narratives contribute to the maintenance of a strong personal fire. For Haudenosaunee people, each characteristic relies on the others and cannot exist in wholeness alone. Thus, a Haudenosaunee personality relies on the wholeness needed for a strong personal fire.

As individuals age through life, it is critical to continually personalize cultural knowledge and incorporate it into our greater understanding of what it means to be an Oneida person. Embedded within the life stages are opportunities for personal reflection and renewal critical to a greater understanding of our cultural and contemporary roles, sense of self, and connection to Creation. A Haudenosaunee understanding of the life

stages is combined with the repository of cultural knowledge within our communities today to form a foundation that guides our lives as Haudenosaunee people.

Current research in collective memory and historical identity recognizes that language, ceremony, values, and principles are critical to forming and maintaining one's cultural identity (Rodriguez & Wakerakatste, 2017). The principles of everyday life can also be regarded as the cultural values by which individuals form and reform their cultural identity over time. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is a critical Oneida cultural value and includes several foundational qualities to an Oneida identity. The complexity of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> speaks to the intricacy of an Oneida sense of self and the process of self-actualization we experience as we grow. Translated, Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> means "our fire within each of us" and refers to the deeply individual and personal conception of the self or our inner spirit. Fire represents our passion, creativity, and motivation as we move throughout the life stages. The larger circles of the fire are equally important and influential to a person's fire. According to Myers (2010), when we are born, we add our fire to the fires of the people we have joined in the physical realm. Together we create collective fires, first with our nuclear family and extended family, then with the community, and successfully as citizens of our Nation, as members of a Confederacy, and ultimately as an integral part of all Creation (Myers, 2010).

One of the cultural responsibilities of women is never to let the family fire go out. Family fire supports individuals and helps keep people on the path to knowing their place in the world. In other words, the family fire helps to regenerate our energies (Cornelius,

2020). As children, those around us primarily sustain and maintain our fires, typically our nuclear and extended families. We rely on others to meet our needs, which is necessary for a strong fire. As individuals transition into adulthood, the communal nature of Oneida culture becomes a more prominent part of their lives as they gain a deeper understanding of relationships to others and Creation. For a young Oneida woman entering adulthood, this is a time when she may understand that she will eventually have a home and family of her own, and she may be responsible in the future for helping others sustain their fires. Responsibility time is also when young people start to see their place in the greater community and Nation fire and how our gifts can contribute to the larger circles of yukwatsistay^.

How Native communities handle the stages of life – childhood, adulthood, and elderly –model the interconnectedness of our cultures. Within many Native communities, the life stages are celebrated as a dynamic of natural life and blend in ways that enhance and express the fullness of the spirit of the community. Moving through time and changing together as a community, members perceive connectedness and relationships as a way of life (Cajete, 2015). Considering that a spiral rather than linear progression over time characterizes the life stages, it is crucial to understand that individuals move through the life stages at individual paces and learn different lessons at each point. Adding to the nuance of the life stages described earlier in this chapter, yukwatsistay^ can be further characterized concerning stages of fire: morning fire (childhood), sustaining fire (adulthood), and banking the fire (elder).

High energy characterizes the morning fire and is akin to a fire needed to warm the house and begin the day. The foundations for our Oneida identity are formed as children are socialized into the community. Children also learn about their sense of self concerning their family and community and generally develop a positive sense of self in early childhood (Sando, cited in Romero-Little, 2010). During childhood, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is largely stoked by our family around us, specifically mothers, aunts, and grandmothers (Cornelius, 2020). During the early stages of life, children rely on those around them to provide for their social and emotional needs, sustaining and maintaining their fires as they learn and grow into the next stage. Through the foundation of our sense of self and the connections to our family fire, Oneida people can grow into the next phase of life with a strong personal fire. A solid foundation of our sense of self and support system for our fires established in childhood is necessary to carry out adult responsibilities to self, family, community, and Creation in a way that reflects the Oneida core values.

The beliefs that young people have about themselves provide the foundation for all areas of their life as they age, including motivation, well-being, and personal accomplishments (Pajares, 2015). For young Oneida women, the childhood foundations of their sense of self stem from the various logs of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and their connection to the family and community fire. As young people transition from the morning fire, they enter the sustaining fire time of their lives.

Sustaining fire is the longest stage and is needed to support us throughout our adult lives. A sustaining fire is akin to a fire that maintains energy throughout the day.

Adulthood is the stage of life where we spend most of our lives and, as such, can be broken down into several more minor phases. Sue and Sue (2016) offered a stage-based model of adult identity development specific to racial identity. Their model outlined identity development in five elements based on their attitudes and beliefs towards themselves, members of their ethnic group, minority groups, and the "white majority." These elements are conformity, dissonance, resistance and immersion, introspection, and integrative awareness. When Native young people enter predominantly white institutions, their experience of dissonance is significant, whereby they begin to experience internal conflicts regarding their sense of self. Sue and Sue (2016) characterize the experience of dissonance as being marked by an encounter or experience inconsistent with culturally held beliefs, attitudes, and values that propel individuals from conformity into dissonance. The age of transition into adulthood and the emerging adult self is a profoundly significant period in life for all people. The experience of moving from childhood to adulthood can be complicated or entangled when entering situations with a worldview that often runs counter to the dominant Western worldview. Encounters that challenge our worldview can be described as dissonance. During adulthood, individuals learn how to sustain their fires through introspection, change, and growth. It is usually during this time that we come to know our true potential and embody the gifts with which we are born (Cornelius, 2020). In adulthood, we learn to rely on our family and community to sustain our fires when necessary, such as when encountering dissonance. The reliance on others to protect our fires speaks to the relational aspects of Indigenous

communities, whereby we often rely on our social networks to help us in times of need (Cornelius, 2020).

As young Oneida women transition into adulthood, sustaining fire time parallels responsibility time (life stage). During both periods, many changes occur for young adults. Culturally, young women learn about new responsibilities for maintaining their fire and place within the family and community fire. As young people enter adulthood, they begin to rely more on an internal sense of self, their interpretations of the world around them, and their place in the world as they enter new experiences, particularly the PWI environment for this study. As young people gain a deeper understanding of the world and their place in it, they use the foundations for a strong fire developed in childhood to sustain their fires in the absence of family and community, as is the situation that often occurs when young people attend PWIs.

In addition to learning about themselves on a deeper level, young people entering the sustaining fire period are also beginning to understand their role in the future of their people. Young Oneida women start to see the intergenerational aspects of women's traditional roles as our relationships with the women in our lives (mothers, aunts, and grandmas) evolve and change. The transition into adulthood and the subsequent deeper understanding of women's roles in the community bring new insights into their roles in the lives of future generations. The concept of making decisions based on future generations is called the Seventh Generation Philosophy and is an integral part of Haudenosaunee epistemology. The family and community fire are directly related to the

seventh generation as Haudenosaunee people believe we are all connected to the community, and that community transcends time. Individual roles in the community are interconnected and, at the core, needed to sustain yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> over time. The interconnectedness of the generations is vital to the sustainment of individual, community, and nation fires as we are connected to our ancestors through ancestral knowledge and connected to future generations through our decisions today. For young adults entering responsibility time, they are learning how to take information from the past and add to it their ideas and understanding of the world. As young adults age, they transfer those ideas and insights to subsequent generations. Young adults learn that their decisions are not just about themselves but part of a web of repository knowledge that impacts all community members and future generations.

While the participants in this study are just entering the sustaining fire period of their lives, the banking fire (elder years) is essential, even though they have not reached that stage. Indigenous elders comprise a vital role in the maintenance of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> for youth and adults and the larger community. A primary responsibility of elders is the transference of traditional knowledge and practices that involve sharing values, culture, and collective identity, notably through participation in education, community development, and intergenerational relationships. The involvement of elders in Indigenous societies contributes to intergenerational relationships that benefit themselves, their families, and society (Viscogliosi et al., 2020). Further, for everyone in the community, the benefits of elders encompass emotional and spiritual dimensions and

environmental, economic, and cultural dimensions. These dimensions are a significant part of sustaining the community and nation fire.

As young people enter adulthood, their relationships with their elders change. During childhood, elders comprise a vital teaching role by passing on knowledge through storytelling and enacting cultural teaching and values. While we continue to learn from our elders as we age, we gain deeper insights into our place in the community and begin to discern how culture shows in subtle and overt ways in elders' life stories. In many ways, a more powerful understanding of elders' histories comes from an increased ability to reflect on past experiences and integrate this learning into our representation of ourselves and our lives. The skill to listen and reflect is greatly enhanced as we enter adulthood and see ourselves concerning our family and community. Through relationships with elders, young adults form a greater awareness of their sense of self and make meaning and coherence of life experiences. While mostly subtle and in the form of storytelling, the intergenerational guidance of elders allows young adults to consider challenges in a cultural context and glean strength from experiences that enable a sense of purpose from the effort. Without the guidance of elders, young adults are less able to access cultural resources when faced with dissonance.

Understanding the stages of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> from childhood to elderhood is a critical foundation for understanding the complexity of how individuals grow and change over time. As individuals move through life stages, they realize that growth and change are critical dynamics of life. Individuals also learn that growth and change are essentially

a reflection of self-determination and moving toward our true potential through experiences of dissonance to arrive at wholeness. The next section of this chapter categorizes yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> into several logs that together form a strong personal fire. As with any fire, there is the fuel that makes it burn. Oneida people have come to understand that we are all born with eight logs of our fire that serve as the starting fuel. However, this differs from imparting that yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> comprises individual components in separation from the other parts.

Like White Shield's (2009) findings of the college experience as an interconnected spiral, the logs of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> are intimately interwoven and cannot be considered in isolation. Each log of the fire connects to the other logs in a unique relationship that forms the persona of an Oneida person. Our fire logs develop as we age, and our connections to family and community grow and change. As discussed below, our fire logs form the foundation for our sense of self and worldview as the Oneida people. For this study, an awareness of the components of the fire is essential to understanding the meaning yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> provides for young Oneida women navigating PWIs.

### ***Inherent Logs***

The metaphor of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> includes several logs necessary to kindle and maintain a strong fire. There are four inherent logs that we are born with – consciousness, to be aware of our motives; concatenation, to link with all beings and phenomena; creativity, to make connections happen in a mutually beneficial way; and curiosity, to be open to the discovery of others (Maracle, 2007). While individuals are born with the

ability to express each of the inherent logs, they are spiraling components of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> that increase their complexity over time as we gain new understandings and insights into our fires. The spiral nature of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> represents multiple cycles of reflection from generation to generation, beyond an individual life. A spiral form does not imply pre-determined stability but instead suggests dynamic and continuous change through reflecting on our experience and the experiences of others. We can experience multiple perspectives in our lives and the world simultaneously by looking back at the teaching of our ancestors and considering how our actions will impact future generations.

**Consciousness.** Consciousness is difficult to understand, and while we consciously experience many different things and reflect on our experiences, it is more challenging to think about consciousness itself (Velmans, 2009). Nagel (1974) described consciousness as 'what it is like to be something.' While Nagel does capture something of the essence of the term, consciousness means many things to many different people, and no universal core meaning exists (Velmans, 2009). Nonetheless, consciousness is a fundamental aspect of the human experience. It reflects an ancient thread that echoes through millennia and reminds humans that we are a movement through time, and each person is a link to the past and the future, woven into a fabric of belonging. For this study, I draw upon Velmans' (2009) "everyday" understanding of consciousness, which purports that consciousness encompasses all we consciously know or experience. This understanding includes experiences we commonly associate with ourselves, such as

thoughts, dreams, images, sensations, feelings, etc., and the non-physical or phenomenal world beyond our bodies (Velmans, 2009).

Consciousness is central to being human, and an understanding of consciousness must also include reflexivity (Velmans, 2009). Reflexivity in consciousness means we examine the things we experience, and the experience leads to greater understandings of ourselves and Creation. Describing consciousness as a reflexive practice to gain a deeper understanding aligns with an Oneida perspective on consciousness. The Oneida believe we are born conscious beings with the innate ability to think deeply and are given the gift of choice or free will. The type of thinking associated with an Oneida consciousness is reflective, comprehensive, and always concerning our connections to those around us, including Creation. While consciousness tends to be described in terms of a spectrum that starts with a beginning to an end (true consciousness), a more detailed description is that the process of consciousness is a circle or spiral in that there are no beginnings and no endings, merely a continual flow (Stanley & Wise, 1993). Understanding the underpinnings of an Oneida consciousness is necessary to understand the complexity of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Oneida consciousness emerged from our matriarchal societies and, therefore, from a matriarchal consciousness, which is intrinsically different from Western conceptions of consciousness.

As they enter adulthood and venture beyond their home communities, young adults everywhere will be confronted with global issues that impact their everyday lives, including poverty, economic stress, climate change, and sustainability because of

globalization and an ever-changing world (Thomas et al., 2014). For Native young adults, compounded with global concerns is the responsibility for continuing cultural traditions and passing on repository ancestral knowledge to future generations. The further development of consciousness for young Oneida women as they transition into responsibility time and from the morning fire into the sustaining fire is crucial. They are learning to be engaged and informed citizens of Oneida and larger global communities. To be informed citizens, young Oneida adults must critically evaluate new situations and experiences. Reflecting on these new experiences is integral to developing consciousness as we grow from childhood to adulthood.

The foundations for a strong fire developed in childhood serve the emerging Oneida adult as they can draw upon learned skill sets such as understanding others' perspectives of thoughts, asking critical questions, and critical reflection on new experiences – all components of the emerging adult consciousness (Thomas et al., 2014). As Oneida youth enter adulthood, expanding consciousness is impacted by learning how to navigate the world independently while relying on familial, peer, and community supports when necessary. The support received from family and community speaks to the importance of the family and community fires to which individuals belong. An essential part of an emerging adult consciousness is developing a social identity and learning our place in the group membership (Thomas et al., 2014).

As previously described, consciousness is a never-ending process that evolves as we gain deeper insights into our roles and responsibilities as Oneida people. For young

Oneida adults, consciousness forms the basis for understanding our relationships with others, our responsibilities to self and community, and the ability to think critically and propose solutions for issues that affect the next seven generations. Consciousness is also profoundly interconnected with the other logs that comprise yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, and all logs are necessary to have a strong personal fire.

**Concatenation.** Interwoven with consciousness is concatenation, or the ability to make linkages or connections. Connections help us form relationships and understand the nature of our relationships with others, our responsibilities to ourselves and others, and our roles in our family and community (Cajete, 2015). Concatenation for Oneida people can best be thought of as the mechanism we use to form and reform relationships with all of Creation and reinforces our sense of belonging in our family and community. The fundamental belief that we are all related and part of a larger cosmic and planetary family emerges from the Creation Story. While we are all human, we are related to all other species because we have the same mother (Mother Earth), which perhaps best sums up our relatedness to Creation and the intimate nature of our relational existence.

An Oneida worldview treats the individual, family, community, Nation, and Creation as interdependent and relational. Within Oneida culture, relationships are the cornerstone of the community, and community is also where we learn what it means to be related. An Oneida identity and sense of self are directly tied to our relationships, which emerge over time with repeated connections between each other and Creation. Kinship with our extended family and clan provides a web of relationships, and children learn

early on the significance of the foundation of their relationships (Cajete, 2015). The necessity of family in relation to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is a critical component of a strong fire. Culturally Oneida people do not follow the nuclear family structure but a communal one where extended family members frequently interact, share daily activities and express interdependence within the family network (Cornelius, 2021). All of our relationships are about meeting each other's needs. Historically, when we lived in longhouses (communal homes) with all our maternal relatives, individuals could go to various people to meet their needs. In a communal family system, individuals' needs are met in multiple ways that are personal and specific to everyone, which keeps their fires strong. Our relationships change and grow over time, and so does the impact of others on the maintenance of our fires. When we are young, we rely heavily on our connections to others to stoke our fires as we learn about ourselves and our place in the world. As we age, we rely on our fires and look to others as needed. However, a strong fire always requires relationships and connections (Cornelius, 2020).

As young adults enter responsibility time, their connections become more complex as they understand individual responsibility to their peers, family members, community, and society. At the age of transition into adulthood, our horizons expand and we begin to recognize the importance of giving back to the community. Viewing ourselves in relation to those around us changes how we interact with family, peers, and community as we understand our effects on others. The relationships and connections we form in our social networks shift from not merely receiving social support but giving

support to others (Kading et al., 2019). Active participation in social and extended networks helps to refine individual purpose further and shapes identity, and maintaining a connection to our support networks is an integral part of maintaining yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Additionally, research shows that maintaining social support from close family is predictive of well-being, even in adversity (Richmond et al., 2007). For the young Oneida women in this study attending PWIs, encountering dissonance (or adversity) was one experience where a strong personal fire was beneficial.

Adding the human relationships and connections that we form, for some individuals, a connection to Creation sustains a strong fire. For individuals entering adulthood, the relationships to Creation deepen through increased understandings of spiritual responsibilities. Our relationships with the earth and spiritual realm are the basis of the Haudenosaunee ceremonial cycle. The purpose of the ceremonies is to acknowledge and reaffirm our relationships to Creation and the responsibilities we have to continue to care for the land (Cornelius, 2021). Stories about relationships and connections are retold during many of the Oneida ceremonies. For example, the Green Corn ceremony is a celebration of the Three Sisters (corn, beans, and squash), and the story of our relationship as humans to the spirits of the Three Sisters is a reminder to be thankful for all that they provide. Many of our epic narratives (Creation, Great Law, and Kaliwiyo) are about relationships as humans and to the spiritual realm and Creation (Cornelius, 2021). Interconnectedness is also essential in the everyday interactions we

have with each other as our relationships help stoke our fires. As we grow through the life stages, we model interconnectedness as well.

**Curiosity.** There are many definitions of curiosity, but all point to the desire to know, learn and understand why and how things occur (Phillips et al., 2015). Curiosity is a natural human trait that motivates us to adapt and survive. As such, individuals are driven to discover new ways to solve problems and continually adapt over time (Gazzaniga, 2005). Curiosity also fosters cognitive, social, emotional, spiritual, and physical development of the life stages by encouraging exploration (Reio et al., 2006). This innate desire to explore the world around us helps individuals develop the flexibility to adapt to changing environments (Voss & Keller, 1983).

Further, curiosity has been acknowledged as essential in developing secure attachments, forming a positive sense of self, and healthy well-being (Reio et al., 2006). As such, curiosity is deeply intertwined with consciousness and concatenation as it facilitates the desire to explore our relationships and make sense of who we are in relation to family and community. Within the Oneida culture, curiosity is a lifelong characteristic of all individuals we are born with and encouraged to maintain over our lifetimes (Cornelius, 2020). Curiosity is significant in Oneida culture. Individuals are encouraged to explore, question, challenge, and engage with stimuli and experiences. As children, Oneida people are encouraged to ask questions to understand the world and why we do things in a certain way. As individuals enter adulthood, the skillset learned as children to think about the world critically allows them to synthesize information and

experiences and then reflect on the experience to deepen their understanding of the world. Critical thinking is an embodiment of high-level thinking, and according to Ennis (2011), critical thinking is reflective and used to make decisions by nature. Curiosity and critical thinking are intertwined. People who can think critically generally have high curiosity, immerse themselves in many experiences, are open-minded, flexible, and always search for and reflect on new information (Permanawati et al., 2018).

Further, research on critical thinking indicates that curiosity is necessary for thinking critically (Permanawati et al., 2018). Phillips et al. (2015) traced curiosity to questions and questions to sensory experiences. They argued that curiosity engaged all the senses and described it as learning to see the world through multiple lenses and consider others' perspectives (Phillips et al., 2015).

As previously described, a critical Haudenosaunee concept was "adding to the rafters," meaning each generation adds to the previous generation. One way to fulfill the responsibility to add to the previous generation is to look critically at the contributions of each generation and determine what will be continued and expanded upon, all with the seventh generation in mind (Cornelius, 2020). In this context, curiosity is not necessarily easy or comfortable and can sometimes invoke an uncomfortable sense of discord. This dissonance, while challenging, can lead to new pathways of thinking, doing, and being (Phillips et al., 2015).

Curiosity forms the basis for thinking critically about the world for young people entering adulthood. The tools learned in childhood around asking questions and seeking

information carry forth into responsibility time and the sustaining fire period. The young Oneida women in this study were entering a period of life often regarded as a period of exploration as they began to make decisions independently for the first time. During this stage of life, the approach to exploring the world around them changes significantly as young adults are more likely to engage in an exploration driven by information seeking (Somerville et al., 2017). Further, Somerville et al. found that young adults were more likely to consider the long-term consequences of gathering information in a future-oriented decision-making process than adolescents (2017). Future-oriented thinking parallels many Oneida concepts forming on a much deeper level for young Oneida women, including the seventh-generation philosophy, the relational nature of Oneida culture and families, and the ability to think critically about our decisions. For young Oneida women, curiosity into adulthood means looking at the world through many perspectives, reconciling experiences, and thinking more deeply about their place in the family, community, and Nation fires. When young Oneida women have been encouraged in their curiosity as children and teens, curiosity remains a central and robust piece of their fire.

**Creativity.** The last inherent log in yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is the innate ability to be creative. Creativity can be applied in several ways, including to the creative person, ideas (process), the products of our thoughts, and our environment (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007). Studies of creativity can also look at an individual's personality, motivation, and intelligence (Kaufman & Sternberg, 2007). While there are many ways to understand

creativity, for this study, I look to the Oneida cultural understanding of creativity, which encourages a person's new or different way of looking at a situation, questioning people or topics, and after introspection, offering creative solutions (Cornelius, 2020). Oneida people are solution-oriented and often consider how possible solutions benefit all (collaborative thinking) rather than just the individual (Western thinking).

When we are children, our creativity is encouraged and most often expressed through play-based learning. Critical, creative thinking allows us to adapt, change, and build meaning individually and collectively as we enter adulthood. Play-based learning teaches individuals how to live with others without controlling each situation, meaning it connects experiences of surprise and openness to those of curiosity and wonder (Latta et al., 2017). Play-based learning that engages the self and others in the world, Creation included, embraces the holistic nature of an Indigenous worldview that values social, emotional, physical, and cognitive development.

While creativity is often thought of in art, performance, or music, self-expression is an additional intrinsic aspect of creativity. Self-expression can take many forms but ultimately expresses one's thoughts and feelings that are accomplished through words, choices, or actions (Kim & Ko, 2007). For Haudenosaunee people, creativity and self-expression are vital pieces of Haudenosaunee society as it allows individuals to be their best selves, reach their full potential, and make valuable contributions to our family and community. Research shows that self-expression is one of the most important ways to connect, navigate, and grow with each other (Glaser, 2016). When self-expression aligns

with our authentic selves, we are encouraged to be the best we can be and work effectively with others.

Additionally, according to Glaser, acting in line with our authentic selves gives us greater access to higher-order abilities such as creative and innovative thinking, problem-solving, and planning (2016). Further, authentic self-expression is essential for our relationships with ourselves and others. Learning about ourselves through self-expression, reflection, and engagement in creative learning benefits us in all walks of life (Hanes & Weisman, 2016).

Creativity is the mechanism by which individuals learn how to express their most authentic selves, impacting all aspects of their lives. For young Oneida women attending PWIs and away from home, creativity becomes an essential mechanism for filtering experiences of dissonance. When individuals experience dissonance, oneself or voice may be silenced. This experience is common for Native young adults in PWIs, especially if the dissonance is coupled with discrimination or intolerance. Our fire can diminish when the experience of dissonance impacts self-esteem, voice, and self-expression. In instances where our fires diminish, self-expression or creativity provides an opportunity to cultivate one's voice and create an environment where individuals feel empowered and develop a stronger sense of self as they learn to work through the experience of dissonance.

### ***Nurturing Logs***

In addition to inherent logs, to have a strong fire, individuals also carry with them four nurturing logs. The nurturing logs include kindness, caring, sharing, and loving. While the nurturing logs are essential for a strong fire, they are secondary to the nurturing logs in this study. As with the other aspects of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, the foundations of our inherent logs are added during childhood and provide us with additional fuel for our fires (Myers, 2010). Oneida people believe that when a child grows, members of the family, extended family, and clan are responsible for nurturing and feeding our fire so that we have the foundations set to reach our highest potential, leading to self-actualization. For our inherent logs to remain in place as fuel for our fire, we must also possess and have the qualities of the nurturing logs around us. As children, warm and loving interactions between parents and children develop a child's confidence, resilience, and communication skills. As individuals grow into adulthood, these skills are needed to work through problems, deal with stress, and form relationships with others in adulthood.

### ***Having a Voice***

Yukwastistay<sup>^</sup> is a complex, relational, and interconnected cultural construct that, at its core, forms the basis for an Oneida sense of self and provides the necessary tools for self-actualization. As children, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is nurtured and maintained by those around us, specifically family and extended family. Childhood provides the necessary, safe space for children to learn about each piece of the fire and sets the stage for future growth as individuals. Once Oneida people transition from childhood to adulthood and into responsibility time and sustain fire time, our understandings of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> deepen and

change, as does our awareness of our responsibilities to self, family, and community. At the core, yukwatsistay^ is the need to be heard and have a voice; acknowledging our voice is necessary for a strong fire. For young Oneida women entering PWIs, there will be instances where their voices are not heard by peers or professors. There may be a conflict with the belief that each voice is essential when entering a college setting and encountering individuals with differing views. These encounters are dissonance. Metaphorically, when dissonance occurs, it is akin to throwing water on your fire, which can diminish it. As young adults, when they start to feel their fire weakening because they conflict with someone else's belief system, they can lean on family and community connections to help rekindle their fires. The reliance on others to stoke our fires during times of need demonstrates strong family and community fires.

Young women from families with strong cultural backgrounds tend to have strong minds and voices, whether they know and understand it or not. Moreover, their families, often the women, hold these young women up and stoke their fires. Young women often rely on their mothers, aunts, and grandmothers for support and strength. The women in their families often have strong voices and, when balanced, are independent and resilient. A strong voice is prevalent in the Oneida community and ties directly to yukwatsistay^, and a strong voice was valued and encouraged. By describing the experiences of the young women in this study, we can begin to understand what yukwatsistay^ means for them.

We can address questions such as: How is their fire sustained? How was it built up? Who stoked the fire? If we can understand in the 21<sup>st</sup> century what a strong fire looks like and how it got that way, we can implement action to provide the foundations for a strong fire for other people, whether they go off to college or not. Regardless of where Oneida people go, everyone needs a strong fire. In most cases, there will be spiritual and human aspects. It is twofold, we have to develop spiritually, and we have to develop culturally or humanly. Furthermore, when we have those two in place together, that gets you through difficult experiences.

### **Dissonance**

Dissonance theory is one of social psychology's most important and prolific theories (Cooper & Fazio, 1984; Aronson, 1992; Heine & Lehman, 1997; Metin & Camgoz, 2011; Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). From education to race and identity studies to developmental theory, dissonance theory has permeated many disciplines and undergone further refinement by scholars and researchers. Despite the far-reaching influence of dissonance theory in literature, more research needs to address dissonance from a socio-cultural perspective. Even less has the research addressed dissonance in the experiences of college students, particularly the college experience for Native American students. The present study focuses on the experience of and meaning of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> for young Oneida women attending PWIs as they experienced dissonance situations. In what preceded above, I discussed yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, particularly the inherent logs, as fundamental to cultural identity and sense of self for the Oneida people. Within

yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> are the beliefs and values of growth and actualization for the individual and the community. To build and maintain one's fire, but also the fires of others, challenges to examine one's thoughts and behaviors and grow in understanding of the teachings are desired experiences. Such experiences foster dissonance. The experience of dissonance is a place of learning that has always been embraced and encouraged by the Haudenosaunee.

Leon Festinger introduced cognitive dissonance in 1957, suggesting that humans innately seek cognitive consistency and are driven to hold attitudes and beliefs in concert. Accordingly, we strive to remove conflicting behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes to resolve dissonance (Taylor, 2019). Cognitive dissonance motivates the individual to reduce the dissonance while avoiding information or situations that would likely increase the dissonance (Harmon-Jones & Mills, 2019). However, Robbins and Jones (2016) emphasized the need for individuals to experience dissonance and that dissonance is not disruptive nor necessarily negative. Instead, one finds alternatives and new pathways in experiencing dissonance. Allan (2003) similarly stated that dissonance could positively affect awareness of cultural differences and foster intercultural learning.

Dissonance is often referred to as a cognitive phenomenon related to uncomfortable senses of discord, confusion, or conflict experienced during a change in the cultural environment (Parker, 2019). In this sense, dissonance results from unexpected, unexplained, or not fully understood changes due to differing cultural dynamics. However, another way to describe dissonance comes from social learning

theory. Social learning theorists describe dissonance as an experience to harness rather than a force to be avoided. In this description, dissonance fosters learning that is the result of the critical reflection and analysis of one's own beliefs, values, and reality (deconstruction), exposure to alternative views (confrontation), and the subsequent construction of new views (reconstruction) (Wals, 2007). For young Oneida adults, deconstruction-confrontation-reconstruction occurs as an essential part of their experience toward growth and maturity. The wisdom gained from this self-discovery process allows Native young adults to realign their skills, dispositions, and ways of engaging necessary for full participation in both their traditional culture and the culture of the PWI. Therefore, the realigned perspectives, attitudes, knowledge, beliefs, behaviors, and skills gained through the deconstruction-confrontation-reconstruction process allows them to effectively engage in the PWI culture that is inherently different from their Native American cultures in the context of today's global society (Bickel & Jensen, 2012).

Widick et al. (1978), Robbins & Jones (2016), and Huffman (1990) emphasized the need for individuals to experience dissonance. They indicated that dissonance is not a time of panic or disruption but a decision point where one can retreat due to alienation (drop out of college, for example) or realize that they can adjust to the new environment without losing their cultural self. Understanding cultural knowledge and values - one's own and others' - liberates interactions, experiences, and thought processes and allows for the examination and engagement in the world. Thus, dissonance cannot be considered

simply an obstacle to overcome or avoid entirely but a reflexive experience that nurtures and deepens our relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Dissonance is a central construct in various fields that describes how individuals experience ideas, values, and behaviors that are divergent from what is known to them. From the experience of dissonance, individuals learn and broaden their horizons. While there are many ways to characterize the experience of dissonance, the essential elements are that dissonance can be personal or cognitive, social, cultural, and educational (Bickel & Jensen, 2012). Dissonance as a socio-cultural experience extends complexity to the application of dissonance in this study. Socio-cultural dissonance occurs when a conflict results from differences between values, beliefs, practices, and ideologies of two or more cultures (Fitzpatrick & Berman, 2016). Dissonance can also occur when encountering a culture on a more hidden level that has previously been experienced. Entering a new cultural environment means encountering a new and different set of non-verbal codes such as gestures, body language, and mannerisms. It also includes other hidden social and cultural variables such as behavior patterns, living styles, family structures, and gender relationships (Allan, 2003). Many of these social and cultural features can be subtle and difficult to recognize, adding to the experience of dissonance as individuals try to reconcile the gap between their place in the larger global society, their cultural knowledge, the strengths derived from cultural values, and the norms and value base of the new environment. Native students that leave their home communities to attend PWIs experience a high degree of this sociocultural dissonance. Inherent in the PWI experience

for Native students are discrepancies among cultural values, worldview beliefs, and behaviors characteristic of mainstream American culture (Bickel & Jensen, 2012). Research shows that Indigenous students from reservations experience a higher level of cultural dissonance than those not from reservations (Bullard, 2021). When Native students enter PWIs from their home community, they enter a new personal, social, cultural, and academic environment. Dissonance in this environment can be pronounced and complex. While experiences of dissonance can lead to dropout or student failure, studies show that drawing upon cultural values throughout the dissonance experience supports self-actualization, affirms relationships, and reduces cultural loss (Huffman, 2001; White Shield, 2009; Bickel & Jensen, 2012; Huffman 2013).

In addition to dissonance's cognitive and socio-cultural descriptions, dissonance can also be educational. In this sense, the dissonance is related both to how knowledge is gained and transferred as well as materials, such as courses or texts with little or no inclusion of Native American history, little access to educational mentors, and weak social support systems within PWIs (Bickel & Jensen, 2012). Jackson et al. (2003) found that educational dissonance is a precursor to college dropout unless Native students had structured social support through Native American clubs or groups on campus and were greeted or contacted warmly by faculty and staff. Connecting to student peers and positive relationships with faculty align with the inherent logs necessary to maintain a strong personal fire.

Haudenosaunee people believe that dissonance provokes people to think differently. One attribute of dissonance in Haudenosaunee culture is that differing views are valued, and disagreement is often encouraged to reach deeper maturity and growth. A concrete example of the encouragement of dissonance in Haudenosaunee epistemology is that everyone has a voice and a range of personalities and ideas are embedded within those voices. It is in and through the plurality of voices that harmony is possible. If individuals do not provoke thought in their relationships, they are unlikely to evoke one another's potentialities to reflect on beliefs, attitudes, and ideas personally; they are not stoking each other's fires. Wals (2007) noted that dissonance inevitably involves diverging norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes, creating learning opportunities. Wals's dissonance conception parallels the Haudenosaunee valuing of differing voices. Further, Wals stated that such dissonance needs to be explicated rather than obscured. For Oneida people, the experience of dissonance is crucial to their reflecting upon and drawing meaning from yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Dissonance fosters creative tension and is central to understanding the experiences of the young Oneida women in this study as they navigate PWIs. Entering an unfamiliar environment, such as a PWI for Native students, often goes against what they know to be accurate, how they view the world, and how they view themselves in the world. In this sense, cultural dissonance results from engaging with different values, beliefs, practices, and ideologies (Fitzpatrick & Berman, 2016) and creates an added layer to the already complex mission of earning a college degree (Marx, 2018). As Native

students transition into PWIs, those with strong cultural foundations can approach their experiences reflexively, framing dissonance as a compelling force for change, creativity, and learning. Bullard (2021) found that Native students who experience dissonance greatly appreciate their Native culture, which increases higher education persistence. In addition, Native students who embraced their culture and had strong ties to their traditions and cultural identity increased their sense of purpose and self-esteem (Bullard, 2021).

In the present study, dissonance is understood to be a means of growth and maturity for young Oneida adults. In learning from and through interactions of personal, social, cultural, and academic dissonance, individuals gain empathy, reflection, and self-confidence (Allan, 2003). In alignment with the sustaining fire and responsibility time of life, Native students learn to take care of their self-esteem (nurture their fire) through self-discovery within the context of the PWI's new academic and cultural environment. Through the experience of dissonance and the resulting process of deconstruction-confrontation-reconstruction, Native students take ownership of their coping skills. Understanding coping skills, or the tools needed to maintain yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, help surmount the sometimes emotionally draining experience of cultural dissonance (Bickel & Jensen, 2012). Dissonance is an essential mechanism by which Native students learn to filter their experiences through their cultural values and, of particular focus in this study, through yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. In addition, as young Oneida women enter responsibility time and learn to create and maintain adult relationships, which is in alignment with the sustaining

fire period of their lives, they are better positioned to make sense of, theorize about, and articulate the dissonance they experience (Fitzpatrick & Berman, 2016). In this sense, Native students draw upon personal and psychological strength from cultural values, which allows them to work through dissonance and, in the process, strengthen their relationship with their values without cultural loss (Bickel & Jensen, 2012; Parisien, 2020).

There are many ways to understand and describe dissonance. However, I do not rely on a single definition of dissonance for this study but rather describe dissonance as a multifaceted experience that includes personal or cognitive, social, cultural, and educational encounters. As a young Oneida adult enters a new cultural environment, such as a PWI, the dissonance experienced is epistemological, ontological, and axiological. Meaning comparing a new and home environment causes cognitive confrontation and requires a questioning of knowledge, their place in the world, and their values. The period of life for young adults is a profound time when they grow and mature. During this stage of life, dissonance helps individuals master insight into their values and assumptions, allowing them to understand others and, thus, greater cultural awareness (Allan, 2003). The ability to learn and grow from the experience of dissonance is an intrinsic part of personal development and of gaining a deeper understanding of a sense of self. Growth leads to self-actualization and the capability to interact with others of different cultures without sacrificing cultural identity.

### **Theoretical Framework**

To reiterate, this study's purpose was to describe how experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly white institutions of higher education influenced young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The research questions that guided this study were:

1. What experiences of dissonance do young Oneida women encounter as they attend PWIs?
2. How do young Oneida women draw upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance?
3. How do the experiences of dissonance help young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>?

To pursue the research questions, I drew upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, dissonance, and transculturation to frame the context of the participants' experiences at PWIs and describe those experiences with depth and complexity.

For young Oneida women attending PWIs, their experience in college is many things. Still, in this study, transculturation was an essential element of their overall experience and is the context for the participants' experiences of dissonance. While there are several definitions of transculturation, for this study, transculturation is the melding of cultures without yielding one's cultural identity (Huffman, 2001; Bickel & Jensen, 2012). Much of the literature discusses the barriers and challenges Native American students face when attending PWIs (Halpern, 2016; Fogarty et al., 2018). Their experiences are often characterized as oppressive, forcing them to compromise their cultural identities to

achieve academic success. While it is true that Native students encounter conflicts resulting from differing values, beliefs, practices, and ideologies, this study applies transculturation to situate their experiences of dissonance as opportunities that stoke their fires – yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Further, for this study, the process of transculturation does not occur as a predictable linear occurrence. Instead, individuals experience what Huffman (2001) named as stages of transculturation as recurring and overlapping as they address personal, social, cultural, and academic dissonance.

As described above, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is a deep and complex cultural construct central to the Oneida people's cultural identity and sense of self. While there are many interrelated facets of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, I focused on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>'s very personal and individual aspects instead of the familial, community, or Nation fires. I focused on the personal aspect of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to describe with depth and complexity each participant's fire as they are in a period of maturation and growth. In addition, the young Oneida women in this study were entering the responsibility stage of life and learning their adult roles and responsibilities. They were also learning what sustained their fire on a deeply personal level as experiences of dissonance in the PWI environment influenced it.

In this study, dissonance is described as a space for learning and growth that is neither positive nor negative but rather an opportunity for the critical reflection of beliefs and values prompted by experiences of dissonance to create a melding of views (Wals & van der Leij, 2007). In addition, dissonance in this study was not bounded by one

definition but is characterized by several interrelated dimensions – personal or cognitive, social, cultural, and academic. Further, this study drew upon an Oneida cultural understanding of dissonance that encourages differing ideas and beliefs to deepen the relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. While dissonance may be an uncomfortable sense of discord when experienced in a new cultural environment, I believe it can strengthen the sense of self, connection, and reliance upon cultural values, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> explicitly for the Oneida women in this study.

Young Oneida women entering college will experience various personal, social, cultural, and educational situations that impact their cultural identity and sense of self. The dissonance at PWIs catalyzes the reflexive process that this study sought to understand and describe deeply. While unsettling, this dissonance is an opportunity for learning and growth supported by yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and encouraged in Oneida culture. The young Oneida women in this study were at a profound stage of their life as they entered responsibility time and the sustaining fire period of their lives. During this time, young Oneida women are experiencing a period of growth and maturity as they come to understand their fire and what sustains it on a deeper level.

### Chapter III: Methodology

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education influenced young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. I wanted to understand their adult experiences of dissonance in relation to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they attended PWIs. Overall, this study added to our understanding of whether young Oneida women gain a deeper connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a result of experiencing dissonance because the purpose of the sustaining fire stage of life is to help prepare individuals for successfully navigating any environment.

During the research study, I aimed to address three guiding questions:

1. What experiences of dissonance do young Oneida women encounter as they attend PWIs?
2. In what ways do young Oneida women draw upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance?
3. In what ways do experiences of dissonance help young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>?

This study was grounded in the epistemology, ontology, and axiology of the Haudenosaunee people, framed in an intrinsic multiple case study method in which emergent data collection methods and data analysis techniques were employed. This framework allowed me to study the participants' experiences of the influences of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> with depth and complexity. Merriam (2009) stated that

qualitative research intends to understand how people interpret their experiences, construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences. Generally speaking, qualitative research seeks to work within the context of human experiences and understand how meaning is made from those experiences (Bhattacharya, 2017).

Adopting an Indigenous research methodology in this study allowed Oneida cultural identity, ways of knowing, and values to be the defining framework through which the experiences of the young Oneida women were interpreted. Indigenous methodologies are by and for Indigenous peoples, using methods and techniques derived from the culture and traditions of those peoples (Evans et al., 2009). Cultural epistemologies inform Indigenous methodologies and thus center the Indigenous worldview. Qualitative methodologies complement Indigenous research methodologies as they encompass similar research principles as both methodologies value process and content (Kovach, 2010). Kovach (2010) further stated that Indigenous ways of knowing are internal, personal, and experiential, which align closely with the central focus of this study – yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

A Haudenosaunee methodological approach is emergent and evolving. It reflects a way that is not a Western approach to research, nor a reaction against it, but a way to use Haudenosaunee knowledge and experience to invest in our thought rather than a foreign one. Complementary to the Haudenosaunee methodology of the present study, a multiple case study research design was adopted. A case study is not a methodological approach in and of itself but provides the boundaries of what makes a case a case (Stake, 2005;

Simons, 2009). A case study design affords a complex and in-depth study of a particular experience as it is lived in "real-life." In a case study design, the case (or cases) can be studied analytically, holistically, hermeneutically, and specific to the present study, culturally (Stake, 2005). The following description of the research design and its characteristics does not capture all Haudenosaunee thought and understanding. However, the design is dynamic and flexible in alignment with Indigenous research methodologies. I incorporated ancestral, spiritual, and community knowledge in the design of this study to frame the methods chosen.

### **Research Design**

This study incorporated Indigenous methodology, case study, and Haudenosaunee ways of knowing to create and implement a Haudenosaunee intrinsic multiple case study design. Drawing upon the tenets of each approach allowed for a robust research design to describe the participants' experiences while being responsive and responsible to the participants and the Oneida community. Case study research emphasizes the essence of a human experience from the perspective of those who live the experience. Case study research is focused on the firsthand knowledge of the participants to provide descriptive data, which provides a firm understanding of the lived experience of a particular phenomenon (Patton, 2002). An Indigenous methodological approach, fused with case study methodology, allowed me to richly describe and interpret the complex and intricate experiences of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> among the participants. Three Oneida women were asked to participate in the study, each participant being a single case within

a multiple-case design. Young Oneida women entering college will experience various personal, social, cultural, and educational situations of dissonance that impact their cultural identity and sense of self. While unsettling, this dissonance is an opportunity for learning and growth supported by yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and encouraged in Oneida culture. In this study, the young Oneida women were at a profound cultural stage as they entered responsibility time and the sustaining fire period. During this time, young Oneida women experience growth and maturity as they understand their fire and what sustains it on a deeper level. The dissonance present at PWIs catalyzes this reflexive process that this study sought to describe in-depth.

A qualitative case study examines the experiences of actual cases in real situations and generates detailed descriptions and possible explanations (Stake, 2005; Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Case studies include the importance of context and thus enable the researcher to gain a holistic view of a phenomenon (Noor, 2008). A key aspect of a case study is that it is bounded in time and place, much like Indigenous research methodologies are bounded by a particular Indigenous group in a particular place. Case studies are anchored in real-life situations, resulting in a rich and holistic account of a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). Case study research investigates a contemporary phenomenon wherein the boundaries between phenomenon and context are inextricably linked (Tetnowski, 2015). Unlike quantitative analysis, where patterns in data are examined on a larger scale, case studies allow researchers to observe and analyze data on a much smaller and more intimate level. In this sense, case study design allows

for a profound description of a phenomenon and allows researchers to show how a phenomenon occurs (Tetnowski, 2015).

While case studies focus on a single entity, multiple case study design focuses on several single cases, and typically the multiple cases share some common characteristic or condition (Stake, 2013). However, each single case of the collective is of interest because it belongs to a particular collection of cases. Stake (2013) describes the overall phenomena or condition studied as a "quintain," the target collection in a multiple case study. As Stake described it, the quintain is the arena or umbrella for the cases to be studied, and to understand the quintain, we study some of its single cases. Each case in a multiple case study design must be understood in-depth, giving little immediate attention to the quintain. Later, each case will provide insights into the quintain. In this study, the quintain I sought to understand was the experience of dissonance and its impact on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The cases in this multiple case study were young Oneida women attending PWIs. The multiple case study design allowed me to examine the uniqueness of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in relation to the experience of dissonance that otherwise may not be accessible. Through applying a multiple case study design, I described yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> through the participant's telling of their lived experiences and the real-life complexities of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> they experienced. For this multiple case study, the context was the lives of the young Oneida women participants (sustaining fire and responsibility time) situated at the PWIs they attended.

For this study, I drew upon Stake's (2013) multiple case study methodology as my research intended to interpret the meanings of the participants' experiences of dissonance and the influence on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Haudenosaunee ways of knowing and understanding inform the philosophical orientation of this study. From this view, Stake (2013) suggested that truth is mainly relative and results from individual perceptions and interpretations of events or experiences embedded in a context. I utilized Stake's (2013) description of intrinsic case studies that highlight and attempt to learn about a unique phenomenon distinguished from others. In other words, by focusing on and trying to understand the unique experiences of each participant in relation to the quintain of the study, I aimed to explore what influence dissonance has on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. As previously discussed in detail, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is highly personal and unique to each person; thus, an intrinsic case study approach aligns with the central tenet of this study. Further, rather than focusing on a single case (or one participant), I employed a multiple case study approach where three young Oneida women participants were selected to understand better the influence of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and its intersecting processes across a diversity of perspectives. Each participant in this study was a single bounded case, with each individual adding to a more in-depth understanding of the phenomena than any single case could provide.

### ***A Haudenosaunee Methodology***

Developing a research design that was reflective of and responsive to Haudenosaunee ways of knowing was essential for this study because it allowed for

exploration of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> on a deep level through exploration and reflection. While the study progression was linear, it was also multidirectional and multilayered, in alignment with the process of multiple case study design and the influence of a Haudenosaunee methodology. Within the multiple case study design adopted, Haudenosaunee ontology, epistemology, and axiology were centered, grounding the methods chosen for the study.

Haudenosaunee knowledge is transmitted through language, experiential learning, ceremony, and intergenerational learning. The stories of our people hold relevancy and authority for ways of living in the world in which we find ourselves. Similar to how case study methodology is bound in time and place, Indigenous knowledge is situated in a specific place (Peltier, 2018). Grounding the research design in Haudenosaunee ways of knowing allowed for the engagement of broader relational factors of knowledge, insights into dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, and the relationships, emotions, and processes that influenced this study. This research design allowed for insight or the seeing of newness born out of intuition, ancestral knowledge, teachings, or other ways of knowing and provided an avenue in which individual and group knowledge could be made relevant to the research process and the participants.

Haudenosaunee epistemology is grounded in the self, the spirit, the unseen world, and the process of rituals and ceremonies. The search for inwardness or inner knowledge is a crucial component of Haudenosaunee ways of knowing. From an Indigenous perspective, knowledge is subjective and consists of inward and outward knowledge.

Inward knowledge is personal and individual and can be gained through introspection, dreams, intuition, and other means, including participation in cultural catalysts such as ceremonies, fasts, and medicine societies. Outward knowledge is often collaboratively produced through sharing and relationships, comprised of sharing personal stories or experiences as well as cultural stories and epic narratives. Within Haudenosaunee culture, all information or "truth" exists simultaneously, meaning that knowledge can come from the past, present, and future through various means, including storytelling, epic narratives, conversations with elders, dreams, or ceremonies, among others. Uncovering "truth" for the participants was a discovery process for this study relative to each individual.

Furthermore, the truth or the knowledge the participants gained from understanding yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> became apparent as they discovered their truth. This discovery process directly impacted the inherent logs of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. In fact, the purpose of this study sought to understand the interaction between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as the participants lived the experience in the real world. This real-world interaction between experiences of dissonance and the influence on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is fluid and dynamic, meaning that the process can unfold in infinite ways. While it is understood that the process is not linear, it is also not without a chronology. The key is that the experience of dissonance and the impacts on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> are unique and can occur in various sequences. In adopting a multiple case study design, I acknowledge that the design did not capture the holistic way of being, but no research can. Employing a

Haudenosaunee methodology and multiple case study was a fluid and dynamic design with the intention that the research process became, for the participants, an experience of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. For the participants, engaging in the study was a reflective experience that built their fires. In turn, their emerging reflection and understanding guided and influenced the course of the study.

Haudenosaunee people understand that the energy flowing from yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> establishes a worldview encompassing connection, reciprocity, relationship, and balance (Antone, 2013). From yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> also comes intuition, an ability to predict and sense what is crossing our boundaries, to feel and sense change, and to have the good sense to be careful in new situations (Antone. 2013). When entering a new environment or culture, as it is when leaving our community to attend a PWI, a strong fire helps guide our journey as we sense dissonance and feel uneasiness in the experience. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> also provides an analytic intuition that allows us to comprehend the totality of our experiences.

Drawing from my own experience as a young Oneida woman who attended a PWI, the dissonance and resulting impacts to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> that occur are deeply personal. When dissonance is experienced, whether through peer or faculty conversations, when engaging in campus culture, or even navigating the physical and organizational structure of a PWI, patterns may develop among individuals, and there can be order to which the dissonance and resulting impacts to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> occur. However, Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is dynamic, and the energy contained within constantly flows. The deeply

personal nature of yukwatsistay^ means that there are infinite ways a person interprets their experiences and in what ways those experiences influence their fire.

To illustrate the interconnectedness of the experience of dissonance and yukwatsistay^, consider the young Oneida woman who has just left her home community and experiences a PWI for the first time. She may also be experiencing being away from her family for the first time. She is transitioning into the sustaining fire and responsibility period of her life, which means that she is also learning what sustains her fire and her role in her family and community more nuanced than when she was a child or adolescent. When the experience of dissonance occurs, it may first impact her curiosity. She may draw upon skills learned in childhood that supported her critical thinking and awareness of her surroundings, leading her into a reflection process where she engages her creativity to help make meaning or sense of the experience. Creativity may also help her form new ways of strengthening yukwatsistay^, considering the current space and time. Engaging in a reflective process of her experience, she may question her relationship to the experience, the people involved, or even Creation. After a time, her consciousness may be raised as she absorbs the new information, and it becomes an experience to look back on to help guide her through new experiences of dissonance. This cycle is continuous, multidirectional, and layered, meaning that after we experience the dissonance, we engage yukwatsistay^ in many ways, and simultaneously we engage yukwatsistay^, which leads us to experiences of dissonance. This cycle is continuous as we grow and learn in many environments. The experience is also layered in that we can use our past

experiences to guide us in the moment and predict how our experiences may impact us in the future. In seeking to receive and understand traditional knowledge in a personal and relevant way to our lives, we commit to living to the best of our ability and in ways that honor yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and what sustains us individually and, ultimately, our community.

Understanding the process by which dissonance influences yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> involves looking at situations in new ways, reflecting, and offering creative solutions to problems or issues. This process toward self-actualization is ultimately the expression of individual thoughts and feelings. When we are self-actualized, we have greater access to our creative and innovative abilities (Glaser, 2016), and it becomes a mechanism by which we filter experiences of dissonance.

### **The Researcher**

In the first chapter, I identified myself as an Oneida woman, born and raised on the Oneida reservation. Additionally, I attended a PWI as a young woman and experienced dissonance during my educational journey. Thus, this research emerged from my personal experience and the specific needs of my community, in which I have a vested interest. My previous experience and coming from the same community means I am an insider researcher in several ways. While Creswell & Creswell (2018) cautions against "backyard" research, I agree with Linda Smith's (2001) standing on Indigenous research:

... it has been about understanding the ways in which research can provide systematic ways of understanding our own predicaments, of answering our own

questions, and of helping us as communities to solve our problems and develop ourselves...when Indigenous peoples become the researchers and not merely the researched, the activity of the research is transformed. (p. 53)

Knowing the community as well as I do gave me unique insights into my community's cultural, historical, and educational needs. However, in some sense, I was an outsider to this research. I was no longer an undergraduate student attending a PWI. I have worked for many years and have a professional income. I am married and a mother of five children. I have continued to engage and thrive in PWIs by earning my Master's and working towards a Doctorate. While I have continued to engage in advanced studies, I have had two decades to reflect on my PWI experiences and their impact on my life and utilize the teachings I have learned to support my higher educational journey. These characteristics, and many others, place me outside the research bounds.

This type of research is about the relationship between the researcher and participants and all of Creation (Wilson, 2001). In addition, research with Indigenous people by Indigenous people is inherently relational because knowledge is shared with all of Creation. Haudenosaunee systems of knowledge, like other Indigenous people, are built on our relationships with everything around us. The ability to concatenate or make linkages are key to forming relationships and connections. For this study, it was essential to consider the relationship I have to the ideas and concepts I am researching, just as it was essential to consider the participants' relationships to their experiences of dissonance and yukwatsistay^.

It is important to consider relational accountability because, as Wilson (2001) stated, "as a researcher, you are answering to *all your relations* when you are doing research" (p. 177). In addition, while discussed in Chapter 1, I will reiterate here that rather than asking about validity or reliability, I will ask how I am fulfilling my role in the research relationship to the participants and all of Creation, including my obligations.

### **Study Participants**

I invited three young Oneida women, ages 19-20, currently attending a PWI and enrolled in an undergraduate program for this study. As I noted above, in this study, the participants were young Oneida women raised in the culture (therefore sharing a cultural basis), of a specific age, at specific stages of life (responsibility time and sustaining fire time), and attending PWIs. Young Oneida women were chosen as the participants because they are the largest demographic of the Oneida community that attend college. Further, young Oneida women were at a critical time as they transitioned from adolescence into adulthood and learned how to sustain their fires outside their family and community environments. Thus, their experiences in college were perhaps one of the first times they were in an immersive educational environment away from their home community. They were experiencing dissonance without the immediate support of their families.

### **Methods**

#### ***Data Gathering***

According to Creswell (2013), a multiple-case design explores multiple real-life experiences in a bounded system through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information. Using a multiple-case design, a wider exploration of the research questions enabled me to understand the influence of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> among the three multiple cases. The multiple case study design also enabled me to describe dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> through sharing the participants' experiences and reflections as they made sense of their experiences in their own ways.

At the heart of Haudenosaunee lifeways is the importance of voice. As I engaged in a reflective process with the participants and as the researcher, I interpreted and shared their voices. For the Haudenosaunee people, the importance of voice is reflected in many ways. In our culture, we believe that our voice is included in all matters if we have something to share and as soon as we can speak. From daily interactions to family or clan meetings to Nation meetings, each voice is equally important and is to be heard. While including all voices is often about consensus-making, more broadly, including everyone speaks to the understanding that everyone's opinions are important. The variety of voices on any given topic encourages and embraces the prospect of dissonance, which helps to nurture and build yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. However, voice is more than speaking or being heard in family, clan, or National issues. Our voice also reflects yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a unique expression of our inner selves. Voice is our inspiration and brings us joy, strengthening yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Finding your voice involves exposing yourself to new ideas and ways to approach problems, deciding what works for you, and growing in the process, reflecting

the central tenant of this study. Finding and embracing our voice reflects our distinctive points of view, life experiences, identity, and values. In alignment with the importance of voice and the ceremony process in Haudenosaunee culture, this study sought to gather the unique voices of the participants regarding the phenomenon being studied while regarding data gathering as an enactment of ceremony. In the context of Indigenous research methodology, Wilson (2008) proposed that "the purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves" (p. 11).

Additionally, participating in a ceremony means not just attending a physical ceremony but also strengthening relationships and engaging in practices that bring about inward knowledge (Wilson, 2004). Meaning that ceremony can also include how individuals engage with and strengthen their fire. Participating in this study strengthened the participants' fires and raised their consciousness by building relationships with each other, myself, and yukwatsistay^.

Qualitative research aims to understand a phenomenon in context-specific settings, such as the "real world," where the researcher does not attempt to manipulate the phenomenon of interest (Patton, 2002). For this reason, data gathering focused on the participants' experiences of dissonance and the ways in which yukwatsistay^ was drawn upon, as they were lived in real-time. Data gathering occurred from January 2022 through May 2022 and consisted of multiple sources of information detailed below.

**Participant Conversations.** Knowledge in Indigenous communities comprises a way of knowing typically based on an oral tradition. In alignment with an oral tradition, the conversational method of Indigenous research was used to form a relational connection to Indigenous knowledge and used protocols that reflect Indigenous knowledge (Kovach, 2010). Throughout the data-gathering period, I engaged the participants in five conversations that included three talking circles (collective conversations) and two individual conversations with each participant.

Further, the conversational method is reflexive, which aligns closely with the central tenet of this study. In alignment with an intrinsic case study design and Indigenous research methods, attention was given to each participant as a unique experience reflecting the quintain during the data gathering period. Further, as each participant shared their experiences, attention was given to the nuances of the content of their experiences, which were individual and unique to them. In this study, emergent methods complemented Indigenous ways of knowing and researching. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2010) stated that emergent methods require the researcher to remain flexible and open to modifications (p. 3). Further, emergent methods stress the interconnections between Haudenosaunee epistemology and what data is collected, and how it is analyzed (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010). Therefore, the data gathered was emergent and dependent on the individual participants, which shaped the evolution of the data collected over time and the meaning that came from reflecting on their experiences.

Throughout the data-gathering period, there were three talking circles with all participants and two individual conversations with each participant. The trajectory of the guiding questions was the trajectory of the conversations. The first Talking circle took place over Zoom, and the remaining Talking circles occurred in a classroom to which I have access. Two participants' individual conversations took place in the Oneida community in a semi-private office. The individual conversations with the third participant occurred at their PWI campus. All conversations were audio and/or video recorded for transcription and analysis, including in-person and virtual conversations. Below was the timeline for data gathering:

1. Talking circle (January)
2. Individual Conversation (February)
3. Talking circle (March)
4. Individual Conversation (April)
5. Talking circle (May)

Talking circles are a safe space for participants to express their viewpoints, experiences, interpretations, and emotions by offering a structure for dialogue that is respectful and inclusive (Brown & Di Lallo, 2020). The process of talking circles is simple; participants arrange in a circle without any barriers to separate them. Everyone is physically present, and everyone can see and be seen by all others. There is no beginning or end to the circle and no "head" of the circle or designated power seat. For this study, during the talking circles, participants were free to discuss their experiences in a group

setting and received support and feedback from their peers. During the talking circles, I paid attention not to the group's collective voice necessarily, but to each participant's individual and unique voices as distinct cases. The conventional use for group discussion is to develop a shared meaning or understanding of a particular issue or topic. In this study, the impetus for group discussion was to create group synergy (Larson, 2013), resulting in a conversational place where participants could fully express their ideas or experiences.

Additionally, and of importance for this study, the synergy created during the talking circles also built connections and relationships among the participants, strengthening their fires. During the talking circles, the participants' synergy facilitated a rich and deep reflection on their experiences. They created a shared construction of their experiences of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, raising their consciousness.

The first talking circle occurred over Zoom, and at this first meeting, the participants and I created a shared understanding of what we were embarking on together. I described the nature of the study, their commitment as participants, and the overall goals of the study. As I engaged the participants in a deep discussion on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, attention was paid to their unique understanding of fire as individual cases. Next, with an understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, I asked the participants to share experiences that may have been challenging or that deepened their understanding of what they knew; these were experiences of dissonance. As a final discussion during the first talking circle, the

participants were asked to create a way to represent their experiences of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance within a PWI as they participated in the study.

Within this layer of data, what the participants created and shared with me, which made sense to them, represented their experiences of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance within a PWI. In what way each participant chose to share or represent their experiences contributed to the focus of each of the talking circles and the individual conversations. The form of the representation participants created was data as well as the ways in which the participants shared their experiences through the form. All conversations with the participants were shaped by the form of representation created by each participant. The personal choice of creating an expression of their experiences aligned with the importance of voice in Haudenosaunee culture and the individuality of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Participants chose an art form to represent their experiences. Art has the potential to reach a deep understanding of phenomena as it reaches beyond the restrictions that can limit communication to express meanings that could otherwise be uncommunicated orally or written (Pentassuglia, 2017). Arts-based methods, grounded in an aesthetic way of knowing (Rieger et al., 2020), can also be used to understand and analyze an experience from the participants' perspective to reach a wider and more complete vision of their reality (Pentassuglia, 2017), opening the doors to new ways of knowing and understanding the influence of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Following the first talking circle, I engaged in an individual conversation with each participant. The first individual conversation and each subsequent talking circle and

individual conversation were informed by the preceding conversation(s), making their content and nature emergent. As stated previously, following the initial Talking circle, conversations were in-person and audio and video recorded for transcription and analysis. Individual conversations were approximately 45-90 minutes and, while conversational, were not unlike semi-structured interviews. The individual conversations were more fluid than a formal interview-based and centered on the participants' experiences of dissonance, how they made sense of their experiences, and in what ways their experiences impacted and shaped their fires over time. The individual conversations were a space for the participants to explore their own experiences individually and deeply with me, and thus they were open-ended but not without purpose.

During the first individual conversations, I asked the participants to expand on what they shared during the first talking circle. I also asked each participant to share one or more experiences of dissonance that occurred since the Talking circle. They also shared any documents they generated that reflected their experiences. The individual conversation created a conversational space to reflect and share openly. Following the trajectory of the guiding questions, this first individual conversation generally focused on their experiences of dissonance and their initial interpretations of those experiences in relation to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Having had two conversations prior, the second talking circle engaged us in deeper reflection about the ways in which the participants engaged yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they navigated experiences of dissonance. This talking circle was also an opportunity for the

participants to meet to share and deeply reflected on their experiences as they started to recognize in what ways they drew upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they navigated through dissonance. By discussing their experiences as a group, the participants found that the experiences of others provided a learning opportunity that deepened their understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Participating in the talking circles also strengthened yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they formed connections with the other participants and me.

Following the second talking circle, the following individual conversations were another opportunity for the participants to discuss with me in greater detail their experiences of dissonance and in what ways those experiences impacted their fires. At this point in the study, the second individual conversation consisted of a much deeper reflection of their experiences and an opportunity for them to explore with me what meaning their experience had for them in relation to the strengthening of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

The final talking circle allowed the participants to reflect on their overall experience. They shared their reflections on the ways in which their fire was strengthened through their experiences of dissonance throughout the data-gathering period and the experience of participating in the study.

### ***Data Analysis***

In case study research, data-gathering and analysis are simultaneous activities, with one aspect informing the other in a flexible and cyclical process (Tetnowski, 2015). This process creates a powerful description of each case to understand the quintain. Yin (2003) explains three general approaches to case study analysis: relying on theoretical

propositions, thinking about rival explanations, and developing a case description. I approached the data analysis for this study by creating individual narratives of each young woman. Each participant was a case (three cases), and data analysis included identifying emergent topics that described their individual experiences of dissonance and the interaction of dissonance with their fire. To analyze the data, I cataloged each conversation topically to identify relevant and significant topics for each participant. In the first collective and individual conversations, I listened for topics that had salience to the participants and analyzed using discourse markers indicating that a topic seemed important (duration, thinking time, redundancy, excitement). Over time, I constructed a narrative description of each woman's experience of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> with them through the conversations and interpretations of the data. I asked the participants to share their experiences of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in a storied way, and as such, I constructed three unique narratives, each representing the quintain. In addition, how each participant represented their experiences with dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was part of the data analysis process appropriate for the Indigenous methodology I adopted driven by Oneida lifeways and teachings. Thus, data analysis was an emergent process that depended on the woman's individuality, which connected to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethics in Indigenous research are largely relational and paramount in research done by and with Indigenous people. There is a responsibility to conduct research to protect Indigenous culture and knowledge, especially when brought into the academy.

The general ethical considerations include respectful research according to cultural protocols, which considers the history of research on Indigenous people and communities. For this study, I considered the ultimate aim of my research and whether it was helpful or a hindrance for the participants, their families, and the larger Oneida community. I also considered whether the study aligned with Oneida values, that there was accountability to the Oneida community, that the study gave back to and benefited the community, and that I did not harm the participants or the community as the researcher.

### ***Study Participation***

Participants were adequately informed about the study and the nature of their participation. Participants were allowed to ask questions or address concerns regarding the study or their participation. All participants had the power of freedom of choice on whether they elected or declined to participate. Participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, even after deciding to participate.

### ***Confidentiality***

Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in case study research with few participants due to the nature of the shared information and the fact that Oneida is a small community. However, all precautions were taken to mitigate identifying information. Participants could select if desired, a pseudonym and decide which identifying information should be concealed or changed as appropriate. All the participants elected to use their Oneida name

in the write-up of their experiences. Data collected was stored on a secure server and was not shared with those outside the research.

### ***Handling and Managing Distress During Data Gathering***

This study sought to understand experiences of dissonance, which at times was a distressing topic for the participants to share. Face-to-face interactions with the participants required me to listen and respond to them in real time. I had counseling information available for the participants from their campuses should they have needed it. I arranged for them to contact a professional counselor or elder in the Oneida community should a conversation have been too difficult. None of the participants required counseling information, a professional counselor, or an elder during the study. Participants could withdraw from the study at any time with no adverse consequences. However, all participants continued through the end of the study.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this study was to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education influenced young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. To do so, I developed a Haudenosaunee intrinsic multiple case study design because it was culturally sensitive and allowed me to centralize the unique voices of each participant in alignment with the cultural value of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. This design was flexible so that the experiences of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> for each participant guided the nature of the data gathering

and analysis procedure to deeply explore the guiding questions and the purpose of this study.

## Chapter IV: Findings

The findings of this study showed that dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> are inextricably linked and exist in a synergistic relationship that propelled the participants into periods of growth and maturation. Further, the findings showed that participants had complex views on whom they were as young Oneida women navigating a PWI environment. I found that their relationships to dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> were layered and interwoven and could not be discussed individually without considering the other. It was impossible to compartmentalize their educational aspirations, cultural values, dissonance experiences, and responsibility to self, family, and community because all worked together to form their Oneida identity and sense of self. Pulling all of these components apart would do an injustice to their experiences. Instead, I present the findings in narratives that include vignettes for each participant that discuss in-depth their relationships to dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and the back-and-forth interaction of each to form a reflexive growth spiral and maturation.

To understand each participant better, throughout each description, I wove in defining traits that represented who each participant was individually, their connections to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, their varied experiences of dissonance at PWIs, and the ways in which they made sense of their experiences on a profoundly personal level, thereby fostering introspection and growth. As explained in Chapter 3, representing each participant's voice was paramount. As such, each of their stories is unique and representative of their

relationship to dissonance and their understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, responsibility time, and the sustaining fire period of their lives.

My purpose in conducting this study was to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) of higher education influenced young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. I used multiple data sources (individual conversations, Talking Circles, and creative reflection pieces) to address the following research questions:

1. What experiences of dissonance do young Oneida women encounter as they attend PWIs?
2. In what ways do young Oneida women draw upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance?
3. In what ways do experiences of dissonance help young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>?

This chapter presents the individual case studies of the three student participants, examining each to reveal the details of their experiences of dissonance and the impact on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> while attending a PWI. To better understand how these three young Oneida women navigate their experiences of dissonance and deepen their connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, it is essential to look at the participants individually. I have tried to display the unique voices of each participant, noting their situation and how the context of the PWI influences their understanding of the impact of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

Since this research was a multiple case study, specific attention was paid to analysis techniques recommended for case studies (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). In all case study research, significant attention is devoted to “thick description” (Stake, 2005; Yin, 2009). As such, each case is defined, explored, and explained in a detailed narrative, incorporating my interpretation of each case.

A note on names. Generally, researchers use pseudonyms to de-identify participants when working with qualitative data, a practice required when researching sensitive topics and encouraged elsewhere. For this study, the participants were allowed to self-select how they wanted to be identified or not identified. Each participant elected to use their ukwehuwe name instead of a pseudonym. For Oneida people, our ukwehuwe names are sacred and represent our journey in life, the gifts we bring to the world, and our characteristics. Each name has a story that accompanies it, and the person that gives us our name often sits in deep reflection or asks for a dream to help guide them in choosing a name. In Oneida culture, it is not typical for names to be handed down as our names are unique and individual to each person. Also, it is rare for two people of the same clan to have the same name. Usually, we receive our names when we are babies, though anyone can receive a name at any age. As people grow and change, they may be given a new name that reflects their adult characteristics. Using their ukwehuwe names, the young Oneida women in this study are grounding themselves within their own stories and embracing their unique voices and identities.

**Yelihwakanyéhs (Yay-lee-wa-gun-yace)**

## ***Introduction***

At the time of this study, Yelihwakanyéhs was 20 years old and in her junior year at a large Big Ten university, majoring in Human Development and Family Studies while working towards a certificate in American Indian Studies. Yelihwakanyéhs is a deeply introspective person, and it was evident throughout our conversations that she regularly looked inward to try and understand her mind, thoughts, feelings, and inner workings. Vermersch (1999) described introspection as a way to make information more accessible and to bring the information towards consciousness. As she entered the responsibility time and sustaining fire periods of her life, Yelihwakanyéhs utilized introspection as a tool to gain insight to understand herself better, which impacted her thoughts, emotions, and behaviors in ways that grew her fire. For Yelihwakanyéhs, introspection was more than simply noticing what was happening in her mind. She was highly aware of her relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and recognized the impacts dissonance had on her well-being.

Yelihwakanyéhs experienced emotions profoundly and was very open about her feelings when in her safe spaces, such as with family or friends. It seemed a significant part of her to heal from the consequences of the legacy of trauma that so many Native families do. In Yelihwakanyéhs's life, she has had specific experiences of trauma around race that have involved her family and community and are reflective of the times we live in such as Native Lives Matter, the Land Back movement, and pipeline protests. She and her family have been in the thick of dramatic and traumatizing moments of racism that

created deep and unsettling feelings around non-Natives and non-Native institutions. It is not surprising that, as someone who paid such close attention to her internal states and processes, Yelihwakanyéhs's fire was strongly linked to her mental and emotional health. However, she found it difficult when she first arrived on campus to express her emotions around other people and tended to suppress her feelings so that others did not feel uncomfortable. Concealing her authenticity diminished her fire, and she was often conflicted with having to mask her true self to protect her well-being. Part of the reason she felt the need to hide her true feelings was that she did not feel comfortable in the PWI environment. However, as she connected with other Native students, she felt safe enough to express her thoughts, feelings, and emotions without apprehension. Being able to freely show her inner self strengthened Yelihwakanyéhs's fire because living authentically made her happier and more self-confident. As a result, she was more creative, trusted herself, and could more easily see solutions to obstacles.

Connecting with other Native students on campus significantly sustained Yelihwakanyéhs's fire. As described in Chapter 2, forming connections or linkages is the foundation of the concatenation log. Within Oneida culture, the connections and relationships we form with others help form the basis of our identity because it is through relationships with others and with Creation that we understand our place in the community and Nation. As Yelihwakanyéhs moved into the responsibility time of life, understanding her contribution to her family, community, and Nation fire was informed by what she learned about herself through her relationships with others, such as empathy

for other Native students with different upbringings or using her voice in a problematic class. Concatenation also refers to understanding the linkages between concepts, such as understanding the systemic issues present in PWIs that made it difficult for her to succeed. As she moved through reflexive experiences of dissonance and growth, she embraced her emotional self. Relying on the logs of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> helped her to process the dissonance, and she allowed her feelings to surface as a way to release the tension she felt in difficult situations.

### ***Cultural Supports***

When Yelihwakanyéhs was new on campus and away from home and family for the first time, she often found it challenging to find her footing in the PWI environment. She frequently felt isolated and alone, which impacted her mental and emotional well-being. It was through grounding herself and reconnecting with cultural practices that reminded her of home, such as participating in medicines and smudging, that she could continue her educational journey. Yelihwakanyéhs grew up heavily involved in Oneida culture and traditions, which continued to be a regular and significant part of her life as she navigated college. Through her connection to Oneida culture, she gained a good, kind heart and an open mind, qualities that shaped her experiences of dissonance. Knowing Oneida ceremonies, traditions, and language gave her a purpose in *just being*, instead of feeling that only her profession or how much money she made validated her existence. Oneida culture was such a substantial part of Yelihwakanyéhs's life that she knew that without culture, she would not have made it through college or her childhood.

Throughout her life, anytime she went through difficult times, she leaned on language and culture to sustain and guide her through. When she was younger, she did not realize how cultural supports sustained her fire and how her involvement in traditions helped fulfill her longing for a sense of family and community. As she grew older, she understood why her culture had a strong impact on her. *It [culture] was always there. It was my safe space when my family, when my home life was really chaotic.* As a student in a PWI, Oneida culture and traditions continued to provide a safe space.

*Having that background of cultural and traditions and teachings, that really helped me learn to just be and just occupy space and not have to explain myself to anybody or justify why I'm saying the things I am or why I'm doing the things I'm doing.*

Living in a dorm on campus was particularly difficult because she could not freely engage in cultural practices. She could not smudge in her dorm room due to campus fire and smoke restrictions that hindered her ability to spiritually cleanse her environment. She also could not travel home as often as she wanted to participate in ceremonies or other cultural activities because of a demanding class schedule and accompanying workload. She felt like she was neglecting her cultural responsibilities.

*Missing ceremonies [was] probably the most heartbreaking thing I've ever witnessed because I was like, I should be there. I know what they're doing right now. I know, they're singing and they're probably dancing, or they're passing out strawberry drink, all these different things that I was like, I just know what they're*

*doing and feeling left out, I felt torn apart between both of my two communities that I was a part of.*

To help support her transition to college, she often leaned on her aunt, with whom she talked daily. Having gone to a PWI for college, her aunt was familiar with the feelings Yelihwakanyéhs was going through and helped her find ways to implement cultural practices into her everyday life. Her aunt reminded her that her culture was a way of life and a way of knowing that was inseparable from her identity.

A significant realization for Yelihwakanyéhs was that without her connection to culture and the experience of growing up in the Oneida community, her life would have been entirely different. Connecting to and understanding her cultural identity gave her tools to navigate experiences of dissonance and helped her mentally and emotionally because embedded within the teachings are values of health and wellness, including self-care, listening to your body, listening to your mind, and voicing your opinions.

### ***Growth and Coming to Know Her Authentic Self***

As Yelihwakanyéhs navigated her first three years of college, she had many experiences that impacted and facilitated her personal growth. It was apparent that Yelihwakanyéhs was a systems thinker. Systems thinkers are curious, have open minds, and tend to seek out the root causes of issues. (Arnold & Wade, 2015). She was aware of the deep structural inequalities along race, class, and gender within PWIs that determined how she and other students of color navigated campus and impacted their ability to be successful. Yelihwakanyéhs's ability to recognize the university's complicity in

perpetuating institutional racism, performative diversity, dominant Western values, and oppressive educational frameworks (Fish & Syed, 2018) spoke to the strength of the concatenation log in her life.

Going through college propelled Yelihwakanyéhs to engage in deep reflection and introspection about her experiences of dissonance including racism, her struggle for visibility, and the fatigue she felt from continually defending her indigeneity as she simultaneously engaged the logs of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. On her journey into adulthood, she recognized that healing from her own past traumas, intergenerational trauma, and the mental and emotional impacts of dissonance in college was not linear and that moving forward and backward through the process of understanding herself and her place in the world was normal.

*College is all about growth, and I don't think I realized that at the time. I thought it was going to be more on an educational basis rather than a personal self-growth journey. But I'm definitely very grateful for it. And I feel very different. Even just hearing myself, I'm like, who am I? Who do I think I am? But it goes to show how much time can change and how much being out of your comfort zone can change you.*

In college, it was challenging to manage all her responsibilities. The fast-paced nature of college and an environment centered on Western societal norms of being busy all the time impacted her ability to balance her personal, familial, and educational obligations. Reminding herself that the expectation to work constantly or study was a

colonial trait and not part of her culture helped Yelihwakanyéhs manage her well-being. She learned to prioritize her mental and emotional health so that she did not experience burnout and feel overwhelmed.

Yelihwakanyéhs realized that part of the transformation of entering the responsibility time of her life was thinking about herself, her identity, her goals in life, and what her place was in her family, community, and Nation. She worked on accepting the changes that came with new stages of life by setting aside unrealistic expectations about what college would be like or thinking that all Native students thought the same as her. She also had to stick to the boundaries she established around how she wanted to be treated by others, making time for self-care, and voicing herself when she became overwhelmed with work, school, and personal responsibilities. Respecting her boundaries was pivotal because she knew that overexertion threw her mental health out of balance, and it was hard to overcome the resulting emotional and mental exhaustion.

*It's a lot of work, and it's not easy. I just feel like college is hard, and they don't teach us this stuff, taking all these credits, and none of these classes talk about this stuff. But having that cultural connection and being aware of our fire, I feel like that really helps through this awkward transitioning period where we're gaining independence and learning about ourselves, learning about our goals and our future, and then just being a functioning human.*

Throughout her experiences, she learned how to embrace and accept her mental and emotional well-being, although it was not a straightforward process. She spent much

time in self-reflection to handle challenging situations while paying attention to her emotional responses. She learned to lean on her family, friends, and the therapists on campus to support her as she navigated college. She found her internal voice through introspection and the support of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to maintain her boundaries and advocate for her well-being.

### ***Racism and the Illusion of Inclusivity***

Before attending college, Yelihwakanyéhs assumed her university was inclusive and accepting of diverse communities. However, shortly after arriving on campus, Yelihwakanyéhs faced just how problematic the university environment could be. Around homecoming during her first year, a student on campus put a sign on the science hall that read "for whites only." Shocked and triggered by the incident, she felt like there was a massive target on her back as a person of color on campus at a time when she was already feeling isolated and disconnected from her authentic self and her community. *I was like, get me out of here, I can't, like I can't.* Without realizing it at the time, the student who posted the racist sign had created a personal relationship with Yelihwakanyéhs and with all students of color on campus, meaning that she and others knew at that moment that their existence on campus was challenged. Making the incident more upsetting was that the institution that was supposed to support and motivate her in her college journey failed to prevent racist behaviors to happen on campus. It was hard for Yelihwakanyéhs to describe how the incident made her feel because she was still trying to understand her emotions around it. However, she realized that what a university proclaims about an

inclusive campus climate and diversity publicly is not always true. While her university decried the racist sign openly, Yelihwakanyéhs felt that the university put little effort into addressing the inequities present within the institution's structure. When she did not see words put into action, she saw the university's response as a passive endorsement of racist behaviors, which led her to understand there are systemic issues at PWIs that make being a person of color on campus difficult.

*That is just how [universities] are. Just because they put on this facade, and I now realize that when they get Native students specifically that they get certain funds for us to say that we're enrolled in their school. And then that also like made all the connections click when I realized that, well, no wonder why they're putting on this facade that they're this inclusive safe environment type thing when they're just benefiting from the funds.*

When the racist sign incident occurred, Yelihwakanyéhs was shocked to realize society still marginalized people of color in general and, more specifically, on her campus. As a freshman and having just graduated from Tribal school, where she felt sheltered from the world, she wondered why something like the “for Whites only” incident happened. She did not think marginalization would be an issue when coming to college, especially when her university advertised inclusion and diversity. However, now that she had grown in her awareness of racially focused situations, she was not surprised. Racial microaggressions are damaging for youth and adults alike, and academic settings are recognized sites that magnify racial tension in broader society (Hurtado, 1992;

Harper, 2015). At PWIs, students are more frequently exposed to racially focused situations and conversations than in most other environments, including home (Williams et al., 2020). The result of frequent microaggressions is a cumulative impact that, without the support of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, can intensify feelings of isolation and marginalization (Tachine et al., 2016).

Due to the racist sign incident, Yelihwakanyéhs found herself holding back in her courses and was hyper-aware of her surroundings because she did not know who posted the sign; it could have been anyone in her classes. It terrified her that people of color were not welcome on campus, and she was embarrassed to go to her school. Reeling from the experience, she was sure that she wanted to quit college and go home. She called her aunt (who raised her) who rekindled Yelihwakanyéhs' fire and encouraged her to stick it out a bit longer.

*But after that, I came to the realization that well, my auntie then told me to at least stick it out for the semester. And then after that every time I said I wanted to drop out she kind of like extended it each semester, "oh wait until the spring semester;" "oh wait till fall semester;" to the point where I was like I'm in my third year I might as well just finish it out, I can't go back now.*

Leaning on familial support during a difficult time strengthened Yelihwakanyéhs' fire by reminding her that she was capable and belonged in college. Yelihwakanyéhs also found support in unexpected places. She was surprised to find comfort in seeing white students equally outraged at the incident and voicing their disgust in her classes and on

campus. She did not expect to see white allies on campus and was shocked to know other people had strong feelings about what had occurred. It was one of the first instances where Yelihwakanyéhs felt disconnected while also feeling connected at the same time.

The emotional turmoil that Yelihwakanyéhs felt during and after the racist sign incident weighed on her heavily. She wrestled with the internal dissonance of feeling let down by the institution that was supposed to protect her. She struggled with the simultaneous feelings of anticipating racism while being shocked by the dramatic occurrence on campus. Already feeling alone on campus, the racist sign incident amplified her feelings of isolation and further marginalized her existence on campus. As Yelihwakanyéhs navigated through her emotions during the aftermath of the racist sign, she leaned on her relationships to help her process the experience. Having found friendship with other Native students as well as seeing White students on campus stand against racist behaviors helped her understand that while she felt isolated, she wasn't alone in her feelings about how the incident impacted her.

Throughout college, Yelihwakanyéhs's relationships and connections with others were a continuous source of support. Yelihwakanyéhs felt comforted knowing her aunt had also attended a PWI and persevered, meaning she had insight on how to navigate PWIs. She also found reassurance in her feelings and emotions through her connections to the Native students on campus. Being with and relating to others that had similar worldviews and experiences was comforting, and as she moved through college, she relied more and more on her friendships to build and maintain her fire.

### *Finding a Safe Space and Removal*

The communal nature of tribal communities and the dependence on our families to build and maintain yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in our youth means that Native students experience homesickness and alienation more significantly than other students (Huffman, 2003). While connection with family is a critical component of a strong fire, as we enter adulthood and the sustaining fire period of our lives, we naturally begin to turn to our friendships to stoke and build yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. That is not to say that our families become irrelevant, rather, it points to the natural separation young adults make from family as we create new bonds with others in our lives. Entering the responsibility time of life provides a meaningful and important transitional period where we gain independence, explore our identities, and begin adult relationships as we shift away from relying on our parents (Nelson et al., 2007). The nature of the parent-child relationship is dynamic and constantly changing and while some changes are minor, others transform the relationship, like leaving home to attend college (Scheinfeld & Worley, 2018). To alleviate the negative feelings associated with separation from their home communities, Native students often act on the powerful need to create a sense of belonging on campus by forming strong connections with other Native students (Tachine et al., 2016).

Having a safe space to be with like-minded people was essential for Yelihwakanyéhs because she needed to feel comfortable before sharing her experiences and feelings. Although she initially did not realize it, she always sought out friendships or

connections with people where she could be herself and not sugarcoat her experiences so that others were not uncomfortable.

*I think that's a main thing too with being on a campus as Indigenous students is finding our people, because it's hard to maneuver through a predominantly white campus with non-Natives specifically, not knowing that the things that we've experienced, and the things that we know, as Native students, because they don't think there's any Native students on campus.*

During her first year, Yelihwakanyéhs struggled with knowing she was capable and belonged in college with the realization that PWIs were not meant for students of color. However, she found that sharing her experiences with other Native students and hearing their similar stories helped her feel connected on campus. The concatenation log was essential to Yelihwakanyéhs's college experience and the connections that Yelihwakanyéhs found in the Native community on campus reassured her that she was not alone in her experiences.

*I feel like at this point, you kind of just have to find your crowd and go on, like move on, move forward from this because the system is so skewed that it's going to take years and years to overcome this. I guess the way the system is built; it's gonna take a long time to fix things and improve things. But that doesn't mean that we can't go through and be successful within these systems.*

On a campus where she otherwise felt disconnected and isolated, Yelihwakanyéhs found a group of likeminded people and a safe space at the American Indian Studies

Cultural Center or AISCC house. The three-story house, home to the Native groups on campus, was a welcoming environment for students and the local Native community alike.

Over the years, the university moved the AISCC house several times, each instance of which was met with protest and disapproval by Native students, a not unfounded response considering the all too real parallels to Indian removals by settlers since contact. At the time of this study, the university threatened to demolish the AISCC house again, proposing to move the Native student organization to the only other multicultural space on campus. This space also housed the Latinx, Black, and Asian communities. The multicultural building, which was old, small, and on the edge of campus, was already too small for the cultural communities that occupied it. To address the potential move, the university met with the Native student community at the AISCC house. Yelihwakanyéhs attended the meeting and felt that the White male contractor that came to the meeting was passive-aggressive and entitled. He dodged questions from the Native students, and when, out of frustration, the Native students stopped asking questions, he took their silence as meaning the students did not care.

*It is very emotional for me because I also spent a lot of time in the house. And that's one of my safe spaces, as it should be. And then to hear somebody who's not from this community talk about tearing it down and moving us like, hello, that's all they've done to Native people. And then also feeling defeated to not say*

*anything or speak up. And even though we outnumbered him, but still, just his presence felt like it was overpowering us.*

The AISCC house nurtured a sense of community and belonging among Yelihwakanyéhs and other Native students. Unfortunately, the university ignored the impact the AISCC house had on not only Native students but the Native community in the area. It was a safe space for Native students to utilize anytime because they knew each other and could talk to one another about anything. Yelihwakanyéhs knew that no other place on campus provided a safe and welcome space for Native students to exist without having to justify their indigeneity.

*Always we're the minority in any other space on campus versus the house because it's just all people we know, all people we're really close to. I feel like we're such a small community, so we all know each other very well and you don't have that anywhere else.*

Yelihwakanyéhs felt the university could have gone a long way to prioritize Native students' existence on campus and acknowledge that Native students were occupying space, which is why it was crucial to create and have safe spaces for them. *They [the university] have no problem advertising that they love Native students and that they love POC, but when it comes down to resources and spaces, it's like, erm, yeah, no, I don't see why that's important.*

Tachine et al. (2016) wrote that fundamental to our well-being is the need to belong and feel connected to a community or group, which is particularly important for

Native students because a cultural worldview emphasizes interdependence.

Concatenation has always been a prominent log for Yelihwakanyéhs's fire and through her experiences of dissonance, she grew in her ability to generate meaningful connections that drove her personal growth. The possibility of the AISCC house being demolished created emotional difficulty and turmoil, which dampened Yelihwakanyéhs's fire.

However, through her relationships with the Native students on campus, especially those that utilized the safe space at the AISCC house, Yelihwakanyéhs persisted knowing she had a strong support system of others with similar values and worldviews.

*I don't want to say there's an upside to being traumatized, but it is nice is having actual people who've gone through the same thing and not feel like an outsider or not feel like the minority ...we just get each other like, something about Native humor and no one else will understand.*

Making friends was the most memorable and enjoyable experience for Yelihwakanyéhs at college, and her friendships opened her eyes to the experiences of other Native students. *When would I have met someone whose Taos, besides going to college, so I'm just really thankful for all the experiences and friendships that I've made.* Although her safe space on campus was threatened, through concatenation and curiosity of others, Yelihwakanyéhs formed meaningful relationships with other Native students. She understood that she was craving family connections and the Native community helped her feel less homesick and lonesome.

***Educational Dissonance and the Problem with Catering to White Students***

Part of the college experience is to broaden our horizons and deepen our understanding of salient topics relevant to our lives. As an education major, Yelihwakanyéhs became acutely aware of how the Western schooling system is colonized and was determined to work for change in her own community. As part of working towards her goal, she enrolled in a course called “Sovereignty in Schoolhouse.” When she first signed up for the class, she thought it would be a course that would discuss how Native people could strengthen sovereignty through culturally based and culturally relevant educational practices or programs. However, as the semester progressed, she realized that the course was far from her initial assumptions and was quite problematic and challenging for her mental and emotional well-being.

From Yelihwakanyéhs’s perspective, the professor conveyed throughout the course that Western forms of imposed education had fostered resiliency in Native communities. While it is true that Native people who attended boarding schools are resilient, what was problematic for Yelihwakanyéhs was that her professor communicated to students that the boarding school experience was necessary for Native perseverance and tenacity. In reality, boarding schools cultivated an environment of survival for Native children and resilience occurred because there was no other option for staying alive and meeting their needs.

*I'm like, well, that's just because we didn't have any other option. It was either that or they're gonna kill us off basically. And I, in my head, it was more of a*

*threat, like colonizers threatened us and then we had to colonize ourselves to fit into their society.*

While there were other Native students in the class, Yelihwakanyéhs did not know them well and was unsure if they realized the issue with teaching non-Natives that Western education was good for Native communities. Occasionally she would add her thoughts to the discussions to let the professor and other students know that she disagreed with the material. However, the professor would often twist her words to make it seem like she agreed with him. The dissonance she felt because of not only the course content, but the delivery of the content led her question her thoughts and feelings. She struggled with feeling like she was the only student with an issue with the course because none of the other Native students spoke up during class. To help her understand her feelings of self-doubt, she frequently discussed her experience in the course with a close friend with similar values and worldviews.

*I was like, but do I sound crazy? Am I just traumatized from all the other classes we've taken, so I automatically want to be defensive about it? Like, please tell me because I will step back if that's the case. And she was like, no, she was reassuring me and validating my feelings. And I was like, okay, that made me feel better.*

Adding to her frustration with the course, during the midterm exam students were required to respond to a question asking what non-Native people were looking to achieve when they put Indigenous people into boarding schools. Yelihwakanyéhs felt the

professor wanted the students to say that non-Natives hoped to educate Indigenous people and help them be civilized. She felt he was making light of the alarming actions of boarding school officials. She disagreed with trying to justify the traumatic events of boarding schools as a necessary evil for resiliency to occur. In her midterm essay, she wrote that boarding schools did not have to occur, period and that boarding schools were a form of assimilation and cultural genocide. She refused to justify boarding schools or that Native people would not be resilient without them.

*I would definitely rather know my language than be resilient. I'm gonna be very open and transparent about it. I was very descriptive, too. Because I feel like, yeah, people want to talk about the physical abuse, but no one wants to talk about the sexual abuse and how children were literally being starved and beaten, all these different things, and that's what I was really descriptive about.*

Although Yelihwakanyéhs struggled at times with finding her voice in college, as she learned more about Indigenous terms and histories, she felt more comfortable speaking up when people said problematic statements. She did not compromise what she knew to be true nor her feelings on boarding schools to appease her professor. Speaking the truth of what Native people experienced in boarding schools and the resulting loss was also more than simply stating her views. She felt a responsibility to acknowledge the history of trauma in Native communities today and speaking up was an act of caring for her own well-being, and the well-being of others affected by boarding schools. Speaking the truth for more than just herself required a sense of empathy and a willingness to

consider the impact of one's words on others. It required recognizing that the truth is not just a personal matter but had wider implications for her community and society at large. As explained in Chapter 2, at the core of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is the need for one's voice to be honored, and without acknowledging our voice, our fire diminishes. Using her voice to stand firm on her understanding of the impacts of boarding schools empowered her and helped her develop a stronger sense of self and identity, which ultimately would add to the community and Nation fires.

Another particularly triggering experience in this class occurred during a class discussion on two opposing articles on Richard Pratt, the creator of boarding schools in the United States. One author justified Pratt's actions, and the other author condemned Pratt's actions. While discussing the articles, a white student raised her hand and stated that Pratt was "the hero of his own story" with good intentions and did not mean for boarding schools to evolve into institutions of colonization and cultural genocide. Yelihwakanyéhs was taken aback by the student's statements. *I was like, she is not justifying Pratt right now; that is not what I just heard. And that's where I felt really overpowered and attacked. My heart dropped to my stomach, and I was just feeling really weird.* In response, her professor said he could see where she, the white student, was coming from and reassured the student of her views. Yelihwakanyéhs was alone in class that day. She later learned that all of the other Native students felt uneasy about the discussion topic for the day and chose not to come. Yelihwakanyéhs had not looked ahead at the discussion topic and, if she had, would also have skipped class.

*So it was just me and I was like, she was non-Native. So I was like, do I say something? Do I put myself on the spot? How do I handle this situation? Because it's never really explicitly happened like that. So that was my first encounter with, I guess, I think that was honestly, the exact definition of dissonance and feeling like, holy shit, this is what these people think like, and it's also really triggering too, a lot of stuff in that class is triggering.*

At the beginning of the semester, Yelihwakanyéhs voiced during class to the other students that they should not be insensitive to Native people because they do not understand the intergenerational trauma that stems from boarding schools. Moreover, non-Natives do not understand how hard it is for Natives to hear about or discuss boarding schools even if they did not have or do not know a family member who attended. This made the student's statements about Pratt even more troubling. *I don't even feel like going anymore, it's just exhausting. It's also disheartening too, to know that someone who is supposed to be an ally is teaching this class the way it is.*

The Sovereignty in Schoolhouse course was particularly triggering and exhausting for Yelihwakanyéhs. The dissonance she experienced on a near daily basis in the course weighed on her and significantly impacted her mental and emotional well-being.. She endured problematic materials from a professor she assumed was an ally. His approach to the course content made her uneasy and furthered her mistrust of the PWI environment. The course also amplified the problematic approaches to Indigenous content that occurred at her university. Throughout her time in the course, she had to

critically analyze her personal beliefs, values, and reality via the exposure to her professor's and non-Native students' views. She engaged yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> by leaning on her connections with other like-minded Native students on campus to reconcile the impact of the course on her emotional and mental wellbeing. While there were many troubling experiences throughout the course, because of a strong relationship with her fire, Yelihwakanyéhs did not internalize the self-doubt, anger, or shame that so often results from blatant insults such as in this course. Instead, she found her voice in the class and fought through the uneasy feelings as she embraced the dissonance. In deconstructing her experiences in the course, she found that confronting her beliefs, values, and reality was a necessary component of self-actualization. Reconstructing her views to encompass the new information she received grew her capability to interact with others with differing views without sacrificing her cultural identity, thereby strengthening her fire.

### ***Racial Battle Fatigue and the Fight to Exist***

Native American college students immersed in the environment of a PWI can often be emotionally and mentally exhausted by justifying their indigeneity to students, faculty, and other university staff. For Yelihwakanyéhs, the daily was taxing. She often felt exhausted from constantly being surrounded by others with a colonial mindset and navigating a highly Westernized institution. This feeling paralleled what William Smith et al. described as racial battle fatigue (RBF) (2007). Racial battle fatigue originally described the social-psychological stress response associated with being African

American on historically white campuses (Smith et al., 2007) but has since been expanded to encompass the fatigue experienced by BIPOC at PWIs (Pete & Bull, 2019).

At college, Yelihwakanyéhs felt like her mind was always racing, partly because of the inherent trauma she felt being at a PWI and partly from being away from family and her safe, comfortable spaces at home. She likened her experience to alternating between worlds – her home in Oneida and her college life.

*It's almost like a switch because there's always so much that I bite my tongue or I hold back with when I'm in a white environment rather than when I'm at home with my community or with my friends or people that I feel comfortable with. So it's definitely very black and white almost, and it feels like you can never reach that gray area. It's so exhausting at times and that's why I really put my own well-being, whether that's mental or physical, first because as long as I know that I'm good then I feel like these challenges are much more easier to overcome or work through.*

Before college, Yelihwakanyéhs did not realize she would have to advocate for Native students as often as she did. It was exhausting and mentally and physically difficult for Yelihwakanyéhs when she constantly had to educate non-Native professors and students about Native experiences and issues, especially in her American Indian Studies courses. *It frustrates me because all these non-Natives are teaching this stuff, and I'm like, there are Native scholars who can teach this correctly. And that just goes to show how the university views Native students.* Educating her professors and peers was

taxing, and she was unsure how to find the balance in voicing that certain statements were detrimental to Indigenous communities while protecting her mental and emotional well-being. Compounding RBF were her feelings that she did not have the right to say anything because she initially felt out of the loop in her American Indian Studies classes when they discussed Indigenous issues. While she generally knew about terms such as blood quantum and sovereignty, she felt she did not know the terms in-depth, what they meant or how they affected tribal communities.

*I guess not knowing where and when to speak when problematic things came about, [it] was hard to recognize that it was problematic because I was like, I don't know what the heck they're talking about. Like, it seems right, not knowing any different.*

Adding to her feelings of fatigue was the overwhelming presence of white staff and faculty on campus. It frustrated Yelihwakanyéhs to know there was staff in positions she should have felt comfortable seeking out when she had concerns or issues, but she felt uncomfortable and intimidated instead.

*It gets exhausting having to maneuver through the system to see who you can and cannot talk by feeling them out. Or you observing how they react to things and then learning from that and how you can approach them almost, and that shouldn't be the case. Like you shouldn't have to study somebody to see how you can approach them, and that goes for professors, faculty members, any kind of person working in academia, like housing; this could go for UHS, and counseling,*

*and all those kinds of things. The university works like they kind of sprinkle a little bit of POC here and a little bit here. And that's it, and they get the bare minimum, and it's so frustrating.*

Before college, Yelihwakanyéhs knew there was a hierarchy and that most of the white people on campus would not understand the experiences of Native people. However, she did not realize the level of ignorance until she arrived on campus because her university advertised diversity and promoted their ethnic studies classes. When she entered the PWI community as a member of a minority group, she soon saw that what the university offered for BIPOC was the bare minimum in terms of courses offered, the funding provided, and the physical spaces for BIPOC communities.

The constant battle to be acknowledged was arduous, and Yelihwakanyéhs felt like Native students were constantly told they had to work to ensure their voices were heard.

*I'm like, these white people don't need to make sure their voices are heard, they're just existing, and it's exhausting. When you're a Native student, you have to not only be educated, like educate yourself but also educate others like your peers and also your professors and then it to go higher up administration and it's the Chancellor and it's all these different higher up people.*

She often felt the university did not want Native students there nor admit that PWIs were not made for Native students. The effects of resisting and fighting against

racially focused stressors continually impacted Yelihwakanyéhs mental and emotional health and took a toll on her body, diminishing her fire.

The turmoil Yelihwakanyéhs experienced when she felt insulted and undermined by racial microaggressions was significant and the effects of RBF weighed on her heavily. While difficult, the dissonance she encountered during interactions with white students and faculty helped her master insight into the practices that built and sustained her fire. She developed strategies to take care of herself and cope in the midst of maneuvering through a system that she felt did not want her there. To protect herself, she often had to step away from situations and from campus in general to process her experiences; in fact she had moved off campus to provide a buffer from the constant barrage of friction. She also often “unplugged” from the people and places that caused harm, like disconnecting from social media or taking the time to watch TV, sleep, and generally not think about the dissonance she experienced. Leaning on the concatenation log and her innate ability to form meaningful connections with others also built Yelihwakanyéhs’s fire by fulfilling her desire for a sense of belonging. Knowing that others were facing similar situations as she made the PWI environment bearable and lessened her feelings of isolation.

### ***Making Connections with Native Students and Expanding Consciousness***

The process of colonization has impacted every Native community and has resulted in many displaced people that did not have the opportunity to grow up with their culture or language. Interacting with Native students with differing construction of their

Native identity was an eye-opening experience for Yelihwakanyéhs. Culture had always been significant in Yelihwakanyéhs's life, and she could not imagine life without her cultural connection; she would be a completely different person. Nevertheless, Yelihwakanyéhs tried to have empathy and compassion for those who did not grow up in their tribal communities but were willing and open to reconnecting and learning. As she learned more about her responsibility to her community, she aspired to facilitate cultural connections for others who may not have had the same access to cultural practices and traditions she knew growing up in Oneida.

*I know the strong impact it has left; I want to help have these things more accessible for students who don't have a very supportive home life. Who don't have a mom to bring them to ceremonies or a mom to teach them language or have them reach out to other language speakers.*

Through meeting Native students that were reconnecting to their heritage, Yelihwakanyéhs learned to keep an open mind because there are many different spaces that Indigenous people occupy, which was something she was not consciously aware of prior to college. In many ways, she felt sheltered growing up on the reservation and did not have much awareness of urban and reconnecting Native people. The expectation that all Native people had the same views and then subsequently learning that Native people had many different beliefs, values, and behaviors was eye-opening for Yelihwakanyéhs. It was important for her to recognize that individual experiences, cultural backgrounds, and personal beliefs can all shape an individual's perspectives and opinions. Recognizing and

respecting these differences helped Yelihwakanyéhs to better understand others and have empathy for reconnecting Natives.

During her first semester, one of Yelihwakanyéhs's roommates was a reconnecting Native that did not grow up connected to her community. When Yelihwakanyéhs disagreed with using "Indian" instead of "Indigenous" in a paper her roommate asked her to edit, she felt that her roommate had a colonized mindset.

*To hear another Native person speak that way or say weird things, I was kind of like, "are you with me or against me type thing." And that's something that I've had to learn while being like on campus is realizing that not everybody comes from a similar community. Not everyone is in tune with their culture.*

Over her time in college, she learned more about why some Natives are disconnected from their cultures or communities, but during her first year, it caught her off guard.

The experience with her roommate helped Yelihwakanyéhs be more understanding of the experiences of others and to be patient with the journey others were on.

*I think being on a campus where there's a lot of reconnecting Natives and urban Natives that didn't grow up around their community; I've learned their perspectives on things. And then also led me to feel not empathetic, but I guess more understanding to how they view these things, which I've learned that it's not their fault.*

She did not know how to have an open mind when meeting someone new when she was first on campus. She thought all Natives mostly grew up the same way or at least had a similar worldview. *That was an experience I am really like grateful for because that really opened my eyes to seeing new point of views of the world and how our community fits in with the rest of the colonial world.*

By opening her mind and embracing the lived realities of reconnecting Natives, she made a close friend, a Taos Pueblo. While her friend was a reconnecting Native, getting to know someone who grew up away from their culture was interesting for Yelihwakanyéhs because she grew up with Oneida culture and traditions as a fundamental part of her life. Hearing from someone firsthand what they had been through and why they were reconnecting to their culture was important for Yelihwakanyéhs because it allowed her to connect with her friend on a deep level. Through their friendship, Yelihwakanyéhs found a safe space to discuss how Indigenous issues affected her and her family and received reassurance that she was not alone in her experiences and feelings.

*That's the thing with having these connections with other people is having reassurance and specifically other Indigenous students, because we all have this...I feel like we all have a similar mindset about things and how we go about the world, and how we think about things. So, I need reassurance to make sure I'm, not necessarily doing the right thing but that I'm not misunderstanding something. And I'm always willing to learn; that's kind of where that connection*

*goes. I'm always open to listen to people's stories and how they were brought up and things that they learned as kids or things that they're learning now in school.*

The concatenation log of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was significant and strong for Yelihwakanyéhs and the relationships she formed with others helped grow her conscious awareness of the lived realities of other Native students. For her to function best, she needed human interactions with those close to her and generally, as she loved meeting new people and hearing their experiences and perspectives. Yelihwakanyéhs's desire to learn more about other people as she embraced her innate desire for connection also piqued her curiosity. Curiosity amplifies concatenation and when we form connections with others outside our usual circles, we understand the world in different ways, a raising of our consciousness. When Yelihwakanyéhs stepped out of her comfort zone and opened her eyes to other ways of being, she stepped into an experience of dissonance. The courage to step into dissonance was fostered by her curiosity and the desire for connections. As her understanding of the experiences of others deepened, she became more receptive to other's perspectives and points of view. She became open to hearing what others have to say which helped her relate to them better. Through her understanding of others, it also created a sense of trust which led to a deeper and more meaningful connection. Her relationships became more authentic and based on mutual respect. Overall, the friendships she made with other Native students allowed Yelihwakanyéhs to approach interactions with a good mind and heart, which was directly

connected to her own identity. Being able to connect with others on such a deep level was rewarding and lifted her spirits.

### ***Conclusion***

At the time of this study, Yelihwakanyéhs was fully coming into the new stages of her life. Through deep introspection, she had learned how to manage her mental and emotional health while she navigated through challenging experiences of dissonance. Self-reflection characterized Yelihwakanyéhs's college journey more so than her educational pursuits. The connections she made with other Native students showed her she was not the only person going through periods of growth.

*All those things that I didn't realize were so normal within Native people that I thought it was just me; I thought I was going crazy. So, to have that self-reassurance really helps to think more about what's actually happening because now that I know that I belong here and that I deserve to be here.*

Much of the growth Yelihwakanyéhs experienced was centered around her conscious awareness of how her experiences influenced and deepened her understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. At the beginning of her college career, she felt like she did not belong, even though she knew she was fully capable of going through college. Being raised in the Oneida community and knowing profoundly that her voice was important, she had never had such feelings of insecurity, which initially made it hard for her to fully engage with her courses and other students. As she got older and more mature, she understood that it was not her that was the issue; it was the system.

*Realizing how these problematic Western colonial systems are not made for us, they're definitely made for the majority. And how that's not something I should internalize. That's not something I can control, nor that I should let have so much power over me. So, to learn that has been more reassuring for myself to reassure me that I do belong here even though the spaces necessarily aren't set up for me, that doesn't mean I can't be successful.*

Throughout her time in college, Yelihwakanyéhs faced many instances of dissonance that were quite challenging. Through her challenging experiences, she understood the deeply entrenched systemic issues around race and bias at the PWI she attended. She had eye-opening experiences that changed or expanded her views and beliefs around Indigenous issues, such as learning more about the impacts of blood quantum, sovereignty, and differing constructions of Indigenous identity. By accepting dissonance, she even made new connections with other Native students on campus and made navigating the PWI easier and safer. Overall, Yelihwakanyéhs' experience in college was a balancing act of maintaining her boundaries for her mental and emotional well-being and learning to embrace new experiences and people, all while actively engaging in introspection to strengthen and protect her fire.

### **Kahteli•yó (Guh-day-lee-yo)**

#### ***Introduction***

At the time of this study, Kahteli•yó was a 19-year-old sophomore attending a small, predominantly White public university and majoring in First Nation Studies.

Although it is easy to focus on the negative noise that surrounds college experiences for Native students, Kahteli•yó was generally positively hopeful. She had confidence in the future success of herself and others, which directly influenced how she moved through dissonance experiences. Even though she could not control all the events happening around her, she understood that she could influence her reactions and decisions, often making choices that reflected her intuitiveness. As she grew into the sustaining fire and responsibility times of her life, she was learning that she had the skill and ability to make good things happen, whether that was for her well-being or her impact on those around her. As Kahteli•yó embraced the new stages of her life, she recognized that she was still learning and understanding herself and other people, their personalities, and what motivated them. Her curiosity pushed her to seek out new people and new experiences with the intention of expanding her own consciousness. Understanding herself and others helped her be grateful for her experiences and she did not know who she would be without the growth she experienced from accepting the dissonance around her. Kahteli•yó understood that attending college was a privilege. She tried to do her best for future generations, a view that became clearer as she entered responsibility time.

Kahteli•yó's name can be translated as "Good Root," which reflected her character as someone who conducted herself with a good mind, a significant Oneida cultural value, and her connection to her roots as an Oneida woman. Kahteli•yó also embodied other cultural values, such as encouraging the best in others, always looking toward the future, and being open-minded. Her embodiment of cultural values also spoke

to her curiosity and willingness to expand her consciousness. Kahteli•yó's natural curiosity propelled her to accept situations of dissonance as a necessary element of growth, especially those situations where she gained a deeper understanding of issues or topics. Through asking questions of others and hearing others' perspectives, Kahteli•yó built a relationship with dissonance and actively accepted that dissonance was an intuitive process of critical reflection and analysis of her beliefs that led to change and growth. Even when faced with challenging circumstances, she always reflected on her experiences and looked for the positive takeaways that led her toward self-actualization.

### ***Intuition, Introspection, and Making Changes***

After graduating high school, Kahteli•yó attended a small, predominantly White public university (University One) for her first year, about an hour and a half from home. Heading into college, Kahteli•yó had expectations of the PWI environment. Having attended a predominantly White public school for most of her life, she figured there would be similarities to her prior experiences. She knew that in spaces where she was one of only a few Native people or BIPOC, there would be a sense of discomfort and uneasiness that she would need to endure or overcome.

*I know for me, I was always intimidated being the only Native in a classroom trying to learn. It's not something easy either, you know. I just don't think it's easy going through those things where you're uncomfortable, and you feel isolated.*

Kahteli•yó encountered challenging situations at a predominantly White public school and was aware of the resilience she had built through adapting to her

circumstances and the resulting mental and emotional growth she underwent. She acknowledged that while the predominantly White public school she attended was often difficult to endure, it fostered her confidence in navigating PWIs and admitted that if she did not attend a predominantly White public school, she would not have been able to sustain herself in a college environment. Kahteli·yó also understood that her prior experiences were bittersweet because, while they were challenging, they helped her prepare for college, where she would continue to be surrounded by those with a different understanding or outlook on life.

*I would not be where I am or how I think now if I didn't go through some of those things. Knowing that I just needed it to better me and to grow that confidence and finding my voice because it would not be nearly as much as it would be back then.*

Utilizing her past experiences in high school to navigate her recent college experiences showed that Kahteli·yó accepted the necessary growth that came with dissonance. She engaged in critical reflection to determine how best to traverse the PWI environment and implemented what she learned into her life on campus.

Kahteli·yó initially lived on campus at University One and was the only minority on her dorm floor. During her first weeks at school, she was surprised that some students tried to get to know her while others were reticent around her, which was not unexpected.

*It felt more secluded with people. If you didn't reach out, they weren't going to reach out to you. So, yeah, I was surprised but wasn't at the same time because a lot of those students who are at [college] came from [high school]. And I actually*

*seen a couple of my classmates, so it makes sense to me why those things were still the same.*

Although the public school had prepared Kahteli·yó for navigating a PWI, the feelings of isolation were often overwhelming. She frequently found herself alone and questioned her decision to attend University One; she knew deep down that it was not the right place for her to be. She felt that University One had very little diversity, and it reminded her of public school growing up. The feelings that arose were complicated and impacted her mind because she had moved to get away from the PWI environment. As someone who relied heavily on her intuition, she could *feel* the dissonance occurring on campus and engaged yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to help her through the experience, namely curiosity and other cultural supports.

At University One, Kahteli·yó had a biology course with an in-person lab. In the lab portion of the course, the professor seated Kahteli·yó in the back corner. Whenever she asked questions, the professor would skip over her and call on other students, even helping students that asked the same or similar questions over her. Considering that Kahteli·yó was the only non-White student in the course, the sense of vague disrespect, that something unsettling had occurred lingered with Kahteli·yó, and the microinvalidation impacted her experience in that class. Her feelings were reminiscent of the dissonance K<sup>^</sup>talehs similarly experienced when being passed over in class in favor of White students. Kahteli·yó's feelings of uneasiness often prevented her from speaking up in classes, and looking back on her biology lab, she wished she had navigated her

experiences differently. *Going to [college] was always very hard because it was predominantly White. My teacher would say things and you hold your tongue because you're outnumbered, and you're in that uncomfortable space.* Nonetheless, she reflected on her first year in college and understood that the PWI environment was not meant for students of color. She realized that her apprehension and loneliness, especially being away from home and her support systems, impacted how she navigated college.

When COVID started, her biology course had transitioned to an online format. While Kahteli•yó experienced tense situations of dissonance in her lab, dissonance also occurred in the classroom portion of the course. During a virtual biology lecture on blood type, Kahteli•yó's professor stated that Native Americans were originally from Asia and that Native Americans have different blood than other people. Kahteli•yó was understandably caught off guard, which was not surprising considering the origin of Native Americans has always been a sensitive topic within tribal communities.

*I was just glad I wasn't in a classroom she was saying that because I was the only semi-dark person in that class. In my classroom online, I could see my other peers, and they were predominantly White [and] my teacher, she was also White. And so just hearing her going on and having that strong feeling about Native Americans are originally from Asia and talking about our blood, it just caught me really off guard and put me feeling alone again.*

At the end of her first year of college, Kahteli•yó knew that University One was not the right place for her and was not where she wanted to be. While her courses were

primarily online during COVID, it was during the hour-and-a-half commute to her biology lab that she realized she needed to make a switch. During her commute, she had ample time to reflect to understand deeper the decisions she was making.

*I was commuting back and forth; it was probably an hour and a half drive. And I always had time to reflect then. That's when I realized I was like, "well what are you doing? Is this where you want to be? Is this what you want to be doing? Is this the right school for you even? Like, what are you doing here? And why are you making this drive?"*

Her natural curiosity and listening to her intuitive way of knowing was significant to Kahteli·yó's decision-making and by acknowledging the voice within her, Kahteli·yó reified the importance of concatenation. As explained in Chapter 2, curiosity encompasses the desire to learn or know something new, which often involves exploring the world around us, asking questions, and seeking answers. Curiosity drove Kahteli·yó to seek out experiences and information to make connections between different pieces of knowledge. Intuition, on the other hand, is the ability to understand or know something without conscious reasoning. For Kahteli·yó, her intuition often involved a feeling or sense that arose from her subconscious mind and was sometimes difficult to explain or articulate. There is a connection between curiosity and intuition in that they both involve a certain level of openness and receptiveness to new information and experiences. Curiosity led Kahteli·yó to explore and gather more information, which then informed her intuition and helped her make decisions. In turn, her intuition led her to insights and

connections that she may not have been able to make through conscious analysis, which fueled her curiosity and desire to learn more. Kahteli·yó's curiosity and intuitiveness were complementary and worked together to help her navigate the world.

Catalyzed by the dissonance at University One, Kahteli·yó reflected on the connection she saw between her experiences of isolation at University One and the similar feelings she had in high school. She recognized that University One diminished her fire and informed by her intuition, she decided to take a semester off to further her inward reflection

*Sometimes it's like that switch again when you go home, and then you're with your family where you're more comfortable. But during that though, now that you're older, you learn from it. And now going back to a predominately White institution, I had to make sure that I had my values close to me, and reestablishing my boundaries with things, just giving that strength back and learning from that I feel like helps.*

As she contemplated her decision to attend University One and the subsequent experiences of dissonance, Kahteli·yó turned to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> for support and guidance. In middle and high school, Kahteli·yó was actively involved in an Oneida social dance song youth group, rising to become a teen leader in the program. Social dance songs continued to be a prominent source of support as she grew into the sustaining fire period of her life. While commuting to the biology lab, Kahteli·yó would listen to her social dance CDs. *It helped [put] me in a comfortable mood...helped me be comfortable in my*

*own skin [and] helped me prepare for class because I was still uncomfortable in that [PWI] setting.* Listening to social dance songs was grounding and helped to build her confidence to be successful in the PWI environment. When she finished biology lab, she would drive home immediately and play social dance music to regroup herself. Carrying on Oneida traditions was an essential part of Kahteli•yó's life and helped keep her grounded with herself and her identity, especially during dissonance experiences. When she was younger, her traditions helped her to maintain a strong fire and continued to sustain her fire even as she entered a new stage of her life. She credited the Oneida language and culture with helping her sustain her fire as she got older and always made the time to participate in cultural activities, especially singing social dance songs. During this study, she was part of a social dance song series and continued to learn and grow her singing, which she always made time to do. *Sometimes during the day, I'll make time to just sit down and actually sing to myself and learn. That's definitely something I still carry on.* Even her family recognized the central impact singing and dancing had on her. *And that's what my family always said, that you know you can just tell yourself out there [that] you're just doing what you know you love to do.*

Traditional cultural practices, values, and worldviews help Native students cope with challenges as they transition into college (Rodriguez & Mallinckrodt, 2021). For Kahteli•yó, Oneida language and culture were consistent fuel for her fire. As she entered the sustaining fire period of her life, she learned more about how to lean on her cultural supports in a way that aligned with who she was becoming. A significant part of

Kahteli·yó's fire was continuing to sing social dance songs and taking her rattle everywhere, which grounded her and made her feel comfortable.

*Especially [carrying my rattle], that helps me ground myself too, because I was taught bring your rattle around, [it] helps you too, but also helps your rattle when you're singing. So, I always bring my rattle here and there when I feel like it is necessary.*

Social dance songs are uplifting and strengthen the individual and community fires. We conduct Social dances for many reasons, including welcoming visitors to the community, enjoyment, and socializing. For the Haudenosaunee people, singing is a form of communication with our ancestors and provides a way to honor our past. Each song has a story enacted through dancing and is a tangible way to express gratitude for Creation. Social dance music fed Kahteli•yó's fire in many ways, from listening to songs to prepare for entering the PWI to singing songs to lift her spirits to carrying her rattle as a constant reminder of her Oneida identity. She also shared social dance songs to express her voice in ways she could not precisely explain.

*For me, singing is one way for me to express myself with words because I'm not good with words. So, singing I would say definitely helps me. It's kind of weird. I don't know how to explain it because it helps me just, I guess express my voice if that makes sense. It just helped me find my voice. I would definitely say that's always fun looking towards, being able to share that [singing].*

The semester before changing schools was a time of growth and introspection for Kahteli•yó that she continued to embrace as she entered her first semester at University Two. After deciding that University One was not a good fit, she initiated a transfer to a college closer to home where she could live with her mom rather than on campus. Although she transferred to another small PWI, she was putting her best foot forward and had the confidence to speak up more. As soon as she stepped onto her new campus, Kahteli•yó felt more comfortable and at ease than at her previous university. *From the moment I even set foot in those classes, I knew there was something different. Definitely feels more, right. I can't even explain it because I just knew.* Kahteli•yó felt that, from her perspective, University Two was more diverse than University One and had a significantly higher population of Native and BIPOC students. Although she recognized that navigating any PWI would always be challenging, she understood that she would persist with a strong fire.

*Don't get me wrong, it's still definitely difficult. It's always gonna be a long road and a challenge but I'm willing to take that challenge and still go on and move forward with it. Because in the end, it's gonna be so much more worth it.*

### ***Accepting Dissonance to Strengthen Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>***

The personal introspection Kahteli•yó engaged in since deciding to leave University One helped her build a strong fire that supported her as she moved through the PWI and experiences of dissonance. After her first year, and even though she transferred to a new college, Kahteli•yó knew that to be successful, she needed to change and took

the time to work on herself and build her fire, which was very low after leaving University One. She needed to find herself again and, being the curious person she was, sought advice from her friends and family, especially her older sister, who had transferred between the same colleges as Kahteli•yó. She used her semester off to build her confidence and started to incorporate practices into her daily life that strengthened her fire. Working on herself and building her fire back up was the first step in feeling ready to return to school after her gap semester, which was an essential step in focusing on her future goals.

Kahteli•yó's decision to switch universities demonstrated the process of reflecting on her experiences, learning from them, and using that knowledge gained to decide and take action. When she decided to switch universities, she initially reflected on her situation at University One and why she was considering a change. She also considered what she did not like about University One, what her educational goals were, and what she hoped to gain from switching universities. After making the decision to switch universities, she reflected on her experiences at University Two, comparing it to her previous experiences and learned from the prior challenges she faced. She also reflected on how her new experiences at University Two shaped her goals and aspirations for the future. The process of reflection and learning was continuous and ongoing, and each reflection built on the previous one, leading to a spiral of growth and development.

Native American students attending PWIs benefit from diverse institutions with Native American programs or organizations on campus (Makomenaw, 2012). At

University Two, Kahteli•yó found a group on campus (Intertribal Student Council) and programs (First Nations Studies) that provided support as she navigated the PWI environment.

*It's [Intertribal Student Council] with all our Native kids that are students that are from different tribes. It's just our little student group, and we have movie nights and stuff. And that wasn't even offered at [her previous college], either. It just helps being around people that understand. Even talking to them, kind of, your background, talking, just building those relationships.*

Although she transferred to another PWI, she no longer had overwhelming feelings of isolation and uneasiness in her courses or on campus. The larger Native student body helped her to feel comfortable. Through meeting other Native students on campus, she further built her fire through connecting with others who understood how she viewed the world. Because she felt more comfortable in her new educational environment, she could focus more on the material in her courses and did not feel sidetracked by having to legitimize her presence on campus constantly. *I can sit there and actually comprehend and learn and enjoy it. I actually enjoy it now. And that's where I think it's different. It's where I'm actually enjoying what I'm learning and what I'm doing.*

Switching colleges was significant because she could major in First Nations Studies (FNS), and the courses in her major helped her feel comfortable because they *were familiar*. When Kahteli•yó transferred to University Two, she chose to continue a major in business that she had been pursuing at University One. One day while sitting in

her accounting class, she started to feel the same sense of uneasiness she felt at University One.

*I'm sitting there thinking like, the other day, I was sitting in my accounting class, and I was like, why am I doing this? This is not something I enjoy. You know, and I'm like, I want to do something that I enjoy and that feels natural. Because I was getting that feeling. I was getting that feeling like, I'm not supposed to be here. I know that feeling real well, too. So I'm just like, there's something wrong. I was like, there's something wrong.*

The sense of uneasiness Kahteli·yó felt while in her accounting stemmed from her desire to be in a learning environment that was welcoming and safe for Native students. In mainstream courses, such as Kahteli·yó's accounting class, Native students can feel marginalized or isolated because their cultural perspectives and experiences may not be adequately represented. Courses focused on Native studies, on the other hand, often prioritize Native knowledge and worldviews, creating an environment where students can see themselves and their cultures valued and respected. It was important to Kahteli·yó that her educational goals aligned with her personal needs and the needs of her community, reflective of the responsibility time of life.

A significant aspect of the growth that Kahteli·yó went through in the new stage of her life was to take the time to listen to her intuition, reflect, and make a change that aligned with her values, goals, and beliefs. As she pondered her thoughts about her time in accounting class, she spoke with her mom about how she felt.

*So just the other day, I was talking to my mom, and I was like, "I think I want to switch my majors." She was like, "you want to switch your majors?" I was like, I'm not gonna lie. I can't see myself doing these things I'm doing right now, in my future, like; I just don't see it.*

After acknowledging the internal dissonance she experienced, she decided to enroll in First Nations Studies (FNS), which she realized aligned with her Oneida identity, values, and beliefs. The dissonance she experienced in college propelled her to listen to herself more. She realized that she had a personal journey, which included doing things for herself that resonated with her spirit and identity as an Oneida woman.

At the time of this study, Kahteli·yó was enrolled in an FNS course that significantly piqued her curiosity and helped expand her consciousness by deepening her understanding of Indigenous issues. She actively put herself in situations during the course that led to experiences with non-Natives that viewed the world differently and had drastically different upbringings, which helped her reflect on her own beliefs and perceptions about Indigenous topics and issues. She took copious notes on the lecture and discussions to help her understand what the professor or other students meant. Her notes helped her later reflect on her learning and understanding of what others may have meant. She learned that her courses correlated with other aspects of her life and drew parallels to her time outside of college, indicative of introspection and the desire for change and growth, which are components reflective of accepting dissonance as a necessary and welcome part of life. For example, in her FNS course, she connected with an older White

classmate in her group. They related to each other and often talked outside of class. They discussed the topics in class and shared their personal experiences regarding the course content. Kahteli•yó saw it as an opportunity to enhance her and her classmate's points of view.

Challenging her perspectives through embracing the views and ideas of others helped Kahteli•yó expand her consciousness and keep an open mind toward others. In her FNS class, her professor created an environment for the students that welcomed different perspectives and created a welcoming and safe space for people to share their thoughts and experiences. The welcoming environment of the class opened Kahteli•yó's perspective to understanding contrasting ideas and beliefs from other students she did not think of before. In her FNS class, she learned from the books and readings and embraced the interactions and connections she made with her classmates. Her professor encouraged the students to look at the material and each other's views holistically to create empathy and understanding between everyone. Kahteli•yó was surprised that Native and non-Native students were open and considerate of one another in a class focused on Indigenous issues and worldviews. Her FNS course opened her mind and helped her realize that because someone's view was different, it did not necessarily mean it was wrong or right. Kahteli•yó's curiosity was engaged in her FNS course, which fueled her fire.

*I just think that's awesome, too, in that class. It helps expand our knowledge and look at it a different way. We have speakers who come in there, and it expands my*

*knowledge on different subjects; we talk about and read different things that happen within life. And it just unending because this makes me understand [more] that I will always be a lifelong learner. It's just important to put that effort in no matter what and look at it from a different viewpoint. And we have those speakers that come in and talk about having that open spirit and just kind of understanding.*

Making connections was vital to Kahteli•yó's college experience, not only with other people but connections between what she was learning and what she knew to be true, reflective of the concatenation log. Much of the expansion of her knowledge happened in her FNS class. In the class, they learned about Indigenous beliefs in contrast to dominant American beliefs, the stories and practices of other tribes, and a general Indigenous worldview. She nurtured her curiosity by balancing her beliefs and knowledge against what she was learning.

*It helps in the class with other students sharing on what they were taking in, kind of opening that view and other people's personalities. And it was very informal, but for the better, always opening my eyes and always learning something new each day. It helped me see better and not in a good or bad way; it was just very informal.*

Kahteli•yó was also comforted by knowing that the non-Natives in her class listened and took in information on Indigenous issues. It strengthened her fire to know

that non-Natives were also learning and growing along with her and that she could be a part of expanding the minds of others.

Kahteli·yó's FNS class profoundly impacted her sense of self and her Oneida identity. While she understood some Indigenous issues before taking the course, she did not understand how specific topics related to her personally or to those around her. When she and her classmates talked about the impacts of colonization on tribal communities, they often went into detail about their own experiences and views. She felt welcomed and comfortable in her course, which meant she could learn freely without feeling like she had to suppress her voice. Even though the course content was sometimes difficult, such as detrimental federal Indian policies, her sense of belonging in the course allowed her to speak her mind, ask questions, and deepen her understanding of the topics discussed. Each time she left her FNS class, she felt different than when she was done with her business or accounting classes because she could relate to the material and the topics covered were discussed by her family at home and in daily life. Her FNS course also made her feel hopeful that others were becoming aware of the issues that Native people deal with every day. Through expressing her voice in her FNS class, she received validation of her thoughts and opinions, which helped her learn more about herself. She absorbed what others said, how they responded or reacted to what she expressed, and aligned their interpretations with her beliefs, a necessary part of the growth and change that accompanied the sustaining fire and responsibility time of Kahteli·yó's life.

As previously mentioned, in her FNS course, Kahteli•yó was one of only a few Native students, with the rest being predominantly White. When picking groups for the course, she noticed that the other Native students chose to be in a group together. Embracing her natural curiosity, she felt the Native students should spread out to other groups because she wanted to bring their knowledge to the students in the course.

*I was thinking, you know, just in my thoughts, it would be more beneficial if we all like expanded to groups individually because we are Native, and we do kind of understand and know these topics already. To just give your knowledge individually as groups. I know I've always practiced that when I was younger, too. When you know you're an older teen, you go and help the younger ones, you spread out, and that's what I was envisioning. You go, and you spread, and you help the ones who don't understand or know.*

Kahteli•yó's desire to bring her knowledge to others to teach and encourage them reflected her transition into the responsibility time of her life, where she was learning her place in the world outside her community. Being naturally optimistic and curious, Kahteli•yó always felt the need to educate those around her, even from a young age. She felt that non-Natives were more scared to ask her questions about her heritage, and instead, they often assumed things. Instead of looking at non-Natives' hesitation to educate themselves as a negative situation, she recognized that there might be feelings of hesitancy on both sides and that non-Natives often did not know where to start or whom

to ask. She encouraged the other students to ask questions and to take advantage of opportunities to interact with other Native students outside of class.

*We had a frybread sale, and I made an announcement, I told them if you've never had frybread before, this is the opportunity to go ahead. I definitely tell them; I encourage them to go and try. And it doesn't hurt, you know? I always tell them to ask questions, it doesn't hurt to ask questions. A lot of people are too scared to ask questions and that they don't know where to start. And I just tell them just ask questions, this is an open environment.*

Kahteli•yó's natural tendency to encourage others, an expression of Oneida cultural values, impacted those around her. She could tell from the positive way her classmates approached her, class discussions, and one-on-one interactions.

Kahteli•yó's encouragement of others to learn and her desire to share her knowledge had a ripple effect beyond her FNS class. Representative of her journey into responsibility time, Kahteli•yó understood her role in spaces outside of her home. She strongly felt that what she shared in class would be spread to other individuals, whether or not they were ready to learn or understand at that moment.

*They will come to you when they're ready. And when they are, they'll be able to have that open mind and understand. And that'll travel a long way. I was always taught no matter what to always express what you know and how things have been because I know that people have a hard time even knowing what to ask or where to start. And so being able to give or inform them, they'll have a rippling*

*effect and travel because then they'll tell people that they know, and it'll just travel. So that's what I think will help our generation continue on with having that open mind.*

Throughout her life and in college, Kahteli•yó was always open to sharing her ideas and views with others in an approachable and kind way, which spoke to the good mind and heart that she embodied as an Oneida woman. She always kept an open mind with everyone and tried to spread her good energy to where it was needed. As a person who embodied Oneida cultural values, she was always aware of how she presented herself to others.

*We got to start somewhere. In the long run, hopefully, we can just do our best to pave that way for the future generations...And even all of us will take something from it, and we'll continue, and then later on, we'll be able to be so much more stronger together too. I feel like it just really helps and changes things, and even one person can change so much.*

As Kahteli•yó started to understand her place in the world, her curiosity helped her navigate responsibility time. She always talked to her FNS professor after class about topics they discussed or other questions that came up. As she drove home after her classes, she thought about what she learned, which made her feel happy and lighthearted to know that other students were also learning, which brought her hope for the future.

*I just feel that hope and moving things forward, or evolving, either as individuals or as a group. It's just really nice because I feel like it opens my eyes a little bit*

*more. Afterwards, I feel almost like decompressed, you know what I mean? It's always really nice afterwards, and just like I said, eye-opening, having that hope in the future.*

Hope in the future was one thing that kept Kahteli·yó going through her experiences of dissonance. She looked toward the future and what she wanted for herself and her community and always kept future generations in mind. College was one step towards making a better future for Oneida, so she worked hard to enhance her communication and critical thinking skills. *I think those all go hand in hand. It also helps me build those different characteristics around me that will further on help me in my future.* Kahteli·yó's approach to dissonance was to accept the learning that came with critically reflecting on and analyzing her beliefs, values, and reality. Her exposure to other views at college helped her understand her views, guiding her through self-discovery and self-actualization. As a curious being, Kahteli·yó embraced her inquisitiveness, which fostered a greater understanding of herself. Because she had a strong relationship with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, she could engage with dissonance without sacrificing her cultural identity.

### ***Cultural Supports and Personal Growth***

It cannot be overstated that a strong cultural identity is an emotional and cultural anchor that fosters a strong sense of self and sense of purpose (Huffman, 2010; Chow-Garcia et al., 2022). Drawing on her traditions was a source of strength for Kahteli·yó and relying on her Oneida identity and heritage was strong fuel for her fire. An Oneida

identity also taught Kahteli•yó about her connection to the larger Oneida community and Oneida Nation. A key element of entering the sustaining fire and responsibility time of life is that we start to see ourselves in the context of our family, community, and Nation fires and our responsibility within each circle.

*And now that I've grown and learned, it makes me realize just having that strong fire in this different sense in this community and having our different cultural practices that helps so much with a person. And everyone together, we're so much stronger. And you can feel that when someone in our community is affected, we feel that. I don't even know where I would be without that. I don't know how I would go on just like how other people go on.*

While social dance songs were a huge part of Kahteli•yó's life, there were other cultural supports she leaned on to sustain her fire. For instance, she had to smudge around her room and bed every night, or her day was incomplete. She had also been learning the Oneida language, an essential part of her fire, since high school, when she took Oneida language classes. During COVID, her mom gave her a new Oneida language dictionary, and she started learning the language again. She even worked in the Oneida Language Immersion program outside her college classes. She also started beading to encourage her creative expression and embrace her curiosity about learning new things. Even though she did not consider herself a beader, she likened the beading process to her personal growth. *I guess I was never a beader, never liked beading, I didn't have patience. So, beading, you have to have patience because you don't see the progress right away. That's*

*something that changed, and [I] also learned...it's a process.* Beading became for Kahteli•yó a chance to slow down and appreciate the step-by-step progress of creating and expressing her creative self-expression. Beading taught her patience and she recognized the parallels between beading and her journey in life.

*That's something that I feel beading's been helping me in a way because it's a process. It's a slower process and take your time, just kind of reflect on a lot of things in my life I'm trying to rush and do.*

Beading was similarly teaching her that she would not figure out her whole life in one day and enjoy the journey. During this study, Kahteli•yó beaded a pair of earrings as part of her creative expression. While it was only her third or fourth time completing a beading project, she felt proud for starting and finishing her earrings.

Beading is a culturally significant art form for Indigenous communities (Ansloos et al., 2022) that promotes wellness and is an intergenerational healing tradition (Belcourt, 2010.) The patterns and symbols that emerge in the final beadwork product express identity and cultural history and often are personally meaningful to the artist. (Ansloos et al., 2022). Beading is a display of cultural resiliency, and the act of beading asserts our indigeneity and continued presence in contemporary times (Gray, 2017). Having the patience to see her beading earrings through to a finished product helped Kahteli•yó realize that she was also learning a coping mechanism to sustain her fire long-term. As someone who was always busy, the slowing down required with beading provided her time to reflect on her life and take her mind off things that were bothering

her. She embraced the change that came with entering the sustaining fire period of her life.

*You know, when there's a lot going on, you just want your mind off things. It's just been helpful. Just kind of stress relieving I'd say. And again, that's something I never thought I'd be [doing] is trying to experiment with beading. [When I was] younger, I tried it, and I was like, "oh, I already know I'm not gonna have the patience for this." I'm like, wow, this seems like a lot, a lot changed, and things continue to change. I'm of acknowledging that now as I'm getting older.*

For Kahteli·yó, while beading taught her to slow down and embrace the rhythms of life, the act of beading also strengthened her relationship with her mom. She worked on her beaded earrings with her mom, through which they connected and shared during their otherwise busy lives. Spending time with her mom strengthened Kahteli·yó's fire and provided her with a means to continually build yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as she moved into the new stages of her life.

### ***Conclusion***

Kahteli·yó's journey through college centered around her deeply personal relationship with dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. She accepted dissonance experiences as necessary for self-actualization. Instead of rejecting or avoiding a challenging situation, she relied on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to support her as she engaged with her experiences. Through critical reflection, Kahteli·yó worked towards a deeper understanding of herself, others, and the world. A significant part of the growth that Kahteli·yó went through as she

entered adulthood was learning her boundaries and what she was comfortable doing and not doing.

*You have to respect yourself and know who you are and not have those expectations within others. You can only hold yourself accountable. That's I feel like, a really good insight for somebody who is leaving their teens right now and going into their early 20s.*

Understanding her boundaries strengthened her Oneida identity and helped her find her voice, which supported and sustained her fire. *It's a learning process, and just having that strong fire within yourself and knowing this isn't right and having those boundaries, I think, goes a long way.* Setting boundaries went hand in hand with Kahteli•yó's mental health, and she could tell when she was having a good day and a strong fire and when there were low fire days. Boundaries helped her balance the good and bad days, keeping the middle ground to sustain her fire over time, which came with learning more about who she was becoming.

*Being away from home, you learn more about yourself. I feel like I'm learning and just growing that fire too. Growing what you're comfortable with and what you're not comfortable with, I think goes hand in hand. I think it all plays a role in sustaining and knowing yourself.*

While transitioning into adulthood was sometimes challenging, Kahteli•yó was excited to figure out her boundaries to bring balance and harmony to her life. The good days reassured her that she was in the place she was supposed to be, and she worked to

sustain yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> through the bad days, which reflected her naturally positive outlook on life. *Even though it was a bad day, there's always something good that you can get from it.*

Finding her voice also came with understanding her boundaries, and she was learning to speak up for herself. After transferring to a school where she felt comfortable, she found it easier to use her voice. For instance, when she had to introduce herself in classes, she would say that she was from Oneida, which not only asserted her identity in the PWI but grounded her in the institution and reassured her comfort in the environment. However, she also learned that she did not always have to speak if she did not want to, a difference she noticed from when she was younger. As a teen, Kahteli•yó used to speak publicly frequently, but when she arrived at college, she did not want to be the Native who always talked or presented herself as having all the answers to everyone's questions. Part of her reasoning for holding back her thoughts and views stemmed from her feelings of isolation in the PWI environment and feelings of imposter syndrome. She was still figuring out what this change meant for her, and sometimes she had difficulty explaining how she felt about using her voice, although she felt like she preferred to keep to herself and speak up only when she wanted. Kahteli•yó was also very humble, and since she was still learning herself, she did not want to make the mistake of seeming like a "know-it-all" and preferred to listen first, reflect, then speak when she felt she was ready.

Since starting college, Kahteli•yó noticed that she had significantly changed from her youth. *I definitely think I would not have the same characteristics or be the same*

*person if I didn't go to college.* She believed that everything happened for a reason and knew she would not be where she was if she did not attend college. She also would not be the person she is if she had not chosen to change universities. Always looking on the bright side of things, she knew that she could work through obstacles and challenges to a good resolution. Even when she was physically and mentally tired, it prepared her for hard days, after which she could reflect and remind herself that she had done it before and could do it again.

Throughout Kahteli•yó's story, a common thread was her relationship to dissonance that stemmed from her innate curiosity and her desire to learn about and understand the world around her. Accepting dissonance nurtured her curiosity and reflected the internal growth that Kahteli•yó experienced as she navigated life after high school. When she sensed internal discomfort, she felt like she was not changing or growing, but she also understood that she needed to be content with feelings of discomfort as not everything was going to change all at once. From questioning herself and her motives, to seeking out the advice of others to engaging her classmates in discussions that furthered her perspectives, Kahteli•yó sought situations that furthered her personal growth. Her actions reflected the transition from adolescent to adult and the natural curiosity that stemmed from wanting to know more about our responsibilities to ourselves, our families, and our communities. Kahteli•yó wanted to be the best version of herself and add to the community and Nation fires, a key component of responsibility time. She deeply reflected to understand better what fueled her fire and what did not. As

she moved through the sustaining fire period of her life, she continued to deepen her connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, which will help her navigate new experiences of dissonance in the future.

### **K<sup>^</sup>talehs (Gun-daa-lace)<sup>1</sup>**

#### ***Introduction***

I begin K<sup>^</sup>talehs's story with one caveat - where the other participants were very forthcoming and talkative, engaging with K<sup>^</sup>talehs was different and so was figuring out how to enter into their narrative. During our conversations, it was clear that K<sup>^</sup>talehs internalized issues, meaning that they preferred to think through problems themselves rather than talk them through with others, including me. They often found difficulty putting their experiences into words during our conversations. Their tendency to reflect inward influenced their relationships with dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, often making each more internally intense.

Having said that, at the time of this study, K<sup>^</sup>talehs was a 19-year-old freshman at a large Big Ten university and often found themselves trying to fit in with a world that was frequently at odds with their identity, upbringing, values, and worldview. The dissonance they encountered was not surprising, considering campus norms at PWIs center primarily around the experiences of White, middle-class students, which often alienates BIPOC students general and Native students in particular (Tachine et al., 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> After the data was collected and analysis completed, K<sup>^</sup>talehs shared that they prefer they/them pronouns. Out of respect and honor for their identity, it was important to me to reflect their preferences in their narrative. However, throughout the dissertation, I do refer to the participants as women for ease of reading.

For K<sup>^</sup>talehs, the overwhelming environment of a large PWI and their natural tendency to feel more comfortable alone meant that their experience was not the usual ups and downs of transitioning to college. As a result, K<sup>^</sup>talehs had several experiences of dissonance that highly impacted them on a deeply personal and intimate level, which influenced how they navigated college. They often found themselves in both expected and yet unexpected situations, a seemingly contradictory emotional and mental space that they had not yet figured out how to reconcile for themselves. While their awareness of the dissonance on campus was still developing, they began to understand the more significant impacts of the deep-rooted issues at PWIs that create systemic dissonances. Nonetheless, their experiences of dissonance affected yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and impacted their feelings of connection to the campus community.

Like all of us, K<sup>^</sup>talehs is a complicated being. Their personality resulted from many different influences, namely art, family, community, and culture, which guided them as they entered responsibility time and the sustaining fire period of their life. As they learned their place on campus and outside their community, they relied on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to guide and support them through their experiences. As described in Chapter 2, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is complex and expressed in infinite ways. For K<sup>^</sup>talehs, while the creativity log was an obvious source for yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and was the primary mechanism through which they interpreted the world around them, deeper than that was the consciousness log. As explained previously, creativity generally refers to the ability to look at situations in new ways and with new ideas, leading to a greater understanding of

the self and our place within our family and community – an expansion of consciousness. Another intrinsic aspect of creativity also includes authentic self-expression, which cultivates a strong sense of self, increasing awareness of our relationships with self and others. The innate ability to be creative and express creatively can engage individuals in reflection and empowerment, facilitating connectedness and self-actualization (Gray et al., 2010).

All cultural groups have creative and artistic histories passed down through the generations and in various ways, such as crafts, storytelling, and visual arts. Gray et al. (2010) stated that engaging in creative activities is a method of connecting to the past while maintaining cultural identity and cultural congruity. Creative expression is also a powerful force for personal change and growth. Leslie Marmon Silko wrote, "The way you change human beings and human behavior is through a change in consciousness that can be effected only through...the arts" (Mellas, 2006, p. 14). For K<sup>^</sup>talehs, creative self-expression came from their connection to art and their creative expression expanded their sense of self, their Oneida identity, and ultimately their consciousness. It was through artistic expression that K<sup>^</sup>talehs engaged the world, built meaning, cultivated their voice, and how they filtered experiences of dissonance. As they moved through the sustaining fire and responsibility times of their life, they critically reflected and analyzed their beliefs, values, and reality that resulted from exposure to various forms of dissonance and led to new intrapersonal discoveries that guided their future experiences.

### ***Microaggressions, Whiteness, and Internal Dissonance***

K^talehs was raised on the Oneida reservation and attended a predominantly White public school for most of their life which, in many ways, prepared them for attending a predominately White university. They came into their first year with notions of what college might entail. Some of their expectations were optimistic, such as feeling excited to meet new people and expand their social and academic horizons. They also had their reservations stemming from being one of the BIPOC students in the class and the isolation from being surrounded by White people. However, their familiarity with PWIs did not make the campus more accessible, and finding a sense of belonging and genuine connections with others on campus was often challenging. Feeling as though they did not fit into any groups on campus weighed on them and reminded them of their days attending a predominantly White public school. Now that they were in college, K^talehs sometimes felt the same in their courses.

Attending a PWI comes with many challenges, opportunities, and experiences that directly and indirectly impact and strengthen yukwatsistay^. For K^talehs, subtle and overt messages that they did not belong in the PWI environment characterized their experiences at college. At college, K^talehs experienced microaggressions from their White roommates and professors that were not the overt forms of racism that can be easily identified (e.g., racial violence and slurs). Instead, it was subtle and perpetuated in normative and indirect ways. Each of the microaggressions they encountered left them feeling emotional, fatigued, and isolated, adding to an overall sense of invisibility on campus. As they frequently stated throughout our conversations, K^talehs felt

uncomfortable around White people and would often freeze, not knowing what to say or how to react in direct interactions. Encountering these microaggressions frequently and in their personal spaces created an internal sense of dissonance that sometimes made navigating college almost unbearable. K<sup>^</sup>talehs leaned heavily on their family and their art for support and guidance to rekindle their fire during particularly challenging moments of dissonance. Their support helped them to continue and guided them when they were unsure how to handle situations which, in turn, strengthened yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

The power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the offender and sometimes the recipient (Sue et al., 2007). While seemingly nonbiased or valid reasons frequently explain away microaggressions, the recipient is often left wondering if it happened, which is especially true when other explanations seem plausible. Many people of color report a vague sense that a microaggression has occurred or something is wrong (Sue et al., 2007). K<sup>^</sup>talehs had similar feelings when unsure if a professor was intentionally passing them over in class. The students presented their artwork in K<sup>^</sup>talehs's studio art classes, and the other students critiqued their pieces. Sometimes, K<sup>^</sup>talehs would raise their hand after another student presented. They had a White instructor and did not know if the instructor did not see them or just ignored them because their instructor would always pick someone else, usually White. K<sup>^</sup>talehs questioned whether they were overly sensitive when considering the actions of their instructor. This microinvalidation became one of many subtle interactions that, over time, impacted the quality of their college experience.

K^talehs's experience in their art course drew attention to their feelings about the White presence on campus. For K^talehs, being surrounded by Whiteness in college and the isolation and hesitation they felt, as a result, was part of the transition or the change that they experienced but did not fully understand. In high school, they had a lot of White friends, and it seemed they were not as impacted by the White presence back then. They had many experiences with White classmates throughout elementary, middle, and high school and the space White people took up. Anderson (2015) described "the White space" as situations that reinforce the normalcy of settings in which BIPOC are "typically absent, not expected, or marginalized when present," including schools and universities (p. 10). When in White spaces, BIPOC tend to look around for other BIPOC to connect with and adjust their comfort level accordingly. When a setting is too White, BIPOC can feel uneasy and consider the space informally off-limits (Anderson, 2015). It was evident for K^talehs when they interacted with White students and faculty that the White people always dominated everything, from conversations and discussions to the questions asked in class to the literal physical spaces on campus. While K^talehs was accustomed to marginalizing experiences with White people in their youth, it was still unsettling to continually be in a White space in college. At the time of this study, they struggled with understanding the internal change that made asserting themselves at college much more challenging than in high school. The dissonance they experienced could have been part of the overwhelmingness of a PWI campus itself or just the sheer multitude of White people, all at the same time.

Feeling passed over and isolated in their classes were situations K^talehs generally expected, considering their past experiences at a predominantly White public school. They knew they would come across racist or oppressive people, of course, and they would have a frame of reference for moving through marginalizing experiences. However, what was unexpected was that they would encounter microaggressions and microinvalidations from their roommates in their dorm room. They needed their personal space to decompress and relax from the barrage of Whiteness on campus and in their courses. Before coming to college, K^talehs wanted to push themselves out of their comfort zone and meet new people. They had known a few people going to the same college but not well enough that they felt those students would want to room with them, so they selected assigned roommates when choosing their housing plans. For K^talehs, as with many introverts, a considerable amount of energy is needed to interact with large groups of people daily, such as attending classes and navigating a large campus. The disadvantage of not having a personal space to go to and peel off the layers of their social interactions meant K^talehs was always on guard. They were in an environment constantly that was usurped by Whiteness in their classes, on campus, and in their dorm. One could imagine how exhausting it was to continually buffer yourself in your environment and personal space.

Before moving into their dorm, K^talehs exchanged messages with their new roommates, which usually centered around who was bringing which items and how they might layout the space. K^talehs, the type of person to not make assumptions about

anyone when first meeting them, gave their new roommates the benefit of the doubt and tried to keep an open mind during their conversations. At first, there was nothing unusual to notice about their conversations. However, as the discussions about the dorm room continued, K^talehs felt their new roommates were leaving them out of the discussion, and K^talehs needed more choice in the decisions their roommates were making. The initial conversations between K^talehs and their roommates were less about the physical space of the dorm room and more about the growing dynamics between them. It brought them back to their years of feeling isolated and pushed to the side by White people they had experienced throughout their childhood and teenage years at a predominantly White public school, a situation that dampened their fire. As a result, they backed off from advocating for their ideas for the room, silencing their voice to benefit their White roommates. At this point, the seeds of internal dissonance were planted as they wrestled with their initial genuine desire to make new connections turn to apprehension and eventually to feeling so uncomfortable in their dorm that they delayed coming back. *It was to the point where I just didn't feel comfortable being in that room anymore. I would be out until maybe nighttime or bedtime when we had to come back and go to bed there.*

Much of the cause for the increasing tension was the lack of self-awareness of one of their roommates, April [pseudonym]. April often vented to her hometown friends about her anti-vaccination stance or joke about wearing “Trumpy merch” around her liberal friends, which made K^talehs extremely uncomfortable. They felt that April’s venting sessions with her friends were *weird* because she knew K^talehs was Oneida. April

claimed to be 1/16 Native American herself and that she was related to a famous Native writer. April's claims were reminiscent of the "pretendian" narrative as old as angry Bostonians raiding British ships dressed as Mohawks during the Boston Tea Party. Claims that nonetheless furthered K^talehs's growing skepticism and they were increasingly on edge around their roommate. April vented to her friends about the oppression she felt as a conservative and being unable to be herself on campus. Hearing April's conversations about supposed oppression angered K^talehs, and they had to leave the room.

*I didn't say anything, but that really set me off. I'm like, you are White as hell. You want to talk about oppression? Like, oh my goodness, you are not being oppressed. You're the oppressor here. That got me really, really angry. I had to leave the room.*

K^talehs was astounded by their roommate's lack of self-awareness and the jokes she would make to her hometown friends.

*It was just so bizarre to me. I mean, it made me angry, too, because not only was she anti-vax, racist, she's also a Trumpy. I just kept thinking, does she think I can't hear her? I can hear her; she's loud about it too.*

April's behavior made K^talehs uneasy, and they felt unsafe voicing their opinion. *Whenever I'd think about maybe saying something, I would also then think, you're the one who's complaining about being oppressed but I'm the one here who can't even say anything.*

The dissonance that K<sup>^</sup>talehs experienced while living with their roommate was incredibly challenging and the internal conflict they felt grew as they were bombarded with microaggressions from their roommate. They wrestled with being shocked and not affronted at what was happening around them. There was an internal struggle to reconcile differing and opposing feelings resulting from their expectations of college life and the reality that surrounded them.

K<sup>^</sup>talehs was living in an intense moment of dissonance, but because of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, they did not absorb the experiences of conflict into their identity. There were levels of disappointment, but they did not let their fire diminish, which was part of the gift of having a strong connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. To deal with the emotions and feelings that resulted from living with their roommate, K<sup>^</sup>talehs leaned on familial support to help them process their experiences, seek advice, and generally have an ear to listen to what was happening. Their mom was always someone they could rely on when their fire was low, but they also talked to their sisters who had gone through college and could relate to what K<sup>^</sup>talehs was experiencing. K<sup>^</sup>talehs talked to their mom nearly every day and asked for advice often on navigating the roommate situation. They visited their family when possible, and they also came to campus to see them. It was during their visits and calls with their family that K<sup>^</sup>talehs renewed their fire and was able to persist on campus.

For young college students, navigating the first year of college can often be daunting and challenging, and many often look to familial support. However, for Native

students, the reliance on family and culture is perhaps even more significant due to the communal nature of tribal communities and the overwhelming sense of alienation that can occur at PWIs, especially for Native students from their home reservations (Huffman, 2003). K^talehs had always been close with their mom and relied on their relationship for support as they were away from their family and their community for the first time.

K^talehs's reliance on their family was not surprising because they were just entering the sustaining fire period of their life, and their family, especially their mom, were the people that fed their fire until that point in their life. As they grew more into the sustaining fire and responsibility periods of their life, it was natural that they would begin to pull away from their previous supports and identify what sustained their fire as an adult.

### ***Dissonance, Reflexivity, and Action***

For Native college students, the importance of Native faculty who can serve as role models and mentors cannot be overstated (Brayboy et al., 2015). Brayboy et al. (2015) discussed the importance of positive relationships with Native faculty as crucial to the success of Native students. For K^talehs, one of the most important and eye-opening experiences they had during their first year of college was the relationship they built with their Native art professor. As a new student, K^talehs knew they should have taken critique days in their art courses more seriously. *I can laugh about it now, but it was embarrassing back then.* They vividly recalled how they were working on an assignment for one of their art courses and messaged their professor that they would be late for class. They arrived about two hours late as students were leaving.

*I came up to my teacher, and I apologized for coming in so late. He told me like strict he was like very blunt about it. He said that was very unprofessional and it's not a good idea to do that in the future because it wastes everybody's time. I was really embarrassed, and I cried a little bit when I got home, but I was trying to be strong.*

The experience was difficult because their professor was Indigenous, and they felt they had to impress him. They thought he held them to a higher standard than the other students, and after his reprimand, they started to feel anxious around him. *I took him seriously; I took him pretty seriously. I was a little nervous around him because I was like, 'oh, am I gonna mess up?' Mostly because after that experience of being embarrassed.* The experience with their art professor prompted K<sup>^</sup>talehs to reflect critically on their actions, come to terms with how their professor perceived their actions, and then construct a new approach to their courses. Initially, they did not think coming late to critique was a big deal and brushed off the notion that the critiques were important. Their professor's response to their tardiness impacted them mentally and emotionally. They had to go through a process of reconciliation where they reflected on and confronted the dissonance they felt, which was an internal process they needed to go through. Through reflecting on their experience, K<sup>^</sup>talehs learned that hard work pays off, and they felt that they needed to experience this lesson and the consequences firsthand for it to sink in. They then reconstructed their views on what it meant to work

hard and professionally present themselves. They started to work extra hard because they wanted others to view them as hardworking and professional.

As K<sup>^</sup>talehs recounted the impact of this experience, they pondered how they had grown and changed. They recalled running into their professor outside of class later in the semester. He told them that he was impressed by their work and that they had one of the highest grades in that class. Their professor encouraged them to keep up the excellent work and remarked that many Indigenous students do not attend college nor do well once at college. Hearing the praise from their professor encouraged K<sup>^</sup>talehs and strengthened yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The experience in their art class impacted how they approached their courses in their second semester. They worked harder, took their classes more seriously, and began to understand their limitations. They found that, particularly in art classes, putting much effort or thought into their work paid off because they liked seeing people look at their work, compliment it, critique it, or generally think critically about their work afterward and the meaning they put into it. The desire for their artwork to provoke individuals' curiosity and raise the consciousness of others speaks to an area of growth that K<sup>^</sup>talehs was just now entering and was also indicative of the responsibility time of life where they were learning their place in the world outside of the Oneida community.

### ***Reconciling Dissonance Outside of College***

Experiences of dissonance for young Oneida women do not always occur within the PWI setting. While in college, we sometimes encounter challenging situations outside the realm of campus that impacts our college experience, such as health issues, family

problems, or financial troubles. Sources of dissonance within our personal lives are often parallel to those in our college lives. For K^talehs, they faced a health issue during winter break that significantly impacted their mental, physical, and emotional well-being. K^talehs had quite suddenly developed a painful abscess on their tailbone and had emergency surgery. As a result of the abscess, they spent most of their winter break recovering, which meant they did not have the time to prepare mentally or emotionally for their second semester.

*I fell into this depression for a month and a half until spring break. I felt like I couldn't do anything, and I felt like I didn't really belong [at college] for a while because I wasn't really doing anything.*

Recovering from their abscess took much longer mentally than it did physically, to the point where it took K^talehs over half the semester to build back their readiness and confidence to tackle their classes and the campus environment. As an introvert, K^talehs found social situations more mentally exhausting than others and they needed the winter break to prepare for the demands of navigating an ocean of people and work out how best to balance all their responsibilities. While the transition into adulthood emphasizes independence and self-sufficiency, in college this largely occurs in social settings where social experiences dominate the atmosphere. On a large campus such as K^talehs's with thousands of students, interacting with others required significant energy and it was essential that they have a quiet and personal space to peel back the layers of social interaction

K<sup>^</sup>talehs interpreted the dissonance surrounding their abscess through artistic expression, which was their preferred method of reflection and introspection. They shared the impact of their emotional and mental struggle caused by the abscess when they described a drawing they made.

*I drew a representation of where I had my surgery, and it was like a pit. That's how they described it. There was like a gap in there and I had to heal inside. And I didn't know what else to do in here [a drawing book] because that's what was all on my mind the whole time. I was putting my emotions and thoughts into this while I was drawing it.*

K<sup>^</sup>talehs's drawing was more than just a physical representation of their abscess. Red and gray radiated outward from a black center while blues, purples, and greens blended together to fill in the background. The drawing symbolized their emotions, with the darkness being the central focus, indicating a mental struggle to reconcile their mind and body. The sea of color surrounding the black center revealed the calm and stillness in their life that they fought to recapture. Their fire was in embers as they struggled to reconcile their physical, emotional, and mental well-being and the drawing exhibited both their pain and the desire to recover and move forward. Their depiction of the abscess reflected their life in deep and powerful ways and their artistic expression of the experience perhaps said more than if they had expressed their thoughts and emotions verbally.

***Strengthening Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> through Creativity and Consciousness***

Throughout college, K^talehs has learned to navigate dissonances while away from their family, who were primary sources of support to keep their fire strong. While reliance on family is one way to maintain yukwatsistay^, an equally consistent and more personal and intimate connection to their fire came from the relationship to their creative self-expression through which they expanded their consciousness. Though we are all naturally creative beings, K^talehs found comfort in their artwork and often spent hours lost in their craft. Drawing was K^talehs' favorite art medium, whether sketching, processing their emotions or creating pieces for their courses. They also favored “traditional” art, preferring the tool and paper in their hands over the touchscreen and mouse characteristic of digital art, though they excelled at both. For K^talehs, creating art was a sensory experience, encompassing the smells, the sounds, and the space in which they worked. They enjoyed the physical connection between them and their art, varying between pencil and pen, layering to achieve depth and texture that was noticeable to the eye and created drama. There was no “undo” button with traditional art, and corrections must be made with tangible mediums, meaning they devoted more time to each project. As K^talehs entered responsibility time and the sustaining fire periods of their life, their art could provide a critique of Indigenous political issues. Some of the pieces that K^talehs created in their art courses reflected a deep connection to their identity as an Oneida person. One notable example was in their digital arts class, where students were required to create a personal piece using Photoshop to edit an historical image. They chose a photograph of Oneida lacemakers. In the early 20th century, Oneida women were

exceptional at creating lace products, often winning awards, and commanding high prices for their work. Lacemaking was typically a skill learned at boarding schools, and once returning home, young people often found it immensely challenging to fit in again with their families and communities. Lacemaking became a means for many Oneida women to earn a living without leaving their homes to seek employment elsewhere.

K<sup>^</sup>talehs took the historical image of the lacemakers, edited out the lace, and added contemporary beadwork in its place. The impetus was to show how, contemporarily, Oneida women were working towards cultural revitalization by creating and selling their beadwork rather than being forced to sell lace like they were in the past. In the background, they placed a blurry image of the Oneida Casino to show that even though the Oneida people are revitalizing our culture, there is still a long way to go because Oneida depends on the casino for funding. They likened the dependence on the casino as a result of capitalism, which is a form of colonization. K<sup>^</sup>talehs remarked that many Oneida people want to avoid admitting the deeply entrenched community issues stemming from settler colonialism. In the photo's foreground, they added a folding table in front of the women, representing their memories of growing up on the reservation and seeing folding tables at many events. Lastly, they added a puddle of blood to the photo to point out the murders of Indigenous women that have happened throughout history and continue to happen today. For K<sup>^</sup>talehs, creating this edited historical image connected them to their Oneida ancestors and their identity as a contemporary Oneida person. Their piece was not easy to produce, nor was it easy to present to the class.

When they presented their photo in class, K<sup>^</sup>talehs spent extra time carefully explaining their process, the meanings behind their choices, and the impact of history on the Oneida people today. Their classmates were all White students, and they felt the students would not understand their image if they did not know the historical and contemporary contexts. The students in their class remarked that the image was compelling, yet they observed that the more profound meaning went over their heads, and they missed the point entirely. K<sup>^</sup>talehs was excited to share their lacemaking piece and expected the class to react meaningfully. However, they were disheartened when their reactions were unexpected. The way they described their lacemaking piece and the meaning they put in it, they hoped that people would understand the deeper significance and context for Oneida people and expand their consciousness through the process. Instead of thoughtful insights into their image, the students asked questions about where they could buy Native beadwork, and one student even asked if K<sup>^</sup>talehs's sister, a beader, could fix her Native bracelet. K<sup>^</sup>talehs could not help but feel that in their presentation, the students colonized their piece, which was not about Oneida people selling beadwork; it was about cultural revitalization in the face of colonization. They could not say if that experience were objectively negative or positive, but they left the class feeling uncomfortable, disappointed, and frustrated.

On low-fire days, such as when they presented the lacemaking piece, they used their art to process their feelings, which took the form of scribbles on a page, coloring, or even drawing figures, all of which served to release their thoughts and emotions and left

them with a sense of calmness and peacefulness. While they often found themselves drawing upset feelings, they also created to center themselves and reflect on what they were going through to self-project and cope with their feelings. As a new college student, K^talehs faced many new experiences, some of which were quite challenging emotionally and others that challenged their consciousness, all of which facilitated change and personal growth. To process their experiences of dissonance, art was their creative outlet for their feelings and emotions.

Drawing upon yukwatsistay^, K^talehs felt most at ease when creating, attending their art courses, and talking about their creative process. Often people think of the creative or artistic process as the journey toward a masterpiece. However, K^talehs recognized that creativity was not necessarily a “neat” process, could be messy and disorganized, and sometimes did not lead anywhere. Nevertheless, they were very conscious that creating was in and of itself a dynamic process that always reflected their inner narrative. For K^talehs, whatever they made was always an allusion to something else. They likened their creative works to writing stories that reflected what they were going through at any given time. What mattered to them was not that they had created a pretty masterpiece but had put their emotion behind the art, giving it a different context entirely.

Before coming to college, K^talehs knew that as they grew, so would their art. They recalled the point at which they realized that their art and identity were inextricably linked. Learning about BIPOC artists in their art history courses evoked a sense of

responsibility to themselves as an Oneida person and Indigenous people everywhere, sharing that they wanted to utilize their work and incorporate social justice and Indigenous issues. *It's dumb thinking about it now, but for some reason, I didn't want to be identified as just the Native student that makes Native art.* For K^talehs, art had the power to inspire and could be a powerful catalyst for both inward and outward change. As someone who relied heavily on their creativity to manage their emotional experiences, K^talehs also understood how their art fed their fire in new and more meaningful ways. As with many Native students, K^talehs felt a commitment to helping their community that went beyond a vague desire to help others, and there was the recognition that individual gifts could be used to promote the general welfare of the tribe, thereby contributing to the community and Nation fires. As they moved further into responsibility time, they learned more about how they could give back to their community through their art and action, which would undoubtedly add to the community and Nation fires.

As a Fine Arts major, K^talehs was exposed to many kinds of artwork and what artists could make, even during their short time in college. They acknowledged that being exposed to the prospects for them as an artist broadened their horizons. When they entered college, they had one idea set in stone – they wanted to be an illustrator and make comics. However, they were now open to other artistic possibilities as they understood art could be a meaningful career. They learned that putting much thought into their artwork was rewarding and fed their fire because they enjoyed having people look at their art and compliment or critique it. As their mind expanded during their first year of college, they

moved away from one-dimensional work to create thought-provoking and multidimensional pieces. They discovered that they liked raising the consciousness of others by putting messages or deeper meaning behind their art while making their art much more personal than in the past. They attributed this change partly to their exposure to political artists and other artists that work with identity, including their own identity.

As described in Chapter 2, dissonance is not simply an obstacle to be avoided but, instead, is a reflexive experience that nurtures and deepens our relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Through their dissonance experiences at college, K<sup>^</sup>talehs strengthened their relationship with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> primarily through deepening their understanding of the creativity log and the resulting expansion of their consciousness. As they learned more about themselves through critical reflection and engagement with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, they realized they could express their values and aspirations through their creative expression. They also realized they could use creative expression to "give back" to the Oneida and larger Indigenous communities. As they deepened their perspective on their artwork and understood that art and their Oneida identity were inextricably linked, they realized that art could synthesize and convey complex information, such as their lacemaking piece. They also learned that art could provoke people to look at Indigenous issues differently, touch their emotions, and become a significant focal point to foster transformative dissonance in themselves and others.

### ***Conclusion***

At the time of this study, K<sup>^</sup>talehs was entering a new stage of their life. They still relied on familiar supports, namely their mom and their artistry, to build and maintain yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they navigated experiences of dissonance. They had challenging and insightful experiences that catalyzed introspection and growth. While there were externally experienced dissonances, what was compelling about K<sup>^</sup>talehs's story was the internal dissonance that propelled them into the sustaining fire and responsibility times of their life. Throughout K<sup>^</sup>talehs's story, a common thread ran through their experiences that spoke to the juxtaposition of seemingly oppositional yet concurrent thoughts, expectations, and feelings. There was also a distinction in K<sup>^</sup>talehs's story between experiences of conflict and dissonance. They were shocked but not shocked. They were affronted but not surprised. They experienced a range of emotions within the dissonances that occurred, and they tried to rectify their beliefs, values, and reality to reconstruct a new view, all components of what became their personal dissonance.

As K<sup>^</sup>talehs wrestled internally with dissonance, we can see how they moved through parallel patterns of reflexivity and growth, such as more minor changes when they altered their approach to coursework in response to the experience with their Indigenous professor. They also had more profound and significant periods of growth, such as the pull to become political in their artistic expression and the addition of an education major to learn more about race and class issues. Whether navigating living with roommates, learning the value of hard work, or deepening their understanding of their

own Oneida identity through artistic expression, K<sup>^</sup>talehs was beginning to grasp their place within the university and their Oneida community.

## **Discussion**

I conducted a multi-case study involving three young Oneida women to examine the influence of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they attended a PWI. The young women in this study drew upon the knowledge, traditions, and values of Haudenosaunee culture as they navigated their experiences of dissonance. As a reminder, Haudenosaunee existence is “rooted in Haudenosaunee constructs of gynocracy, intuitive analysis, ecocentric ideals, and democratic peacemaking” (Antone, 2013, p. 139). Within Haudenosaunee culture, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is one of the core values and we draw upon the interconnected aspects of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to interpret and make meaning from our experiences as we journey through life.

Haudenosaunee people view fire as representing the spirit of all aspects of life. We believe that everyone is born with a personal fire and gains a deeper understanding of their fire as they age. During responsibility time, young Oneida women and men learn their roles and responsibilities in their family and community while also gaining a deeper understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is a holistic and balanced concept dependent on personal, social, and cultural factors and provides individuals with meaning, purpose, hope, and a sense of belonging. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> provides the analytical and intuitive abilities to meet and comprehend the totality of our experiences. As Oneida people, we draw upon the interrelated aspects of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to form and reform our

cultural identity as we grow and change over time. As we journey through the life stages, our connection to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> deepens as we come to understand our responsibility to the family, community, and Nation fires, and ultimately as an integral part of all of Creation.

Chapter 2 explains that dissonance is a complex phenomenon that prompts us to reflect critically on our beliefs, values, and perception of reality when we encounter contrasting perspectives. This process can lead us to gain a more profound understanding of ourselves and the world around us. In Haudenosaunee culture, dissonance is highly regarded, as it fosters diverse viewpoints that promote a reflexive process, which leads to personal growth and maturity. Dissonance fosters creative tension and is central to understanding the experiences of young Oneida women navigating PWIs. Dissonance is understood as a multifaceted experience that includes personal, social, cultural, and educational encounters, which helps individuals gain empathy, reflection, and self-confidence. It is important to understand that it is not the dissonance itself that leads to personal growth, but rather the process and outcome of how one engages with the dissonance. Engaging with dissonance presents an opportunity for personal growth, and going through that process can lead to self-actualization. However, this growth is not automatic; it requires a strong fire to navigate the challenging process of confronting one's assumptions, beliefs, and values. For young adults, entering new cultural environments, dissonance can be particularly challenging, as it often causes cognitive confrontation and requires them to question their reality. However, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>

provides individuals with the tools to engage with the dissonance and they can grow from their experiences on the path to self-actualization. This process of growth allows individuals to interact with others of different cultures without sacrificing their own cultural identity.

Through a Haudenosaunee lens, this study deepens the meaning of dissonance as an opportunity for personal growth and reveals a complex relationship of *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup> and dissonance in contexts such as PWIs. The young women in this study approached their experiences of dissonance by relying on the logs of *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup>, which is a cultural framework for Haudenosaunee people. This cultural framework served as a filter by which they saw and interpreted the world, measured their self-worth, and responded when strong emotions arose. The young women in this study encountered various forms of dissonance as they navigated a PWI environment that did not always align with their cultural values and experiences. Through engaging in deep reflection and introspection about their experiences of dissonance, the participants were able to achieve a higher level of consciousness. They experienced intense feelings and thoughts and responded with curiosity, rather than internalizing the self-doubt and even trauma of their experiences of dissonance on campus. This higher level of consciousness allowed them to better understand their experiences and to ideally develop strategies for coping with dissonance in the future.

In many PWIs, BIPOC encounter a range of challenges that can significantly impact their academic and personal success. These challenges may include

microaggressions, bias, and discrimination. However, through a strong relationship with Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, the young women in this study developed skills and qualities that enabled them to navigate difficult experiences. The interplay between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> helped the participants develop resilience, empathy and connection with their values and personal growth.

### ***The Nature of Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and Dissonance***

Throughout the many stories of Haudenosaunee, and especially the epic narratives (Creation Story, Great Law, and Kaliwiiyo), there is a consistent thread of the importance of accepting dissonance. Embedded within each the primary cultural narratives are teachings that support the understanding that dissonance is a mechanism through which we gain knowledge, our identities are formed and reformed, and self-actualization is realized. Without dissonance, we would not be able to reach our higher selves, for we deconstruct and reconstruct our understandings by embracing differing thoughts, opinions, and beliefs. Further, when considered in context with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, it is through experiences of dissonance that our fire is strengthened and sustained.

The reflexive thinking characteristic of a Haudenosaunee understanding of engaging dissonance means that as we experience differing beliefs and values, we naturally undergo a process of critically examining our perspectives to realign and construct new views. The process of analyzing our experiences of dissonance is ongoing and perpetual. We move forward and backward as we experience new and different ways of knowing, drawing upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to support us spiritually while we make sense

of the experience. The process recurs throughout our lives as we journey toward self-actualization. Overall, while dissonance was often difficult and painful in the moment for the participants, it also provided an opportunity for spiritual and personal growths. By accepting dissonance, the participants emerged stronger, more compassionate, and more connected to themselves and others.

In this study, the participants encountered unsettling and, at times, unbearable moments of discord, pronounced and complex experiences of dissonance. The learning that occurred through their experiences of dissonance was highly personalized. No commonplace description can encompass the growth each young woman underwent, nor would it be appropriate to generalize their experiences. Each woman's experiences of engaging dissonance was meaningful because it motivated them to reflect on their beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors, leading to personal growth and positive change. Conversations with each participant indicated frequent personal, social, cultural, and educational dissonances at their respective PWIs and in their lives outside the PWI, impacting their overall college experience. The dissonances had different effects on each participant concerning their circumstances, ages, and backgrounds. However, regardless of their impact, the dissonances and the subsequent engagement and strengthening of *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup> were apparent. Encountering dissonance prompted a reflexive process where the participants critically reflected and analyzed their experiences upon being exposed to alternative views and subsequently constructed new perspectives and

understandings, an essential component of growth and maturity, characteristic of the responsibility time of their lives.

For the participants in this study, placing themselves in the dissonances strengthened their fire and led to a greater awareness of how they could nurture the inherent logs to sustain their fire over time. While dissonance was sometimes an uncomfortable experience for the participants, it was also meaningful because it indicated there were insights to be gained through examining their beliefs and behaviors more closely, leading to personal growth and change. The young women in this study showed that dissonance challenged their personally held beliefs, worldview, and identity in both complex and rewarding ways. Each young woman exhibited a relationship with dissonance just as they had a relationship with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, and the dialectic relationship between them was particularly significant.

Each of the experiences shared by the young Oneida women in this study led to a greater understanding of the interactions between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and how it is the interplay between the two that help guide us through our lives. Through engaging yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, the participants were able to move through dissonance experiences in college, find new meaning, and ultimately strengthen their fires. This reflexive process fostered resilience, and as we observe the participants' journeys, we see this process in action. It is a powerful reminder that navigating dissonance experiences is not just about bouncing back from adversity, but about engaging with and transforming the challenges that arise from living in a culturally diverse world.

**Resilience.** What emerged in the analysis was that a strong fire was essential for the participants in navigating experiences of dissonance within PWIs. A strong fire supported the participants in many ways. Having a strong fire helped the participants navigate dissonance with greater ease and resilience and it was apparent throughout the narratives of the young women in this study that dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> were inextricably linked. Experiences of dissonance can be difficult to navigate, testing our resilience and strength. . For the participants, the dissonances experienced often required them to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zones, whether it was a personal struggle, a difficult situation in class, or a major life transition such as entering new stages of life. Engaging in the dissonance was emotionally draining and required considerable mental and emotional energy to overcome. However, a strong fire helped the participants find the courage and resilience to engage with the dissonance on the path to self-actualization. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> gave the participants the strength to persevere when situations were difficult, and the emotional and mental fortitude to keep pushing forward. In other words, a strong fire helped the participants face dissonance and emerge stronger and more resilient as a result. The development of resilience is a critical aspect of personal growth and maturation. Individuals who possess resilience have the ability to adapt and recover from adversity and setbacks. Resilient individuals possess a strong sense of self and are committed to their values and beliefs (Heineberg et al., 2021; Kennedy-Chouane & Deveau, 2020). The participants in this study were learning more about their strengths and limitations through their experiences of dissonance and they

understood that setbacks and disappointments were a natural to growing and maturing in their life journeys. When faced with difficult situations, the participants learned to see challenges as opportunities for growth and development. The cultivation of a resilient mindset enabled them to rebound from setbacks and exhibit dedication towards their educational goals. Resilience is especially essential for individuals who attend PWIs, which can present unique challenges for BIPOC students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2002; Harper, 2010). For the participants, these challenges included feelings of isolation, marginalization, and discrimination. Despite these challenges, the participants were resilient and able to persist in the PWI environment.

Like most BIPOC students in a PWI environment, the participants experienced various forms of discrimination and bias, which made it difficult for them to stay on the path of their education. On their PWI campuses, the participants were challenged by a paradoxical and ironic situation. While the participants were all raised in the Oneida community, they understood the dynamics of a PWI environment on some level, including marginalization and microaggressions. However, they each entered college with optimistic anticipation. They hopefully anticipated that college would be an experience of diversity where they belonged and could flourish, as the universities promoted. Despite their expectation, the reality of experiencing the racial and social dissonances in campus was difficult. On the one hand, the participants anticipated encountering microaggressions and microinvalidations in the PWI environment. On the other hand, experiencing them was disappointing, discouraging, and emotionally

draining. The internal dissonance the participants experienced as they wrestled with the juxtaposition of feeling affronted but not surprised by discrimination and bias on campus made it difficult for them to navigate their academic and social environments. For example, when K<sup>^</sup>talehs knew she would encounter racist people but did not think it would be her roommate her first semester, or when Kahteli•yó felt isolated on campus due to the lack of diversity at University One. The resilience they developed through recognizing challenging experiences as opportunities for growth helped them manage the dissonance. While the incongruence between their expectations and their actual experiences after being on campus often resulted in mental and emotional difficulties that impacted how they navigated the PWI, sometimes the dissonance opened their eyes and challenged their expectations encouragingly.

One common experience for the participants was the existence of microaggressions and microinvalidations. While seemingly nonbiased or valid reasons frequently explain away microaggressions, the participants were often left questioning the occurrence of the microaggressions and whether they truly happened, such as perhaps the professor did not see K<sup>^</sup>talehs's or Kahteli•yó's hand raised during class. When the participants felt particularly affronted, like the "for Whites only" instance at Yelihwakanyéhs's campus, leaning on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> through her relationships with others, conversations with family, or by grounding themselves with cultural practices, was vital to their continued persistence in college. However, the dissonance was not

always a challenging experience, such as when Yelihwakanyéhs was surprised to find white allies on campus after the racist sign at her university.

The dissonance between expectations and reality created an internal paradox for each participant, causing them to feel both surprised by their experiences and yet not affronted. They were aware of the people and situations they might encounter at a PWI but were sometimes surprised when the dissonance occurred. As expected, each participant responded to their internal dissonance differently depending on their age and circumstances, such as when K<sup>^</sup>talehs used art to express her emotions or when Yelihwakanyéhs sought out connections with other Native students to relieve feelings of isolation. Through leaning on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and cultural supports, they refused to let challenges define their experiences or limit their opportunities. Instead, they took ownership of their education and made the most of the resources available to them, whether it was seeking out support systems or finding ways to advocate for themselves. The ability to manage their internal dissonance helped the participants persist in the PWI environment despite the obstacles they faced.

A strong fire also helped the participants cultivate a positive outlook, which was essential for navigating through experiences of dissonance. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> helped the participants maintain a sense of hope, even in particularly challenging situations. By focusing on their inner strength and resilience, the participants drew upon their own personal resources to navigate dissonance and they emerged stronger on the other side. In short, dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> were linked because the latter helped the participants

overcome the former. By relying on their fire for inner strength and resilience, the participants navigated dissonance in college with grace and a good mind.

**Empathy.** The participants moved through dissonance experiences in ways that provided insight into their values, beliefs, and behaviors. Key to the process of moving through dissonance was each participant's relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, which provided a source of cultural grounding and strength during challenging situations. Experiences of dissonance both challenged the participants' sense of self and strengthened yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> for them in different ways. For example, when Yelihwakanyéhs reflected on her experience with a reconnecting Native roommate, she learned to have empathy for her and other Native students that grew up differently than she did. Kahteli·yó exhibited empathy for others when she was open to hearing and understanding the experiences of non-Natives in her FNS course. Empathy for others strengthened Yelihwakanyéhs and Kahteli·yó's fires because they could look at the world from their perspective, which helped them feel safe exploring their own experiences.

Through the empathy for others that Yelihwakanyéhs and Kahteli·yó exhibited, they came to a deeper understanding of their own vulnerability and the challenges that they faced. For many individuals, attending a PWI can be isolating. Often the participants felt like they did not fit in, struggled to make friends, or did not belong with faculty and peers. While their experiences were difficult to manage at times, they also saw opportunities for personal growth and development. As the participants deepened their sense of empathy, they became more understanding of others, particularly other students

that differed in their upbringing, beliefs, and views. The development of empathy had a profound impact on the participants' lives. In their relationships with other students, having empathy for others led to deeper connections and more meaningful interactions, such as when Yelihwakanyéhs found a safe space to share her thoughts and feelings with other Native students on campus. This study highlights the critical role of resilience and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in supporting the participants to navigate experiences of dissonance in PWIs. The participants in this study faced various forms of marginalization, leading to internal dissonance that challenged their expectations and emotions. However, the young women showed remarkable resilience in their ability to adapt and recover from setbacks, which allowed them to persist and thrive despite the challenges they encountered. The development of a resilient mindset enabled them to see setbacks as opportunities for growth and personal development, enabling them to take ownership of their education and make the most of their opportunities. By leaning on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and cultural supports, the participants did not let challenging experiences define their college experiences or limit their opportunities, highlighting the importance of resilience and cultural identity in supporting the participants' success in PWIs.

**The Good mind.** What emerged in the analysis of the narratives of the young women in this study was that their relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> enabled them to embody other cultural values as they navigated experiences of dissonance in college. The core values are inherent to a Haudenosaunee way of being and guide how we live our lives, including the young women in this study. While yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is just one of several core

values, without a strong fire it is challenging to express other cultural values, such as the good mind or encouragement of others, when our fires are low. Despite their challenges, the participants were able to connect with cultural values in powerful and meaningful ways, including using the good mind when engaging in their courses, with faculty, and their peers. The participants drew on their experiences and perspectives to make meaning from challenging situations and sought out support systems to navigate the PWI environment. Through their efforts, the participants were able to develop a greater understanding of the good mind, as well as other cultural values such as encouraging the best in others.

One of the key strategies that the young women in this study used to navigate experiences of dissonance was to connect with their values. By reflecting on what was truly important to them, they clarified their priorities and goals, and developed a greater sense of purpose and meaning in their lives. A sense of purpose was a powerful tool for staying focused and dedicated to their core values, even in the face of challenging situations. However, connecting with their core values was sometimes challenging for the participants in the PWI environment, where the dominant culture did not reflect their core values. In the PWI, the participants experienced a disconnect between their personal values and the values espoused by the institution, which, for instance, led Yelihwakanyéhs to notice the deeply entrenched systemic issues at her campus that made it difficult for BIPC to persist. The dissonance that occurred from conflicting values was pronounced and the participants found themselves struggling to reconcile their desire for

change with the entrenched systems of power and privilege they encountered in the PWI environment.

Despite their challenges, the participants were able to connect with cultural values in powerful and meaningful ways, including using the good mind when engaging in their courses, with faculty, and their peers. The participants drew on their experiences and perspectives to make meaning from challenging situations and sought out support systems to navigate the PWI environment. Through their efforts, the participants were able to develop a greater understanding of the good mind, as well as other cultural values such as encouraging the best in others.

The core value of the good mind was particularly relevant in the lives of the participants. The principle of the good mind is likened to righteousness and refers to the shared ideology that we use our purest and most unselfish mind in harmony with the flow of the universe (Basic Call to Consciousness, 1991). The principle of having a good mind is the idea that individuals should act in accordance with what is right, just, and fair, and that they should avoid actions that are unjust. A good mind is rooted in Haudensaunee culture, which emphasizes the importance of treating others with respect and dignity. Further, the good mind suggests that we all have a responsibility to act in ways that promote the well-being of all members of society, not just ourselves. In practice, the principle of the good mind can take many forms, from treating others with kindness and compassion, to standing up for justice and speaking out against injustice. Ultimately, the

principle of the good mind encourages individuals to act in ways that align with their deepest moral values and principles, and to strive for a better world for all people.

The interrelatedness of the good mind and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> cannot be overlooked in the lives of the young women in this study. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> inspired and guided the participants as they navigated their experiences of dissonance and having a good mind was the result of being attuned to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and following its guidance. Within Haudensaunee culture, a good mind can be thought of as the manifestation of our moral identity, which is shaped by our beliefs, values, and emotions. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> can be understood as the inner force that motivates and sustains our moral identity, providing a sense of purpose and meaning to our life. Therefore, the good mind can be seen as the expression of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The interrelatedness of the good mind and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was a lived dynamic for the participants in the study between their actions and their inner selves, where the Good mind reflected the alignment of their values and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> with the ways in which they engaged dissonance.

### ***Conclusion***

Ultimately, what emerged in the analysis of the experiences of the young Oneida women in this study was the interplay between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> within the context of PWIs. The tension between the experiences of dissonance and the cultural strength of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> captured the complexity of the experiences and resulting growth that the young Oneida women underwent as they navigated various stages of life in PWIs. The interplay between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> involved engaging with

and working through conflicts, contradictions, or challenges, and ultimately transcending them to achieve a higher level of consciousness and balance.

To fully comprehend the participants' experiences, we must view the tension between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> dialectically, within the context of PWIs, rather than only considering each concept in isolation. The learning and growth accompanying experiences of dissonance occur in a dynamic state of in-betweenness that, while connected to the participants, goes beyond each young woman, impacting the family, community, and Nation fires. Understanding the dialectic nature of dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> helps us appreciate the complexity of each participant's identity as an Oneida woman within the context of PWIs, the ways in which they strengthened yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as they experienced tension, and how the resulting growth propelled them into the responsibility time and sustaining fire periods of their lives.

As this chapter illustrates, dissonance is an integral and meaningful experience that is deeply connected to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, a core cultural strength, within the context of PWIs. The findings show that dissonance is more dynamic and dimensional than the common understanding as a situation to be avoided or reduced. Through the participants' experiences, we see that each young woman had a relationship with dissonance that was influenced by their relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. Dissonance was just as much a part of their identity as was yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, for when we consider dissonance within Haudenosaunee culture, we cannot build our fire without entering a place of learning and reflection that is catalyzed by experiences that challenge our beliefs, views, and

understandings of the world around us. In this way, dissonance cannot only be considered as an isolated series of events or experiences that prompt growth in a disconnected or superficial way. We must also consider dissonance in relation to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> within PWIs, as they provide the tools or the logs that allow us to interpret and make meaning of our experiences of dissonance. Therefore, dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> exist in a dialectic relationship, meaning that together, they create a greater contribution towards self-actualization than they would independently.

## Chapter V: Implications and Recommendations

### Introduction

The experiences of young Native women in college have gained significant interest and concern in recent years (White Shield, 2009; Waterman et al., 2013; Shotton, 2017; Waterman, 2021). As a researcher, my goal was to explore the challenges that Oneida women face in college and understand how yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> assists them in navigating experiences of dissonance. Rather than taking a deficit lens, I sought to highlight the strengths and resilience that Oneida women bring to their college journeys.

Drawing from my own background and experiences, I entered a PWI with the belief that my voice and perspective were important in the academic setting. Raised in a community that emphasized cultural values and support, I had a unique perspective on my college journey. Despite facing challenges and encountering individuals who challenged my beliefs, I did not let them diminish my sense of belonging or the importance of my experiences as a Native student. I wondered whether my experience was similar to that of other Oneida women in college, particularly in today's global age with access to social media and information at our fingertips.

In this study, I delved deep into the experiences of young Oneida women in college, examining how yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was utilized in the face of challenges and how the interplay between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> influenced their college experiences. By shedding light on the complexities of Oneida women's experiences in higher education, I aimed to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of their resilience, strengths, and

ways of navigating college challenges beyond a deficit lens. Furthermore, understanding the significance of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> in shaping the identity of Oneida people and its inseparability from their sense of self is crucial in comprehending the findings of this study.

As an Oneida researcher, my understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> goes beyond a superficial notion of cultural support and recognizes its profound significance in shaping Oneida women's experiences in college. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, an intrinsic part of our identity as Oneida people, serves as the foundation of our sense of self and is inseparable from who we are. It encompasses our language, customs, history, and connection to the land and our ancestors. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is not just a set of practices or traditions, but a way of being in the world that shapes our values, beliefs, and interactions with others. It is a source of strength, resilience, and guidance that is passed down from generation to generation. For the young women in this study, yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was not simply a resource to be accessed, but a fundamental aspect of their existence that informed their worldview, shaped their experiences, and influenced their responses to challenges they encountered in the college environment.

I adopted yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> as a lens through which we can examine the complexities of Oneida women's identities and the ways in which they navigate the challenges they face in the PWI setting. I adopted also upon the Haudenosaunee understanding of dissonance, drawing upon the cultural construct of the 50 Chiefs Council, where dissonance was valued and respected in decision-making. Viewing the participants'

experiences through these Haudenosaunee cultural constructs allowed me to acknowledge and appreciate their strengths, resilience, and adaptability as Oneida women as they drew upon their cultural heritage to navigate the complexities of college life. Acknowledging the deep-rooted connection between yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and Oneida women's sense of self, I moved beyond a deficit perspective and honored the rich cultural heritage that informed their college experiences.

### **Summary of Findings, Outcomes, and Implications**

#### ***The Interplay of Dissonance and Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>: Relationships and Growth***

The experiences of Native American students in higher education and the importance of cultural supports have been widely studied in the literature (Huffman, 1990; Guillory & Wolverton, 2008; White Shield, 2009; Huffman, 2010; Makomenaw, 2012; Al-Asfour & Abraham, 2016; Tachine et al., 2016; Benally, 2017; Chinn, 2018; Fish & Syed, 2018). In this context, the concept of dissonance, as understood by the Haudenosaunee people, is of particular significance. The Haudenosaunee, through their epic narratives passed down through generations, emphasize the importance of accepting dissonance as a means of gaining knowledge, forming and reforming identities, and achieving self-actualization.

In this study, three young Oneida women attending PWIs for their higher education encountered various forms of dissonance that impacted their college experience. These dissonances arose in personal, social, cultural, and institutional contexts and had different effects on each participant. However, what emerged as a

commonality in their experiences was the engagement and strengthening of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, the nurturing of the inner fire, as they navigated the challenges. Despite the difficulties, sometimes painful, experiences of dissonance, the participants found meaning in juxtaposing the experiences to their beliefs and behaviors in a self-reflective and self-reflexive process (Nelson, 2021). In this process, dissonance challenged their worldview and identity, but also opened opportunities for personal growth and change.

The dialectic relationship between dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> was particularly significant, as it was through the interplay between the two that the participants found new meaning and strengthened their fires. The three participants, while fully aware of racism and other challenges on campus, their encounters were mixed with expectations and anticipations of what higher education is supposed to be. There were identifiable moments when their sensibilities and identities were affronted, sometimes subtle and personal, other times blatant in the community, and in the institution of the university. The nature of their engaging the dissonance was fully Haudenosaunee in that they took up the contradictions, self-doubt, and affronts and deconstructed them to reconstruct them. In that deconstruction-reconstruction, they drew upon and fueled yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>

The findings contribute to the existing literature regarding Native American students' cultural development and academic success (Alejandro, et al., 2020; Brazill, et al., 2021; Fong, et al., 2021). The results of this study further research which has substantially shown that institutions of higher education lack in understanding and valuing the cultural ways of knowing and being to Native students' identities (Fong, et

al., 2021). The three participants shared experiences widely reported, for example, not feeling understood nor valued and not belonging. In their process of engaging yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance, they engaged in their cultural knowledge and practices in ways that sustained them in spite of the institution's diversity rhetoric.

Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> provides Oneida people with a sense of self that is intimately intertwined with their identity. Yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is not merely a tool or a concept, but rather a fundamental aspect of who Oneida people are. When considering diversity on campuses, it becomes clear that the way in which diversity is defined and understood is often generalized. However, for these Oneida women, their strength came from the uniqueness of their teachings, community, and cultural identity, which inform their relationship to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The participants found that their identity as Oneida women were homogenized with other BIPOC on campus and not recognized by universities as a form of diversity. This led to a level of dissonance, both externally through microaggressions and internally as the university failed to acknowledge their unique sense of self. Three women's experiences in PWIs paralleled feelings of not belonging, isolation, and encountering microaggressions, as well as a lack of representation in course content often felt by Native students. Despite these challenges, these women navigated through the dissonance and drew strength from their understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> at a deeply personal and interpersonal level. They recognized the institutional rhetoric of the university and mapped out the various dissonances they encountered with resilience and determination. Through this process, they developed a heightened political consciousness

that impacted their communities, aligning with Brayboy's (2005) assertion that the oppression of Native American communities is often intertwined with political and power dynamics. The relationship between yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance ultimately led to a deeper understanding of the constructs and ideas surrounding resilience and well-being, particularly in the context of Indigenous identity in PWIs.

**Transculturation.** The theory of transculturation as articulated by Huffman (1990, 2008, 2010), discussed in Chapter 2, offers a model of the complex process of cultural adaptation and transformation that occurs when Native students navigate mainstream educational environments. Transculturation theory acknowledges that the experiences of Native American students in higher education are not merely assimilation into dominant mainstream culture, but rather involve a dynamic interplay between their Native cultural heritage and the influences of the dominant culture.

While the current study did not apply transculturation theory as the theoretical framework, it does contribute to the existing literature, situating this study within the broader literature of the experience of Native students in higher education. Previous studies by Huffman (2001, 2008), White Shield (2009), Tachine et al. (2016), and Fish & Syed (2018) applied transculturation theory to understand the overall experiences of Native college students' cultural identity and success in higher education. In contrast to Huffman's findings, the three Oneida women in this study entered PWIs with an existing awareness of their cultural identity and reliance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. White Shield (2009) furthered the understanding of the experiences of Native women students in higher

education, demonstrating that Native women relied on their innate cultural and spiritual strengths as a source of hope and support in their higher education experience. This study builds upon White Shield, through the specific lens of Haudenosaunee ways of knowing to examine crucial aspects of dissonance that cannot be separated from yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. White Shield's work highlighted the importance of cultural and spiritual strengths as sources of hope and support; this study acknowledges that the experiences of young Oneida women in PWIs also involved conflicting emotions and challenges as they negotiated their cultural identity in a predominantly non-Native environment. By building upon the work of Huffman and White Shield, the findings of this study provide a more nuanced understanding of the importance of cultural and spiritual strengths, having specifically focused on the deeply personal and individualized experiences of three young Oneida women in PWIs. This study proposes that transculturation is a reflexive and recurring process rather than a linear, staged process. It suggests as well that cultural identity and reliance on cultural strengths are already present in Native students who are raised in their cultures and communities.

Additionally, this study contributes to the existing literature by expanding the dimensionality of the Native student experience. The analysis of the three participants' experiences illustrated the diverse perspectives and realities among Native students, even from the same culture and community, and highlights the importance of cultural and spiritual strengths as sources of resilience and empowerment. The findings of this study suggest alternatives to deficit-based narratives of Native students that foster assimilation

to PWI campus culture and instead highlight their cultural richness and resilience in navigating higher education.

**Personal Growth and Change.** The experiences of Native students in higher education can vary significantly depending on their unique cultural and contextual factors. This study offers insights regarding how Native students may draw upon the specific knowledge and practices of their cultures to sustain themselves in PWI contexts (Runner & Marshall, 2003; Garland, 2013; Lopez, 2017; Tachine et al., 2016). The participants in this study developed resilience and coping strategies through critical reflection on their experiences of dissonance, drawing on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the unique challenges of higher education. In engaging with dissonance, the three Oneida women were able to develop a deeper understanding of their Oneida identity and assert it, challenging stereotypes. Their experiences are instances of the ways in which Native students rely on their cultural identities to shape and reshape their identities as they incorporate being Native students on PWI campuses (Burk, 2007; Wright, 2013; Ferebee & Lawlor, 2020). The findings of this study also underscore the connection between experiences of dissonance and academic success as well as persistence in higher education. Despite facing challenges, the young women in this study were able to succeed academically and persist in their educational journey. For them as Oneida women, the process of engaging with dissonance contributed to their academic achievement and resilience.

The learning and growth that accompanied experiences of dissonance for the young Oneida women in this study contribute to the wider body of literature by shedding light on their resilience, identity formation, academic success, and intersectional experiences. The study findings may serve to inform strategies for supporting the holistic development and success of Native students in higher education. The need for more research that centers on the experiences of underrepresented populations in academia is crucial for promoting inclusive and equitable higher education environments that acknowledge and support the unique experiences of Native students.

**Use of the Good Mind.** The narratives of the young women in this study illustrate how their connection with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> enabled them to embody the good mind in their actions and decision-making as they navigated challenges in the PWI environment. Despite the dissonance they experienced from conflicting values, the participants drew on their cultural values to seek support, make meaning from their experiences, and strive for positive change. The narratives of the young women offer one illustration of the importance of cultural knowledge for Native American students in higher education. Cultural values, in this study the good mind and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, serve to guide their experiences in higher education. The study offers insight into how the participants' relationship with yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and the embodiment of cultural values, such as the good mind, can serve as powerful tools for resilience, empowerment, and meaningful engagement in the face of dissonance and challenges in a PWI environment. The interrelatedness of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and the good mind in the lives of the Oneida

participants further emphasizes the importance of considering Native American students' cultural perspectives and values as assets, resources to be acknowledged and understood, rather than conformed.

### ***Methodological Implications***

In this study, I drew upon Wilson's (2008) work, "Research Is Ceremony," and Indigenous research methods to develop a methodology that was authentically Haudenosaunee. My methodology aimed to provide a practical way to conduct research within the Oneida community. In designing this study, I prioritized the perspectives of the participants, which ensured that their voices were respected and valued and their cultural heritage was affirmed throughout the research process, allowing me to capture the nuances of their experiences and understand the impact of dissonance on their understanding of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. The methodology employed in this study has the potential to serve as a model for other Indigenous researchers. By grounding the theoretical and analytical frameworks in Haudenosaunee ways of knowing, this methodology could be adapted and applied by other Indigenous communities to conduct research that aligns with their own cultural values and practices.

The drawing upon Haudenosaunee ways of knowing and being as a methodology was deliberate in the research design of the study. The intention was for the experience of participating in the research to be itself a nurturing of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. As a study investigating the relationship of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance, the reflective and critical thinking inherent in Oneida culture, along with the generative meaning of dissonance

were mirrored in the study and the experience of being in the study. The three participants shared that doing the study has a profound impact on strengthening their fires. By centering their perspectives and centering their voices, the research process itself became an empowering experience. The research design served to validate and reinforce the participants' knowledge and perspectives, ultimately strengthening their sense of identity, pride, and connection to their cultural heritage, which is fundamental to the Haudenosaunee way of life.

The use of a culturally grounded and participant-centered methodology in this research was crucial for several reasons. It upheld and respected the sovereignty and self-determination of the three young women and their Oneida community by acknowledging their unique cultural knowledge, practices, and perspectives. This approach challenged the historically oppressive and extractive nature of research historically conducted on/in Indigenous communities, which has often ignored or marginalized Indigenous voices and perpetuated harmful narratives and stereotypes. Prioritizing the lived experiences, through a culturally grounded framework, allowed for a more accurate and nuanced understanding of their experiences and challenges. Thus, grounding the methodology in Haudenosaunee ways of knowing and being was the complement of the theoretical framework built around yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

The authentic Haudenosaunee approach adopted in this study, strengthened the participants' fires by validating their knowledge, reinforcing their cultural identity, and fostering a sense of community and belonging among the four of us – researcher and

participants. By upholding Indigenous sovereignty, promoting an accurate understanding of Indigenous experiences, and fostering ethical research practices, this culturally grounded and participant-centered approach contributed to a more inclusive and empowering research experience. In essence, this study embodied "research is ceremony," honoring the participants and their cultural heritage throughout the research process (Wilson, 2008).

## **Recommendations**

### ***Oneida Community***

The findings of this study are significant and provide valuable insights for the Oneida community, where education is highly regarded for its cultural value. Education empowers Oneida members to gain knowledge, skills, and perspectives that are essential for preserving and revitalizing our unique cultures and traditions. Education is seen as a means to strengthen cultural identity, promote self-determination, and ensure the resilience and success of the Oneida people in a changing world.

The encouragement of higher education within the Oneida community reflects the commitment to empowering young women and promoting self-determination while recognizing the importance of education in uplifting the community's well-being and sovereignty. However, an important aspect of Oneida's commitment to higher education is missing, as there is a lack of emphasis on strengthening cultural values before young Oneida women leave the community to pursue their higher education. Without a strong cultural grounding, differences can arise between those who prioritize cultural values and

those who do not, particularly among those who return from higher education and assume positions of leadership. The importance of a strong fire cannot be overstated as yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> serves as a guiding force of wisdom and resilience in navigating challenges in college and beyond, fostering a positive mindset, and inspiring others.

The findings of this study demonstrate the essential role of a strong fire for sustained growth and development toward self-actualization for Oneida people. Therefore, the Oneida community should consider these findings and ensure that cultural values are preserved and strengthened alongside modern education, to maintain a harmonious balance between the two. This will ensure that young Oneida women and all members of the community are empowered with both education and cultural values as they navigate their paths to success.

### *Native Communities*

This study can provide a compelling example for other Native communities to follow, showcasing the significance of embracing and incorporating cultural assets in order to uplift Native students in higher education. By acknowledging and respecting Indigenous traditions, beliefs, and perspectives, Native communities have the opportunity to empower their students, cultivate a strong sense of heritage and identity, and cultivate a conducive environment for academic achievement. This study can serve as a source of inspiration for Native communities seeking to create a positive and culturally-affirming educational experience for their students, ultimately leading to improved outcomes and success in higher education.

### *Predominantly White Institutions of Higher Education*

The insights from this study shed light on the challenges that Oneida women faced on PWI campuses when it came to diversity and multiculturalism. The participants in the study expressed a sense of disconnect between the rhetoric about diversity and multiculturalism that PWIs often promote and the reality they experienced on campus. They felt that the universities' messages about diversity were not reflected in their daily experiences, which made them feel homogenized or forced into a uniform mold, akin to colonialism.

This study suggests that PWIs need to critically examine their rhetoric about diversity and multiculturalism to truly understand and address the complexities of diversity. It is not enough for institutions to simply promote diversity as a catchphrase or a box to check. Instead, PWIs must strive to create an inclusive environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel genuinely welcomed and respected, and where their unique perspectives and experiences are acknowledged and valued. This requires moving beyond tokenism and superficial representation, and instead embracing the richness of diversity in all its forms, including race, ethnicity, culture, religion, gender, sexual orientation, and more.

This study also suggests that PWIs should recognize and challenge the ways in which they may unintentionally homogenize diversity. This includes avoiding assumptions that BIPOC are a monolithic group and instead acknowledging and celebrating the intersectionality within diverse communities. By doing so, PWIs can

move beyond performative diversity and towards meaningful inclusion that fosters a sense of belonging for all students, regardless of their background.

### **Future Research**

The findings of this study shed light on the experiences of Oneida women in PWIs of higher education. The potential of ongoing research is crucial to further understand Native students' experiences in higher education, including the unique challenges they face, the cultural strengths they bring with them, and the long-term effects of cultural resilience on their persistence. Further investigation of the interplay between the unique and distinct values, knowledge, and practices that are their cultural identities, and the university environment could inform the creation of inclusive and culturally responsive environments in higher education institutions for Native students. Further research could study university practices that promote sense of belonging and foster academic and personal growth in culturally informed ways. Moreover, understanding the broader social impact of cultural resilience, such as engagement with communities and political activism, can contribute to advancing Indigenous perspectives and promoting social justice. By acknowledging the limitations of the current study and addressing them in future research, we can further expand our knowledge and understanding of the experiences of Native students in higher education, and promote their success and well-being in diverse academic environments.

While this study focused on the experiences of Oneida women in PWIs, it is equally important to understand the experiences of Oneida men. Further research could

explore the unique challenges Oneida men face related to gender, race, and culture in PWIs, and the cultural strengths they bring with them to the PWI environment. The experiences of Oneida men in PWIs may differ from those of Oneida women due to differences in Western societal expectations and perceptions of masculinity.

Exploration of the experiences of Oneida men in PWIs could shed light on their experiences of dissonance and how they navigate these experiences. Understanding the experiences of Oneida men in PWIs may serve to inform policies and practices that better support their success. Research could examine how Oneida men navigate their experiences of dissonance and draw upon cultural strengths such as yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to develop skills and qualities that enable them to navigate difficult experiences with resilience and empathy, similar to what was found in the experiences of Oneida women in PWIs in this study.

Overall, exploring the experiences of Oneida men in PWIs is important to gain a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of Oneida students in these environments. It is important to recognize the unique challenges that Oneida men face in PWIs and to understand how cultural strengths can be leveraged to support their success.

Building on the insights gained from this study, a future research study could focus specifically on the experiences of Oneida students at tribal colleges. Tribal colleges are unique institutions that are rooted in Indigenous cultures and values, and they offer a supportive environment that is often lacking in mainstream institutions of higher education. A future study could explore how a strong cultural sense of self contributes to

the academic and personal success of Oneida students at tribal colleges, and how this success translates into career trajectories and overall well-being.

Furthermore, a future study could explore the impact of tribal colleges on the overall well-being of Native students, including their sense of belonging, cultural pride, and mental health. By understanding the ways in which tribal colleges promote the success and well-being of Native students, policymakers, educators, and practitioners can better support the development of culturally responsive and inclusive environments in other institutions of higher education. Overall, a future research study that focuses on Native students at tribal colleges could provide important insights into the ways in which a strong cultural sense of self contributes to academic and personal success, and how Indigenous cultures and values can be leveraged to support student achievement and well-being.

Not all Oneida students, or Native students, generally speaking, are raised in the culture and bring with them the fortitude given through *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup>. Engaging with Native students that are reconnecting to their culture was eye-opening for one participant. Further research could explore the role of community, traditional knowledge, and values in promoting resilience and academic success among Native students at tribal colleges. Additionally, the study could examine the unique challenges faced by Native students at tribal colleges, such as intergenerational trauma and the impact of colonization on Indigenous communities, and how a strong cultural sense of self can support students in navigating these challenges.

Understanding the long-term effects of a strong fire on Oneida students beyond their college experience can provide insights into the potential for personal and professional success, as well as overall well-being. For example, research could explore how a strong fire contributes to Oneida students' success in their chosen careers, including how it informs their approach to work and decision-making. Additionally, investigating the relationship between a strong fire and mental health outcomes, such as rates of depression and anxiety, could help identify factors that contribute to overall well-being among Oneida students.

Moreover, exploring how *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup> shapes Oneida students' engagement with their communities and political activism can also provide valuable insights into the broader social impact of cultural resilience. By investigating the long-term effects of a strong fire on Oneida students in PWIs, researchers can provide a more nuanced understanding of the value of *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup> and its potential to positively impact the lives of Oneida people.

### **Limitations**

This study adopted a multiple-case design focused on three Oneida women from the Oneida Nation in Wisconsin in order to describe in-depth with nuance their experiences of *yukwatsistay*<sup>^</sup> and dissonances as they attended a PWI. That said, there are several limitations to acknowledge. The focus on Oneida Nation and Oneida women is a limitation in that it limits the generalizability of the findings to other Indigenous communities and genders. The participants were recruited from one geographic area,

which is relevant given the relationship of place and identity among Native peoples. The study did not examine the experiences of Native students attending Indigenous-serving institutions, which may have different experiences and perspectives. Finally, the study did not examine the impact of historical trauma on the participants' experiences, which is an essential aspect of understanding Native experiences. Despite these limitations, this study provides valuable insights into the experiences of young Oneida women attending PWIs and highlights the importance of exploring the interplay between cultural values, dissonance, and personal growth. Future research should consider these limitations in the design of research about the relationship of Native students' cultural knowledge and lifeways and navigating PWIs.

### **Conclusion**

My research on the experiences of young Oneida women in college, informed by Indigenous research methods and centered on the concept of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>, has shed light on the profound significance of cultural resilience in shaping their journeys. By prioritizing the perspectives of the participants and fostering a sense of community and belonging, my study has moved beyond a deficit perspective and honored the cultural heritage of the three Oneida women. The findings have important implications for the Oneida community, Native communities, and predominantly White institutions of higher education. This study serves as a powerful example for Native communities to embrace and incorporate their cultural assets in higher education, empowering their students and fostering a sense of heritage and identity. It also calls on predominantly White institutions

of higher education to critically examine their approaches to diversity and multiculturalism and create inclusive environments that value and celebrate diversity in all its forms. Moreover, the findings of this study underscore the need for ongoing research to further understand the experiences of Native students in higher education, including their unique challenges, cultural strengths, and the long-term effects of cultural resilience on their persistence. By advancing our understanding of the relationship between yukwatsistay^ and dissonance, we honor and uplift the experiences of Oneida students, leading to a more equitable and empowering educational experience for all students.

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**Appendix A: IRB Determination Form**

# UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

Twin Cities Campus

Human Research Protection Program  
Office of the Vice President for Research

Room 350-2  
McNamara Alumni Center  
200 Oak Street S.E.  
Minneapolis, MN 55455  
612-626-5654  
irb@umn.edu  
<https://research.umn.edu/units/irb>

## NOT HUMAN RESEARCH

December 29, 2021

Lynn Brice  
lbrice@umn.edu

Dear Lynn Brice:

On 12/29/2021, the IRB reviewed the following submission:

Type of Review:	Initial Study
Title of Study:	A Haudenosaunee Intrinsic Multiple-Case Study on the Influence of Dissonance on Yukwatsistay^ for Young Oneida Women at Predominantly White Institutions
Investigator:	Lynn Brice
IRB ID:	STUDY00014777
Sponsored Funding:	None
Grant ID:	None
Internal UMN Funding:	None
Fund Management Outside University:	None
IND, IDE, or HDE:	None
Documents Reviewed with this Submission:	• HRP-503 - Human Research Determination Form - DRAFT 12.20.21.docx, Category: IRB Protocol;

The IRB determined that the proposed activity is not research involving human subjects as defined by DHHS and FDA regulations. To arrive at this determination, the IRB used "WORKSHEET: Human Research (HRP-310)." If you have any questions about this determination, please review that Worksheet in the [HRPP Toolkit Library](#) and contact the IRB office if needed.

Ongoing IRB review and approval for this activity is not required; however, this determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether IRB review is required, please submit a Modification to the IRB for a determination.

Sincerely,

Jeni O'Keefe, MS

**Driven to Discover**<sup>SM</sup>

## Appendix B: Oneida Nation Research Request Approval

Jo Anne House, PhD | Chief Counsel  
James R. Bittorf | Deputy Chief Counsel  
Kelly M. McAndrews | Senior Staff Attorney

Carl J. Artman  
Krystal L. John  
Peggy A. Schneider  
Lydia M. Witte

Law Office



January 26, 2022

Priscilla Belisle  
Via e-mail: dcss0031@d.umn.edu

*RE: Research Request: University of Minnesota – “A Haudenosaunee Intrinsic Multiple Case Study on the Influence of Dissonance on Yulwatsistay” for Young Oneida Women at Predominantly White Institutions”*

Dear Ms. Belisle:

You have requested, in accordance with Resolution # BC-05-08-19-A, *Research Requests: Review and Approval to Conduct*, approval to conduct research involving tribal members. Your research attempts to identify conflicts between higher education environments and yukwatsistay^ experienced by young Oneida women.

The Oneida Nation has had a long history of supporting education and providing opportunities to members to attend undergrad, graduate, post-graduate and technical education institutions. We have also recognized the difficulties experienced by members coming from a close-knit supportive community who enter educational institutional environments. The Oneida Business Committee has reviewed your proposed doctoral study and believes the results can provide meaningful insight into this issue. This insight can assist the Oneida Higher Education Office in proactively identifying resources to assist members pursuing education opportunities.

At the January 26, 2022 regular meeting of the Oneida Business Committee the following motion was approved.

Motion approve the research request, consistent with resolution # BC-05-08-19-A, *Research Requests: Review and Approval to Conduct*, and, in accordance with:

- Resolve #2(3), Ms. Belisle is required to submit the final draft research paper for review;
- Resolve #2(4), Ms. Belisle is required to submit a copy of the published work and can request to present the research findings to the Oneida Business Committee;
- Resolve #5, any further use of this research information is subject to authorization by the Oneida Business Committee.

I look forward to reviewing the results of your research. If you need further information please contact me.

Sincerely,

ONEIDA LAW OFFICE

Digitally signed by Jo Anne House  
Date: 2022.01.26 09:07:27 -06'00'

By: \_\_\_\_\_  
Jo Anne House, Chief Counsel  
Wisconsin State Bar No. 1021514

## Appendix C: Human Research Determination Form

### PROJECT PLAN COVER PAGE:

<b>Protocol Title</b>	Yukwatsistay^ Multi-Case Study
<b>Principal Investigator/Faculty Advisor</b>	Name: Dr. Lynn Brice
	Department: Department of Education
	Telephone Number: 218-726-6812
	Email Address: lbrice@d.umn.edu
<b>Student Investigator</b>	Name: Priscilla Belisle
	Current Academic Status (Student, Fellow, Resident): Student
	Department: Department of Education
	Telephone Number: 920-265-3456
	Institutional Email Address: dess0031@d.umn.edu
<b>Version Number/Date:</b>	12/20/2021; Initial Submission

## **Description of Activity**

### **1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this multiple-case study is to describe the ways in which experiences of dissonance while attending predominantly white institutions (PWI) of higher education influence young Oneida women's understanding of yukwatsistay^ (the fire within each of us).

The participants will be three young Oneida women, ages 18-22, who are currently attending a PWI and enrolled in an undergraduate program.

Young Oneida women entering college will experience various personal, social, cultural, and educational situations that impact their cultural identity and sense of self. While unsettling, this dissonance is an opportunity for learning and growth supported by yukwatsistay^ and encouraged in Oneida culture. The young Oneida women in this study are at a profound cultural stage of their life as they enter responsibility time and the sustaining fire period of their lives. During this time, young Oneida women are experiencing a period of growth and maturity as they come to understand their fire and what sustains their fire on a deeper level. The dissonance present at PWIs catalyzes this reflexive process that this study will seek to understand and describe in-depth.

### **1.2 Procedures**

In this study, an Indigenous methodology is applied. Indigenous methodologies are informed by cultural epistemologies and thus center the Indigenous worldview. Indigenous research methodologies are complementary to qualitative methodologies as they encompass similar principles of research as both methodologies value process and content. Adopting an Indigenous research methodology in this study allows for Oneida cultural identity, ways of knowing, and values to be the defining framework through which the experiences of the young Oneida women will be interpreted.

For this study, data gathering will include individual conversations with each participant and talking circles (collective conversations) with all participants. Pending IRB approval, data collection will take place from January to May, 2022. Individual conversations will be

approximately 90 minutes and take place monthly (1 conversation each month with each participant). There will be two talking circles where all three participants are present together, one occurring at the beginning of the data gathering period and one at the end. At the initial talking circle there will be a discussion of how each participant would like to share or represent their story. In alignment with both the Indigenous view on stories and the importance of having a voice in Haudenosaunee culture, this study will seek to gather the unique stories of the participants to represent their voices regarding the impact of dissonance on yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>. There are many ways in which the participants may decide to share their story and could include journaling, through sharing and interpreting dreams, voice recordings, pictures, etc. How each participant chooses to share or represent their story will determine the focus of each individual conversation. Thus, the data gathered will be emergent and dependent on the individual participants. However, this is not to say there will be no parameters to the nature of the data gathered. Rather, the data will be driven by the guiding questions with the variation occurring in the ways in which information is shared by the participants. Depending on the schedule of each participant, data collection may be in person in Oneida, WI, at their respective college of attendance, or virtual using Zoom.

The questions that will guide this research are:

1. What experiences of dissonance do young Oneida women encounter as they attend PWIs?
2. How do young Oneida women draw upon yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> to navigate the experiences of dissonance?
3. How do the experiences of dissonance help young Oneida women strengthen yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>?

### 1.3 Data and/or specimens

- **Data and/or Specimen Collection and Analysis**

For this study there will be two types of data collection – individual and collective conversations (talking circles). The individual conversations will take place monthly and while conversational in nature and not unlike a semi structured

interview, they will be true to Oneida ways. Meaning the conversations will be more fluid than a formal interview and will be based on each participant's individual experiences. The conversations will have general guidelines that align with the guiding questions and will evolve throughout the data collection period. Generally, the conversations will center on the participants' experiences of dissonance, how they are making sense of it and the relationship over time of their experiences.

To analyze, I will catalog each individual conversation topically as they occur to identify relevant and significant topics that happen within the conversations. All of this is within case analysis (analysis happening for each participant, not across participants). There will be an emergent ongoing process and when conversations gain in number, I will identify themes that emerge among the topics, which will become the basis of the narrative.

Another layer of data is to have the participants determine and create their own way to document, log, or represent their experiences (or story) and that they want to share or talk about. I want them to choose how they share their story because the medium that they chose is a kind of data – it is informative. Within this layer of data, what the participants gather that makes sense to them might be a collection of pieces they create and share with me that are representations of their experiences of yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> and dissonance within a PWI. In an indigenous methodology data could also be dreams, conversations with an elder, poems, photos, or journals. The conversations with the participants are meant to be open-ended and emergent because the form of the data is just as important as the data itself.

The second type of data will be talking circles or collective conversations. The first purpose of the talking circles is to create the conversational space I will have with them as individuals and give them the opportunity to have an initial conversation on yukwatsistay (very open-ended). I will also introduce the idea of choosing how they represent their experiences. In the first collective conversation I will listen for topics that have salience to the participants collectively and analyze using discourse markers that indicate for the participant that a topic seems to

be important (duration, thinking time, redundancy, excitement). The second conversation will take place at the end of the data collection period and will be a conversation that brings closure to the study for the participants. Participants will also be able to share their overall experience of the study and what they learned.

All conversations will be audio recorded. Transcriptions and any materials provided by the participants will be analyzed by me using emergent data analysis. Each individual participant is a case (three cases) and data from each case will be analyzed separately. Data analysis will include identifying emergent themes that are descriptive of their experiences of dissonance and the interaction of dissonance with their personal fire.

- **Data and/or Specimen Collection Method**

While ideally each meeting with participants will be in person either in Oneida or at their respective campus, but because of distance or COVID-19, some may be virtual. The individual and collective conversations will be audio recorded with a handheld audio recording device if in person or recorded using the Zoom recording if virtual. Any physical data such as written documents, photographs, or artistic representations will be discussed during the individual or collective conversations where participants can share orally about the piece. Written or visual data from participants will be photographed or scanned only with permission from the participant.

How each participant chooses to represent their experiences with dissonance and yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup> is part of the data collection process, which is appropriate for the Indigenous methodology I am adopting that is driven by Oneida lifeways and teachings. Thus, this is an emergent process, which is very dependent on the individuality of the woman, which connects to yukwatsistay<sup>^</sup>.

- **Identifiability of Data or Specimens**

In this multiple-case study research in which each participant is a case, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed due to the nature of the information shared, coupled with the fact that Oneida, WI

is a small community. Participants will be identifiable in the Oneida Nation community. Considering outside of that community, participants will be able to select, if desired, a pseudonym and decide other identifying information they would like masked. Data collected will be encrypted and securely stored on a University of Minnesota Server (Box) and will not be shared with those outside the research.