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STORIES AS RELATIONS

A THESIS APPROVED FOR THE

DEPARTMENT OF NATIVE AMERICAN STUDIES

BY THE COMMITTEE CONSISTING OF

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Abstract

This research will focus on understanding the personhood of Indigenous women and finding one's light and autonomy. Here, I build on the work of Leanne Simpson and Laura Harjo about finding one's light and autonomy and sharing that light in service to Indigenous communities. By utilizing both archival research and the invocation of Indigenous feminist and relationality theories, this paper will examine the key concepts of kin-space-time envelopes, relationality, autonomy, and stories as relatives. The specific material I researched was oral histories from the Doris Duke Collection of American Indian Oral History that are housed in the Western History Collections of the University of Oklahoma Libraries. By utilizing concrete examples from archival research, a better understanding of the context of Indigenous values through time and space will inform current Indigenous women of the power and light that is inherently ours. These stories are relations that teach us about autonomy, relationality, and how to be in the world.

Introduction

My academic journey of Indigenous feminist autonomy was influenced by both course material and the Native American Studies community. I was led to the knowledge that I needed to find out about oppression and personal empowerment. In my Native American Women class, we talked about hard truths that Indigenous women endure on a personal and systemic level. I read stories about women that were survivors of violence and learned about Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women (MMIW). As we engaged in class discussions, we grew closer to one another and recognized the light we possessed that others sought to extinguish. This class became a major intervention in my life and would be the precipice for my life's journey to take a different direction.

One of the early influences of my path of learning Indigenous feminisms was *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood,* by Cree/Metis author Kim Anderson. In her book she details her journey to find her Indigenous identity, a path I was also just embarking on. Anderson writes, "My journey as a Native person, my recognition of being as explored in this book, is one way of telling the assimilation-makers that it didn't work," (Anderson 2000, 26). From Anderson I learned that Indigeneity is more powerful than the nation-state's desire to extinguish it in Indigenous women. I learned that how we live our lives everyday can be an act of resistance.

My journey to understand my autonomy and find my light first came as a whisper of a song. It was a song that was locked inside of me, faint at first. One of my assigned readings that greatly impacted me was *We Are Dancing for You: Native Feminisms & the Revitalization of Women's Coming-of-Age Ceremonies*, by Cutcha Risling Baldy. Her book is about her personal journey, as well. She details her lived experience with intimate partner violence and her

subsequent efforts to revitalize the empowering coming-of-age ceremony for young girls in her tribe, the Hoopa Valley Tribe. She recalls the night she found her song and was ready to leave her abusive relationship. She called her mother about her latest instance with his rage. After pinning her against the wall he told her, "Nobody else will ever want you. Nobody else will ever love you," (Risling Baldy 2018, xiii).

Her mom affirmed that it was time to leave, but Cutcha voiced her doubts. "No, Mom, he is right. I am nothing." Her mom answered, "Oh, Cutcha, we should have danced for you." (Risling Baldy 2018, xiii) Cutcha did leave that abusive relationship and she did sing her soul's song. "But I wasn't singing alone. I could hear the song in my head, and it echoed with voices from many times I had heard my grandmother, my mother, and aunties sing these songs to me as I was growing up" (Risling Baldy 2018, xiii). Cutcha describes her work empowering other Native women and girls by saying, "I am here. You will never be alone. We are dancing for you" (Risling Baldy 2018, xiii). Cutcha showed me an example of a strong Indigenous women who had found her autonomy. She showed me the way forward after trauma can involve doing big things for others by sharing our light and life lessons.

My path to understanding Indigenous feminisms and autonomy was shaped largely by the Native American Studies community that I became a part of. I had developed relationships in my department with the female professors who were guiding me on my academic path. The relationships that I have built with these professors, and other mentors in my academic career, I think of as aunties, women who offered me support and acceptance. They believed me when I spoke my truth. One auntie would help me to breathe through panic attacks in her office, reminding me to stay grounded to Mother Earth. Other aunties gave me their personal cell phone numbers in case I needed them- day or night. I have cried with them and received comforting

hugs. I have explored how to feel safe in my body with my aunties and been reminded that I have a place in academia, and in our department when doubts would threaten to change my course.

As a trauma survivor, my path to healing and my higher education are intimately entwined. The storyteller cannot be separated from the story, and my academic career is indicative of this concept. This is evidenced by the research that I have embarked on and the classes that I have chosen over the course of my academic career. Each one changed me as a person, in a way that goes well beyond the purely academic. Much has changed in my life since I first began the Native American Studies program at the University of Oklahoma and these changes that I have undergone would greatly influence my research questions.

Like many of my Indigenous sisters, I have survived unthinkable violence. But like them, my body also houses the memory of the warrior blood running through my veins. I continued to be led on my path, on my journey to be whole. I established relationships with sisters and aunties along the way, and with more than human kin. These relationships would sustain me along my difficult journey.

I share these details in this introduction to situate myself in my research so that the reader may know why these research questions were so important to me. The oral history archives are full of stories that can serve as a map to the world. Stories can come to you to teach you how to live in good relations with all our relatives. They can teach you how to care for your body, your mind, and your spirit by remaining connected with the natural world. How to be true to yourself despite the ravages of a harsh world that is bent on taking your autonomy as an Indigenous woman. The stories I am keeping are the ones that teach me about how to care for others in the community. How to love and keep giving despite structural violence and ongoing trauma that we are faced with.

For the last year and a half, I had the privilege of working with the Doris Duke Native American Oral History Collection at the University of Oklahoma in the Western History Collections Library. As my time there drew to an end, so did my time in the Native American Studies department as a master's student. My mentor and advisor said something that really stuck with me, and I've been mulling it over since. She said, "write the stories that come to you like a relative." On the last day of my grant-funded position, I went through my stack of manuscripts and decided which ones to take with me, the stories that had become relatives. The oral histories that resonated the most deeply with me are the women's stories. Jo-ann Archibald writes of the holistic grasp that takes place when stories come to you as a relative in her book, *Indigenous Storywork: Educating the Heart, Mind, Body, and Spirit*. She expresses, "It was as though these stories became embedded in my body, in my emotional being, in my consciousness, and in my spirit," (Archibald 2008, 93). I feel like I know these women intimately, and they have much to teach me about how to be an Indigenous woman and how to live like a good relative.

Conceptual Framework

Indigenous Feminisms

Indigenous feminism is a diverse field of inquiry that is predicated on several foundational themes and critiques, such as a pliable conceptual framework, bodily violence and settler colonialism, Indigenous women's bodies resist every day by existing, autonomy, relationality, and kin-space-time envelopes. First, Indigenous Feminism can be conceived of as a set of theoretical, political, and material interventions that can then be personalized to fit the needs of the specific community. Indigenous scholar, Joyce Green, editor of the book, *Making Space for Indigenous Feminism*, refers to it as a "body of work" that is at once theory, political

stance, and actions that are as diverse as Indigenous communities are (Green 2007, 18). Indigenous feminism incorporates the specific worldviews of the community, taking into account specific cultures and the history of the people (Green 2007, 18). Thus, it is hard to narrow it down to one specific definition.

Second, Indigenous Feminism considers, bodies as political orders and the bodily violence of settler colonialism. An understanding of the ravages of colonization and its impact on Indigenous peoples is central to understanding the structural violence. Structural violence can be known by examining the lived experience of Indigenous peoples and specifically Indigenous women due to the threat that Indigenous women pose to settler politics. As Mohawk scholar, Audra Simpson, attests in her keynote address, "The Chief's Two Bodies," at the International R.A.C.E. Conference, "Indian woman's bodies in settler regimes, such as Canada and the U.S… are loaded with meaning... signifying other political orders, the land itself, of the dangerous possibility-also- of reproducing life," (Simpson 2014, The Chief's Two Bodies). Indeed, Simpson's assertion- which is backed by other Indigenous Feminist scholars- that Indigenous women's bodies are a "political order" evidences the amount of ongoing conflict to usurp the autonomy, and the very life of Indigenous womanhood (Dorries & Harjo 2020, 211; Millon, 24).

Third, Indigenous feminism involves Indigenous women's bodies as sites of everyday resistance. Building on Audra Simpson's theory of the body as a political order, Nishnaabeg feminist scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, in her seminal work, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance*, articulates how Indigenous feminist researchers can utilize personal and lived experience to develop deeply personal work that is a meaningful site of resistance. Simpson affirms this by stating "I use my body, mind, spirit, and life in my writing as research and as a canvas" (Simpson 2017, 114). The body and mind

remember and carry Indigenous thought and lifeways, and as such, it remains a site of critical battle for the lives of Indigenous people. As targets for dispossession, acts of everyday life are resistance.

Fourth, seeing one's light is seeing the reflection of their inner being. Leanne Simpson describes this as, "reflecting back to them their essence and worth as a being, it is a mirroring (Simpson 2017, 180). For example, in the introduction I discussed building relationships with my female professors. At that time in my life, I did not see my own light, but I saw theirs. They did see my light and reflected it back to me. Instead of reading history to retrench United States narratives of exceptionalism of conquering the frontier, this theory enables me to read the archives and see the light in and of the Indigenous figures in the archive. By utilizing this internal light to advance Indigenous rights and the inclusion of all in the community, the researcher forms meaningful relationships with themselves, their research, research participants, and Indigenous historical figures.

Finally, I conceive of autonomy as embracing one's personal power and freedom. It is recognizing Indigenous Feminist body sovereignty and that self-determination is our "birthright," (Simpson 2017, 110). Personal power is knowing your own worth; that it is embodied, it is inherently ours and cannot be taken away. It is recognizing one's own inner light and allowing that light to radiate outwards. For example, sharing your light could be cooking for the unhoused in your community, forming kinship bonds with friends, or caring for plant and animal relations. My theory of autonomy comes from Leanne Simpson's description of *kwe*, "I understand the word *kwe* to mean woman within the spectrum of genders in Nishnaabemowin, or the Nishnaabe language. Kwe is not a commodity. Kwe is not capital... Kwe cannot be exploited," (Simpson 2017, 29). Autonomy cannot be taken away; it inherently belongs to

Indigenous women. I argue that when Indigenous women recognize their own autonomy, they embody Simpson's articulation of kwe. I include myself in this definition of kwe and autonomy and, based on that, offer the following assertions.

> We will not be oppressed.
>
> We are not here to be commodified or abused.
>
> We refuse to let our light be dimmed by oppression from anyone.
>
> We know who we are and what we have to offer the world.
>
> We embrace our bodies as political orders and all the power that entails. Simpson writes, "As political orders our bodies, minds, emotions, and spirits produce theory and knowledge on a daily basis without conforming," (Simpson 2017, 31).

Relationality

This research, further, incorporates as one of the key concepts the theory of kin-space-time envelopes from Mvskoke Indigenous feminist scholar, Laura Harjo, from her inspiring book, *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity.* Primarily, the introduction of kin-space-time envelopes of knowledge as a way of conceiving archival research. With a focus on kinship, a kin-space-time envelope incorporates Indigenous ways of knowing the world. They remind us of how to be a good relative and how to live a life that is true to Indigenous value systems. Harjo defines a kin-space-time envelope as a "polyvalent," rather than a "container" that "considers ancestral practices that we draw upon to renovate, reinvigorate, and sustain our bodies, psyches, livelihoods, and communities" (Harjo 2019, 28).

Archival research cannot be separated from the researcher for, as Harjo states, "we read through our subjectivity of the moment" (Harjo 2019, 31). Harjo draws on work by Indigenous scholar, Dian Million, who attests, "We feel our histories as well as think them" (Million 2009,

54). Oral histories hold unique memories of not just the person being interviewed, but also the interviewer, and the person reading these kin-space-time envelopes. Harjo iterates that "the body is an archive of experiences where knowledge is also produced and held" (Harjo 2019, 84). The researcher then utilizes their own felt knowledge and memory to understand and relate with the kin-space-time envelope. Therefore, Indigenous feminist archival research is a deeply personal process with the potential to affect the researcher in profound ways.

This research also seeks to honor relationality and relational accountability in the manner of Shawn Wilson's hallmark book, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*. Indeed, Wilson attests that relationality is in keeping with fundamental Indigenous epistemologies, or ways of knowing (Wilson 2008, 7). Wilson affirms the importance of relationality to be considered, foremost by stating, "relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality" (Wilson 2008, 7). Metis scholar, Kim Anderson attests that relationality is "what informs time and holds us through the generations- those relations between human, natural, and spiritual worlds," (Groat & Anderson 2021, 480). Hence, the researcher builds relationships with the research, the community the research originates from, and the reader. Furthermore, Indigenous methodology necessitates "relational accountability" that considers the ethical practices of "respect, reciprocity, and responsibility" that encompasses all of our relations through time and space, (Wilson 2008, 77).

This research utilizes Indigenous feminist and relationality theories as the lens to explore archival study. By focusing on these key concepts, one can learn how to be a good relative and recognize personal autonomy and light through the ongoing structural violence that is the lived experience of Indigenous women today. The archival stories that presented themselves as relations, or unique kin-space-time envelopes, can serve as roadmaps for how to be in the world;

thus, answering the research questions posed: What shared values are exhibited that teach how to be in the world as an Indigenous Woman? In what ways do they show Indigenous Feminism?

Methods

Indigenous scholar, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, in her renowned book, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, stresses the need to decolonize the story of Indigenous communities. Decolonization in academia is about challenging the underlying bias that pervades the system and working to unravel this mechanism of control (Smith 2021, xii). Smith maintains that "research is implicated in the worst excesses of colonialism and remains a powerful remembered history for many of the world's colonized peoples" (Smith 2021, 1). The power dynamics that Smith references have historically been weaponized at the expense of Indigenous people to tell the story of colonial domination from a Eurocentric perspective. My reading of archival oral histories intervenes in weaponized stories, by reading history as narrated by Indigenous people and read by an Indigenous scholar using critical Indigenous theories and methodologies to identify moments and practices of autonomy, relationality, and kin-space-time-envelopes.

Research with Indigenous people has often been extractive and exploitative. The researcher- and the story they ultimately tell- can be a critical danger if the community's needs are disregarded. For example, if a researcher is addressing violence against women and their narrative pathologizes individual women, instead of asking them directly what they need, they would find it for them and tell them what they need. In addition, in communities with gendered power dynamics, interviews could compromise the safety of the women being interviewed if their identities were exposed. Reading the archives is an example of a safe way to work with Indigenous women.

Native activist, Vine Deloria, Jr., poignantly discusses this extraction and exploitation in his famous book, published in 1969, *Custer Died for Your Sins: An Indian Manifesto*. Deloria maintains that the primary goal of researchers is not to help Indigenous communities through research that benefits them, but "merely the creation of slogans and doctrines" that benefit the academic career of the researcher, (Deloria 1969, 94). Deloria calls for researchers to give back to the people rather than preying on Indigenous communities as "ideological vultures" (Deloria 1969, 95).

Deloria's critique of extractive research methods, though conceived in the late 1960's, is relevant to this research since the archival histories that I researched took place within that time span. Though many of the interviews conducted were done by community and family members, some were conducted by outside researchers who most likely benefited from personal gain in conducting the interviews. This critique of extractive research is an ongoing conversation of Indigenous scholars today who have continued to develop critiques. For example, in Smith's book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, she writes:

> "Make no mistake, however, that despite some indications of positive change, it is still dangerous in the twenty-first century to be an Indigenous person and 'research' remains a dirty word for many of the world's Indigenous peoples and communities" (Smith 2021, xi-xii).

Researchers must then be conscious of the social location of individuals when seeking to learn from the stories of the past. One of the primary goals of Indigenous research is telling the story from the Indigenous person's perspective instead of simply stories of the past or the widely received historical narratives that continue reproducing stories of Eurocentric exceptionalism. Linda Tuhiwai Smith poses the following question for Indigenous researchers to ponder:

"Why then has revisiting history been a significant part of decolonization?... It means that there is unfinished business, that we are still being colonized (and know it), and that we are still searching for justice… Telling our own stories from the past, reclaiming the past, giving testimony to the injustices of the past, are all strategies which are commonly employed by Indigenous peoples struggling for justice" (Smith 2021, 34-35).

Archives have become places of power, as keepers of knowledge and story. Archives often shape history as new researchers come to shape theories of the past. The past carries into the present and builds the future narrative. Indigenous scholar and archaeologist, Dr. Lewis Borck, refers to the gravity of the shaping of history as invoking "the past in the present to construct a history for the production of the future," (Borck 2019, 232). Stories are conveyors of Indigenous culture and lifeways and, therefore, should be treated with utmost care and attention. The stories in the archives have life and should be respected and cared for as the community would for their very own. Indigenous scholars Margaret Kovach and Elizabeth Fast reiterate the safe keeping that should go into researching with Indigenous stories in their contribution, "Community Relationships within Indigenous Methodologies," in *Applying Indigenous Research Methods: Storying with Peoples and Communities,* "It reminds us, as researchers, to show the same respect and regard to the story of the other as we would hope our own story would be treated," (Kovach & Fast 2019, 26).

Indigenous scholar, Shawn Wilson, in *Research is Ceremony*, provides a guidepost to conducting research with Indigenous people that is centered on relationships. Wilson illustrates this when he says, "If Indigenous ways of knowing have to be narrowed through one particular lens (which they certainly do not), then surely that lens would be relationality. All things are related and therefore relevant, (Wilson 2008, 58). I rely heavily on Wilson's theory and strive to

uphold a research paradigm that honors Indigenous ways of knowing and proper protocols of prioritizing the spirit and the core Indigenous values of "respect, reciprocity and responsibility," (Wilson 2008, 99).

The first hallmark of Wilson's theory is the relationship. The relationship must encompass the research topic and grow from there to build a relationship with the material. Wilson describes this encompassing nature of relationships through research as including, "the relationships we build together, between us, our homelands, and our ideas," (Wilson 2008, 83). To this end, it is foundational to not only build a relationship with the oral histories that I researched, but also with others that helped guide my research, all while maintaining balance through connections with where I am from and my spirituality.

From the foundation built on relationships comes relational accountability. If research is grounded in relationships, then being a good relative necessitates respectfulness, reciprocity and responsibility (Wilson 2008, 99). Wilson stresses the importance of being accountable to oneself, as well. He states, "You have to be true to yourself and put your own voice in there, and those stories that speak to you," (Wilson 2008, 123). Therefore, in addition to maintaining a good relationship to the oral histories and the communities of origin, it is vital to be accountable to myself and be true to what is meaningful to me and my path.

Another method incorporated in this research is Dian Million's felt theory, which integrates using our emotional intelligence and lived experiences as part of the research practice. Questions then are not purely analytical through this lens. Million uses felt theory to analyze important historical contexts, such as the experiences of Native children in boarding schools (Million 2009, 55). Million writes, "By insisting on the inclusion of our lived experience, rich with emotional knowledges, of what pain and grief and hope meant or mean now in our pasts and

futures," (Million 2009, 54) one can gain a more nuanced understanding of both history and our present. By integrating the researcher's whole-body knowledge, an intuitive sense of understanding is allowed to unfold in that space where the researcher can see the light and hear the unspoken words in the story. If the story is a relative, it is impossible not to connect emotionally with those stories that speak of a shared past. Million states, "Those whose subjective history this is, must speak it, since its emotional resonance still lives through them; because we are who we are because of this history that continuously haunts our storied bodies and lands." (Million 2009, 72).

Angela Teresa Morrill also utilizes felt theory in her dissertation, *Toward a Native Feminist Reading Methodology,* published in 2016. Morrill describes a Native feminist reading methodology as "A sort of double-consciousness that sees through the settler reading of historical and contemporary events, and recognizes the Native feminist story underneath it, and through it all, and beyond all of it," (Morrill 2016, 1). I conceive of researching with felt theory as utilizing intuitive knowledge to listen with wisdom held in the body and an open heart to form a relationship with the story. Researching with this method aims to gain a clear understanding beyond what is written in the archive alone. Morrill writes, "At heart in the analysis is the understanding that no story, historical, archival, is complete. As a Native feminist scholar, I read the unknowns and refusals," (Morrill 2016, 19).

The research I am carrying out is qualitative research in which I used coding to conduct deductive analysis. I utilized coding with different colored highlighters and sticky notes, as referenced in the journal article "Ensuring Rigor in Qualitative Data Analysis." The highlighters and sticky notes allowed me to invoke my kinesthetic preference to categorize the data into select categories. Maher et al. state:

> "It is essential for the researcher to 'immerse' themselves in data, to explore all the possible nuances and relationships, to view data from a variety of perspectives, and to move from micro- to macro view in order to support the analytic imagination necessary for understanding and theory generally. This form of analysis is augmented by multi-modality forms of interaction with data," (Maher, et al. 2018, 12).

This multi-modality form of coding facilitated immersion in the material and the engagement with the data brought forth the common themes. For this paper, four oral histories were selected and studied in-depth for the common themes of autonomy, relationality, and kin-space-time-envelopes. As each reference was made to my research questions, I coded them with different colored highlighters and posted comments on sticky notes. I am employing the Indigenous Research methods I discussed on oral histories to answer my research questions: What shared values are exhibited that teach how to be in the world as an Indigenous woman? In what ways do they show Indigenous Feminism?

Background on Collection

The Doris Duke Collection of American Indian Oral History interviews were conducted between 1967-1972 (https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/whc/duke/). In 1966, Doris Duke began to provide funding to universities to gather a diverse array of oral histories from Elders, tribal leaders, and community members. The university would then appoint "faculty, graduate students, and/ or researchers" to conduct these interviews in the community. Tribal citizens were interviewed from [illegible]" (https://digital.libraries.ou.edu/whc/duke/). The interviews covered topics such as boarding schools, community life, reservation life, tribal histories, and traditions. Susan Feller, president of the Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums highlights

the importance of the collection by saying, “The recordings, now over 50 years old, represent a treasure trove of unique stories told in the voices of our ancestors” (Dryfoos & Roth-Schrefer).

Funding for the current revitalization project was announced on February 9, 2021, with funding by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation in the amount of over $1.6 million in grant money (Dryfoos & Roth-Schrefer 2021, 1). The funding aims to “increase access to, use of, and visibility of the Doris Duke Native American Oral History Collections” (Dryfoos & Roth-Schrefer 2021, 1). The Association of Tribal Archives, Libraries and Museums (ATALM) received funding to serve as the coordinating agency for the project throughout the United States (Dryfoos & Roth-Schrefer 2021, 1). In addition, seven universities that housed oral histories from this collection received funding and took part in the revitalization program. Included in this is the University of Oklahoma, where I had the privilege of being a part of the work done as a graduate research assistant for the collection reviewing interviews housed at the University of Oklahoma in the Western History Collections Library.

As part of the project, select materials are uploaded onto a website using the Mukurtu platform, “an open-source content management system” (Dryfoos & Roth-Schrefer 2021, 2). Mukurtu began on a grassroots level in Australia “to manage, circulate, and narrate the Warumungu Aboriginal community’s digital materials using their own cultural protocols” (Christen, et al. 2017, 1). A focus on community curation and data sovereignty ensued. Warumungu Elder and archivist, coined the name of the system from the word Mukurtu, which means “dilly bag” in Warumungu (Christen, et al. 2017, 2). A dilly bag was kept and protected by elders in the community and held sacred items which the elders were obliged to keep safe “for their communities, relatives, places and ancestors” (Christen, et al. 2017, 2). However, the elders were not to be “stingy” and were to “open them up when younger generations asked

respectfully" (Christen, et al. 2017, 2). Thus, Mukurtu would become the name and need to be "a safe keeping place" (Christen, et al. 2017, 2).

Mukurtu is designed to provide layers of protection for Indigenous communities' data. Proper procedures are decided upon, and care is given to ensure that only those materials are shared outside of the community that the Indigenous community allows (Christen, et al. 2017, 2). In addition, each item in the Mukurtu content management system has a set of "protocols relating to family relations, gender, and country affiliations" (Christen, et al. 2017, 2). Individuals must create unique profiles so that their ties to the community can be determined and access is decided based on the information gathered. For instance, there are materials that are sacred that only elders can have access to and other materials that can be viewed only by women or men. Relationality is then evidenced by these protocols which place each person into context within their communities, as "each user views their own 'mini-community archive'" (Christen, et al. 2017, 2).

My role in this project, as a graduate research assistant for the Doris Duke Collection of American Indian Oral History, was to carefully read transcripts to gather metadata to provide to the Native communities and tribal leaders for the oral histories that are housed at the Western History Collections Library on the campus of the University of Oklahoma. I would then catalog the information, noting people and places mentioned in the oral interviews, the extent of Native language included in each interview, and any potentially sensitive information that the community may not want to have open access to going forward. To gain a clear picture of a community that was included, I read the interviews based on tribal affiliation together. Another exciting aspect of this position was to research through the library's finding aids for photographs

in the Western History Collections. One of my favorite parts of this experience was being able to put together images of the people I had come to know and think of as relatives.

Findings

Kin-Space-Time Envelopes

My conception of an archival story as a kin-space-time-envelope is derived from the theory that each story is special and contains a unique set of instructions for how to live as a good relation. Each oral interview that I have had the privilege of working with deserves respect, as one would treat a beloved relative. Furthermore, since the majority of those interviewed in the Doris Duke Oral History Collection were Elders at the time of the interviews, they possess a treasure trove of wisdom. Mvskoke scholar Laura Harjo writes, "A kin-space-time envelope can be a memory, but not solely in the sense of recalling a scene or a vignette; it also provides instructions for how to be in the world, or it invokes a sense of responsibility in the person recalling the memory," (Harjo 2019, 28).

Harjo uses the example of stargazing as a unique kin-space-time envelope, "We are observing the same stars as our ancestors," (Harjo 2019, 31). The archival collection itself, as a "network of kin-space-time envelopes," can then be conceived of as a "constellation" of instructions (Harjo 2019, 28). Each set of instructions taken individually has a message that is unique based on the lived experience of the person telling their story. Just as we can look to the stars for guidance, we can look to the stories for guidance. The stars in the night sky hold wisdom that has guided the people for generations. Along this manner, stories that stay with you do so because the lessons there are meant for you. "We read these spaces as kin-space-time envelopes based on our standpoint, or subjectivity of the moment," (Harjo 2019, 31).

Autonomy

Shirley Fish

Shirley Fish was born in Holdenville, Oklahoma on October 15, 1934. Ms. Fish's heritage is both Creek and Seminole but she identifies primarily with the Creek Nation. She was disabled because of contracting polio at the age of two and a half but has worked hard to accomplish much with her life, despite her challenges. At the time she contracted polio, Ms. Fish was also diagnosed with double pneumonia and had to be transferred to a rehabilitation facility in Marlin, Texas. She lived at the rehabilitation center until the age of seven. Ms. Fish states:

Physical disability and Perseverance

> "Before I went to Marlin, Texas, I had no use of the lower part of my limbs, as well as my left arm. And after returning, I received strength in my arm and in my legs. And I was assisted by braces and crutches. And also while I attended school I, eventually, discarded my braces and used my crutches only going to school," (Fish 1969, 2).

Ms. Fish did not let being disabled hold her back from pursuing her dreams of an education and independence. "And I went to Okmulgee two years and finished my education there. And also, I didn't miss any days up there also. It seems very unusual, but it can be done... it can be done I always feel," (Fish 1969, 2).

Autonomy and Recognizing Your Gifts

Ms. Fish exemplifies the art of finding her unique gifts that Leanne Simpson describes the importance of, "People were expected to figure out their gifts and their responsibilities though ceremony and reflection and self-actualization, and that process was really the most important governing process on an individual level," (Simpson 2017, 4)

> "I had polio; and now I get around on crutches. Well, all of the work done at home is done by me. Dad doesn't have to call anyone to do any outside work. Like I said, 'Jack of All Trades'… And I feel like if someone else asks, 'Can you do so and so?' I may say, 'No, I can't.' But then I always figure out a way to do it… So, this has been my motto all these years. I may not do things as quickly as another person will do it, but I can do most anything that another person can do in my own little way," (Fish 1969, 16-17).
>
> "I don't feel sorry for myself at all. I don't as far as being handicapped. It's one of the things a person has to adjust to. I've lived with it all my life. It never has hurt me. I have never blamed anybody for it or anything like this. And this is just the way I feel," (Fish 1969, 17).

Despite the protests of her father, Ms. Fish became determined to learn how to drive to be more self-sufficient. With the help of a friend, Ms. Fish had hand controls put on the steering wheel to be able to drive.

> "And I have goals. Seem like, I don't know where they come from. They pop up, and I want to lean something new. It is fascinating. I know over a year ago, I had the urge I wanted to learn how to drive. Other handicaps have driven. And I thought, 'Well, if they drive, why can't I?'… He said, 'You'll never be able to drive this car.' He said, 'It's too powerful.' And I said, 'Oh, I will. Don't worry about it'… I took my test, and I passed it. And I was so proud of myself... Now I'm so independent, and I have always been independent," (Fish 1969, 21).

In addition to learning how to drive, Ms. Fish also learned how to swim. Ms. Fish relays this conversation with her swim instructor, "Possibly, this will be my last goal." He said, "No, you'll think of something else." (Fish 1969, 22). Her swim instructor was correct, Ms. Fish did not stop there. At the time of the interview, Ms. Fish had returned to school to study at East

Central College in Ada with the goal of pursuing a career in rehabilitation counseling (Fish 1969, 27). Ms. Fish focuses on what she can accomplish that brings her unique gifts and leadership qualities to the forefront exemplifying what Leanne Simpson attests to when she writes about the decentralized nature of Indigenous leadership, "Different manifestations of leadership lies in all Indigenous bodies," (Simpson 2017, 117).

Autonomy and Trusting Inner Voice

"I have done this since a child. I can hear two parties talking. I do not have to know who the parties are, but I can usually figure out what type of person each party is. And nine times out of ten, I can tell you exactly what kind of person they are. Or I can talk to them or just study them while I'm talking. I don't know what it is. Sometimes, I kind of get leery of myself and wonder, 'Well, who am I?' 'Am I really supposed to be here?' But as I talk to one of my friends, this is sort of a talent that's built within you. The Lord has gifted me with it which I appreciate very much," (Fish 1969, 15).

Autonomy and Believing there are No Limits

Ms. Fish continually imagines a future that is full of possibility. In addition to finishing her degree and becoming a rehabilitation counselor, Ms. Fish lives in a world where she accomplishes anything she sets her mind to:

> "I have thought of wanting to learn how to fly. Why can't I? So this will be my next project. I don't know if I can find a plane. A special plane, you have to have for handicaps to fly. And if that is possible, I think that will be my next project," (Fish 1969, 22).

Ms. Fish exemplifies autonomy and Indigenous leadership in ways consistent with

Simpson's assertion, "Within Nishnaabeg thought, every body is a political order and every body houses individual self-determination," (Simpson 2017, 112).

Autonomy and Sharing Your Story

Ms. Fish also longs to be an inspiration and tell her story to others. "And all in all even though all this has happened, I had intended to tape off a tape and later on in life, I thought maybe it might be a help to some handicap further on down the line," (Fish 1969, 26). Ms. Fish's dream of one day telling her story speaks to her autonomy and desire to empower other differently abled individuals. Ms. Fish has refused to accept defeat time and time again and though I am not certain whether the story was widely known in her lifetime, I believe her spirit reached out to mine to include her story as a relation. Harjo writes regarding the concept of living out the dreams of our relations, "Unactivated possibilities relate to imagining and carrying out what could have been had settler colonialism not taken root, on a range of scales- across a range of scales a broad geography, or at the scale of the body," (Harjo 2019, 199). Thus, Ms. Smith's story continues to resonate across time and space as I carry out her "unactivated possibilities," (Harjo 2019, 199).

May Walquah

May Walquah is my Comanche relative. She was born on her grandfather's homestead in Cache, Oklahoma in the year 1912. Throughout her entire life, Ms. Walquah lived by her own rules. She embodied toughness, bravery, and personal autonomy. Growing up on horseback, she had a lifelong love for horses. Over the course of her life, she worked non-traditional jobs as a horse jockey and a bull rider. She was a mother to two sons who seem to have carried out her characteristics of braverybull rider.

Childhood Autonomy

Ms. Walquah's refusal to conform started at an early age when she attended Fort Sill Indian School at the age of seven (Walquah 1967, 20). Prior to going to school, May was raised by her grandmother and allowed freedom and independence. She was well-loved and supported in exploring her autonomy. "They pet me so much…I would do as my please. Have to take orders, I don't like that," (Walquah 1967, 20). May thrived in this environment and was able to recognize her power, even in childhood. Her independence would cause her conflict in school as well as serve to help her remember who she was throughout the difficult days filled with homesickness:

> "You know, and I'll do anything what I want to do. But when I went to school, why the assistant had to tell me what to do. Say, you do this, go do that. Said at times, I don't care to do anything. I sass back and maybe I get scolding for that and maybe get punishing for that. I know once, one time they put me in the corner… Well, this older than me, she sweep you know. And our assistant told me, 'You pick up that dust pan and get that broom and pick them dirts up. Trash up and go put in the trash can.' I thought to myself, she's doing it, let her finish it. I thought that. I didn't pay no attention to it. I just looking the other way. She come up to me, says, "You going to do what I said?' I said, 'Let her finish it, she's working.' Boy, she just took me and set me at the corner. She punish me for not picking that trash for her," (Walquah 1967, 21).

Autonomy and Refusing Gender Roles

In relaying her family history, May describes one of her uncles, her dad's brother, as being brave and being able to take whatever he wanted (Walquah 1967, 4). She describes him as a warrior, wearing a buckskin suit and an otter cap (Walquah 1967, 2-3). "So, if he likes any horses, why he just go after them… he steal horses from Ft. Sill. Yeah, and that's how brave he

was," (Walquah 1967, 3). "They always say I took after this, my uncle. My dad's brother cause he was kind of like that brave one, you know. Said she, 'You got his ways,' (Walquah 1967, 5). May gives an example of her brave uncle not being afraid to go after what he wants:

> He says, 'I show you what can I done.' So he took his wife away from him. He couldn't do nothing. He took this other Indian's wife away from him. So, he fought just put that woman behind his horse, behind himself and took off… You just have to be really tough yourself. Go through that life. Though I could say that my own uncle, my dad's oldest brother, he's a tough one. Any horse he like he fought for it and take it away from the owner. They just that kind of person whatever that he wants, why he'll get it… Just to show that he's brave, that's all. Brave man could just uh- have anything he wanted," (Walquah 1967, 4).
>
> Interviewer, David E Jones: "You were telling me the other day that you rode bulls. When did you first do that?"
>
> May Walquah: "Yeah. When I first done that I was, I guess I was just crazy goofy. Boy, I tell you, we was just raised up with horses. Everybody knows us in our tribe… and so I, oh, I rode bulls, ride horses and all of that 'til I was about, oh well, until I got married. I just quit then. I started riding them when I was about eight years old. (Walquah 1967, 6)."
>
> Interviewer, David E Jones: "Bulls?"
>
> May Walquah: "Yeah. And I was a jockey too, and see my dad, he's got lot of race horses. We just growed up with horses and all of that. Uh, I rode them too," (Walquah 1967, 6).

Autonomy and Toughness

Ms. Walquah does not let the interviewer gain information that she does not wish him to have. When asked for more material on the unique care of racehorses, Ms. Walquah refuses to divulge this information. Mr. Jones asks, "They have any special kind of medicine for the horses before they brought them? What kind of things did they do?" She does not let the interviewer extract information from her that is private. To which, May answers, "Secret. There were things but it's a secret," (Walquah 1967, 8). Once again, Ms. Walquah shows her toughness and refusal to back down.

Man Stealing

> Interviewer, David E Jones: "What about women? Were the women taught that same way?" (Walquah 1967, 4).
>
> May Walquah: "Yeah, some of the women rough. Yeah. Some of the women rough and uh- I kinda tried it myself. That man knows it too, right there by the tree, sitting right there. I took, I took his brother away from his wife. I took him away in this Anadarko street like this all this Anadarko street. I had a car and I come along and I parked. And they were standing right there together. His brother and his wife were standing right there. I call him, he looked at me. I says, 'You want to go along?' He says, 'Yeah, but…' he went like this toward his wife. I says, 'Oh come on, be a brave one like me.' Well, he mind me and he walked and got right in the car. I say, 'You don't have to have any clothes.' I took him, I took him for two years then I brought him back to you.' And there's my proof, one sitting right there. That other one on the other side, that's his brother. And I took him away… So that's one time I done it. And I don't deny it. And so I done that, I took his brother away from his wife. And took him two years and now I

got a boy, right now by hims, by his brother. Right now he's in Vietnam," (Walquah 1967, 5).

Interviewer, David E Jones: Did his wife try to get after you for that?

May Walquah: She tried but she couldn't do nothing. She didn't fight or do nothing. She just try to talk rough but at the same time she always cry. So, I kept him two years and then I bring him back and I says, 'Well sister, I tease you. Here's your husband,' (Walquah 1967, 5).

Throughout her life, May Walquah does not wait for others to tell her what to do or how to live her life. She simply lives her life following her own standards of conduct based on her core value of exemplifying bravery. Ms. Walquah embodies what Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Simpson, articulates as "*kwe* as method" (Simpson 2017, 29). Simpson describes "*kwe"* as "woman within the spectrum of genders…in the Nishnaabe language," (Simpson 2017, 29. Simpson writes, "At its core, kwe as method is about refusal. It is about refusing colonial domination, refusing heteropatriarchy, and refusing to be tamed by whiteness or the academy," (Simpson 2017, 33). Ms. Walquah shows this refusal to conform time and again and is unapologetically Comanche despite the efforts of the white school administrators she was forced to contend with at Fort Sill Indian School. This attitude of bravery and refusal would carry her through life where she stays true to herself, never seeking the approval of white society for how she lived her life.

Jesse Rowlodge and Sally Coolidge

Respected Equals

Jesse Rowlodge was born in 1884 and was a respected Arapaho tribal leader at the time of his interview in 1968. His father was "one of the head chiefs" of the Arapaho Nation

(Rowlodge 1968, 8). He received his education from Haskell Institute (Rowlodge 1968, 1). Mr. Rowlodge was highly involved in tribal politics and made several trips to Washington D.C. on behalf of his tribe. Mr. Rowlodge assisted the tribe in negotiating their "claims cases against the government," (Rowlodge 1968, 1).

Mr. Rowlodge relates the story of meeting his second wife later in life in this interview. Sally Coolidge, a Northern Arapaho from Wyoming (Rowlodge 1968, 17) was a successful businesswoman living in Los Angeles, California (Rowlodge 1968, 16). They connected at a National Congress of American Indians Convention in Denver, Colorado where Mr. Rowlodge was one of the speakers (Rowlodge 1968, 15-16).

> "And when I got through, she came by and sat down by me. I had met her once, but I didn't recognize her until she called. I guess she remembered me. 'Oh yeah,' she said. 'I just came over to sit down by you. You made a nice talk. Made me think of my father.' So, then she stopped in at the hotel. So, when the thing was over about eleven o'clock that night I got a cab and went and took her to the hotel and we sat around there in that hotel lobby and some of our friends came in -Indians- they come by there, and about midnight I came back to the hotel. Next morning, she was over there at our hotel where the convention was held- the Cosmopolitan Hotel in Denver. She came up and talked with me. When the convention was over she flew back to – she had a store at Los Angeles, California. She flew back and I came back to Oklahoma. And she sent me a Christmas card, and I had sent her a card about the same time she had sent me a card. So, about the time I got mine, she got hers. This was November of 1952. So that Spring I was at Anadarko. I was going on into Washington. I got back to my daughter's house and walked in that living room there and a woman was sitting there. She had my little

> grandboy in her arms. 'Well,' I said- 'Am I dreaming, or what?' 'No,' she said, 'You're not dreaming. I'm here…She said, 'I plan to live in Oklahoma.' I said, 'Don't you have a store in Los Angeles?' She said, 'I sold out. I'm leaving for Oklahoma. I'm going to ask you where would be a good location.' (Rowlodge 1968, 16).

Over the course of the next couple of days Mr. Rowlodge and Ms. Coolidge spent time together talking about various places to live in Oklahoma and a possible future together. Mr. Rowlodge said, "I'm much older than you are. I'm eighteen years older than you are. I'll just adopt you as my daughter." "No," she said. "You know what I'm going to ask you to do?" she said. I said, "No." "Just get us a pup tent and a can opener!" (Rowlodge 1968, 17). Ms. Coolidge won that disagreement, and they were married soon thereafter (Rowlodge 1968, 18).

Mr. Rowlodge demonstrates that he looks at Ms. Coolidge as a respected equal. Traditionally, many Indigenous cultures did not view men as superior to women or other genders. In the journal article, *Navajo Patriarchy in a Twenty-First Century World,* Lloyd L. Lee writes, "The Navajo Nation in the past has been complementary and egalitarian with men, women, third gender, fourth gender, and children having an equal responsibility to sustain families and communities. This system of responsibility did not equate one gender greater than the other or one gender as better but rather the need for all to ensure peace and wellness," (Lee 2022, 126). Mr. Rowlodge and Ms. Coolidge are both willing to defy Western societal norms to find happiness. If Mr. Rowlodge had not respected Ms. Coolidge's autonomy and independent spirit, they likely would not have married. The romance between Mr. Rowlodge and Ms. Coolidge has taught me to look for equal partnerships in life and to demand respect from those of the male gender.

Relational Accountability

Carmen Fife

Carmen Fife is Creek and was born on November 2, 1915, in the vicinity of Dustin, Oklahoma (Fife 1970, 1). Her interview for the Doris Duke Oral History Collection took place on June 12, 1970 (Fife 1970, 1). She graduated from Chilocco Indian School in 1934 (Fife 1970, 2). Mrs. Fife continued her education at the University of Oklahoma and finished her academic journey at the Santa Fe Indian School where she obtained training in arts and crafts (Fife 1970, 3). She then taught artwork and crafting at the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California for a year before returning home to Oklahoma (Fife 1970, 3).

She was married to Jimmy Fife and the mother of eight children. Mrs. Fife put a strong emphasis on education for her children and, at the time of the interview, had two with college degrees, four enrolled in college, and one more about to enter college (Fife 1970, 2). Mrs. Fife did not limit her caretaking to the domestic realm but was also a community leader and organizer.

Advocating for Children

Mrs. Fife was a trusted leader in the community whom many came to regarding their problems. For instance, Mrs. Fife relays an instance with a prejudice school superintendent about eight years prior to the interview. Mrs. Fife recalls him making racist comments such as, "You Indian kids don't need to complain about the food. You don't have to pay for your lunch," and, "Every Indian home, you can tell it's an Indian home. They have junk cars all over the yard." (Fife 1970, 4). Mrs. Fife approached Chief McIntosh and their representative from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mr. Shipley.

Mrs. Fife reached out to others in the community and was able to gather support from both Native and non-native people to attend the next board meeting to air their complaints. "At

the board meeting, we all showed up and he sat there dumb-founded, really. He didn't deny anything, he just sat there and you know, kinda looked down" (Fife 1970, 5). The school board tried to deny knowledge of any prejudice, however, Mrs. Fife had already approached them with the issue. "However, I know they did know of some of the problems because I, myself had gone to the different board members and talked to them about the problem," (Fife 1970, 5). Mrs. Fife's efforts for the community paid off the next year the superintendent was fired after his contract ended (Fife 1970, 5).

Mrs. Fife did not stop there. Her efforts to improve the school continued as she spearheaded the formation of the PTA. Mrs. Fife was elected president of the PTA for two years (Fife 1970, 5). During her tenure as president, Mrs. Fife worked tirelessly to make the school a better place for the children in the community. The teachers and the PTA began to work together in a cohesive manner under her leadership (Fife 1970, 6). Together they were able to accomplish such feats as renovating the lunchroom, redecorating the auditorium, and installing playground equipment (Fife 1970, 6).

Carmen Fife Highway

Next, Mrs. Fife worked to establish an Indian Center in the community. Mrs. Fife states, "Now the Indians can do something if they will just organize," (Fife 1970, 6). She enlisted the help of their representative from the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mr. Shipley once again (Fife 1970, 6). The first big project that Mrs. Fife coordinated through the Indian Center was the paving of the road in the community (Fife 1970, 6). Mrs. Fife says, "And I suggested that we get our highway black-topped from Graham School towards Henrietta," (Fife 1970, 6). Mrs. Fife expressed concern for all who traveled that road towards Henrietta including such activities as work, school, grocery shopping, ranching, farming and postal workers (Fife 1970, 6). Mrs. Fife

states of the dismal road conditions that were endured, “And it was the rockiest, dustiest, or muddiest- you know, just full of holes!” (Fife 1970, 6).

As chairman of the Graham Community Center, Mrs. Fife invited multiple persons of influence, including the Highway Commissioner, various state legislatures, three County Commissioners, and several Bureau of Indian Affairs personnel to attend her meeting about paving the road. In addition, Mrs. Fife gathered around twenty Indigenous community members to speak about the reasons that a paved road was needed in their community. Mrs. Fife states, “And some of these old boys, had never gotten up in a group and talked, however, when I asked them to get up and talk for this road, they did,” (Fife 1970, 7). The invited officials responded positively to the needs of the community and the road was paved the following Spring (Fife 1970, 7). In recognition of Mrs. Fife’s efforts, the community members began referring to the road as “The Carmen Fife Highway,” (Fife 1970, 7). In appreciation, Mrs. Fife invited everyone who had been instrumental in paving the road to attend a special dinner that included traditional Creek food (Fife, 7). “Oh, we really had a feast! And we felt that they really appreciated what we did for them as much as we appreciated what they did for us,” (Fife 1970, 8).

Political Activism

The summer prior to the interview, much to the dismay of the community, the election committee removed the local polling location called the North Fork Precinct (Fife 1970, 8). Once again, Mrs. Fife stepped forward to meet the needs of the community. When she initially approached one of their county officials about the need to get the local polls back, he responded that there was nothing that could be done, “to go home and forget about it,” (Fife 1970, 9). However, Mrs. Fife is not one to bow down to opposition when it comes to her community

caretaking role. She responded, “If you want our votes, you had better give us our polls back or we’re not going to vote,” (Fife 1970, 9).

Next, Mrs. Fife visited the election board office on behalf of her community. Despite being told that the polls would be returned the following year, Mrs. Fife continued her advocacy for her community to get their polls back prior to the next election. She wrote a letter to local and state politicians and called a meeting to have her community sign a petition (Fife 1970, 10). Mrs. Fife found allies in Representative Allard and Senator Young. Her efforts paid off and the community received their polls back before the next election cycle. Mrs. Fife states of their local representative, Mr. Allard:

> “And we showed him our appreciation by voting for him for voting for him, you know. So, he was re-elected. And we feel like that we do have a friend in Graham Community- from Graham Community who will help us there at the capitol if we ever need his help. And that is Mr. Allard and we have also called on Mr. Young, and he remembers our sofky and fry bread. And sometimes when I see him, he talks Creek to me,” (Fife 1970, 11).

Community Caretaking in Everyday Life

Mrs. Fife was involved in community caretaking in her everyday life, as well. She was the “official scorekeeper” for her local softball team and enjoyed being involved in the comradery that ball games ensued (Fife 1970, 17). She believed in being a part of activities, such as this, that “will benefit the community,” (Fife 1970, 18). In addition, she helped facilitate Creek language classes (Fife 1970, 16), taught adult education classes (Fife 1970, 12), and traditional Creek basket making (Fife 1970, 14). Another way that she promoted the wellbeing

of her community was through reporting the local news to both the Hughes County Times and the Henrietta Freeman, "to keep Dustin and Graham on the map," (Fife 1970, 18).

Environmental Caretaking

Furthermore, Mrs. Fife spearheaded the installation of a well in her community for twenty-three families that had been getting their water from a nearby spring (Fife 1970, 19). Mrs. Fife determined that it was a good water supply but needed the same proper sanitation that was being incorporated in other nearby areas. Mrs. Fife approached Chief McIntosh about this need for her community and was told to submit something in writing at the next council meeting (Fife 1970, 19). She put forth her best effort for her relations, gathering stories and photographing the spring surrounded by trash with a turtle relative sitting nearby. Mrs. Fife states, "I wrote a story about the spring and how it helped the community, but it was impure water. And all these stories. I didn't write half of the stuff I found out about it. Just from talking to all the people around. But, anyway, it made a pretty good story," (Fife 1970, 20). Her efforts paid off and within the next few months a well was put in for her relations that had been hauling water from the spring. Mrs. Fife recalls, "I said, 'Well, just thank God for that spring that we can use.' And they said, 'Yeah, and thank Carmen for the pump,' (Fife 1970, 20).

From Carmen Fife, I have learned that a fulfilling life in service to others often looks like taking the lead and standing up for others. Mrs. Fife is not afraid to lead in her community's planning and organizing. She doesn't wait for someone else to start the petition to get the community's polls back or install a well in the community. She is continuously looking for the next need and creating a different reality for the community in the present context to enable future relatives to live in a fulfilling place. Mrs. Fife lives, specifically, what Mvskoke scholar, Laura Harjo, writes about in her book *Spiral to the Stars: Mvskoke Tools of Futurity,* "It is

important to consider relationality in our engagements with both human and more-than human entities. Through this relationality, social relations between blood and nonblood kin are forged, which creates the conditions for energy and relationality to construct futurity at the most fundamental level," (Harjo 2019, 39). Truly, Carmen Fife embodies the Indigenous value of relationality as evidenced by how she lives her life in service of her community.

From Mrs. Fife, I have also learned the magic in everyday interactions. She lives a life of ceremony. Making small moves, consistently through her life, she respects those in her community. For instance, she shows this respect by helping the school children to have a place where they can be respected and not subjected to racist comments and providing an atmosphere on the softball field that teenagers can come to and enjoy. Additionally, she shows reciprocity by thanking officials with a feast of traditional and homecooked foods. Lastly, she puts into action her responsibility to care for her community, thus fulfilling what Wilson writes about relational accountability. Relational accountability "needs to be based in a community context (be relational) and has to demonstrate respect, reciprocity and responsibility (be accountable as it is put into action)," (Wilson 2008, 99).

Stories as Relations

This is my understanding based on the samples I reviewed from the Doris Duke Native American Oral History Collection at the University of Oklahoma. The shared values from my research include autonomy, relationality, and kin-space-time envelopes. These values manifested themselves in various themes in these archival histories such as boldness, trusting yourself, recognizing that you carry gifts, that it is acceptable to be tough as a woman, advocating for your blood relatives and chosen relatives, your community, and taking care of .

Autonomy is believing in yourself. It is seeing your own value and not dimming your light to make others comfortable. Autonomy is May's toughness that allowed her to confront any challenge confidently, not conforming to the gender roles of her time. It is *kwe* running wild and free. It is the spirit of May Walquah full of unbridled energy and boldness of spirit. She chose to live free, and no one dared to tell her otherwise. May Walquah's fierce autonomy speaks to what Simpson says, "It is an unfolding of a different present. It was freedom as a way of being as a constellation of relationship, freedom as world making, freedom as a practice," (Simpson 2017, 18).

Autonomy is the perseverance of Shirley Fish, determined to conquer life's obstacles and not allowing her disability to keep her from accomplishing her goals. Autonomy is Ms. Fish, believing she could accomplish anything she set her mind to, including flying. She demonstrates the self-determination that Harjo speaks of when she writes, "recognizing and mobilizing one's agency and power unlocks a variety of possibilities," (Harjo 2019, 51). There are no limitations. Further, Ms. Fish also teaches us the importance of believing in your own gifts, listening to your inner voice, and sharing those gifts with the world.

Autonomy is *kwe,* not being afraid to risk everything for happiness, despite not knowing the outcome, like Sally Coolidge. Ms. Coolidge demonstration of autonomy manifests in a distinct boldness and a refusal to conform to gender roles. She sought the life she desired with confidence and decisiveness. She didn't sit and wait for things to work out; she took matters into her own hands. She embodied personal agency. Simpson writes of traditional values, "Agency was valued, honored, and respected because it produced a diversity of highly self-sufficient individuals, families, and communities" (Simpson 2017, 129). This was undoubtably recognized by her community, and certainly her partner.

Relationality is Carmen Fife who lived her life in service to others. It is sharing your gifts with others in your community, as she did. It is using your voice to advocate for all your relations, human and more than human kin. Relationality is a form of "*este-cate* sovereignty" (Harjo 2019, 53). Harjo explains that este-cate sovereignty is based on Mvskoke ways of knowing:

> "The concept of este-cate sovereignty I am suggesting is comprised of Mvskoke principles of energy, relationality, felt knowledge, and vnokecky (intentions of a non-hetero decolonial love). The tenet of energy means that we recognize the power and life in all things; relationality means that we make kinship connections and come to know and recognize our responsibility to our kin; felt knowledge refers to the fact that we carry an archive of experiential knowledge that can empower us or trigger us into submission," (Harjo 2019, 53).

Carmen Fife proved her relationality time and again in her lifetime. Her life is an excellent example of este-cate sovereignty and relationality.

These archival histories can be conceived of as kin-space-time envelopes of knowledge full of instructions for how to be in the world. They say to know your own power and to live free. They say to recognize your gifts and share them with the world. They say to not live small to make others comfortable. They say to make big moves; it's okay to take risks. They say to be a good relative; to take care of yourself and those you care about. Once you see your own light, you have more to share with others. With that insight comes your relational accountability to give back to community.

Stories are relations that we come to know and love. With an open heart and mind, they can become teachers. They are conduits of knowledge that can show you how to be in the world,

like a good relation would. By actively engaging with stories, one can see the lesson and new possibilities unfold. Learning to intimately know the stories we engage with becomes a sacred work. Wilson attests, "The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world," (Wilson 2008, 11).

My research with the oral histories from my archival study has brought me a new understanding of our Indigenous ancestors. By coming to know in a deep way the lives of these remarkable women, I have clear examples of the strength that is inherently ours. My autonomy is still unfolding, in layers, and this research has brought me to a clearer understanding of this. I have learned that women can be tough and brave. That it is okay to be free-spirited. We don't have to follow all the societal "rules" for how to be a woman. Indigenous women have their own way of being in the world and that does not conform to the heteropatriarchal mandates that society seeks to enforce by disciplining us or punishing us for not conforming to. We are a fundamental "disruption to the hierarchy of heteropatriarchy," (Simpson 2017, 17). Indigenous women are unique and powerful beings. All the knowledge that we need, we possess. We are already doing so many things right. We all possess gifts and if we listen to our intuition, we can navigate life in a meaningful way. Caretaking is part of our instructions for how to be in the world and we each carry that out in our own unique ways. We are not alone. We are in this together. Being in this together allows us to rely on one another so that during those times where we cannot see our own light, we have sisters, and aunties that we can go to who see it for us. Some of those aunties may not be with us in the physical realm, but we can rely on their stories

to reflect our own light. Truly, that light is still with us like a good relation that never leaves us to wander alone.

Conclusion

Leanne Simpson refers to the journey of coming to know as, "Biiskabiyang- the process of returning to ourselves, a reengagement with the things we have left behind, a reemergence, an unfolding from the inside out- is a concept, an individual and collective process of decolonization and resurgence" (Simpson 2017, 17). This is a journey I have been on for the last few years over my academic career. Each new step on my path leads me closer to understanding myself and what it means to be a good relative. Those who I have met along this path have taught me many lessons. The stories have taught me still more. I have tried to remain accountable while sharing these lessons of autonomy, relationality, and the importance of coming to recognize the kin-space-time-envelopes that hold instructions for us. It is my hope that the reader will come to know and love the stories that I shared and view them as relations as well.

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